



# **The New Landscape of the Religion Blogosphere**

Social Science Research Council

Online at: <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/religion-blogosphere/>

## Table of Contents

Introduction	3
1. Why bother with blogs?	4
2. Blogging and academia	10
3. The shape of the religion blogosphere	18
4. Religion bloggers on blogging	32
Appendix I. Bibliography	41
Appendix II. Religion blogs	48

## Acknowledgments

This report was principally researched and written by Nathan Schneider, with the exception of section 2, written by Ruth Braunstein. Productive feedback on earlier drafts was generously provided by Sarah Posner, John A. Schmalzbauer, Diane Winston, and Angela R. Zito, and well as by various members of The Immanent Frame's editorial team, including Laura Duane, Charles Gelman, Nicole Greenfield, Jessica Polebaum, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen.

## Introduction

Blogs have given occasion to a whole new set of conversations about religion in public life. They represent a tremendous opportunity for publication, discussion, cross-fertilization, and critique of a kind never seen before. In principle, at least, the Internet offers an opportunity to break down old barriers and engender new communities. While the promise is vast, the actuality is only what those taking part happen to make of it.

This report surveys nearly 100 of the most influential blogs that contribute to an online discussion about religion in the public sphere and the academy. It places this religion blogosphere in the context of the blogosphere as a whole, maps out its contours, and presents the voices of some of the bloggers themselves. For those new to the world of blogs, there is an overview of what blogging is and represents (section 1). The already-initiated can proceed directly to the in-depth analyses of academic blogging (section 2), where religion blogs stand now, and where they may go in the future (sections 3 and 4).

The purpose at hand is to foster a more self-reflective, collaborative, and mutually-aware religion blogosphere. Ideally, this report will spark discussion among religion bloggers that will take their work further, while also inviting new voices from outside existing networks to join in and take part.

## 1. Why bother with blogs?

Blogs are beyond being the next big thing. For the moment, they are firmly entrenched in the ecology of media and intellectual life. With the breakneck rapidity that we've come to expect from creatures of the Internet, blogging has gone from nonexistent to up-and-coming to having to adapt and keep up with novel developments.

Religion blogs, as such, have not necessarily been at the forefront of the blogosphere as a whole; for instance, few of those that this report focuses on are in the very highest echelons of rank and influence (blogging *about* religion from time to time, on the other hand, certainly occurs there). Still, in hardly so much as a decade, religion blogs have already come and gone, debuted and declined, mutated and morphed. This is not, therefore, a report on the religion blogosphere as a new and emerging phenomenon. Rather, it surveys a field that has already begun to mature and grow settled in certain tendencies and habits. We have not only a future to contend with—though the future is so often the prevailing tense in discussions about the Internet—but a past.

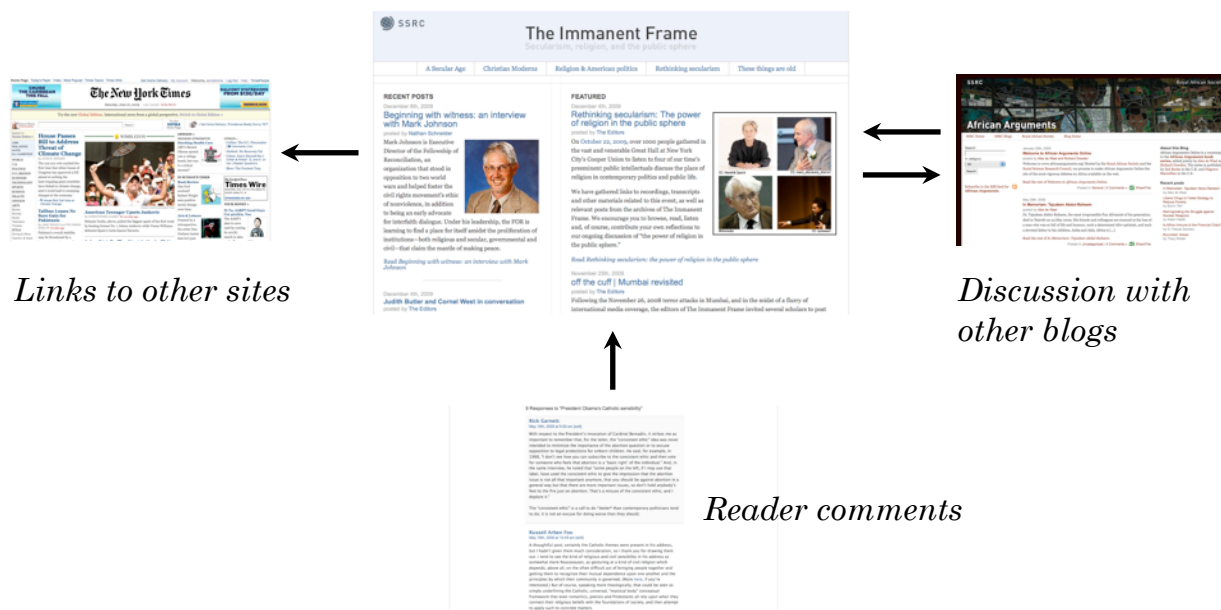
### 1.1 What a blog is

The word “weblog” is said to have been coined by [Jorn Barger](#) on December 17, 1997, in the name of his Robot Wisdom Weblog, essentially an ongoing collection of links to items of interest on the Web (Blood 2000). Within two years, people began shortening the word to “blog.” Thanks to [Blogger.com](#), an easy-to-use publishing platform launched in the summer of 1999, the term stuck. That year also saw the release of two other major blogging systems, [WordPress](#) and [LiveJournal](#).

Soon, blogs began to absorb the energetic discussions about practically everything that had already been taking place elsewhere on the Internet—on Usenet, listservs, and bulletin boards, as well as through commercial services like CompuServe and America Online. The customizable look and user-friendliness of the new blogging platforms attracted the growing online population.

Today, blogs have come a long way from Barger's collection of links. They are diverse, despite sharing a general family resemblance. They typically consist of a series of posts, listed with the most recent at the top, written by one or more authors. Many bloggers post each day; others do so more occasionally. Images—as well as audio and video—are often embedded in posts. Readers can usually submit comments, which appear in chronological order at the bottom of a given post. For this reason, blogs have been heralded, along with wikis and social-networking sites, as the harbingers of the interactive, user-generated culture of Web 2.0 (O'Reilly 2005).

Links to other websites and blogs, in addition to quotations and commentary, continue to be the lifeblood of the blogosphere. For many bloggers, the motivation to write and publish comes from the conversations that ensue, both in the user comments on their own posts and in the responses posted elsewhere by other bloggers.



Using traffic-analysis software like [Site Meter](#) and [Google Analytics](#), bloggers can gather data about their readers and see which other sites are linking to theirs. Social hierarchies naturally emerge; popular bloggers have the power to drive large numbers of readers to the sites they link to, which means that they can effectively make or break the readerships of smaller blogs.

Blogging is an open-ended medium that lends itself to a variety of genres and styles. Some bloggers write long, literary essays, while others stick to short, rapid-fire fragments. Some posts read like informal—even “snarky”—diary entries, while others make pretense to objectivity. Some rely on the authority of their particular authors, while others draw from the collective wisdom of a community. One way or another, every successful blog comes to cultivate a character all its own.

The technology of blogging has changed over the years, and it continues to do so today. Easy-to-use blogging platforms were the first watershed, making blogging accessible to anyone with something to say and an Internet connection. In recent years, two developments, often working in tandem, have continued to guide the development of the blogosphere: syndication feeds and social-networking sites.

Syndication feeds, through protocols such as RSS and Atom, allow readers to keep track of many blogs at once. Rather than having to go to each blog one at a time, users can view (in a program called a feed reader) a condensed list of new posts from all the blogs to which they subscribe. From there, they can choose which posts they want to see in full on the blog itself. The experience of checking a feed reader contributes to the sense that there is a collective blogosphere rather than simply an assortment of isolated blogs—a customized blogosphere, that is, populated by the sites one chooses to follow.

While syndication feeds are most common among bloggers themselves and advanced Internet users, social-networking sites have reached far wider audiences. The two most relevant for the English-speaking blogosphere are [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#). Increasingly, bloggers use these services to deliver content to their readers and even to create new kinds of content, such as the 140-character-or-fewer “tweets” that Twitter users exchange. Just as chat and messaging through Facebook has begun to challenge the ubiquity of email, social-networking sites are likely to bring about substantial changes in the ways and means of blogging, if not its eventual transformation into something else entirely.

The blogosphere, in any case, is a moving target.

## 1.2 Why blogs matter

Only a decade since the rise of the first user-friendly blog platforms, the blogosphere has become one of the eminent spaces for serious public discourse in the online world. Increasingly, leading intellectuals—such as [Richard Posner](#) and [Stanley Fish](#)—have added blogging to their media repertoires. More significantly, blogs have created a new kind of public intellectual in the mold of [Andrew Sullivan](#), [Juan Cole](#), or [Michelle Malkin](#). They thrive on quick opinions, a minute-to-minute news cycle, and public exchanges with one another. Still, there is heated debate about whether blogs can provide a level of discourse comparable to that of traditional print media. The likely answer is no; what they offer is something quite different.

Assessments of the blogosphere have taken on new urgency amidst an ongoing pattern of closings and cutbacks across the mainstream publishing industry. “The newspaper is dead,” announced the lead of a January, 2009 *New Yorker* article by Jill Lepore. “You can read all about it online, blog by blog, where the digital gloom over the death of an industry often veils, if thinly, a pallid glee.” Major city newspapers, including the *Rocky Mountain News* and the *Seattle Post-*

*Intelligencer* have stopped the presses for good, and print circulation among those that remain continues to decline. While newspapers attract online readers to their websites in large numbers, they have yet to develop a business model by which digital content alone can support high quality news-gathering. [The Huffington Post](#), essentially an enormous group blog, is positioning itself to take the papers' place, even though it lacks anything like the well-defined editorial policies or the foreign bureaus of a traditional newspaper (see Waldman 2009). We are, without doubt, in the middle of a dramatic turning point in the business of media and, by extension, the exchange of ideas in the public square.

The growing influence of blogs has been indisputable at least since the much-touted role of [Talking Points Memo](#) in bringing about Trent Lott's resignation as Senate Majority Leader in 2002. In 2004, a phalanx of mainly conservative bloggers caused a stir over Dan Rather's report on President Bush's Vietnam War record that led to the anchor's retirement. By the 2008 presidential election, it was conventional wisdom that blogs had become key arbiters of political discourse, and major candidates were sure to have campaign blogs of their own.

The informality and lack of oversight that characterizes much of the blogosphere takes its toll on readers' trust. According to a Pew study from 2005, only 20% of Americans considered news blogs to be "mostly facts"—low, certainly, though in fact twice the level of trust registered for talk radio (Rainie 2005, Baron 2008). Consequently, blogs have become parasitic on the mainstream press, using it both as a source of fodder for commentary and as a legitimizing imprimatur. Kathy Gill (2004) observes that people's sense of a blog's influence is still very much determined by whether it attracts the attention of more traditional outlets. But the relationship, she points out, is becoming ever more circular: "After the print reporter wraps the story and it hits the Web, it's time for the bloggers to check out the facts, the spin. It's a system, an ecosystem."

Meanwhile, the mainstream press is coming to look more like the blogosphere. Old-guard newspapers and magazines now host blogs by reporters and columnists on their websites. Though such organizations have long resisted providing links to their competitors' content—which is precisely how blog networks ordinarily function—NBC and *The New York Times* have begun doing so (Stelter 2008). They have also started treating the blogosphere as a kind of farm team for more conventional pedestals, as in the case of Ross Douthat's recent transition from blogging for *The Atlantic's* website to writing for *The New York Times* op-ed page. (The blog portal [Technorati](#) reports that 20% of the bloggers it surveyed have been invited to write for print media because of their blog, and 17% have received invitations for broadcast media.) While blogs have not replaced traditional media, they have already begun to transform it as they become more and more mainstream themselves.

As in politics and news media, the use of blogs has exploded in the realm of religious life. Religious communities, leaders, and individual practitioners use blogs to trade insights and build networks, and even as platforms for religious

experiences (Cheong et al. 2008). [Beliefnet](#), launched in 1999 and now owned by Fox Digital Media, has made its cluster of religion blogs on politics, inspiration, entertainment, and culture into a profitable enterprise. In 2008, it began to draw competition from Patheos, a site dedicated to providing expert information about religion to the general public, as well as blogs, user forums, and timely debates. The Revealer and GetReligion, both conceived in 2003, have provided critical commentary on how the mainstream press discusses religion, and major newspapers and broadcasters have cited their influence. During recent years, blogs like Talk to Action and Street Prophets have played a part in fostering the new, “progressive” religious left that helped Democrats find a religious vocabulary leading up to the 2008 election. More academic blogs like The Immanent Frame, Religion in American History, and The Prosblogion are already loci for new kinds of virtual scholarly exchanges.

Because of their ease of publication and use, blogs have changed the shape of public discourse in society as a whole and around religious questions in particular. They adjust the bar for entry, making dissemination to a great many readers possible for those who previously couldn't. Blogs also alter the content of that discourse, often privileging the immediate over the reflective and opinion over original research. Nevertheless, blogging is a powerful and flexible medium, one uniquely suited to providing the space for vibrant, diverse, and productive discussions about religion.

### 1.3 Making a public sphere

What kind of community is forming in the blogosphere and, in turn, what kind of discourse—what kind of public sphere—emerges from it?

Douglas Rushkoff (2005) has argued that the blogosphere, among other components of contemporary publishing and technological culture, are moving us increasingly toward an “authorship society.” While, before, the vast majority simply consumed content produced by a tiny minority, more and more people are now creating and publishing the raw material of culture. If this characterization is correct, it amounts to a radical shift—and a radically democratizing one—in the constitution of the public sphere. But one should be careful about jumping to optimistic conclusions too quickly. For one thing, precisely what makes blogs so vibrant and diverse also makes the blogosphere difficult to mark out and measure. Naomi S. Baron (2008) conveys a sense of why this is the case:

I've created four or five blogs for my classes over the past few years. When the course is over, the blog remains, floating like space junk—but in cyberspace. Am I a blogger? Not really, but I have several blogs in my name. Do I read blogs? Sometimes, but mostly when they turn up in web searches. If a survey asked me whether I write



or read blogs, and how many blogs I have, I could at best confound the data.

According to recent statistics from the Pew Internet & American Life Project, 33% of Internet users say they currently read blogs, and 42% say that they ever have (Smith 2008). Given the variation in people's understanding of the terms and technology of the Internet, however, these numbers likely don't account for many people who come across and read blogs through web searches without necessarily knowing that what they're looking at is a blog. Other metrics, cited by Technorati in its 2008 "State of the Blogosphere" report, place the number of blog readers at 41%, 50%, and 77% of Internet users.

Blog authors are far fewer. Pew reports that 12% of Internet users say they ever blog, and only 5% do so on a typical day. Technorati corroborates the 12% figure and provides some more detail about who the bloggers are. Around two-thirds are male, and 70% have college degrees. Compared to the general Internet population, they are more likely to be male, less likely to be married, and more likely to be employed full-time. Though blogging has sometimes been hailed as a great leveler, a voice for the previously voiceless, this is evidence that its adopters trend toward the demographics of the establishment.

The consequences of these changes for public discourse on serious issues are only beginning to unfold. There is much excitement when blogs and social networks enable dissidents to reach audiences in countries that make a policy of curtailing free speech (China and Iran are exemplary cases in this regard). On the other hand, it usually isn't long before officials catch up by restricting access to the offending sites or pressuring them to conform. Even where free expression is ostensibly protected, as in the United States, blog readers can limit the breadth of perspectives they're exposed to by following only those blogs with which they already agree (Sunstein 2001; 2007). There is strong evidence, in fact, that leading bloggers tend to link to those who share their own political viewpoints (Hargittai et al. 2008). Some bloggers even explicitly limit the range of discussion on their blogs, promising to remove comments that call into question certain foundational assumptions.

In an analysis of the blogosphere that draws on Jürgen Habermas' model of the public sphere, Andrew Baioill (2004) points to significant stumbling blocks that the blogosphere poses for genuinely open, egalitarian discussion. Blogs don't form a universal conversation in which all are welcome; instead, they gather in clusters of more-or-less overlapping conversations, governed, more or less centrally, by their particular barons. Anyone can start a blog, but few will be widely read. While it may be true that blogging can reach beyond some of the limitations of older media, it certainly raises problems of its own as well.

## 2. Blogging and academia

*“Academics, especially in the arts and humanities, have taken to blogs like ducks to water.”*

– Craig Saper, [Blogademia](#)

“Imagine if the great thinkers of the past could have blogged, bouncing ideas off each other in real time, engaging in rapid-fire debates across borders. Would it have led to some kind of intellectual utopia, or total chaos?” This was the question *Village Voice* reporter [Geeta Dayal posed](#) in an April 2005 piece on academic blogging. Although she found ample evidence that academics had taken to the blogosphere in great numbers, this article, like most other discussions about academic blogging, provided more questions than answers. Indeed, four years and countless academic blogs later, as Dayal’s thought experiment increasingly resembles reality, the prospect of an answer to her pressing question has seemingly grown even more remote.

This section attempts to define the sphere of academic blogging and to identify the major issues that have emerged in discussions about blogging in academia, including:

- What kinds of academics blog, and why?
- Do blogs represent powerful new forms of collaboration, or not?
- How do blogs impact the careers of academics who do (or do not) contribute to them?
- How do blogs impact the development of knowledge within and across academic fields?

There is also a burgeoning literature on the use of blogs as pedagogical tools (see Dahl 2009, Krause 2005, Stutzman 2006), which explores the extent to which blogging has the “potential to be a transformational technology for teaching and

learning” (Williams and Jacobs 2004). Although this is an important and relevant topic, there is not space to treat it fully here.

## 2.1 Blogging and academic discourse: hopeful thoughts

Despite the proliferation of questions and anxieties about the implications of academia’s turn to new technologies, most observers cannot help but be intrigued by the possibilities that blogging presents. In a widely read 2005 piece at *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, [Crooked Timber](#)’s Henry Farrell likens the blogosphere to a “carnival of ideas” and believes it will “transform how we think of ourselves as scholars”:

Why are so many academics beginning to blog? Academic blogs offer the kind of intellectual excitement and engagement that attracted many scholars to the academic life in the first place, but which often get lost in the hustle to secure positions, grants, and disciplinary recognition. Properly considered, the blogosphere represents the closest equivalent to the Republic of Letters that we have today. Academic blogs, like their 18th-century equivalent, are rife with feuds, displays of spleen, crotchets, fads, and nonsenses. As in the blogosphere more generally, there is a lot of dross. However, academic blogs also provide a carnival of ideas, a lively and exciting interchange of argument and debate that makes many scholarly conversations seem drab and desiccated in comparison. Over the next 10 years, blogs and bloglike forms of exchange are likely to transform how we think of ourselves as scholars. While blogging won’t replace academic publishing, it builds a space for serious conversation around and between the more considered articles and monographs that we write.

In the *Teachers College Record*, Frederick Stutzman (2006) has a less lofty assessment of academic blogging, arguing that blogs are not actually so different, fundamentally, from other “communication tools,” although they certainly may be more powerful and far-reaching. At their root, however, blogs are simply a new form of “conversation.” So what, he wonders, is all the fuss about? “Why is it that so many of us are apprehensive about the role blogs play in academia, and particularly, the role blogging may play in our careers?”

Part of the fuss seems to stem from the hope that blogs could foster new and enhanced forms of scholarly collaboration of the kind most researchers strive for, but cannot—because of limits to time, resources, or nearby colleagues—actually bring about. Many also express hope that technological advances, including blogging, could ultimately advance knowledge in unforeseen ways through more

rapid publication of research, real-time feedback on new ideas, as well as more engagement across disciplines and with the public. These hopes, however, are tempered by apprehension about the unintended consequences of the information overload that blogs inevitably deliver into already cluttered research agendas, personal lives, and public domains.

Furthermore, many are simply wary of the new norms of conduct that blogs have ushered into a relatively ordered academic environment. As Farrell explains, “Some academics view them as an unbecoming occupation for junior (and senior) scholars; in the words of Alex Halavais of the State University of New York at Buffalo, they seem ‘threatening to those who are established in academia, to financial interests, and to ... well, decorum.’ Not exactly dignified; a little undisciplined; carnivalesque. Sometimes signal, sometimes noise.”

Still, Farrell concludes, “exactly because of this, they provide a kind of space for the exuberant debate of ideas, for connecting scholarship to the outside world, which we haven’t had for a long while. We should embrace them wholeheartedly.”

## 2.2 Questions and anxieties

### *The orientation*

First, it is important to make a distinction between two different types of academic blogger: *academics who blog as a scholarly pursuit* and *academics who happen to have personal blogs*. Much of the controversy and concern about academic blogging stems from the conflation of these two orientations, but the potential implications of each for the development of specialized knowledge and for the individual practitioners involved are quite varied.

In fact, the difficulty that some have in distinguishing between the two is itself cause for concern. For example, if students discover a blog penned by a professor at their institution, are they to assume that the information posted at that blog constitutes trustworthy, even citable, scholarship? How does one draw the line between idle speculation and certified knowledge when there are no gatekeepers between author and post? This can be contrasted to more traditional academic practices, in which publication in a journal or book is granted only after passing through a peer review process and other filters, lending legitimacy to the resulting product.

That said, academics have long written for non-peer reviewed publications, including popular magazines and newspapers. These pursuits, however, tend to be reserved for “established” scholars who have already earned the requisite trust of the public and their peers. Such publications do pass through an editorial process, albeit one of a different nature than in academic publishing. Blogs, in contrast, are often not edited by anyone besides the principal author.

Although there are not yet any comprehensive maps of the academic blogosphere and empirical data about academic bloggers is scant, it has become clear that there are multiple types of academic blogging. (Note: For survey research on economics bloggers, see Schiff (2008). For data on the motivations of political scientists and policy bloggers, see Drezner (2006) and McKenna (2007). For data and analysis of gender gaps in academic blogging, see Pedersen and Macafee (2007), “Bitch PhD” (2006), Kaufman (2006), Healy (2004), Arnold and Miller (2001).) At one end are personal blogs—often resembling diaries—that happen to be penned by academics. These might cover topics that are in line with the authors’ professional expertise, but they may also feature the banal and personal ephemera of most diary-style blogs. Geeta Dayal suggests that, for some academics, this orientation to blogging “offers an escape valve, a forum for free expression that’s not bound to the constraints of their fields.” She reports that some such bloggers post anonymously to protect their carefully cultivated professional reputations. Others “[blog only in lowercase letters](#)” or refer to this activity as “[unofficial blogging](#)” to distinguish it from their “official” work as academics. As important as this diversionary activity might be for enabling these individuals to pursue more serious scholarship when they are on the clock, the products of these blogs themselves should not be considered scholarship in its own right.

At the other end of this spectrum, however, are online forums to which academic authors contribute short-form and timely essays intended for their colleagues or for a general audience. These are occasionally refereed by a formal editorial team, as is the case with *The Immanent Frame*, but are more often self-regulated by the blogger or bloggers themselves, as is the case with sites like *Crooked Timber*. Such blogs, which are typically organized around a particular academic discipline or set of themes, can foster collaboration between different types of scholars (i.e., across disciplinary lines and geographical distances), as well as between scholars and the public. Although a number of blogs have emerged that seek to embody this ideal, the reality often falls short of the ambition. In a 2005 piece for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Steven D. Krause notes that

even collaborative academic blogs—like the excellent site *Crooked Timber*, an eclectic mix of writers about academe, politics, science, technology, and more; and [Grand Text Auto](#), which describes itself as being about computer-mediated and computer-generated works of many forms—are interactive only in the sense that they are run by groups of writers who have similar interests and goals. The posts on those blogs are more akin to individual articles in a single issue of a journal than to truly collaborative writings.

Empirical research is needed to answer the questions of whether and how blogging by academics might be opening up new lines of communication between

different specialized disciplines within the academy, as well as between scholars and the general public.

### *The producers*

In the meantime, heated debates continue—mostly within the blogosphere itself, although occasionally, it seems, also behind the closed doors of hiring and tenure review committees—over the question of how blogging impacts the careers of academics. To the growing number of graduate students who blog, sometimes attracting a considerable following in the process, the medium can seem to represent a fast track to publication, though the perceived status of such publication remains to be determined. Again, empirical data is limited concerning the likelihood that engaging in certain forms of blogging will impact one’s career trajectory. Certainly, this will vary significantly across academic disciplines, as well as across institutions, but there are a handful of specific cases that have drawn attention to the issue.

Stephen D. Krause—author of [Steven D. Krause’s Official Blog](#) and [Steve Krause’s Unofficial Blog](#), and a prolific writer about the phenomenon of academic blogging—has published a series of articles updated over several years that reflect on the relationship between blogging as what he calls “S/scholarship” and the question of where blogs “fit into the all-important document in an academic career, the *curriculum vitae*.” The decision, it seems, comes down to whether or not it should be listed at all, and if it is, whether it should be counted under “Scholarship” or under “Teaching and Service.” These distinctions can be crucial for faculty members seeking tenure.

Robert Boynton asked a critical question in a 2005 *Slate* piece: “When academics post online, do they risk their jobs?” That same year, in an oft-cited article in the *Chronicle*, “Bloggers Need Not Apply,” Ivan Tribble argued forcefully that blogging negatively impacts job prospects. Many bloggers have learned this lesson the hard way, including Tufts political scientist and frequent blogger Daniel Drezner, who was denied tenure at the University of Chicago in 2005. Another high profile case exemplifying the risks of academic blogging involves Juan R.I. Cole, a professor of Middle East and South Asian history who was an outspoken critic of the Iraq War and whose blog, [Informed Comment](#), launched him into national prominence as a political commentator on the region. As Siva Vaidyanathan wrote:

There has never been a better time to be a public intellectual, and the Web is the big reason why. Juan Cole is exhibit No. 1. Cole is an academic who writes clearly and forcefully about the most trenchant issues of the day (academics are not supposed to know how to do that, remember?). Cole gets quoted by the mainstream news media. He appears regularly in popular publications like

Salon. And—love it or hate it—everyone who is anyone reads his blog.

Unfortunately, despite his academic accolades and solid recommendations, he was denied tenure by Yale University, and many suspected the decision was political. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* played host to an online discussion of the topic, called “Can Blogging Derail Your Career? 7 Bloggers Discuss the Case of Juan Cole.” The conclusions of the authors were mixed.

Some cited the virtues of blogging. Economist and blogger J. Bradford DeLong (2006) argued that “academics who blog think more profound thoughts, have a bigger influence on the world—both the academic and the broader worlds—and are happier for it.” Furthermore, DeLong argues, blogging might enhance a scholar’s visibility and influence, something most universities support and encourage among their faculty.

Still, most observers focus on the double-edged sword of high exposure. While this might enhance one’s academic star power, it also opens one up to increased criticism (Vaidhyanathan 2006, Althouse 2006, Berube 2006). This fear was echoed in an anonymous [2009 post](#) by “Female Science Professor” at the Chronicle Careers blog. The author laments that “if any academic wants even more evaluation, writing a blog is a good way to get an endless supply of criticism.”

Others reflect on the fragility of academic reputations, in which “one bad blog post can erase a lot of good will very quickly” (Drezner 2006). Still others focus on the information overload that academic blogs produce, making it increasingly difficult to discern trustworthy data from drivel. Kara Dawson (2007) found that her students had grown “blogged down and blogged out.” Finally, many simply see blogging as a waste of time, as a form of procrastination, with high opportunity costs for producing “real” scholarship (Drezner 2006).

### *The product*

How do blogs impact the development of knowledge within and across academic fields? What is their relationship to the production of “real” scholarship?

In September 2006, Brian Leiter wrote an influential piece in *The Yale Law Journal* blog, Pocket Part, arguing “Why Blogs Are Bad for Legal Scholarship,” which has for years been “the most popular item” on the Pocket Part site (according to a January 2009 post at [Leiter’s blog](#)). In this piece, he first argues that blogs ought to be set apart from other forms of online collaboration among scholars, outlining three qualities that are unique to blogs: “they are unmediated (like so much of what is on the Internet), public (like [the Social Science Research Network]), and normative (like much e-mail about scholarly topics). It is this conjunction that makes blogs special, and especially dangerous—at least for legal scholarship.” These three characteristics together pose a challenge to scholarly expertise, making “possible the repeated and systematic broadcast of non-expert

opinions, opinions that can then be picked up and amplified by other non-expert blogs.” He notes that this is a form of what Timur Kuran and Cass Sunstein have called an “availability cascade,” in which “an opinion that appears to be informed gains credibility by virtue of being repeated and thus becoming current in discourse.”

Although some would argue that the open and democratic nature of blogs might provide more opportunities for inaccurate information to be corrected, Leiter suggests that it is more common to see “amplification and repetition of existing prejudices and ignorance, or, occasionally, feeding frenzies on trivial mistakes in the mainstream media.” He concludes, we must not confuse “buzz” with “real scholarly impact.”

Adam Kotsko, then a doctoral student at Chicago Theological Seminary, published a weary *Inside Higher Ed* piece on academic blogging in 2007. Though he had used his blog to host some productive discussions in the past, he soured on the quality of conversation that the typical comment thread produces, calling the blog format “hierarchical” as well as “generally cumbersome and difficult to use for in-depth conversation.” Kotsko himself continues to blog regularly, but he believes blogging should have only a very limited role in academic discourse. “Academic blogs,” he writes, “seem to me to be best-suited as a social outlet for academics who would otherwise feel isolated, creating camaraderie and supplementing the social aspects of disciplinary conferences.” They can be an academic grapevine, perhaps, but definitely not places for serious scholarly discussion.

At Crooked Timber, Eszter Hargittai (2004) takes on those who argue that blogging should not count as rigorous scholarship. In a comparison between blog writing and journal publishing, she disagrees with Leiter’s and others’ argument that blogs inherently lack a peer review process. In fact, she argues that the mechanisms for exchange and feedback on some blogs is akin to the formal review process at some journals, and, to the extent these mechanisms differ, one is not necessarily superior to the other:

Blogs that allow comments make it possible for others to discuss the posted material. In many ways this is much more conducive to intellectual exchange and the advancement of knowledge than publishing articles in journals that no one will ever read. Not only is the original post available to all subsequent readers but so are the reactions of others. Sure, there are all sorts of limitations present. It may be that the most appropriate people are not reading the post and so those who would be able to offer the most helpful and relevant critique are not present in the discussion. But this is often likely true in the journal refereeing process as well.

She is careful to explain that she is not proposing that blogs could replace journals, but rather that neither medium offers a perfect review process and that blogging



can be pursued more carefully and with more academic seriousness than critics have allowed. Furthermore, although the writing posted at blogs may not in itself constitute scholarly writing, she notes the indirect influence this work may have on one's eventual scholarly output. She cites the example of articles published in scholarly journals that were refined based on useful feedback received through her blog. Her Crooked Timber colleague Brian Weatherson suggests that blog posts could be understood as "first drafts" for future, more polished and better researched writing on a topic. By posting these less considered musings for public consumption and feedback, a scholar can use blogging "to trial genuinely new ideas" (Hargittai 2004).

The Immanent Frame's experience offers several instructive examples of how scholarly work can be refined through an interplay between blogging and more traditional scholarly media. [A vigorous debate](#) on the question of secular criticism between Saba Mahmood and Stathis Gourgouris was reprinted in the Fall 2008 issue of the interdisciplinary journal *Public Culture*, showing that an academic journal and a blog can hold some territory in common. And, as a result of The Immanent Frame's [critical discussion of his book \*A Stillborn God\*](#), Mark Lilla was inspired to write an afterword for its paperback edition. Through his engagement with other scholars at The Immanent Frame, as well as with readers participating through comments, Charles Taylor has been working to refine the account presented in *A Secular Age*, primarily through an extension of his analysis beyond the West. Several contributors to The Immanent Frame have published revised versions of the ideas they originally presented on the blog, demonstrating the potential for such sites to serve not only as forms of publicity for finished scholarly work, but also as part of an ongoing, collective, and public endeavor to advance knowledge. On the other hand, when The Immanent Frame began to offer sample academic citations for citing its posts, it stirred a stern reply at the blog [Clavi Non Defixi](#): "Are blogs 'legitimate piece[s] of academic writing'? God help us... **no**" (Kuehn 2008).

Nobody is suggesting that a blog post should be equivalent to a peer-reviewed academic journal article. However, it does seem clear that blogs are finding a place, as in the mainstream media, within academic discourse. Doubtlessly, this process will require adapting the blog medium to the specific needs and expectations of scholars, as is being done with other technologies. The American Academy of Religion, for instance, together with other learned societies and academic publishers, is working to develop a new social-networking platform for collaboration online. There is surely comparable room for innovation in the blogosphere to make it better-suited for supporting scholarship. One would hope that room can be found for innovation in the academy as well.

### 3. The shape of the religion blogosphere

This report can pretend to cover neither the vast array of blogs that publish about religion nor even those specifically devoted to religion or particular religions. Instead, it will focus on the sectors of the English-speaking—and largely American—blogosphere that are engaged in conversation about religion in public life. The emphasis is on:

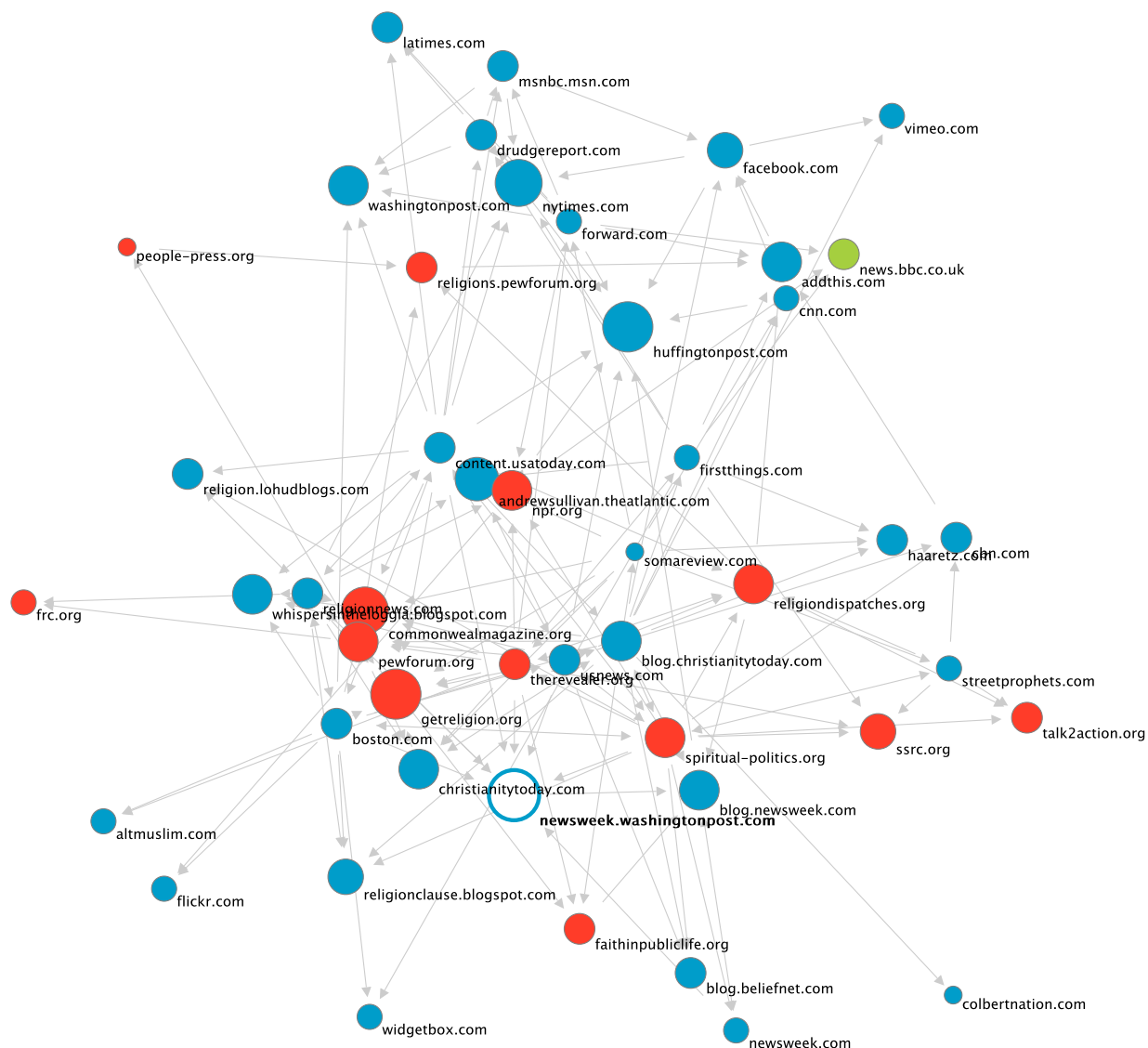
- The subset of the “active blogosphere”—“the ecosystem of interconnected communities of bloggers and readers at the convergence of journalism and conversation” (Technorati)—that specializes in religion
- Crossover between academia and public discourse
- Coverage of religion as it relates to broader culture and politics

Not included in this report are the many religion blogs that focus on lifestyle, personal experience, or the internal affairs of particular religious communities (except when the affairs of those communities are demonstrably of interest to a wider public).

In some cases, it is debatable whether certain sites count as blogs at all. Some, for instance, prefer to describe *The Immanent Frame* as an academic forum. *Religion Dispatches* and *Killing the Buddha* call themselves online magazines and host their own blogs, but the line between magazine articles and blog posts isn’t always perfectly clear—both appear on a rolling basis, exclusively online. Gray areas are inevitable in such an amorphous, evolving medium as blogging; this report takes the wide view. 93 sites were chosen by editors of *The Immanent Frame* for analysis based on quality of discussion, influence, and participation in a common conversation—inevitably, the sample is incomplete, as the blogosphere is a vast, widely distributed, and messy thing. Hereafter, for simplicity, this subset of blogs about religion will be called the “religion blogosphere.”

### 3.1 Mapping the network

It should be evident by now that the religion blogosphere is no unified, clearly-delineated thing. Important insights about religion in public life appear on blogs that don't necessarily specialize in the topic. Those that do specialize in religion form distinct subgroups and clusters around institutions and areas of particular interest. And they, in turn, draw habitually from more mainstream blogs and news sources, as can be seen in this simple network analysis of the religion blogosphere on December 13, 2009 generated by [IssueCrawler](#):



Source: *IssueCrawler.net*

There is a clear group of large circles at the center, which represent the most linked-to domains in the religion blogosphere (size is determined by indegree count

and location by indegree centrality). Some, including [getreligion.org](http://getreligion.org), [christianitytoday.com](http://christianitytoday.com), and [beliefnet.com](http://beliefnet.com), are themselves part of the religion blogosphere. Others, like [pewforum.org](http://pewforum.org) and [nytimes.com](http://nytimes.com), are outside information sources that religion bloggers commonly link to. The blogosphere's shape is anything but smooth.

### 3.2 The A-list

For all the lip-service lent to the democratizing potential of the blogosphere, it can be a very inegalitarian place. Following a power-law distribution, so-called "A-list" bloggers dominate the traffic and therefore the influence, while millions of smaller blogs can expect little of either (Shirky 2003). In the blogosphere at large, according to rankings such as [Technorati's top 100](#) and [Time's top 25](#), the A-list is by and large devoted to politics, technology, and entertainment.

None of the blogs discussed in this report were part of Technorati's top 100 at the time of writing; the closest was biologist PZ Myers' Pharyngula. But because the religion blogosphere is a tiny subset of the blogosphere as a whole, with its own particular concerns, those sites in it that draw the most overall traffic might not be the ones that other religion bloggers happen to be most attentive to.

To get a quantitative picture of how influence is distributed in the religion blogosphere, the blogs included in this report were ranked according to three public, Web-wide services: [Technorati](#), [Alexa](#), and [Compete](#). Technorati (1), which specializes in blogs, bases its "Authority" metric on how many other blogs link to a given blog in their posts. Alexa (2, 3) and Compete (4), on the other hand, derive their numbers from the subset of web users who use their respective plug-ins in their web browsers, not unlike the "Set Meters" that companies such as Nielsen use for television ratings. In addition, the number of comments on each of the last 10 posts from every blog was averaged (6). All these numbers come from December 3-4, 2009.

Metrics such as these are part of the picture but not all of it. Kathy Gill (2004) has argued that more pointed measures need to be used for mapping the blogosphere in addition to Web-wide services like Technorati, Compete, and Alexa. She observes that they fail to capture, among other things, the influence of a site within particular subcultures, as we see from the differences between these raw numbers and the network analysis of the religion blogosphere above.

It will be helpful, therefore, to consider the sites cited as trusted sources by the religion bloggers themselves. The IssueCrawler data (6)—from December 13, 2009—shows the sites that are most linked-to by other sites in the religion blogosphere. The final list (7) derives from the survey of bloggers conducted for this report (see section 4). The sites listed are those which two or more respondents described as among their favorite and most trusted sources for content.

Each metric represents only a partial picture of a blog's popularity and influence. In many cases, data about certain blogs is unavailable through a given ranking. Data for blogs located in subdomains or subdirectories can't be isolated through Alexa (e.g., <http://subdomain.domain.com/subdirectory/>); this excludes blogs hosted on sites like Beliefnet or those of many major newspapers. Also, some blogs have not been claimed on Technorati and therefore don't have an Authority ranking. On Faith, for instance, appears on neither but would likely rank quite highly if it did. Nevertheless, a glance at the top sites according to the following lists will convey a sense of the A-list of the religion blogosphere.

(1) *Technorati: Authority*

This measures the number of blogs linking a given site in the recent past. Only sites registered on Technorati have an Authority rank. Unfortunately, Technorati recently redesigned its Authority system, and many blogs that used to have an Authority ranking no longer do.

1. Pharyngula (724)
2. Crunchy Con (699)
3. God's Politics (648)
4. Archbishop Cranmer (627)
5. Religion Clause (608)
6. City of Brass (601)
7. Progressive Revival (593)
8. Jesus' General (593)
9. Whispers in the Loggia (593)
10. Killing the Buddha (582)

(2) *Alexa: Traffic Rank*

Alexa ranks each domain's traffic compared to other domains, based on visitors and pageviews over the last three months. Only those blogs that are featured prominently on the domain's main index page are included. The lower the rank, the more traffic the site receives.

1. Elephant Journal (88,275)
2. God's Politics (109,602)
3. Street Prophets (111,782)
4. Slacktivist (115,562)
5. MuslimMatters (129,597)
6. Religion News Blog (135,500)
7. GetReligion (140,673)
8. Religion Dispatches (162,146)
9. Talk to Action (184,380)
10. Religion News Service Blog (230,711)

(3) *Alexa: Sites Linking In*

This estimates the number of unique sites linking to each domain. Again, only included are those blogs which are featured prominently on the domain's main index page.

1. God's Politics (1,404)
2. Jesus' General (1,108)
3. The Wall of Separation (1,091)
4. Religion News Blog (990)
5. La Shawn Barber's Corner (989)
6. Evangelical Outpost (895)
7. GetReligion (873)
8. Religion Dispatches (687)
9. Talk to Action (666)
10. Slacktivist (617)

(4) *Compete: Unique Visitors*

Compete estimates the number of individual users who visited each site in a given month. Unlike Alexa, it compiles data for blogs located in subdomains, though not data for blogs in subdirectories.

1. Religion Dispatches (45,809)
2. God's Politics (42,627)
3. Religion News Blog (40,003)
4. GetReligion (32,802)
5. Elephant Journal (31,735)
6. Whispers in the Loggia (25,546)
7. Talk to Action (18,834)
8. The Wild Hunt (17,292)
9. La Shawn Barber's Corner (16,393)
10. Tikkun Daily Blog (15,003)

(5) *IssueCrawler: Inlink count from total network*

This extraction from the IssueCrawler data ranks sites based on the number of sites in the religion blogosphere they receive links from.

1. GetReligion (23)
2. OnFaith (18)
3. ReligionDispatches (17)
4. dotCommonweal (16)
5. God's Politics (13)
6. Street Prophets (12)

7. Whispers in the Loggia (12)
8. AltMuslim (11)
9. Articles of Faith (11)
10. Christianity Today blogs (10)

(6) *Average comments per post*

For each blog, the number of comments on the last 10 posts were counted and averaged in order to measure the extent of user discussion. Some blogs, it should be noted, don't allow comments at all.

1. Slacktivist (345.2)
2. Comment Is Free Belief (301)
3. The Wall of Separation (130.6)
4. Damian Thompson (85.2)
5. Pharyngula (83.9)
6. Archbishop Cranmer (65.8)
7. Holy Post (40.6)
8. *Christianity Today* Politics Blog (37.2)
9. All Things Catholic (35.8)
10. Steven Waldman (33.3)

(7) *The bloggers' favorites*

Each of the sites below was cited two or more times in the 19 responses to this report's blogger survey (see section 4), in which bloggers were asked for their "favorite websites and/or blogs about religion, particularly those that [they] might rely on in generating [their] own content."

- The Immanent Frame (7)
- GetReligion (6)
- Religion Dispatches (6)
- Talk to Action (5)
- God & Country (4)
- Beliefnet (3)
- Bold Faith Type (3)
- *Christianity Today* Liveblog (3)
- On Faith (3)
- The Revealer (3)
- Street Prophets (3)
- Articles of Faith (2)
- Bartholomew's Notes on Religion (2)
- Blogging Religiously (2)
- Dispatches from the Culture Wars (2)
- Episcopal Cafe (2)

- Sarah Posner (2)
- Jesus' General (2)
- Killing the Buddha (2)
- *New York Times* religion feed (2)
- Spiritual Politics (2)
- The Wall of Separation (2)
- Whispers in the Loggia (2)

While none of these lists gives a complete picture of the relative influence of the blogs listed, together they offer some useful insights. Take, for instance, Elephant Journal and Religion News Blog. Metrics 2 and 4 place them at the very highest levels of influence. But 5 and 7, which focus more particularly on the religion blogosphere, suggest that they aren't of great interest to the rest of the religion blogosphere as such. The widely-read Pharyngula, too, is absent from 5 and 7, implying that despite its traffic and influence, religion bloggers don't pay much attention to it—perhaps because of the dismissive tone its author takes toward religion. In contrast, while The Immanent Frame doesn't make it to the top 10 of any Web-wide metrics, it ranks well in the religion blogosphere, according to metric 7, perhaps due to the perception of academic cachet. (Some of its standing may be attributable to the fact that the survey was conducted by Immanent Frame editors.) Evidently, the religion blogosphere has a hierarchy quite separate from that of the blogosphere as a whole.

Blogs associated with larger institutions and establishment media tend to do quite well; Pharyngula is part of Seed Media Group's ScienceBlogs network, Crunchy Con and City of Brass are part of Beliefnet, God's Politics is the blog of the Sojourners community and magazine, Street Prophets is affiliated with the politics blog Daily Kos, and Religion News Blog is published by Apologetics Index. Nevertheless, independent, online-only sites make a strong showing as well; these include: Talk to Action, Jesus' General, GetReligion, Slacktivist, and Whispers in the Loggia. In such cases, smaller sites carry influence far in excess of their shoestring budgets. It is also notable that, with the exception of Slacktivist and Archbishop Cranmer, all of the top 10 blogs with the most comments belong to wider networks.

The pecking order of the religion blogosphere takes different forms depending on how one frames the question.

### 3.3 A rough typology

Blogs, sometimes as a matter of principle, are not easily put into boxes. Unlike traditional publishers, bloggers aren't anxious to categorize their content according to the aisles in a bookstore. Instead, they strive to cultivate a unique voice, a loyal community, and an eclectic collection of source material. Nevertheless, religion



blogs do fall into certain groupings. Note that the examples of each listed below are hardly exhaustive.

### *Political opinion*

Discussions of religion and politics, often from a well-hewn partisan perspective.

- Archbishop Cranmer
- Bold Faith Type
- *Christianity Today* Politics Blog
- Crunchy Con
- God's Politics
- Progressive Revival
- Religion Dispatches
- Street Prophets
- Talk to Action
- Tikkun Daily Blog
- The Wall of Separation

### *Culture and ideas*

Discussion of religion in life, culture, and society.

- AltMuslim
- The Point
- Charlotte Was Both
- *Christianity Today* Liveblog
- Comment is Free Belief
- *The Dallas Morning News* Religion Blog
- Elephant Journal
- Episcopal Cafe
- Evangelical Outpost
- First Thoughts (at *First Things*)
- Killing the Buddha
- Monkey Mind
- On Faith
- Irtiqa
- Muslim Matters
- Pharyngula
- Theolog
- Vox Nova
- The Wild Hunt

### *Academic research and reflection*

Written mainly by academics with other academics in mind.

- At the Intersection
- Call & Response
- Faith and Theology
- The Immanent Frame
- The Prosblogion
- Religion Clause
- Religion in American History
- Spiritual Politics
- The Way of Improvement Leads Home

### *News*

Original reporting on, or drawing attention to, religion news stories.

- Articles of Faith
- Bartholomew's Notes on Religion
- Blogging Religiously
- Damian Thompson
- FaithWorld
- God and Country
- The God Blog
- Holy Post
- Religion News Blog
- Religion News Service Blog
- Whispers in the Loggia

### *Commentary on the press*

Ongoing critique of how mainstream press reports discuss religion.

- GetReligion
- Muslimah Media Watch
- The Revealer
- The Scoop

Again, categories like these tell only part of the story. They don't necessarily reflect the clusters that blogs form with links to one another, as a detailed network analysis would. Like so much of the Internet, the religion blogosphere is a system of self-directed, independent parts, fueled by a variety of motivations and following no coherent underlying design.

Some of these groupings are more cohesive than others; the "political opinion" blogs, for instance, share relatively more of a conversation than the others, reading and referring to each other regularly. "Culture and ideas" blogs tend to be active in conversations outside the religion blogosphere specifically. Pharyngula and Irtiqa,

for instance, often cite scientific and stridently-secularist blogs. *First Things* blogs, like *First Thoughts*, typically refer to politically conservative sites. Academic blogs tend to appeal to specialized audiences; *The Prosblogion* addresses philosophers of religion, particularly in the analytic tradition, while *The Immanent Frame*'s emphasis is social theory, and rarely the twain shall meet. That these blogs participate in communities beyond the religion blogosphere means there is little redundancy among them, as each draws from such diverse sources and conversations. On the other hand, such eclecticism means that authors across the religion blogosphere don't pay attention to each other as much as they might.

### 3.4 Beyond “Protestant-Catholic-Jew” (and Muslim)

Because this report is focused on English-language blogs about religion in the public sphere and the academy, and because only certain religious traditions are a major part of public debate in Anglophone politics and society, it does not attempt to present the full spectrum of diversity among blogs about religion. There are, in fact, blogs out there for just about any living (or even not so living) tradition within reach of an Internet connection. But, inevitably, the A-List is likely to be dominated by sites that focus on the prevailing traditions of the Anglophone public: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. (Notable exceptions include, for instance, *Pharyngula*, which is atheist, *The Wild Hunt*, which is pagan, and *Elephant Journal*, which is influenced by Buddhism.) Many sites discussed here, however, seek not to limit themselves in this respect to the usual suspects, even if they often do; taking their subject matter as “religion” generally, and not any particular religion, they regularly feature posts about traditions that are less widely-represented.

With its ease of access, the blogosphere certainly offers the means for under-represented traditions to find a public voice. The vitality of the Western Muslim blogosphere shows, through sites like *AltMuslim* and *MuslimMatters*, how blogs can enable religious minorities to enter into weighty discussions online with each other and the world beyond.

### 3.5 Communities in the making

Although the contribution of blogging to sectarian religious institutions is not within the purview of this report, the community-building at work in the religion blogosphere, which often overlaps with these institutions, cannot be neglected.

In old-guard organizations like the Catholic Church and mainline Protestant denominations, blogging has created space for discourse that leans against prevailing trends. At sites like *Progressive Revival*, *Episcopal Cafe*, and *Christian Century*'s *Theolog*, mainliners maintain a rich public conversation about the present and future of their communities. They do so, meanwhile, often outside the auspices

of traditional ecclesial bodies (whose populations are in a state of decline), possibly pointing toward a shift in the locus of intellectual leadership.

Recognizing the possibility of such a shift in Catholicism, high-level meetings at the Vatican have discussed how blogging is shaping the conversation about Catholicism and have even suggested the idea of issuing guidelines for Catholic bloggers. “In the past, the church’s educational efforts included helping people decide what they should or should not watch,” said one archbishop. “Now it must also help them decide what they should or should not produce”—including, he added, what they post on the Internet (Wooden 2009). Daily dispatches from Vatican correspondent John Allen’s All Things Catholic blog, together with the more gossipy Whispers in the Loggia, are part of a blogosphere that lends a new degree of transparency to a hierarchy more accustomed to an older media environment. The kind of discourse available on less judicious blogs has already made a strong impression on the curia. “I have been appalled by some of the things I’ve seen,” said Roger Mahoney, Cardinal of Los Angeles, about the blogosphere, adding: “Of course, I’ve been the object of some of them.”

Meanwhile, leading American Catholic magazines like *Commonweal* and *America* have widely-read blogs, each of which caters to its own subculture within the Catholic Church. The same can be said for the blogs of magazines associated with other religious communities, including *The Jewish Daily Forward*, the *New Humanist*, and *Christianity Today*. In this respect, blogs represent an extension of the role traditionally played by these magazines, but they do so in ways that inevitably adjust the roles of editors, writers, and readers: editors edit more content less; writers write shorter, punchier pieces; and readers become commentators. The resulting community may be more vibrant and interactive than ever, but likely less carefully defined.

The religion blogosphere has seen wholly new kinds of belonging form as well. Over the last decade, *Killing the Buddha* has become a destination for, in the words of its “Manifesto,” “people made anxious by churches.” Open Source Theology, which serves the “emerging church,” allows for open-ended discussion about theology for a nascent movement within Protestant Christianity, one small and spread-out enough that offline meetings aren’t always an option.

The emergence of new blogging communities has political consequences. Just as sites like MoveOn.org and DailyKos rallied the political left during George W. Bush’s presidency, Talk to Action, Tikkun Daily Blog, Religion Dispatches, God’s Politics, and Street Prophets (itself a subsidiary of DailyKos) helped to cultivate a specifically religious language for the Left’s political priorities, which many felt the mainstream Democratic Party had abandoned. While such blogs can’t take sole credit for the Democrats’ rediscovery of religious language during the 2008 campaigns, the fact that prominent activists like Michael Lerner and Jim Wallis are also bloggers attests that blogs played a crucial supporting role.

With comments and up-to-the-minute updates, the interactivity of blogs makes them ideal for fostering communities, especially ones that have yet to find a

place among more traditional religious institutions. How, precisely, they do so has been examined by some (Cheong et al. 2008, Cheong and Poon 2008, Dawson and Cowan 2004) and deserves further study.

### 3.6 What counts as journalism?

As religion desks at national and regional media organizations have disappeared amidst sweeping budget cuts, many journalists specializing in religion look to the Internet—and the blogosphere in particular—for their rescue. With lower overhead and greater flexibility, blogs offer the opportunity for a renaissance in serious religion coverage, just as they are becoming key sources for business, entertainment, and technology news.

One positive sign, certainly, has been the success of blogs labeled, in section 3.3, “commentary on the press.” GetReligion and The Revealer have developed loyal followings for their discussions of how religion is represented in news stories. These blogs, their authors say, have pushed reporters in old and new media alike to be more careful and nuanced in their coverage of religion, suggesting that—contrary to some conventional wisdom—blogs are capable of elevating the level of public discourse and expanding its breadth. Even more to the point, a number of religion journalists at conventional media outlets maintain blogs that enable them to cover more stories than the space in their primary media alone would allow. Stand-out examples include FaithWorld, Blogging Religiously, All Things Catholic, Articles of Faith, and (for popular culture) The God Blog. *The Dallas Morning News* Religion Blog, which once offered highly-regarded original coverage by reporters, now mainly features commentary by a panel of religious leaders.

Such genre-bending should serve as a reminder that the traditional lines between reported journalism and editorializing—much less between instances of pure advocacy and self-promotion—have yet to be clearly defined in the blogosphere. It isn’t always easy to distinguish one from the other, though in the eyes of trained journalists, the distinction is all-important. At the Intersection, for instance, provides informative reports on religion and politics, much as one would expect from a reporter. However, the blog doesn’t mask the fact that it is published by Public Religion Research, a private strategic consulting firm, and serves essentially as a publicity tool for the company’s work. This phenomenon calls to mind the inserts that sometimes appear in newspapers that resemble news reports but are actually paid advertising. On the blogosphere, such examples seem less insidious simply because they are so commonplace.

Another liminal case, and one of the most widely-cited and read participants in the religion blogosphere, is On Faith. Though hosted jointly by the *The Washington Post* and *Newsweek*, it doesn’t hold itself to the standards of journalistic reportage; instead, it draws short, opinionated essays from (often prominent) public figures who are often unapologetic about representing institutional and ideological

agendas. More than a newspaper's opinion page, it calls to mind the talking heads that spar on television.

While distinctions such as these might become clear to those who are well-versed in the religion blogosphere, they will not always be evident to casual readers. If robust, reported journalism is to find a place in the fray, either it will have to change its standards or impose those standards visibly and consistently on the rather bewildering and inconsistent medium of the blogosphere.

From the perspective of journalists themselves, perhaps the most daunting concern is one of financing. The blogosphere, except for a few isolated cases, has yet to be able to support the kind of investigative reporting that print newspapers and magazines have provided in the past. Sites like Religion Dispatches and Comment is Free Belief might pay at least some of their writers, but rarely enough for them to do sustained reporting. This is, again, a subset of a dilemma that plagues the news media in general. But with religion reporters in particular rapidly losing their jobs or being transferred to other desks, the question of whether truly professional journalism is plausible in the blogosphere has come to be a particularly urgent matter. If the answer is to be yes, it will require a deeper institutional and financial commitment from those concerned to see true religion journalism flourish online.

### **3.7 Is there really a religion blogosphere?**

The very idea of a religion blogosphere—a network of blogs devoted to discussing the place of religion in public life—is in some respects a construction of this report. There is no canonical list or definition to bound such a thing, and different observers would make different choices. Nevertheless, the community here identified does represent the possibility of a common conversation among a diverse set of voices. The blogging medium allows for far more cross-fertilization among far-flung communities than currently exists, and a wider variety of blogs would doubtlessly benefit from paying closer attention to one another than they do. There could be, for instance, more consolidation among them at the institutional level to facilitate interaction. Beliefnet provides its numerous blogs an automatic audience, including readers who might not otherwise find them but who have a general interest in religion. Less formal networks and link exchanges might suffice to foster a stronger sense of community.

At the same time, part of what makes the religion blogosphere so powerful is its capacity to easily participate in exchanges with other kinds of blogs that have overlapping interests. Andrew Sullivan's *The Daily Dish*, a popular politics blog at *The Atlantic's* website, regularly covers matters of religion, and often cites religion blogs in the process (especially *Crunchy Con*), exposing them to a very broad audience. *Informed Comment*, the widely-read blog of Islamicist Juan Cole, doesn't focus on religion per se, but Cole draws on his training in the study of religion for his essays on politics and Middle Eastern affairs. Regularly attracting mainstream

media attention and readerships far beyond blogs that focus specifically on religion, these two are reminders that the religion blogosphere need not and should not keep only to itself. Staying in conversation with more mainstream concerns will ensure both the continued relevance of religion blogs and that the wider public discourse benefits from their expertise.

While there may be strength in community and thus an opportunity for a new kind of conversation about religion to emerge among religion bloggers, they should resist the temptation to ghettoize themselves. There are benefits to keeping the religion blogosphere's boundaries undefined and porous.

The eclecticism of the religion blogosphere as it stands—made up of journalists, critics of journalists, academics, satirists, non-profits, and activists, each with their particular constituencies and expectations to satisfy—means that there is a considerable breadth of views that one can access relatively easily. There could be far more diversity still. Perhaps this report, by naming and describing the religion blogosphere as such, and putting the construct into currency, will encourage bloggers to work more collectively even while expanding their variety.

## 4. Religion bloggers on blogging

The 19 bloggers surveyed for this report represent many corners of the religion blogosphere—high traffic and low traffic sites, conventional blogs and web magazines, academic and recreational endeavors. They are:

- Richard Bartholomew, Bartholomew’s Notes on Religion
- J.C. Christian, Jesus’ General
- Frederick Clarkson, Talk to Action
- Rod Dreher, Crunchy Con
- Howard M. Friedman, Religion Clause
- Brad A. Greenberg, The God Blog
- Salman Hameed, Irtiqa
- Paul Harvey, Religion in American History
- M.Z. Hemmingway, GetReligion
- Sam Hodges, *The Dallas Morning News* Religion Blog
- Robert P. Jones, At the Intersection
- Bill McKenzie, *The Dallas Morning News* Religion Blog
- Benjamin Myers, Faith and Theology
- Daniel Schultz, Street Prophets
- Jeff Sharlet, Killing the Buddha and The Revealer
- Mark Silk, Spiritual Politics
- Lisa Webster, Religion Dispatches
- Diane Winston, The Scoop
- (anonymous), *First Things* blogs

The following sections sift through their responses and use them to construct something approaching a cohesive insiders’ view of the challenges and rewards of blogging about religion.

### 4.1 Driving forces



When asked about their reasons for blogging in the first place, the bloggers surveyed didn't put fame and fortune high on their lists.

Most of them simply saw a need. When he took emeritus status, law professor Howard M. Friedman began Religion Clause as a hobby. "It seemed to me that there was a need for a resource that tracked church-state, religious liberty developments from a lawyer's perspective," he says. Paul Harvey of Religion in American History, a historian at the University of Colorado, had noticed other academic blogs and, he recalls, "thought it would be interesting to try something similar for American religious history." Jeff Sharlet, together with Peter Manseau, started Killing the Buddha in 2000 out of "contempt—to be honest—contempt for a press (and, for the most part, academe) that looks on religion as if it's either innocuous spirituality or dangerous fanaticism, when most often it contains elements of both and a lot else besides." For Benjamin Myers, it was simply "personal boredom—where I was living, there weren't many like-minded people to talk with about theology." Street Prophets began, according to Daniel Schultz, after the 2004 election. "It was clear that progressive believers needed to stand up and claim their presence," he says. Talk to Action and Religion Dispatches began with a similar intent to foster a new progressive religious voice. Often, bloggers simply notice an absence, have some of the necessary expertise, and get their projects going without much fanfare.

Not all begin out of personal interest alone. Brad A. Greenberg says he resisted the idea for years, but finally "relented" while working as a religion reporter for the *Los Angeles Daily News*. Soon, he continues, "I discovered that I not only enjoyed blogging but that I found it about as enjoyable as the long-form feature writing for which I entered journalism." Mark Silk began Spiritual Politics as part of an academic project with colleagues aimed at covering religion during the 2008 election. Though the others ended up losing interest, Silk enjoyed it so much that he kept going. The Revealer, similarly, started when New York University's Center for Religion and Media approached Jeff Sharlet about the idea of creating a blog to monitor religion in the press. *The Dallas Morning News* Religion Blog, explains Sam Hodges, came about after the paper curtailed its religion coverage. "Three of us who had worked on the stand-alone religion section were depressed that the section was discontinued, and we decided to compensate, at least in a small way, by blogging about religion." For Robert P. Jones, it was a business decision; Public Religion Research created At the Intersection "as one channel (of many) for raising the profile of the firm and clients."

The low cost and ease-of-use of blogging software enables those so inclined to get started on a whim. "There is essentially no budget," says Friedman. And Benjamin Myers: "There is no budget or expenditure; I just do it as a hobby." "We're financed?" jokes Daniel Schultz of Street Prophets; "You could have fooled me." Both he and Fredrick Clarkson estimate their budgets at around \$1,000 per year, which they cover with advertising and small donations from readers. When a custom design and a paid staff is involved, though, as for The Revealer, Religion Dispatches, and others, the initial investment can be much more substantial.

Those with institutional affiliations—such as *Spiritual Politics*, *The Scoop*, and *The Dallas Morning News Religion Blog*—tend to have help from support staff for their site’s launch and subsequent technical issues. But many of those who go it alone with Blogger or WordPress seem able to get by. “I’ve just figured it out as I’ve gone along,” says Benjamin Myers. Some, however, including Clarkson and Salman Hameed of *Irtiqa*, wish they had more facility with the technology.

After getting started, any blogger has to find a source of motivation to keep posting day after day. Blogs are notorious for eating up their authors’ time and attention. “I have sometimes joked that what bloggers really need is a ‘12-step program’ to reduce their addiction to blogging,” says Friedman, adding: “I think most bloggers would find some element of truth in that.” Usually, what seems to keep them going—even to the point of addiction—is community. Friedman says that *Religion Clause* has been “sustained largely by the wide acceptance and continually increasing readership,” as well as his interest in the topic. Richard Bartholomew, too, says, “Support from other bloggers and reasonable hit-rates have encouraged me to continue.” All the more so on sites like *Talk to Action*, *Killing the Buddha*, *Streets Prophets*, and *Religion in American History*, which provide the basis, in part, for ongoing relationships among their multiple authors. According to Paul Harvey, blogging “seems to help create and foster a sense of community among people, mostly scholars and professionals I think, about the field of American religious history.” Adds Benjamin Myers, “For me, the most valuable part is this wider communal dimension.”

Ultimately, personal drive appears to prevail over institutional infrastructure. Even when brought into blogging by outside institutions, as were Mark Silk and Diane Winston, for example, bloggers cite personal motives as having sustained them. As Friedman’s joke suggests, the disciplines and habits that make one a successful blogger become, for some people, deeply ingrained and continually rewarding. Others, like Silk’s colleagues, lose interest quickly. It’s not for everybody. And even successful blogs, like *The Revealer*, have life cycles; after some years at the helm, editor Jeff Sharlet has at times put the site on hiatus and directed his energy to other projects.

As befits the natural eclecticism of the blogosphere, religion bloggers come to what they do with a variety of methods and motivations. That variety has created a remarkable profusion of content that takes on diverse subjects and styles. New intellectual communities have emerged and learned to persevere, often outside of traditional institutions, academic and otherwise. Thanks to an easily-accessible medium with so much capacity to connect people with common interests, the religion blogosphere constitutes a relatively self-organizing, self-sustaining collection of conversations.

## 4.2 Marginal or mainstream?

Blogs depend on mainstream media as source material for their commentary and as an authority to legitimate them. To an extent, the reverse is becoming true; religion bloggers are increasingly aware of and concerned with their impact on these traditional platforms.

“We are a major source of data and information for mainstream media,” boasts Robert P. Jones. “Our research was featured in over 200 major national news stories over the past year.” Howard M. Friedman says, “It is a two-way relationship.” On the one hand, he draws his content from mainstream press sources; on the other, because of his blog, he has been interviewed by reporters and radio talk shows as an expert on his topic.

Rod Dreher says, “I have been surprised by how many mainstream radio and TV outlets have found me because of my blog.” When his posts attract attention among popular blogs outside the religion blogosphere, like Andrew Sullivan’s *The Daily Dish*, it confers legitimacy on him in the perception of the mainstream media. Blogging has uniquely enabled him to interact with such media more than he otherwise could have. “It seems to me that because I’m far away from Washington and NYC in terms of my physical location, that it would be harder to notice me, but of course that’s not true in the blogosphere.”

M.Z. Hemmingway says of GetReligion, “We have a very close relationship to mainstream media outlets since the purpose of our site is to critique or praise their work.” Most of these interactions, though, are behind the scenes, in direct email exchanges with the reporters they write about, so the site’s influence isn’t always publicly visible.

Some have a more confrontational relationship with the establishment. Jeff Sharlet says, “The Revealer has been an irritant and, occasionally, inspiration to more mainstream media outlets.” It has been cited over the years by many large newspapers and broadcasters. On the whole, thinks Sharlet, the effect has been positive. “A significant minority of journalists have taken advantage of resources like *The Revealer* to complicate and deepen their understandings of ‘religion,’” he says. “That’s an improvement, I think.” Fredrick Clarkson, too, sees *Talk to Action* as “a critic of some of the MSM as well as a friendly consumer and frequent source.”

Clarkson also insists that his site has been able to do what traditional media couldn’t: its readers and commenters, he says, “have the opportunity to interact with featured writers and each other and to network. We have also helped to shape public discourse on a wide range of matters.” *Jesus’ General*, which is satirical in ways that mainstream news outlets can’t be, has been quoted in *Newsweek*, CNN, and a number of newspapers, in addition to winning an honorable mention in *The Washington Post*’s 2004 Best Blogs awards. “We provide a crucial complement to mainstream media coverage of religion,” says Lisa Webster of Religion Dispatches, “as we feature, in many cases, more sustained analysis of topics than a regular news outlet can offer, and a greater diversity of voices.” Her site is regularly mentioned in the religion sections of major national news organizations.

While some bloggers see the mainstream as the target of their work, others see it as extraneous—they're up to something entirely different. But more and more, as blogging becomes integrated into the normal cycle of news-gathering and interpretation, we can expect bloggers to answer as does *The Dallas Morning News*' Bill McKenzie: "We are part of the mainstream media."

### 4.3 Creating a community, making an impact

Savvy bloggers have available to them the means to develop a quite sophisticated picture of their readership. Tools like Google Analytics and Site Meter allow one to know with high precision (and reasonable accuracy) who is visiting one's website and what they are doing there. This includes data on visitors' geographical location, computer system and web browser, duration on a given page, and how they arrived there. In addition, bloggers often embed surveys on their sites for their readers to fill out. Though participation is self-selecting, these can provide more specialized information such as education level, political views, income, or whatever else one might choose to ask about. Through social networks, such as a blog's Facebook Group or Fan Page, one can browse a certain segment of one's readers person by person. Finally, bloggers learn about their readers through the post comments and emails they receive. Given the interactive nature of the medium, most bloggers are quite attentive and highly responsive to their readerships. Noticing that certain topics garner more traffic and comments than others, for instance, might turn the course of the blog in that direction.

Most religion bloggers feel they have a sense of who their readers are. Usually, it tends to be a group that shares a relatively narrow set of interests. "Judging by the comments," says Rod Dreher, "I draw folks like me." Overall, since bloggers generally write on what they happen to be passionate about, this is the prevailing tendency. M.Z. Hemmingway and Diane Winston, not surprisingly, say that their readers are people interested in religion journalism. Sometimes, though, bloggers are surprised to find readers they weren't expecting. Dreher, who describes himself as "socially and religiously conservative," finds that "probably more than half" of his readers are liberals. And though Street Prophets is devoted to the creation of a religious progressive movement, Daniel Schultz has found that "not everyone is a believer, not everyone is a progressive."

Nearly all the bloggers polled have some awareness of their traffic. Lisa Webster, for instance, follows Religion Dispatches' traffic on a daily basis. While she does make sure to revisit topics and writers that draw a lot of attention, she says, "we also take care to feature less popular stories, and unknown writers, in order to broaden the discussion." Rod Dreher's traffic actually affects his paycheck from Beliefnet, which hosts Crunchy Con. For most religion bloggers, though, keeping track of traffic isn't much more than a passing interest. They might look at it weekly or monthly. But regardless, they tend to insist that the traffic doesn't

affect the way they create content. Says J.C. Christian, the anonymous author of *Jesus' General*, "I believe writing to keep or gain audience is suicidal." Adds Brad Greenberg, "If I did, every post I wrote would mention Sarah Palin in a swimsuit."

There are, however, other ways of measuring success than attention in the mainstream media and traffic data. Through posts, comments, and emails, authors and readers develop a synergy that the stricter boundaries of traditional media don't allow for. Even with relatively little traffic and mainstream exposure, a blog can become a public forum for a cluster of scholars or others interested in a specialized topic. Such a blog's influence therefore spreads through the readers' students, books, and scholarship. It becomes an online think-tank or professional newsletter, its consequence potentially far outreaching its public visibility.

Taking account of the religion blogosphere's impact has to be more than a matter of counting hits and clipping mentions in *The New York Times*. Those metrics have their place, but it is also necessary to look more deeply into the kind of community being developed around a site and the impact of those who participate in it. Blog communities are increasingly becoming fixtures of the contemporary public sphere, with an impact exceeding what the most obvious measurements might suggest.

#### 4.4 Fit for a CV?

For scholars who blog, a task which often implies a considerable commitment of time and exposure to criticism, section 2 laid out the issues attendant on the academic status of their work. Academic religion bloggers tend to agree that, even if blogging isn't true scholarship, it has a useful role to play. Paul Harvey affirms that blogging can be part of an academic career: "I count my work as 'service' on my scholarly reports; I think of it as a professional service to my field." Robert P. Jones, who holds a Ph.D. in religion from Emory University, adds, "It can provide a window into academic work, and it can help promote academic work." Salman Hameed, an astronomer who teaches science and religion courses at Hampshire College, calls blogging an academic "gray area." But, he says, "Overall, my blog definitely contributes to my academic work. It helps me stay up to date with the topic as well as refine ideas."

Benjamin Myers, too, says that his research and teaching has been enriched by the experience of blogging. In fact, he says, "My own institution also seems very happy about the blog—I suppose they see it as legitimately linked to academic work, since the blog has its own international reputation." Diane Winston, a professor of media and religion at the University of Southern California, uses her blog as a teaching tool. "My students blog on the site," she says, "and that has opened up intellectual collaboration and conversation."

Others take a more skeptical tone. Jeff Sharlet, who edited *The Revealer* while teaching journalism at New York University, says, "I don't think blogging

should count as legitimate academic work. That's not to devalue it but only to recognize that it is different than academic work, just as fiction is." Rod Dreher agrees that blogging and academic work should be seen as different. "If one were to go at blogging with the seriousness of an academic," he says, "it seems to me likely that the spontaneity and liveliness of the blog would suffer." Howard M. Friedman even suggests, "Blogging is likely to interfere with attempts by a person early in his or her career to produce more traditional scholarship."

Religion Dispatches has made a point, says Lisa Webster, of "cultivating scholar-contributors, who might not otherwise write for the public." She doesn't think that such writing does, or ever will, count as academic. But she does hope that academic culture will become more appreciative of scholars who take the time to do this kind of work as well. "We're enormously grateful to scholars who consider that it is part of their vocation as educators to share what they know with an audience that isn't parked in a lecture hall."

#### 4.5 What is missing?

"Of course," complains Jeff Sharlet about the religion blogosphere as a whole, "it's terribly, terribly dull. There's very little great writing about religion." Whether or not that's true, it may be a healthy attitude. The religion blogosphere should be wary of falling into self-satisfaction—a dangerous posture, anyway, in an Internet always so eager to evolve and leave the self-satisfied behind.

When asked about gaps in the field, perhaps understandably, some bloggers didn't come forth with a great many suggestions; after all, most of them started their blogs in order to fill the gaps they perceived. Fredrick Clarkson says, on the other hand, that there are "Too many to count." But the group had a number of more concrete ideas as well:

- "**High quality academic writing** from known experts in the field is still missing." (Robert P. Jones)
- "I've had a hard time finding good writing in English about **Islam as a lived religion.**" (Jeff Sharlet)
- "It seems to me that, just as foundations have been stepping forward to **underwrite investigative reporting**, so thought ought to be given to doing the same for reporting on religion." (Mark Silk)
- "At least among theology blogs, there's an overwhelming predominance of white males; and I think the bigger blogs only represent a relatively small variety of theological viewpoints. So it would be good to see some **a lot more diversity.**" (Benjamin Myers)
- "I wish that there were more and **stronger progressive religious voices**, but that's just me." (Daniel Schultz)

- “It is a shame that *Christianity Today*’s **daily round-up of news links** [by Ted Olsen] has stopped running.” (Richard Bartholomew)
- “Good blogs on the **history and philosophy of religion**, I think, are still missing.” (Salman Hameed)
- Perhaps it is time to “**convene bloggers** with a goal of enhancing and expanding their impact and outreach.” (Diane Winston)
- “I’d like to see more **metro papers** have meaningful religion blogs.” (Brad A. Greenberg)
- “David Crum’s *Read the Spirit* gives valuable attention to **religion-related books**, but I think there is room for a blog that would provide much more extensive coverage of that area.” (Sam Hodges)

Each of these suggestions could provide fodder for new bloggers in search of a niche to fill. They also respond to pressures outside the blogosphere itself.

The decline of the traditional press, particularly local and investigative reporting, raises the question of whether blogs could take up that mantle. Compelling arguments have been made that they cannot (see section 1.2 and section 3.6). But perhaps, with the sufficient funding that Silk calls for, they could begin to. Religion Dispatches, which has an ever-growing readership, has made efforts to address many of these concerns, including investigative work, book reviews, progressive voices, and academic authors. Still, despite support from foundation grants and university departments, it lacks the resources to fund the caliber of reporting that was a matter of course in the heyday of newspapers.

The issue of diversity, which Myers mentions, may also have its roots in broader pressures. According to Technorati’s 2008 data on the blogosphere, the majority of bloggers are affluent and male (see section 1.3). Recent religion scholarship on feminist perspectives and a range of ethnic groups reveal the insufficiency of a discussion dominated by white males (which happens to be what nearly all the bloggers here quoted are, though not by design). If, indeed, the blogosphere is to be taken seriously as a space for important conversation about religion, steps should be taken to bring a broader range of voices into dialogue.

Richard Bartholomew mentions the discontinued blog by Ted Olsen at *Christianity Today*’s website, which was a thorough collection of recent news and discussion on the web about religion. It was, in some sense, a blog in the classic sense, akin to the “Weblog” Jorn Barger began back in 1997. This “filter blog” format—useful links with minimal editorializing—provides something from which the punditry and heated comment threads of more recent blogging can sometimes distract. A one-stop shop that brings together content from around the religion blogosphere would help bring the many different conversations going on at various blogs into more direct interaction with one another. A project like this might be carried further by means of community authorship, as on sites like [MetaFilter](#), [Slashdot](#), and [Reddit](#). There, anybody is able to suggest a link, and the community helps to determine which ones become featured most prominently. This helps

prevent any one person, group, or perspective from gaining control of the portal. In the process, some of Andrew Baoill's criticism (2004) about the kind of public sphere blogs tend to form (see section 1.3) would be addressed; it would provide a more equal playing field for new and diverse voices to be heard.

The key variable for the future of the religion blogosphere is the same as for the Internet as a whole: connectivity. In what ways will people interact, share ideas, form hierarchies, and gather social capital? There are certainly content areas that need to be filled, as the bloggers quoted above suggest. But just as important is the kind of infrastructure within which they work. There likely is, somewhere on the Internet, the great writing on Islam Sharlet is looking for, or the diversity Myers sees as lacking, yet they don't have the means for finding it. While Web 2.0 brought vast, user-generated content-creation, the challenge of Web 3.0 will undoubtedly be finding ways to make all that information even more accessible, useful, and social—"taming the deluge of data," as one observer puts it (Griner 2009). Even the nearly 100 blogs discussed in this report are more than most people can afford to keep track of on a daily or weekly basis. The bloggers' suggestions—more diversity, more investigative journalism, more metro coverage, and so on—all amount to more blogs, more data to consume. The question then becomes: what to do with it all?



## Appendix I. Bibliography

- Althouse, Ann. 2006. "Exposed in the Blogosphere." In *Can Blogging Derail Your Career? 7 Bloggers Discuss the Case of Juan Cole*. The Chronicle of Higher Education. <http://chronicle.com/free/v52/i47/47b00601.htm>
- Arnold, Jill and Hugh Miller. 2001. "Academic Masters, Mistresses, and Apprentices: Gender and Power in the Real World of the Web." *Mots Pluriels* 19. <http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/MotsPluriels/MP1901jahm.html>
- Baoill, Andrew. 2004. "Weblogs and the Public Sphere." In Laura Gurak, Smiljana Antonijevic, Laurie Johnson, Clancy Ratliff, and Jessica Reyman (editors), *Into the blogosphere: Rhetoric, community, and culture of weblogs*. <http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/>
- Barlow, Aaron. 2008. *Bloggng America: The New Public Sphere*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Baron, Naomi. 2008. *Always On: Language in an Online and Mobile World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bérubé, Michael. 2006. "The Attention Blogs Bring." In *Can Blogging Derail Your Career? 7 Bloggers Discuss the Case of Juan Cole*. The Chronicle of Higher Education. <http://chronicle.com/free/v52/i47/47b00601.htm>
- BitchPhD. 2006. "The survey says ..." Bitch Ph.D. <http://bitchphd.blogspot.com/2006/02/survey-says.html>
- Blood, Rebecca. 2000. "Weblogs: A History and Perspective." Rebecca's Pocket. [http://www.rebeccablood.net/essays/weblog\\_history.html](http://www.rebeccablood.net/essays/weblog_history.html)

- Borgman, Christine L. 2007. *Scholarship in the Digital Age*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Boynton, Robert. 2005. "Attack of the Career-Killing Blogs," *Slate*. [www.slate.com/id/2130466/](http://www.slate.com/id/2130466/).
- Bruns, Axel and Joanne Jacobs (editors). 2006. *Uses of Blogs*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Campbell, H. 2005. *Exploring Religious Community Online: We Are One in the Network*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Castells, Manuel. 2008. "The New Public Sphere: Global Civil Society, Communication Networks, and Global Governance." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616, no. 1 (March): 78-93.
- Cheong, Pauline Hope, Alexander Halavais, and Kyounghee Kwon. 2008. "The Chronicles of Me: Understanding Blogging as a Religious Practice." *Journal of Media and Religion* 7: 107-131.
- Cheong, P. H. and J.P. Poon 2008. "'WWW.faith.org': (Re)structuring communication and social capital building among religious organizations." *Information, Communication and Society* 11: 89-110.
- Cole, Juan R.I. 2006. "Juan R.I. Cole Responds." In *Can Blogging Derail Your Career? 7 Bloggers Discuss the Case of Juan Cole*. The Chronicle of Higher Education. <http://chronicle.com/free/v52/i47/47b00601.htm>
- Communications of the ACM* 47, no. 12 (December 2004). Special issue on "The Blogosphere."
- Dahl, Candice. 2009. "Undergraduate research in the public domain: the evaluation of non-academic sources online." 2009. *Reference Services Review* 37, no. 2: 155 - 163.
- Dawson, Kara M. 2007. "Blog Overload." The Chronicle of Higher Education. <http://chronicle.com/jobs/news/2007/01/2007013001c.htm>.
- Dawson, Lorne L. and Douglas E. Cowan (editors). 2004. *Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Internet*. New York: Routledge.

- Dayal, Geeta. 2005. "PH.Dotcom: What if professors could lecture 24-7? Blog culture invades academia." *The Village Voice*. Tuesday, April 5. <http://www.villagevoice.com/2005-04-05/art/ph-dotcom/>
- DeLong, J. Bradford. 2006. "The Invisible College." In "Can Blogging Derail Your Career? 7 Bloggers Discuss the Case of Juan Cole." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. <http://chronicle.com/free/v52/i47/47b00601.htm>
- Drezner, Daniel W. 2006. "The Trouble With Blogs." In "Can Blogging Derail Your Career? 7 Bloggers Discuss the Case of Juan Cole." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. <http://chronicle.com/free/v52/i47/47b00601.htm>
- Economist*. 2008. "User-Generated Science." September 28. [http://www.economist.com/sciencetechnology/displayStory.cfm?story\\_id=12253189](http://www.economist.com/sciencetechnology/displayStory.cfm?story_id=12253189)
- Ewins, Rory. 2003. "You Are Where? Building a research presence in cyberspace." Seminar at Edinburgh: Moray House School of Education. <http://speedysnail.com/2003/youarewhere/>
- Farrell, Henry. 2005. "The Blogosphere as a Carnival of Ideas." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. <http://chronicle.com/free/v52/i07/07b01401.htm>
- Farrell, Henry and Daniel W. Drezner. 2008. "The Power and Politics of Blogs." *Public Choice* 134: 15-30. See online peer-review discussion at <http://www.danieldrezner.com/archives/001489.html>.
- Female Science Professor. 2009. "Everything Is Evaluated." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. <http://chronicle.com/jobs/news/2009/04/2009042001c.htm>
- Ferguson, Ross, and Barry Griffiths. 2006. "Thin Democracy? Parliamentarians, Citizens and the Influence of Blogging on Political Engagement." *Parliamentary Affairs* 59, no. 2: 366-374. <http://pa.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/short/59/2/366>
- Gill, Kathy E. 2004. "How can we measure the influence of the blogosphere?" *Proceedings of the WWW2004 Conference* (New York, May 17-22). <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.124.2509&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- Griner, David. 2009. "Web 3.0 is about taming the deluge of data." *The Social Path*. <http://www.thesocialpath.com/2009/06/taming-the-river-of-data.html>

- Haas, Tanni. 2005. "From 'Public Journalism' to the 'Public's Journalism'? Rhetoric and reality in the discourse on weblogs." *Journalism Studies* 6, no.3 (August): 387-396.
- Hargittai, Eszter. 2004. "The academic contributions of blogging?" Crooked Timber. <http://crookedtimber.org/2004/11/18/the-academic-contributions-of-blogging/>.
- Hargittai, Eszter, Jason Gallo, and Matthew Kane. 2008. "Cross-ideological Discussions among Conservative and Liberal Bloggers." *Public Choice* 134.
- Healy, Kieran. 2004. "Gender and blogging." Crooked Timber. <http://crookedtimber.org/2004/12/17/gender-and-blogging>
- Kaufman, Scott Eric. 2006. "A post in two parts: The first will bore you; the second, infuriate." Acephalous. [http://acephalous.typepad.com/acephalous/2006/02/a\\_post\\_in\\_two\\_p.html](http://acephalous.typepad.com/acephalous/2006/02/a_post_in_two_p.html)
- Kotsko, Adam. 2007. "A Skeptic's Take on Academic Blogs." *Inside Higher Ed*. November 1. <http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2007/11/01/kotsko>
- Krause, Steven D. 2002. "Where Do I List This on My CV?" Version 1.0. CCC Online, hosted at stevendkrause.com. <http://www.stevendkrause.com/academic/2002CCC/>
- Krause, Steven D. 2005. "Blogs as a Tool for Teaching." The Chronicle of Higher Education. <http://chronicle.com/weekly/v51/i42/42b03301.htm>
- Krause, Steven D. 2007. "Where Do I List This on My CV?" Version 2.0. *Kairos*. <http://kairos.technorhretoric.net/12.1/binder.html?topoi/krause/index.html>
- Kuehn, Evan. 2008. "Are Blogs 'Legitimate Piece[s] of Academic Writing'?" Clavi Non Defixi. <http://nondefixi.blogspot.com/2008/09/are-blogs-legitimate-pieces-of-academic.html>
- Leiter, Brian. 2006. "Why Blogs Are Bad for Legal Scholarship." *Yale Law Journal Pocket Part* 116, 53: 53-58. <http://www.thepocketpart.org/2006/09/20/leiter.html>.
- Lepore, Jill. 2009. "Back Issues." *New Yorker*. January 26. [http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/atlarge/2009/01/26/090126crat\\_atlarge\\_lepore](http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/atlarge/2009/01/26/090126crat_atlarge_lepore).

- McKenna, Laura. 2007. "Getting the Word Out': Policy Bloggers Use Their Soap Box To Make Change." *Review of Policy Research* 24(May): 209–29.
- Mortensen, Torill Elvira. 2004. "Weblogs and the Dilemma of Academia." In L.J. Gurak, S. Antonijevic, L. Johnson, C. Ratliff, & J. Reyman (editors), *Into the blogosphere: Rhetoric, community, and culture of weblogs*. [http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/personal\\_publication.html](http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/personal_publication.html)
- Mortensen, Torill and Jill Walker. 2002. "Blogging Thoughts: personal publication as an online research tool," in Morrison (editor) *Researching ICTs in Context*. Oslo: InterMedia/UniPub. <http://www.intermedia.uio.no/konferanser/skikt-02/docs/Researching ICTs in context-Ch11-Mortensen-Walker.pdf>
- O'Connor, Erin. 2006. "The Controversy That Wasn't." In "Can Blogging Derail Your Career? 7 Bloggers Discuss the Case of Juan Cole." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. <http://chronicle.com/free/v52/i47/47b00601.htm>
- Olsen, Ted. 2007. "The Death of Blogs." *Christianity Today* (October). <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/october/13.22.html>
- O'Reilly, Tim. 2005. "What Is Web 2.0." O'Reilly Media. <http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html>
- Pedersen, Sarah and Caroline Macafee. 2007. "Gender differences in British blogging." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*. 12(4), article 16. <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol12/issue4/pedersen.html>
- Public Choice* 134. 2008. Special issue on "Blogs, Politics and Power."
- Rainie, Lee. 2005. "The State of Blogging." Pew Internet & American Life Project. <http://www.pewInternet.org/Reports/2005/The-State-of-Blogging.aspx>
- Reynolds, Glenn. 2006. "The Politics of Academic Appointments." In "Can Blogging Derail Your Career? 7 Bloggers Discuss the Case of Juan Cole." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. <http://chronicle.com/free/v52/i47/47b00601.htm>
- Rushkoff, Douglas. 2005. *Get Back in the Box: Innovation from the Inside Out*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Saper, Craig. 2006. "Blogademia." *Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture* 6, no. 4. <http://reconstruction.eserver.org/064/saper.shtml>

- Schiff, Aaron. 2008. "A Survey of Economics Bloggers." <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1080238>
- Schmidt, Jan. 2007. "Blogging practices: An analytical framework." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12, no. 4. <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol12/issue4/schmidt.html>
- Shirky, Clay. 2003. "Power Laws, Weblogs, and Inequality." Clay Shirky's Writings About the Internet. [http://shirky.com/writings/powerlaw\\_weblog.html](http://shirky.com/writings/powerlaw_weblog.html).
- Smith, Aaron. 2008. "New numbers for blogging and blog readership." Pew Internet & American Life Project. <http://www.pewInternet.org/Commentary/2008/July/New-numbers-for-blogging-and-blog-readership.aspx>
- Stelter, Brian. 2008. "Mainstream News Outlets Start Linking to Other Sites." *New York Times*. October 12.
- Stutzman, Frederic. 2006. "Academic Blogging: The Value of Conversation" *Teachers College Record*. October 31. <http://www.tcrecord.org/Content.asp?ContentID=12817>.
- Sullivan, Andrew. 2008. "Why I Blog." *Atlantic* (November).
- Sunstein, Cass. 2001. *Republic.com*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Sunstein, Cass. 2007. *Republic.com 2.0*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Technorati. "State of the Blogosphere / 2008." <http://technorati.com/blogging/state-of-the-blogosphere/>
- Tremayne, Mark (editor). 2006. *Blogging, Citizenship, and the Future of Media*. New York: Routledge.
- Tribble, Ivan. 2005. "Bloggers Need Not Apply," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. <http://chronicle.com/jobs/news/2005/07/2005070801c.htm>.
- Vaidhyanathan, Siva. 2006. "The Lessons of Juan Cole." In "Can Blogging Derail Your Career? 7 Bloggers Discuss the Case of Juan Cole." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. <http://chronicle.com/free/v52/i47/47b00601.htm>
- Various. 2006. "Can Blogging Derail Your Career? 7 Bloggers Discuss the Case of Juan Cole." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. <http://chronicle.com/free/v52/i47/47b00601.htm>

- Waldman, Steven. 2009. "Why the Huffington Post Can't Replace the *New York Times*." Huffington Post. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/steven-waldman/the-case-against-huffingt\\_b\\_157075.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/steven-waldman/the-case-against-huffingt_b_157075.html)
- Walker, Jill. 2006. "Blogging from Inside the Ivory Tower." In Axel Bruns and Joanne Jacobs (editors), *Uses of Blogs*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Wasik, Bill. 2009. *And Then There's This: How Stories Live and Die in Viral Culture*. New York: Viking.
- Weatherson, Brian. 2004. "Blogging as Scholarship." Crooked Timber. <http://crookedtimber.org/2004/01/10/blogging-as-scholarship/>
- Williams, Jeremy B. and Joanne Jacobs. 2004. "Exploring the use of blogs as learning spaces in the higher education sector." *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology* 20, no. 2: 232-247.
- Wooden, Cindy. 2009. "Catholic Blogosphere: Council Looks at Promoting Charity, Truth Online." Catholic News Service. <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0904838.htm>

## Appendix II. Religion blogs

The blogs and bloggers listed on the chart below represent those that were examined in the course of compiling this report. They represent various sectors of the English-speaking—and largely American—blogosphere engaged in conversation about religion, public life, and academia. The list, assembled by The Immanent Frame's editors, is by no means exhaustive, due simply to the expansiveness of the religion blogosphere.

We welcome nominations for blogs to be considered for inclusion in an additional running list and possibly in future editions of this report. Please send nominations to [ifblog@ssrc.org](mailto:ifblog@ssrc.org) with the name, URL, and a description of the blog.

Name	URL	Description
All Things Catholic	<a href="http://ncronline.org/blogs/all-things-catholic">http://ncronline.org/blogs/all-things-catholic</a>	John Allen, a correspondent at the <i>National Catholic Reporter</i> , as well as CNN, the <i>New York Times</i> , and elsewhere, gives detailed reports on the inner workings of the Vatican and its role in international affairs.
AltMuslim	<a href="http://www.altmuslim.com/">http://www.altmuslim.com/</a>	AltMuslim's contributors offer global perspectives on Muslim life, politics, and culture. They present these viewpoints in a variety of formats including interviews, analysis, opinion, media reviews, and photos and videos.
AltMuslimah	<a href="http://www.altmuslimah.com/">http://www.altmuslimah.com/</a>	A partner site to AltMuslim “exploring both sides of the gender divide.” Articles probe orthodoxies and their boundaries in the Islamic tradition as they relate to sexuality. Content provided by a number of regular and guest writers.



Name	URL	Description
American Buddhist Perspective	<a href="http://americanbuddhist.blogspot.com/">http://americanbuddhist.blogspot.com/</a>	Justin Whitaker, an American graduate student in Buddhist Ethics at the University of London, writes often-lengthy posts on topics that range from Pali linguistics to Buddhist practice to academic life.
Archbishop Cranmer	<a href="http://archbishop-cranmer.blogspot.com/">http://archbishop-cranmer.blogspot.com/</a>	Written by an anonymous Anglican who takes his name after one of the leaders (and martyrs) of the English Reformation. It focuses mainly on religion and politics in England and gives rise to vibrant comment threads.
Articles of Faith	<a href="http://www.boston.com/news/local/articles_of_faith">http://www.boston.com/news/local/articles_of_faith</a>	A blog by <i>Boston Globe</i> religion reporter Michael Paulson, Articles of Faith provides daily commentary on religion news, a lot of which is centered on Boston and Catholicism. Paulson links frequently to his and others' news stories and also puts together the occasional roundup of news coverage on significant events.
At the Intersection	<a href="http://www.publicreligion.org/blog">http://www.publicreligion.org/blog</a>	At the Intersection is the blog for Public Religion Research, a Washington D.C.-based for-profit consulting firm, in their words, "bringing expertise and insight to the intersection of religion, values and public policy." Many of the blog posts come from Robert P. Jones, PRR's president and founder. They tend to comment on and analyze survey data and political trends relating to religion in the United States.
Bartholomew's Notes on Religion	<a href="http://barthsnotes.wordpress.com/">http://barthsnotes.wordpress.com/</a>	Since February 2004, British scholar Richard Bartholomew has been keeping an eye on the fringes of religiosity around the world, with special attention to East Asia, Europe, and underreported goings-on among more reactionary elements in the United States. He tends not to comment on the stories garnering headlines at a given moment. Instead, he keeps his eye on the quieter ongoing trends that interest him, often based on his readings of small, sectarian media outlets.
Bible Belt Blogger	<a href="http://biblebeltblogger.com/">http://biblebeltblogger.com/</a>	The blog of Frank Lockwood, religion editor at the <i>Arkansas Democrat-Gazette</i> . Offers spirited commentaries, of varying length, on religion news and opinion articles around the Internet. The sidebar includes a ranking of Arkansas's megachurches and denominations, listed by attendance numbers.
Blog from the Capital	<a href="http://www.bjconline.org/index.php?option=com_content&amp;task=blogsection">http://www.bjconline.org/index.php?option=com_content&amp;task=blogsection</a>	The politics blog of the Baptist Joint Committee, Blog from the Capital offers brief commentary on news items and policy debates related to church/state issues from a Baptist, separationist point of view.

Name	URL	Description
Blogging Religiously	<a href="http://religion.lohudblogs.com/">http://religion.lohudblogs.com/</a>	“Religion writer Gary Stern comments on news and trends in the world of religion — in the Lower Hudson Valley and beyond.” Posts often focus on New York religious politics, but Stern takes on issues of national and international interest sometimes as well.
Bold Faith Type	<a href="http://blog.faithinpubliclife.org/">http://blog.faithinpubliclife.org/</a>	As the blog of Faith in Public Life, an organization devoted to supporting progressive religious voices in politics and the media, Bold Faith Type maintains a left-of-center commentary on religion news items. Its authors mainly include the media staff of FPL. Posts often summarize discussion on a variety of other religion blogs and media outlets.
Busted Halo	<a href="http://www.bustedhalo.com/bustedblog">http://www.bustedhalo.com/bustedblog</a>	This “online magazine for spiritual seekers” is a project of the Catholic Paulist Fathers, aimed especially at young adults trying to live out their faith in the modern world. It includes basic articles about Catholic teaching, as well as sections about politics, culture, sexuality, entertainment, and more. It also includes audio/video sections and an XM Radio show.
Call & Response	<a href="http://www.faithandleadership.com/blog">http://www.faithandleadership.com/blog</a>	This blog from Duke Divinity School includes short essays by scholars largely from a liberal Christian perspective, as well as a daily digest of “News & Ideas.”
Charlotte was Both	<a href="http://amywelborn.wordpress.com/">http://amywelborn.wordpress.com/</a>	Conservative Catholic author Amy Welborn comments on religion in culture and politics, as well as glimpses of ordinary life.
Christianity Today Liveblog	<a href="http://blog.christianitytoday.com/ctliveblog/">http://blog.christianitytoday.com/ctliveblog/</a>	Here, editors and contributors to <i>Christianity Today</i> comment on controversies and news items, especially ones little-discussed outside the evangelical community. Posts include modest editorializing, but mainly point to things of interest on the internet.
Christianity Today Politics Blog	<a href="http://blog.christianitytoday.com/ctpolitics/">http://blog.christianitytoday.com/ctpolitics/</a>	This group blog by the editors of <i>Christianity Today</i> and others (including bloggers Mark Silk, Steve Waldman, and Dan Gilgoff). Mainly covers religion, especially Christianity, as it relates to national politics stories. The emphasis is on reporting and perspectives much more than opinion.
City of Brass	<a href="http://blog.beliefnet.com/cityofbrass/">http://blog.beliefnet.com/cityofbrass/</a>	Aziz Poonawalla, an Ismaili Muslim based in Wisconsin, blogs mainly about Islam in major news stories. His posts are often in-depth and full of links to resources around the internet.

Name	URL	Description
Clerical Whispers	<a href="http://www.clericalwhispers.blogspot.com">http://www.clericalwhispers.blogspot.com</a>	"Irish RC Priests...Giving The Uncomfortable Truth And News From The Inside..." is how this blog describes itself. It has been much involved in matters related to sexual abuse by priests. In addition to commentary about developments in the Catholic Church around the world, the blog also publishes prayers.
Comment Is Free Belief	<a href="http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief">http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief</a>	This Webby-winning section of the <i>Guardian's</i> extensive online opinion section has been running only since late 2008, but it has played host to leading figures including Tariq Ramadan, Mary Midgley, Michael Lerner, Rowan Williams, Tony Blair, and Sue Blackmore. They situate the discussion of religion in the contexts of philosophy, secularism, politics, and culture. Much of it is centered on "The Question," a weekly prompt which various authors address concurrently and conversationally. The "new atheism" debates figure prominently.
Crunchy Con	<a href="http://blog.beliefnet.com/crunchycon/">http://blog.beliefnet.com/crunchycon/</a>	A "conservative politics and religion blog" at BeliefNet by Rod Dreher, editorial columnist for the <i>Dallas Morning News</i> . Dreher was raised Methodist, but converted to Roman Catholicism, and then, to Eastern Orthodoxy. Gives opinionated commentary on national news stories, lesser-known stories, and even inspirational pieces, such as saints' stories. The blog began in mid-2006 and concluded at the end of 2009, when Dreher became director of publications at the John Templeton Foundation.
Dallas Morning News Religion Blog	<a href="http://religionblog.dallasnews.com/">http://religionblog.dallasnews.com/</a>	When the <i>Dallas Morning News</i> closed its well-regarded religion section, its reporters started this blog to compensate. Most posts now are framed as questions to the "Texas Faith" panel, an interfaith group of religious leaders and thinkers in Texas.
Damian Thompson	<a href="http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/damian_thompson">http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/damian_thompson</a>	Written by the editor-in-chief of the <i>Catholic Herald</i> . Offers commentary on current events in the U.K. and abroad from a conservative Catholic perspective. Posts often cover debates over Catholic liturgy and Catholic-Anglican Church relations.

Name	URL	Description
dotCommonweal	<a href="http://www.commonwealmagazine.org/blog">http://www.commonwealmagazine.org/blog</a>	A blog from <i>Commonweal</i> magazine's editors and contributors, dotCommonweal, like the magazine, is written from a liberal lay Catholic perspective. Also like the magazine, dotCommonweal's content is politics-centered. Posts can range from a simple link to more in-depth commentary on an issue, and readers actively participate in the discussion through the comments section.
Ekklesia	<a href="http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/blog">http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/blog</a>	The blog of Ekklesia, a London-based think tank interested in church/state issues with a theologically liberal, usually Christian, perspective. A handful of bloggers comment on international and British news items, especially lesser-known ones that relate to Ekklesia's interests. There are no user comments.
Elephant Journal	<a href="http://www.elephantjournal.com/">http://www.elephantjournal.com/</a>	A print magazine that, online, operates in blog format. It covers "Yoga, Sustainability, Politics, Spirituality" with a young, hipster bent. Posts include articles, interviews, and multimedia.
Episcopal Cafe	<a href="http://www.episcopalcafe.com/">http://www.episcopalcafe.com/</a>	A group site about the Episcopal Church, including The Lead, a blog that deals with church affairs and politics, an "Art Blog," and others.
Evangelical Outpost	<a href="http://evangelicaloutpost.com/">http://evangelicaloutpost.com/</a>	Perhaps more magazine than blog, Evangelical Outpost publishes articles on news and culture (as well as more esoteric topics like philosophy and "pop semiotics") "from an evangelical worldview." Many of the contributors are young evangelical journalists.
Faith and Theology	<a href="http://faith-theology.blogspot.com/">http://faith-theology.blogspot.com/</a>	Australian-Anglican theologian Ben Myers writes this popular "blog for theological scholarship and contemporary theological reflection." Posts are often lengthy, literary, and are rarely news-driven.
FaithWorld	<a href="http://blogs.reuters.com/faithworld/">http://blogs.reuters.com/faithworld/</a>	Written by Reuters religion reporters, posts are serious explorations of religion news items they're covering that venture somewhat outside the normal constraints of news reporting, including opinionated perspectives and the stories behind the news. International coverage is particularly strong.

Name	URL	Description
First Things blogs	<a href="http://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/">http://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/</a> and several others	Written by <i>First Things</i> staff and writers, First Thoughts carries an ongoing discussion about the magazine's articles, as well as goings-on on the internet in news, culture (both low and high), and religion. Commentary tends to be brief and opinionated, reflecting <i>First Things's</i> conservative approach. There are also a handful of specialized blogs on the site by particular authors. One, Evangel, is an evangelical group blog.
GetReligion	<a href="http://www.getreligion.org">http://www.getreligion.org</a>	Written by a team of seasoned journalists who lean conservative, GetReligion carries on an ongoing commentary about how religion is portrayed in the media. Posts include analysis of one or more particular news stories, shedding light on the reporting and editorial processes that were going on behind the scenes and offering pointed critique. Comments threads are active and usually substantive.
God & Country	<a href="http://www.usnews.com/blogs/god-and-country">http://www.usnews.com/blogs/god-and-country</a>	Until God & Country was discontinued at the end of 2009, <i>U.S. News &amp; World Report</i> journalist Dan Giloff followed religion mainly as it finds its way into major national news stories. With the eye of a political insider, he comments on religious trends as they might affect alignments in Washington. As a reporter, he regularly has access to leading figures and offers insights about them on the blog.
God Blog, The	<a href="http://www.jewishjournal.com/thegodblog/">http://www.jewishjournal.com/thegodblog/</a>	As a feature on the website of the Los Angeles-based <i>Jewish Journal</i> , Brad A. Greenberg maintains spirited commentary on the religion headlines, often bringing little-known perspectives to bear. Greenberg is a Christian working for a Jewish site, but his coverage—which began in March of 2007—is hardly sectarian. He has a particularly good eye for how religion plays out in American popular culture.
God's Politics	<a href="http://blog.sojo.net/">http://blog.sojo.net/</a>	A group blog on religion and politics led by Jim Wallis, founder of <i>Sojourners</i> magazine and community. It is devoted to building a progressive evangelical movement.
Holy Post	<a href="http://network.nationalpost.com/np/blogs/holy-post/">http://network.nationalpost.com/np/blogs/holy-post/</a>	The religion blog of the <i>National Post</i> , a Toronto-based conservative paper. It posts often lengthy articles by a variety of authors, including both breaking news and commentary.

Name	URL	Description
Immanent Frame, The	<a href="http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/">http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/</a>	A collective blog publishing interdisciplinary perspectives on secularism, religion, and the public sphere. Authors are almost entirely academics writing serious but accessible reflections, sometimes relating to current events. Also includes a filter blog, “here & there” with links to related articles from around the internet.
In All Things	<a href="http://www.americamagazine.org/blog/blog.cfm?blog_id=2">http://www.americamagazine.org/blog/blog.cfm?blog_id=2</a>	The group blog of <i>America</i> , “the National Catholic Weekly,” In All Things offers opinionated commentary on news that relate to the Catholic Church and its role in politics and culture.
Inside Islam	<a href="http://insideislam.wisc.edu/">http://insideislam.wisc.edu/</a>	A project of the University of Wisconsin and Wisconsin Public Radio, this blog and radio series includes interviews, essays, and dispatches about the culture and politics of Islam.
International Religious Freedom News	<a href="http://becketinternational.wordpress.com">http://becketinternational.wordpress.com</a>	IRFN is maintained by the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, a public interest law firm based in Washington DC. The blog aggregates news related to the active infringement of, and failure to enforce, religious freedom laws across the globe. Posts are brief and written in a journalistic tone. The site’s intention is to compile relevant headlines and link to full articles on a daily basis, as well as to serve as a database for past articles concerning religious freedom law.
Irtiqa	<a href="http://sciencereigionnews.blogspot.com/">http://sciencereigionnews.blogspot.com/</a>	Formerly Science and Religion News, Irtiqa is the blog of Salman Hameed, an astronomer and Assistant Professor of Integrated Science & Humanities at Hampshire College. Since 2006, he has commented on a variety of issues at the confluence of science of religion, with a special focus on the Muslim world. His perspective tends to privilege science at the expense of some of its religious dissenters.
Jesus’ General	<a href="http://patriotboy.blogspot.com/">http://patriotboy.blogspot.com/</a>	Written by an anonymous “graduate of Bear River High in Garland/Tremonton, UT; Weber State University, and The George Washington University,” Jesus’ General is an award-winning, left-leaning blog on the religious right. It is usually satirical in tone.
JTA blogs	<a href="http://blogs.jta.org/politics/">http://blogs.jta.org/politics/</a> , <a href="http://blogs.jta.org/telegraph/">http://blogs.jta.org/telegraph/</a>	Since January 2009, Ron Kampeas and Eric Fingerhut write on JTA’s website about Jewish affairs inside the Beltway in Capital J. In The Telegraph, JTA editors comment on political and cultural news relating to the Jewish community. Posts, often quite lengthy and informative, privilege news reporting over opinion.

Name	URL	Description
Killing the Buddha	<a href="http://killingthebuddha.com/">http://killingthebuddha.com/</a>	So-called KtB was founded in 2000 by Peter Manseau, Jeff Sharlet, and Jeremy Brothers as “a religion magazine for people made anxious by churches, people embarrassed to be caught in the ‘spirituality’ section of a bookstore, people both hostile and drawn to talk of God.” Highlights have been collected in two print anthologies, <i>Killing the Buddha</i> (Free Press, 2004) and <i>Believer, Beware</i> (Beacon, 2009). Since a relaunch in early 2009, KtB has been publishing several pieces per week in addition to daily posts on the “KtBlog” by the site’s editors.
La Shawn Barber’s Corner	<a href="http://lashawnbarber.com/">http://lashawnbarber.com/</a>	“Independent conservative” La Shawn Barber comments on news, popular culture, and daily life from a pro-life, evangelical perspective. She has been widely-cited in major newspapers and makes appearances on television talk shows.
Martin Marty Center	<a href="http://divinity.uchicago.edu/martycenter/publications/">http://divinity.uchicago.edu/martycenter/publications/</a>	At the University of Chicago Divinity School’s Martin Marty Center, the Religion and Culture Web Forum and Sightings are less standard blogs than online newsletters. Scholars write brief essays that bring their research interests to bear on current issues in religion and public life.
Monkey Mind	<a href="http://monkeymindonline.blogspot.com/">http://monkeymindonline.blogspot.com/</a>	James Ford is a Unitarian Universalist minister and Soto Zen priest. His posts are spiritually wide-ranging, bringing Western and Eastern insights to bear on contemporary issues and interreligious dialogue.
Mormon Inquiry, Beliefnet	<a href="http://blog.beliefnet.com/mormoninquiry/">http://blog.beliefnet.com/mormoninquiry/</a>	Written by Dave Banack, a journalist and attorney who converted to Mormonism at the age of fifteen. Banack discusses issues of church doctrine, as well as culture, and inter-denominational relations. He occasionally comments on events within the greater public sphere, though most posts pertain specifically to issues of interest to those in the LDS church.
Muslim Voices	<a href="http://muslimvoices.org/blog/">http://muslimvoices.org/blog/</a>	The blog of a site, based out of the University of Indiana, designed to promote intercultural dialogue with global Islam. Posts, by the site’s editors as well as guest bloggers, cover the politics and culture of Muslim-majority countries and, particularly, the diaspora.

Name	URL	Description
Muslimah Media Watch	<a href="http://muslimahmediawatch.org/">http://muslimahmediawatch.org/</a>	A group blog geared towards critiquing misogynistic, racist, and simplistic representations of Muslim women in popular culture and the news-media, as well as commenting on contemporary events and issues of interest to Muslim women. The website's contributors, many of whom are students and Ph.D. candidates, identify as Muslim feminists.
MuslimMatters	<a href="http://muslimmatters.org/">http://muslimmatters.org/</a>	A group site started in 2007 by a pair of Muslim bloggers that discusses issues relevant to Islam, "especially in the West." Topics include civil rights, religion, politics, and society.
New Humanist Blog	<a href="http://blog.newhumanist.org.uk/">http://blog.newhumanist.org.uk/</a>	The online wing of <i>New Humanist</i> magazine, a periodical published by the Rationalist Association and ideologically aligned with New Atheists Dawkins, Hitchens, et al. Posts are terse and often sardonic. They cover a smattering of current events, books, and articles. The authors of the blog are generally dismissive of religion and religious perspectives.
No God Blog	<a href="http://atheists.org/blog/">http://atheists.org/blog/</a>	The blog of American Atheists, No God Blog delivers snarky commentary on AA activities as well as news and articles around the web about religion.
Of Sacred and Secular	<a href="http://www.statesman.com/blogs/content/shared-gen/blogs/austin/faith/index.html">http://www.statesman.com/blogs/content/shared-gen/blogs/austin/faith/index.html</a>	Of Sacred and Secular is the religion blog of the Austin American-Statesman (Austin, TX). It is written by Joshunda Sanders, the Statesman's religion reporter. Posts cover religion news, both local and national, and are written in a somewhat conversational, albeit nondescript, journalistic style. In addition to news coverage, Sanders has been visiting various houses of worship in Central Texas and reporting on her experience.
Old Black Church!, The	<a href="http://theoldblackchurch.blogspot.com/">http://theoldblackchurch.blogspot.com/</a>	Ann Brock gives a conservative Christian perspective on African-American, urban culture in the United States.
On Faith	<a href="http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith">http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith</a>	A collaborative effort between the <i>Washington Post</i> and <i>Newsweek</i> , On Faith provides a forum for intelligent discussion on faith and its global implications. It draws from a pool of scholars, journalists and religious leaders to comment on the latest and most significant questions about religion's role in society. The site offers a number of topic-specific blogs and columns. Each week the editors, Sally Quinn and Jon Meacham, pose a specific question and a panel of experts offers perspectives on the topic.



Name	URL	Description
Open Source Theology	<a href="http://www.OpensourceTheology.net/">http://www.OpensourceTheology.net/</a>	“The purpose of this site is to assist the development of an emerging theology for the emerging church.” This collaborative group blog features on going discussion from a “postmodern,” largely young, Christian perspective.
Patheos	<a href="http://www.patheos.com/">http://www.patheos.com/</a>	A for-profit website launched in 2009, Patheos describes itself as “the premier online destination to engage in the global dialogue about religion and spirituality and to explore and experience the world’s beliefs.” Drawing on the expertise of academics, it aims to create a trusted resource for information about religion to non-experts, as well as a hub for topical discussion through articles in its “Public Square” section and blogs. It also features an extensive directory listing of religious organizations.
Pharyngula	<a href="http://scienceblogs.com/pharyngula/">http://scienceblogs.com/pharyngula/</a>	Part of Seed Media Group’s ScienceBlogs Network, this blog by biologist PZ Myers is best known for clever invective against religious critics of mainstream science. He also weighs in on American politics with a progressive orientation. The big red “A” on his sidebar indicates, as do many of his posts, identification with the New Atheists. Myers has a large number of regular followers and commenters; he has been known to rally them to skew online surveys that speak to his interests.
Point, The	<a href="http://thepoint.breakpoint.org/">http://thepoint.breakpoint.org/</a>	On the website of Chuck Colson’s Breakpoint ministry, “a conversation on current events and Christian worldview.” Comments on news with a conservative evangelical point of view. Includes a “daily roundup” of news stories as well as opinionated commentary by about 25 contributors, ranging from short to long posts.
Progressive Revival	<a href="http://blog.beliefnet.com/progressiverevival/">http://blog.beliefnet.com/progressiverevival/</a>	With an image of a revival tent in front of the Capitol as its header, this collective blog (headed by Diana Butler Bass and Paul Raushenbush) is devoted to the fostering of a religious coalition steeped in progressive politics. “Both,” the site says of its authors, “stand firmly within the Mainline Protestant tradition.” Posts generally take the form of substantial, serious, analytic essays.

Name	URL	Description
ProgressiveIslam.org	<a href="http://progressiveislam.org/">http://progressiveislam.org/</a>	Orchestrated by American Muslims, ProgressiveIslam.org is “an online community and a super blog for Muslims of all theological orientations and any one else with an interest in issues relating to Islam, empowerment, freedom, equality and authenticity.” In addition to front page articles, there is a section for blog posts by readers. The emphasis is on discussion of reformist causes in global Islam.
Prosblogion, The	<a href="http://prosblogion.ektopos.com/">http://prosblogion.ektopos.com/</a>	An academic philosophy of religion blog established in 2004. It is a group blog maintained by Matthew Mullins, a Ph.D. student at Northwestern University. “Individuals interested in becoming a contributor to Prosblogion should have an established reputation in the field, a recommendation from a current contributor, or a history of contributing to the life of blog ( <i>sic.</i> ) as a commenter.”
Read the Spirit	<a href="http://www.readthespirit.com/">http://www.readthespirit.com/</a>	Through book reviews, recommendations, and interviews, this site headed by David Crumm curates a selection of works that amount to an interfaith spirituality infused with social conscience.
Religion Clause	<a href="http://religionclause.blogspot.com">http://religionclause.blogspot.com</a>	Howard M. Friedman, an emeritus professor of law at the University of Toledo in Ohio, blogs prolifically (to the tune of half a dozen or more posts in a day) about church/state issues in the United States. He mainly summarizes news articles on the Internet, without much commentary or personal interjection. The archives go back to 2005.
Religion Dispatches	<a href="http://www.religiondispatches.org/">http://www.religiondispatches.org/</a>	Religion Dispatches began in early 2008, providing daily original reporting and commentary about religion and politics from a progressive perspective. In the process, it has also provided a common space for both religion scholars and journalists to discuss religion in public life. Areas of interest include popular culture, electoral politics, sexuality, technology, science, and civil rights.

Name	URL	Description
Religion in American History	<a href="http://usreligion.blogspot.com">http://usreligion.blogspot.com</a>	Religion in American History is a self-described “group blog to foster discussion and share research, insights, reviews, observations, syllabi, links, new books, project information, grant opportunities, seminars, lectures, and thoughts about religion in American history and American religious history.” Edited by Paul Harvey and Kelly Baker, the blog is updated daily with a variety of material and also provides more permanent links to teaching resources and other discussion forums.
Religion News Blog	<a href="http://www.religionnewsblog.com">http://www.religionnewsblog.com</a>	Published by the Christian counter-cult organization Apologetics Index, the RNB focuses on often under-reported trends in the world of new religious movements and religious freedom around the world. The blog mainly consists of text clipped from news articles, occasionally with brief, highly opinionated commentary.
Religion News Service Blog	<a href="http://www.religionnews.com/index.php?rnsblog">http://www.religionnews.com/index.php?rnsblog</a>	“The only secular news and photo service devoted to unbiased coverage of religion and ethics—exclusively.” Their blog includes roundups of religion in the news and commentary on major news items.
Revealer, The	<a href="http://www.therevealer.org">http://www.therevealer.org</a>	Published by New York University’s Center for Religion and Media, The Revealer is a daily review of religion in the news and news about religion. The blog separates its press critiques into three categories: today (for shorter observations), timely (for longer, newsier pieces), and timeless (for the more evergreen criticism).
Sarah Posner	<a href="http://www.prospect.org/cs/author?id=1314">http://www.prospect.org/cs/author?id=1314</a> , <a href="http://www.religiondispatches.org/bloggers/sarahposner/">http://www.religiondispatches.org/bloggers/sarahposner/</a>	Journalist Sarah Posner writes about the Religious Right for <i>The American Prospect</i> with an inside-the-beltway perspective. In 2009, she moved from the Prospect to Religion Dispatches.
Scoop, The	<a href="http://www.uscmidiareligion.org/?theScoop">http://www.uscmidiareligion.org/?theScoop</a>	Diane Winston, who holds the Knight Chair in Media and Religion at the University of Southern California, is the driving force behind The Scoop, a blog about religion in the media. It focuses on how news media reports (or doesn’t report) religion and offers insightful commentary on religion in other media forms such as television and film. The goal of the website is to “serve as a resource for journalists, including journalism educators and students seeking new models for covering politics, science, sex and gender among other key issues for the 21st century.”

Name	URL	Description
Seeker, The	<a href="http://newsblogs.chicagotribune.com/religion_theseeker/">http://newsblogs.chicagotribune.com/religion_theseeker/</a>	The <i>Chicago Tribune's</i> religion blog is Manya Brachear's self-described "personal and professional quest for truth." Posts comment on news events, and are written in a non-polemical, journalistic style. She often, at the end, invites readers to comment, giving rise to sometimes quite active comment threads.
Shambala SunSpace	<a href="http://www.shambhalasun.com/sunspace/">http://www.shambhalasun.com/sunspace/</a>	The blog of the <i>Shambala Sun</i> , an American Buddhist magazine. The blog features commentary by the Sun's editors on recent publications, debates within Buddhism, and wider social issues.
Slacktivist	<a href="http://slacktivist.typepad.com/">http://slacktivist.typepad.com/</a>	Calls itself a "politically liberal weblog featuring commentary on contemporary evangelicalism as well as social issues." The author, Fred Clark, is a magazine editor in Pennsylvania with experience in Christian organizations. Posts are long, literate, and thoughtful. They're relevant to current events, often, but they're also wide-ranging and perennial. One particularly popular series is his ongoing commentary on the <i>Left Behind</i> books.
SOF Observed	<a href="http://blog.speakingoffaith.org/">http://blog.speakingoffaith.org/</a>	The blog of Speaking of Faith, Krista Tippett's American Public Media radio show. Producers give background on current programs and comment on religion in the news.
South Jerusalem	<a href="http://southjerusalem.com/">http://southjerusalem.com/</a>	Written and published by Jerusalem-based journalists Gershom Gorenberg and Haim Watzman, South Jerusalem is billed as a "Progressive, Skeptical Blog on Israel, Judaism, Culture, Politics and Literature." Its emphasis is on Israeli politics and culture with an especial focus on the post-1967 occupation, as well as modern Judaism and Jewish/Israeli literature. Blog posts also cover Palestinian politics and society, U.S.-Israel relations, and the role of religion in Israeli life. Gorenberg is a correspondent for <i>The American Prospect</i> and the author of several books. Watzman is a prolific author, journalist, and translator.
Spiritual Politics	<a href="http://www.spiritual-politics.org">http://www.spiritual-politics.org</a>	Spiritual Politics is Mark Silk's blog on religion and American political culture. Silk, director of the Center for the Study of Religion and Public Life at Trinity College which publishes the blog, provides informed commentary on new stories on a range of political issues including abortion, same-sex marriage, and church-state controversies.

Name	URL	Description
State of Belief Blog	<a href="http://stateofbelief.com/blog/">http://stateofbelief.com/blog/</a>	The blog of <i>State of Belief</i> , C. Welton Gaddy's radio show on religious progressive politics. The blog discusses current programs on the show as well as commenting on religion in the news.
Steven Waldman	<a href="http://blog.beliefnet.com/stevenwaldman/">http://blog.beliefnet.com/stevenwaldman/</a>	Beliefnet.com editor-in-chief and co-founder Steven Waldman is a veteran religion journalist. He comments on religion and politics from a perspective that spans across political divides. He has also been involved in the growing movement to forge a new progressive religious coalition on issues like abortion. Ended on November 20, 2009, when Waldman left Beliefnet to work for the FCC.
Street Prophets	<a href="http://streetprophets.com/">http://streetprophets.com/</a>	Affiliated with the popular liberal politics blog Daily Kos, Street Prophets is a group blog edited by Rev. Daniel Schultz, a UCC minister. It calls itself "the online forum that mobilizes progressive people of faith to name, discuss and take action on critical political and religious issues."
Suhaib Webb	<a href="http://www.suhaibwebb.com">http://www.suhaibwebb.com</a>	Blog and podcasts from an American Muslim convert studying at Al-Azhar in Cairo. Winner of "Best Blog" from the 2009 Brass Crescent Awards. Posts often come from guest writers, or are simply reprinted from other publications. They generally deal with Islamic spirituality and social activism.
Talk to Action	<a href="http://www.talk2action.org">http://www.talk2action.org</a>	"Talk to Action is a platform for reporting on, learning about, and analyzing and discussing the religious right—and what to do about it." Co-founded by Bruce Wilson and Frederick Clarkson, contributors update the blog daily and readers play an important role by ranking comments and becoming "trusted users." Talk to Action's ultimate goal of providing this forum for discussion of the religious right is to encourage readers to take action and "reclaim citizenship, history, and faith."
Theolog	<a href="http://www.theolog.org">http://www.theolog.org</a>	As "the online community of the <i>Christian Century</i> ," Theolog's mission is to facilitate discussion between the magazine and its readers at a faster pace than the print medium allows. Posts tend to be substantial and reflective, including book reviews and sermons. The perspective, as with <i>Christian Century</i> , is liberal, mainline Protestant. Contributors include the magazine's staff, as well as scholars and clergy.

Name	URL	Description
thinkBuddha.org	<a href="http://www.thinkbuddha.org/">http://www.thinkbuddha.org/</a>	These “wayward thoughts on the Buddhist way” come from Will Buckingham, a UK-based Buddhist teacher and philosopher. He offers reflections on Buddhist spirituality and its intersection with intellectual life.
Tikkun Daily Blog	<a href="http://www.tikkun.org/tikkundaily/">http://www.tikkun.org/tikkundaily/</a>	Daily comments on the news from a progressive Jewish perspective, written by <i>Tikkun</i> magazine editors, including Rabbi Michael Lerner.
Tricycle Editors’ Blog	<a href="http://www.tricycle.com/blog/">http://www.tricycle.com/blog/</a>	As the blog of the editors of the Buddhist magazine <i>Tricycle</i> , it includes posts about the magazine’s content, as well as commentary and links about Buddhist engagement with social concerns.
Vox Nova	<a href="http://vox-nova.com">http://vox-nova.com</a>	The about page of this Catholic collective blog says, “Vox Nova is free, to the furthest extent possible, from partisanship, nationalism and demagoguery, all of which banish intellectual honesty from rational discourse.” Their banner image is suggestive; portraits of Catholic saints line the top, and culture-shapers, from Aristotle to Bono, line the bottom. The site aims to put both in dialogue. Many of the contributors have their own blogs as well. Posts range from thoughtful commentary on the timely to book reviews and nearly academic theological reflections.
Wall of Separation, The	<a href="http://blog.au.org/">http://blog.au.org/</a>	The blog of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, The Wall provides daily commentary on news and legal milestones related to church/state issues. It takes a strong disestablishmentarian perspective. The voice tends to be informal and polemical, likely expecting the audience to be mainly in agreement.
Way of Improvement Leads Home, The	<a href="http://www.philipvickersfithian.com/">http://www.philipvickersfithian.com/</a>	John Fea, a professor of American history at Messiah College, offers commentary on “the intersection of American history, religion, politics, and academic life.” Blog posts focus on American religious history, current dilemmas concerning the role of religion in public education, and questions regarding the religious inflection of historical narratives. Messiah College, where Fea professes, is “committed to an embracing evangelical spirit rooted in the Anabaptist, Pietist, and Wesleyan traditions of the Christian Church.”

Name	URL	Description
Whispers in the Loggia	<a href="http://whispersintheloggia.blogspot.com/">http://whispersintheloggia.blogspot.com/</a>	The Internet's preeminent source of gossip on the Catholic Church. Rocco Palmo's blog has earned him columns at <i>The Tablet</i> and <i>Busted Halo</i> , and he has commented on the Church for a number of major outlets, including the <i>New York Times</i> , Associated Press, the <i>San Francisco Chronicle</i> , BBC, National Public Radio, the <i>Washington Post</i> , and more. While he often treads in genuine gossip, Palmo's obsessive attention to the inner workings of the Church often lends unique insights that escape the conventional wisdom.
Wild Hunt, The	<a href="http://wildhunt.org/blog/">http://wildhunt.org/blog/</a>	A leading blog on paganism by Jason Pitzl-Waters, an artist and writer. Discusses paganism in a worldwide context, offering news and discussion about non-monotheistic religions in societies around the globe. Posts are often long with considerable hyperlinking.
Windows and Doors	<a href="http://blog.beliefnet.com/windowsanddoors/">http://blog.beliefnet.com/windowsanddoors/</a>	Rabbi Brad Hirschfield's BeliefNet blog, "where politics and pop culture meet 3,000 years of Jewish wisdom." It tends to offer sober commentary on the news cycle, especially when there is a connection with Jews or Judaism that isn't elsewhere well explored.