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YouTube Videos Draw Attention to Palin's Faith

By [LAURIE GOODSTEIN](#)

In an interview this week with the Christian Broadcasting Network, Gov. [Sarah Palin](#) of Alaska, the Republican vice-presidential candidate, was asked to “clear up exactly what you believe in” about her religious faith, including her involvement with Pentecostalism.

Ms. Palin responded by speaking generally, but extensively, about how she counts on God for strength, guidance and wisdom. “My faith has always been pretty personal,” she said. But she did not talk more specifically about her church affiliation or her beliefs.

Ms. Palin's faith has come under scrutiny after two videos taken in her former church surfaced on YouTube and became immediate sensations. The first showed a visiting preacher from Kenya praying fervently over Ms. Palin in a gravelly voice and asking God to favor her campaign for governor and protect her from “every form of witchcraft.”

The second showed Ms. Palin at an event in June praising the African preacher's prayer as “awesome” and “very, very powerful.” She is also seen nodding as her former pastor from Wasilla prays over her and declares that Alaska is “one of the refuge states in the Last Days,” a piece of prophecy popular in some prayer networks that predicts that as the “end times” approach, people will flock to Alaska for its abundant open space and natural resources.

Ms. Palin declined an interview, and the McCain campaign did not respond to specific questions about her faith. Thus, it is difficult to say with certainty what she believes.

What is known, however, is that Ms. Palin has had long associations with religious leaders who practice a particularly assertive and urgent brand of Pentecostalism known as “spiritual warfare.”

Its adherents believe that demonic forces can colonize specific geographic areas and individuals, and that “spiritual warriors” must “battle” them to assert God's control, using prayer and evangelism. The movement's fixation on demons, its aggressiveness and its leaders' claims to exalted spiritual authority have troubled even some Pentecostal Christians.

Ms. Palin delivered an enthusiastic graduation speech for a class of young spiritual warriors in June at the Wasilla Assembly of God, the church in which she was raised.

As governor, Ms. Palin appointed Patrick Donelson, a pastor and fishing guide who helped found a spiritual warfare ministry, to the only seat reserved for members of the clergy on the state's Suicide Prevention Council.

Bishop Thomas Muthee, the Kenyan preacher shown on the YouTube video anointing her as she

ran for governor, is celebrated internationally as an effective spiritual warrior who led a prayer movement that drove a witch out of his town in Kenya. The removal of the witch, Bishop Muthee says, resulted in a drop in crime, alcoholism and traffic accidents.

Religious leaders in Alaska, including Mr. Donelson, declined interviews, with several saying they had been told by the McCain-Palin campaign not to talk to members of the news media.

Russell P. Spittler, provost emeritus at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, Calif., and an eminent scholar of Pentecostalism, said, "Most Christians would accept the view that there are forces and powers in the world that oppose Christian virtues." But, Mr. Spittler added, "Spiritual warfare makes a religion of identifying demons by names and ZIP codes."

Promoters of spiritual warfare say its vocabulary sounds more militant than its methods.

"The term 'spiritual warfare' sounds scary as all get-out if you're not biblically literate," said George Otis Jr., president of the Sentinel Group, in Seattle, which has helped spread the movement by producing video documentaries of spiritual warfare at work.

"It's taken from the sixth chapter of Ephesians, which talks about that the weapons of our warfare are not of this world," Mr. Otis said. "Which means, we don't respond with guns or violence. If we've got a problem with somebody, we'll go pray."

Critics say the goal of the spiritual warfare movement is to create a theocracy. Bruce Wilson, a researcher for Talk2Action, a Web site that tracks religious groups, said: "One of the imperatives of the movement is to achieve worldly power, including political control. Then you can more effectively drive out the demons. The ultimate goal is to purify the earth."

Ms. Palin referred to "prayer warriors" in a radio interview Wednesday with Dr. James C. Dobson, the founder of Focus on the Family, a conservative Christian multimedia ministry. Dr. Dobson told Ms. Palin that he and his wife, Shirley, were praying for her, and that they had convened 430 people last weekend to pray for "God's perfect will to be done on Nov. 4."

She responded, "I can feel the power of prayer and the strength that is provided by our prayer warriors across this nation."

Ms. Palin was baptized a Roman Catholic as an infant, but when she was young, her mother took the family to the Wasilla Assembly of God church. That church is part of the Assemblies of God, a Pentecostal denomination with 2.8 million members in the United States and 60 million worldwide.

Pentecostalism is the fastest-growing form of Christianity, both in the United States and internationally. Pentecostals believe that the Holy Spirit can touch believers directly through spiritual "gifts" like speaking in tongues, divine healings, casting out demons and the ability to prophesize. Spiritual warfare is only one stream running through Pentecostal and charismatic churches.

Since Ms. Palin left the Wasilla Assembly of God church six years ago, she has not joined another

church. Of the four churches she has attended most frequently, three are either Pentecostal or “charismatic.” The latter is a church that adopts Pentecostal practices but is not part of a Pentecostal denomination.

Ms. Palin has retained friendly relations with the pastor at the Wasilla Assembly of God church, Ed Kalnins. In June, she and other politicians were blessed by Mr. Kalnins in front of thousands at “One Lord Sunday,” a multichurch-sponsored event at the Wasilla sports complex.

The governor’s relationships with practitioners of spiritual warfare appear to go back many years. Mary Glazier, an Alaska Native who helped bring together the prayer warrior networks in the state, told a prayer conference in June that Ms. Palin “became a part of our prayer group out in Wasilla” when she was 24, and that “God began to speak” to her about entering politics.

Ms. Glazier did not respond to messages left at her office. But a friend of hers, J. Lee Grady, the editor of Charisma magazine, said Mrs. Glazier recently told him that when Ms. Palin was in her 20s, she was part of her prayer network.

Mr. Grady, whose magazine reports on and promotes charismatic Christianity, and other Pentecostal leaders said they had been deeply troubled by portrayals of Ms. Palin’s religious beliefs as bizarre or scary.

“We wouldn’t have a problem with the fact that this African pastor prays for her and believes Jesus is more powerful than demonic activity,” he said.

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