



RELIGIOUS STUDIES NEWS

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AAR Staff Directory

Kyle Cole
Director of Professional Programs
E-MAIL: kcole@aarweb.org
TEL: 404-727-1489

Jessica Davenport
Associate Director of Professional Programs
E-MAIL: jdavenport@aarweb.org
TEL: 404-727-4707

Joe DeRose
Director of Technology Services
E-MAIL: jderose@aarweb.org
TEL: 404-727-7972

Toby Director
Finance and Administration Coordinator
E-MAIL: tdirector@aarweb.org
TEL: 404-712-9503

Ina Ferrell
Associate Director of Finance and Administration
E-MAIL: iferrell@aarweb.org
TEL: 404-727-2331

John Fitzmier
Executive Director
E-MAIL: jfitzmier@aarweb.org
TEL: 404-727-3049

Carey J. Gifford
Director of Publications and Theological Programs
E-MAIL: cgifford@aarweb.org
TEL: 404-727-2270

Stephanie Gray
Associate Director of Publications
E-MAIL: sgray@aarweb.org
TEL: 404-727-3059

Steve Herrick
Director of External Relations
E-MAIL: sherrick@aarweb.org
TEL: 404-727-7948

Margaret P. Jenkins
Director of Development
E-MAIL: margaret.jenkins@aarweb.org
TEL: 404-727-7928

Myesha D. Jenkins
Director of Membership Development
E-MAIL: mjenkins@aarweb.org
TEL: 404-727-3026

Aislinn Jones
Director of Meetings and Marketing
E-MAIL: ajones@aarweb.org
TEL: 404-727-8132

Deanna Lord
Administrative Assistant
E-MAIL: dlord@aarweb.org
TEL: 404-727-3049

Deborah Minor
Director of Finance and Administration
E-MAIL: dminor@aarweb.org
TEL: 404-727-7954

Robert Puckett
Associate Director of Meetings
E-MAIL: rpuckett@aarweb.org
TEL: 404-727-1461

Susan Snider
Associate Director of External Relations
E-MAIL: ssnider@aarweb.org
TEL: 404-727-4725

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Subscriptions for individuals and institutions are available. See www.aarweb.org/publications/rsn for more information.

Deadlines for submissions:

January	October 15
March	December 15
May	February 15
October	June 15

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For information on advertising, please see www.aarweb.org/publications/rsn.

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Executive Editor
Carey J. Gifford

Editor
Stephanie Gray

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2008 Member Calendar

Dates are subject to change. Check www.aarweb.org for the latest information.

May

Religious Studies News May issue.

Spotlight on Teaching Spring issue.

May 1. Nominations (including self-nominations) for committee appointments requested.

May 1. Annual Meeting Additional Meeting requests due for priority consideration.

May 2–4. Pacific Northwest regional meeting, Newberg, OR.

May 2–3. Eastern International regional meeting, Montréal, Quebec.

May 15. Change of address due for priority receipt of the *Annual Meeting Program Planner*. *Program Planners* will be mailed to members in late May.

(For more Annual Meeting information, see www.aarweb.org/Meetings/Annual_Meeting/Current_Meeting).

June

Journal of the American Academy of Religion June issue.

June 15. Membership renewal deadline for 2008 Annual Meeting participants.

June 15. Submission deadline for the October issue of *Religious Studies News*. For more information, see www.aarweb.org/Publications/RSN.

July

Annual Meeting program goes online.

July 1. New fiscal year begins.

July 31. Deadline for participants to request audiovisual equipment at the Annual Meeting.

August

August 1. Research Grant applications due. For more information, see www.aarweb.org/Publications/Grants.

August 1. Regional development grant applications due to regionally elected directors.

August 15. Membership renewal period for 2009 begins.

September

Journal of the American Academy of Religion September issue.

September 5. Program Committee meeting, New Haven, CT.

September 6. Executive Committee meeting, New Haven, CT.

September 22–October 20. AAR officer election period. Candidate profiles will be published in the October *RSN*.

October

Religious Studies News October issue.

Spotlight on Teaching Fall issue.

October 13. Annual Meeting Job Center pre-registration closes.

October 15. Submissions for the January 2009 issue of *Religious Studies News* due. For more information, see www.aarweb.org/Publications/RSN.

October 30. Regionally Elected Directors meeting, Chicago, IL.

October 30. Executive Committee meeting, Chicago, IL.

October 31. Fall Board of Directors meeting, Chicago, IL.

October 31. Chairs Workshop at the Annual Meeting, Chicago, IL.

November

November 1. Research Grant Awards announced.

November 1–3. Annual Meeting, Chicago, IL. The AAR Annual Meeting, the world's largest gathering of scholars of religion, anticipates some 5,000 registrants, 200 publishers, and 125 hiring departments.

November 3. Annual Business Meeting at the Annual Meeting. See the *Program Planner* for day and time.

November 14. New program unit proposals due.

December

Journal of the American Academy of Religion December issue.

December 12–13. Program Committee meeting, Atlanta, GA.

December 15. Submissions for the March 2009 issue of *Religious Studies News* due. For more information, see www.aarweb.org/Publications/RSN.

December 31. Membership renewal for 2009 due. Renew online at www.aarweb.org/Members/Dues.

And keep in mind throughout the year...

Regional organizations have various deadlines throughout the fall for the Calls for Papers. See www.aarweb.org/Meetings/regions.

In the Field. News of events and opportunities for scholars of religion. *In the Field* is a members-only publication that accepts brief announcements, including calls for papers, grant news, conference announcements, and other opportunities appropriate for scholars of religion. Submit text online at www.aarweb.org/Publications/In_the_Field/submit1/asp.

Job Postings. A members-only publication, *Job Postings* lists job announcements in areas of interest to members. Issues are available online from the first through the last day of the month. Submit announcements online, and review policies and pricing, at www.aarweb.org/jump/jobpostings. RSN

FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers,

As many of you look forward to the end of the semester, we in the executive office are excited to present another issue of the Academy's newspaper of record. Of particular note in the Focus section of *Religious Studies News* is the unveiling of our most recent survey of the undergraduate study of religion. The results of this important survey are being published here for the first time. The complete survey, together with analysis, will be posted on our website this summer. Also in this section is a report on a relatively new trend — undergraduate research in religious studies.

In the March *RSN* we published the results of our survey of the membership regarding our Annual Meeting. At the April meeting of the Board, the results of the survey were discussed and in this topic you will also see the Board's action regarding the topic of the future of our Annual Meeting.

Congratulations are certainly in order to two of our members (Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Serene Jones, and Alice Hunt) who

have recently been selected as presidents of two important institutions. Details of their appointments can be seen in the Briefs section.

Twice a year we publish *Spotlight on Teaching* in *RSN*. This issue has as its guest editor Vincent L. Wimbush, who has conducted an interesting online conversation among five very creative and successful teacher-scholars on the topic of Signifying (on) Scriptures: Text(ures) and Orientations.

We look forward to our Annual Meeting in Chicago this fall. In preparation, we have been working over the last nine months to put together an impressive list of plenary speakers, panels, sessions, leadership workshops, and book exhibitors, with the view toward making this an enriching experience for all our members. We hope you have a productive and happy summer and look forward to seeing you in the Windy City!

Carey J. Gifford
Executive Editor RSN

RSN
RELIGIOUS STUDIES NEWS

Religious Studies News is the newspaper of record for the field especially designed to serve the professional needs of persons involved in teaching and scholarship in religion (broadly construed to include religious studies, theology, and sacred texts). Published quarterly by the American Academy of Religion, *RSN* is received by some 11,000 scholars and by libraries at colleges and universities across North America and abroad. *Religious Studies News* communicates the important events of the field and related areas. It provides a forum for members and others to examine critical issues in education, pedagogy (especially through the biannual *Spotlight on Teaching*), theological education (through the annual *Spotlight on Theological Education*), research, publishing, and the public understanding of religion. It also publishes news about the services and programs of the AAR and other organizations, including employment services and registration information for the AAR Annual Meeting.

For writing and advertising guidelines, please see www.aarweb.org/publications/rsn.

2008 Plenary Speakers

Exploring the Soul of Human Community

Saturday
11:45 AM–12:45 PM
Nikky Finney, University of Kentucky

Poet Nikky Finney, a native of South Carolina, is an associate professor of creative writing at the University of Kentucky. She is also a founding member of the Affrilachian Poets, a community-based writing collective that, as the name suggests, acknowledges and celebrates the role African Americans have played in the development of the culture of Appalachia. Finney is the author of a collection of short stories and two books of poetry, *Wings Made of Gauze* and *Rice*. She and her work are also featured in a video about the Affrilachian Poets, *Coal Black Voices*. Finney has received an Al Smith Fellowship from the Kentucky Arts Council for her work.



2008 Presidential Address

Saturday
8:00 PM–9:00 PM
Emilie M. Townes,
Yale Divinity School

Emilie M. Townes, Andrew W. Mellon Professor of African American Religion

and Theology at Yale University, has been instrumental in constructing womanist theology. Her books, *Womanist Justice*, *Womanist Hope*, *In a Blaze of Glory: Womanist Spirituality as Social Witness*, *Breaking the Fine Rain of Death: African American Health Care*, and *A Womanist Ethic of Care* are considered ground-breaking texts in the field. An ordained American Baptist clergywoman, Townes served as an interim minister at the Christ the Redeemer Metropolitan Community Church in Evanston, Illinois, and held teaching positions at theological schools and seminaries, including Union Theological Seminary. She holds three degrees from the University of Chicago: a Bachelor of Arts, a Master of Arts from the Divinity School, and a Doctor of Ministry. She earned a PhD from the joint Garrett–Evangelical Theological Seminary/Northwestern University Program in Religious and Theological Studies.

How I've Changed My Mind (or Not)

Sunday
7:15–8:15 PM
Charles H. Long, Chapel Hill, NC

Charles H. Long, after attending Dunbar Junior College and volunteering for the U.S. Army Air Force during World War II, received a DB and PhD from the University of Chicago. He joined Mircea Eliade and Joseph Kitagawa in establishing the international journal *History of Religions*. Along with a group of his colleagues, he established the first curriculum for the study of religion at the University of Chicago. Long has been involved in the training of three generations of scholars in religion and African-American studies. He has a unique perspective from which to speak about the general meaning of religion in history and culture, and specifically about African religions in Africa and in the Atlantic world. Long has served on the faculties at the University of Chicago, University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill, and Syracuse University, and is professor emeritus at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He is the author of several books, including *Significations*.

The Journey of Black Sacred Music

Monday
11:45 AM–12:45 PM
Nolan Williams Jr., Washington, D.C.

Even a cursory look at the career of Nolan Williams Jr. reveals the story of an exceptional young man gifted with extraordinary talent. A musical prodigy since age four, Williams has emerged as a significant presence in the music world with his chief-editorial leadership of the landmark *The African-American Hymnal*; his premiere orchestrations performed by some of the country's leading orchestras; and his musical direction for events of national and international prominence, such as inaugural events for Presidents Clinton and Bush and a U.S. celebration of South African President Nelson Mandela. Williams has also received Grammy nominations for his songwriting projects and has worked collaboratively with major gospel and mainstream artists such as Diana Ross, Yolanda Adams, Erykah Badu, Donnie McClurkin, and Sean Combs. Williams lives in Washington, D.C., where he is Minister of Music at the Metropolitan Baptist Church.

Special Invited Guests



Michael Heller, 2008 Templeton Prize Winner

Michael Heller, Professor of Philosophy at the Pontifical Academy of Theology in Cracow, Poland, is a cosmologist and

Catholic priest who has developed sharply focused and strikingly original concepts on the origin and cause of the universe. He earned masters in theology and philosophy and a PhD in philosophy from the Catholic University of Lublin. His studies were largely in physics, but authorities prevented the university from granting degrees in that discipline. He has served as researcher at the Institute of Astrophysics at Oxford University and the Vatican Observatory. Heller is a compelling figure in physics, cosmology, theology, and philosophy with provocative concepts on issues that all of these disciplines pursue, albeit from vastly different perspectives. His academic and religious background enables him to comfortably and credibly move within each of these domains, and his extensive writings have evoked new and important consideration of humankind's most profound concepts.



Father Patrick Desbois

French Catholic priest and interfaith activist, Father Patrick Desbois will speak on his research in the Ukraine. Desbois has devoted his career in recent

years to uncovering mass graves from the Holocaust in the Ukraine and interviewing eyewitnesses of the atrocities. He and his team have now found some 700 of an estimated 2,000 mass graves of Jewish victims, and he has collected over 700 oral testimonies from those who witnessed the violence (many of them as children). Simultaneously his research team has used the archival holdings of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum to substantiate these oral histories, and in so doing he has changed our understanding of how the Holocaust occurred in that part of Europe. His work is a fascinating and profound example of the post-genocidal task of establishing the truth and creating a ground for reconciliation.

Krista Tippett

Host of *Speaking of Faith*, a weekly National Public Radio program, Krista Tippett probes the myriad ways in which religious impulses inform every aspect of life and culture, nationally and globally. *Speaking of Faith* fills an important and neglected need in American media by addressing the intellectual and spiritual content of religion head-on, illuminating the ideas and prac-

tices that form the headlines from the inside. A journalist and former diplomat, Tippett has hosted and produced the program since the *Speaking of Faith* project began as an occasional feature in 2000, before taking on its current form as a national weekly program in 2003. She is a graduate of Yale Divinity School and a former Fulbright Scholar. She has reported and written for *The New York Times*, *Newsweek*, the BBC, and other international news organizations. Tippett also served as special assistant to the United States ambassador to West Germany.

Martin E. Marty

Martin E. Marty is one of the most prominent interpreters of religion and culture today. Author of more than 50 books, Marty is a speaker, columnist, pastor, and teacher. He is professor emeritus at the University of Chicago Divinity School after a 35 year tenure. The Martin Marty Center, a research center with a focus on public religion, is named in his honor. Marty is a past president of the AAR, the American Society of Church History, and the American Catholic Historical Association. He also has served on two United States Presidential Commissions and was director of both the Fundamentalism Projection of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Public Religion Project at the University of Chicago. He is the founding president of the Park Ridge Center for the Study of Health, Faith, and Ethics and is now the George B. Caldwell Senior-Scholar-in-Residence there.

Future AAR Annual Meeting Dates and Sites

- 2008 — Chicago, IL
November 1–3
- 2009 — Montréal, QC,
Canada
November 7–10
- 2010 — Atlanta, GA
October 30–
November 2
- 2011 — San Francisco, CA
November 19–22
- 2012 — Atlanta, GA
November 3–6

Annual Meeting Leadership Workshop

Taking Religion(s) Seriously: What Students Need to Know

KRISTA TIPPETT, the host of Minnesota Public Radio's popular *Speaking of Faith* program, will open the Academic Relations Committee's annual Leadership Workshop during the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Chicago on Friday, October 31.

The daylong workshop, "Taking Religion(s) Seriously: What Students Need to Know," will explore the common goal of religion courses: that all students learn to think seriously about the ways religion impacts public life and their role as citizens.

"Even though this objective is not always articulated and may be submerged in more specialized concerns, it is always an underlying goal," said Fred Glennon, chair of the Academic Relations Committee.

In this workshop we will investigate what this goal entails and then invite participants to consider how the curriculum they oversee addresses (or could address) it; how the mission and culture of their institution shapes this objective; and how it might contribute to assessment of their program's effectiveness.

"Exchange of experience and ideas will be central to the day's work," Glennon said.

The interactive workshop will feature several speakers, panelists, and breakout sessions. Following the opening introduction by Chester Gillis, Georgetown University, Tippet will open with a discussion of "Educating Students for Public Life."

"We are fortunate to have Krista Tippet address this topic," said Kyle Cole, AAR director of professional programs. "She brings a front-line perspective to the topic of religion and public life."

After questions and answers, a panel discussion will follow, addressing "How does the goal that all students learn to think seriously about the ways religion impacts public life and their role as citizens interact with the mission and culture of your institution?" The concluding plenary will concentrate on a principal question: "How should this goal be assessed and how do you assess it?"

The workshop will expand a specific area addressed by the Teagle Foundation-funded "The Religion Major and Liberal Education," which guided the theme of last year's Leadership Workshop. "Assessment issues and student learning have been highly cited as potential workshop topics by past workshop participants," Glennon said. "I'm very happy for the Academy that we can explore these areas and offer such a rich workshop topic."

Colleagues in your institution, such as chairs, other faculty members, faculty being developed to assume leadership responsibilities, and deans, may be interested in attending this workshop. Chairs may want to bring a team of faculty or send a designated faculty person.

Registration is limited to the first 75 participants, and last year's workshop filled up long before the Annual Meeting. The cost for the workshop is \$100, which includes the entire day of sessions, lunch, and a book on the topic.

The topics for past workshops have been:

2007 Annual Meeting

Chairs Workshop – Best Practices: Diversifying Your Faculty – Honest Conversations

Leadership Workshop – The Religion Major and Liberal Education

2006 Annual Meeting

Chairs Workshop – Personnel Issues: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

2005 Annual Meeting

Chairs Workshop – Enlarging the Pie: Strategies for Managing and Growing Departmental Resources

2004 Annual Meeting

Chairs Workshop – Being a Chair in Today's Consumer Culture: Navigating in the Knowledge Factory

2003 Annual Meeting

Chairs Workshop – Scholarship, Service, and Stress: The Tensions of Being a Chair

Summer 2003

Chairs Workshop – The Entrepreneurial Chair: Building and Sustaining Your Department in an Era of Shrinking Resources and Increasing Demands

2002 Annual Meeting

Chairs Workshop – Running a Successful Faculty Search in the Religious Studies Department

2001 Annual Meeting

Chairs Workshop – Evaluating and Advancing Teaching in the Religious Studies Department

2000 Annual Meeting

Chairs Workshop – Assessing and Advancing the Religious Studies Department

We look forward to seeing you in Chicago!

The Academic Relations Committee: Fred Glennon, chair, Chester Gillis, L. DeAne Lagerquist, Steve Young, Rosetta Ross, Edwin David Aponte, and Kyle Cole, staff liaison.



TAKING RELIGION(S) SERIOUSLY: WHAT STUDENTS NEED TO KNOW

Featuring Krista Tippet, host of *Speaking of Faith*

**Friday, October 31, 2008
Chicago, IL**

The goal of the workshop is that all students learn to think seriously about the ways religion(s) impacts public life and their role as citizens. This may be a common goal of religion courses offered at all sorts of institutions; however, this objective is not always articulated and may be submerged in more specialized concerns. In this workshop we

explore what this goal entails and then invite chairs to consider how the curriculum they oversee addresses (or could address) it, how the mission and culture of their institution shape this objective, and how it might contribute to assessment of their program's effectiveness. Exchange of experience and ideas will be central to the day's work.

PRELIMINARY PROGRAM

Legal issues, conflicts, and life cycles will be addressed for individual, department, and administration concerns.

9–9:15	Introductions	10:15–11	Panel discussion: How does this interact with the mission and culture of your institution?	1:15–2	Assessment of your institution: Addressing the question — How should this be assessed and how do you assess it?
9:15–9:45	Educating students for public life	11–12	Break-out session		
9:45–10:15	Break-out session	12–1:15	LUNCH	2–3:30	Plenary session on objectives and assessments

The workshop will be of benefit to a range of participants: faculty, administrators, and graduate students. The goal is to bring a diverse group of AAR members together in a lively and open discussion.

TO REGISTER

Complete the information below, arrange payment, and send via fax or surface mail. You can also register online as part of the Annual Meeting registration process: www.aarweb.org/meeting/annual_meeting/current_meeting.

Name _____

Department _____

Institution _____ Serving as Chair since _____ Number of faculty in department _____

Registration is limited to the first 75 participants.
Send your registration form and payment of \$100.00.

PAYMENT INFORMATION

- Check:** (payable to "AAR Annual Meeting," memo "Leadership Workshop")
- Credit Card (Check one):**
- Visa Mastercard American Express Discover

Credit Card Number _____ Expiration Date _____

CID _____

Cardholder Signature _____

Name on Card (Please Print) _____

For more information, contact Kyle Cole, Director of Professional Programs, at kcole@aarweb.org, or by phone at 404-727-1489.

The Leadership Workshop is arranged by the Academic Relations Committee of the American Academy of Religion, chaired by Fred Glennon.

Register online (as part of Annual Meeting registration): www.aarweb.org/meetings/annual_meeting/current_meeting

Register by Fax: 330-963-0319

Register by surface mail:
AAR Leadership Workshop
c/o Experient
2451 Enterprise PKWY
Twinsburg, OH 44087
USA

Improved Annual Meeting Publications

U PDATE YOUR MAILING address now to receive a copy of the new *Annual Meeting Program Planner*, mailed in early June to all current members of the AAR. The *Program Planner* contains a listing of the day, time, and theme for all AAR and Additional Meetings sessions, and is a great way to begin your Annual Meeting planning.

A complete listing of all AAR and Additional Meeting session information, including participant names, paper titles, room locations, and abstracts will be available in the online *Program Book* on the AAR website at www.aarweb.org by July 1. The keyword, date/time, and other search features will allow you to find the sessions you're most interested in attending. The new online *Program Book* includes a utility so you can select the individual sessions you want to print to make your own custom print program.

The *Annual Meeting Program Book* will be distributed to all Annual Meeting attendees onsite in Chicago. This is the familiar publication that includes complete session listings of AAR and Additional Meetings with up-to-date times, room locations, session and participant indices, hotel maps, and advertising about discounts in the Annual Meeting exhibit hall.

The rationale for this shift in Annual Meeting publications is:


- The early June mailing of the *Program Planner* instead of the previous early September mailing of the *Program Book* gives AAR members even more time to begin their Annual Meeting planning.
- The online *Program Book* allows people to see the program in its entirety in an accessible and searchable format. Schedule updates are posted to the

online *Program Book* every 24 hours. It is the most accurate and up-to-date way to view the program. Print publications are accurate only up to their print date and important changes or cancellations may be missed by attendees. Many organizations, including some other ACLS organizations, have abandoned preliminary print programs for their meetings entirely.

- AAR is reviewing all of its Annual Meeting practices with an eye toward sustainability. The *Program Planner* has been designed to waste less paper by using fewer pages — it will use an estimated 200 pages versus the 500 pages of past *Program Books* — and is being produced at a standard print production size to decrease trimming waste. The lighter weight and smaller page count costs less in postage to mail; the lighter weight minimizes the

carbon footprint of mailing the *Program Planner* to AAR members around the world.

- Annual Meeting attendees have complained in the past about the inconvenience of juggling several different publications at the same time to get the full picture of a session. By publishing the detailed *Program Book* for use onsite, attendees will now have the complete description of a session; the participant list, paper titles, and room location will all be on the same page.

Make sure your membership address is listed correctly in the AAR member directory by logging in to www.aarweb.org/Members/My_Account. Please allow 3–4 weeks for delivery. *Program Planners* will continue to be mailed to new and renewing members until October 1. 

South Asian Contributions to the Study of Religion

International Focus for 2008 Annual Meeting

THE ACADEMY is committed to increasing its international membership and participation, as well as to deepening awareness of global contributions to the study of religion. In keeping with this charge, the International Connections Committee (ICC) has sponsored a focus on one region or theme at each AAR Annual Meeting since 2002. Previous years have highlighted Canadian, Japanese, Latin American, Eastern and Central European, African, and Chinese contributions to the field. At this year's Annual Meeting in Chicago, the focus shifts to South Asia. Looking ahead, the Annual Meeting will concentrate on Globalization and Religious Studies in North America in 2009.


Beyond a series of Special Topics Forums and panels centered on a particular region, the ICC has encouraged incorporation of the area's scholars of religion into panels across the full spectrum of AAR program units. Adding multiple dimensions to the International Focus, the committee has helped arrange films, plenary lectures, and other presentations associated with the year's regional theme. In order to promote participation of international members at the Annual Meeting, the ICC has worked closely with the AAR executive office to raise scholarship funds for those who require financial assistance and to devise mechanisms for distributing travel assistance fairly.

This year, members of the ICC along with members of the numerous South Asia-related program units, have selected 13 scholars for full travel assistance packages in advance of the deadline for the submission of panel proposals for the Annual Meeting, which hopefully will further facilitate the integration of these scholars into the general program.

The ICC also sponsors two independent Special Topics Forums and offers four

potential co-sponsorships of panels. Those program unit members seeking potential co-sponsorship for focus-related panels and events, therefore, should contact ICC Chair Richard Jaffe at richard.jaffe@duke.edu. The two planned Special Topics Forums for the Annual Meeting, which will center on various invited South Asian scholars, are "Art, Aesthetics, and Performance" and "Religion, Law, and Human Rights."

Planning for the South Asia Focus at the upcoming Annual Meeting is being coordinated by a working group of AAR members from the various South Asia-related units and AAR committee members. We thank all those who have contributed their expertise and recommendations to the ICC thus far. Their goal has been not only to call attention to research by South Asian scholars, but also to provide an avenue for exploring central themes and issues for scholars in South Asian religions, to strengthen existing ties, and to enhance possibilities for future collaboration between South Asian scholars and members of the AAR.

We look forward to hosting and interacting with our South Asian colleagues at the Annual Meeting in Chicago. 

Don't Let Time Get Away from You!

Register for the AAR Annual Meeting Job Center by October 13. The Job Center is an efficient way for candidates and employers to communicate and participate in job interviews. Those who register by the deadline will receive the full benefits of the Center.

EMPLOYERS:

Unlimited use of the interview hall

Placement of job advertisement in the Annual Meeting edition of *Job Postings*

Seven months of online access to candidate CVs organized by specialization

Ability to use the message center to communicate with registered candidates

CANDIDATES:

Opportunity to place CV online for employer review

Personal copy of registered job advertisements and employers' interview plans

Ability to use the message center to communicate with employers

For more information about the Job Center, and to register, see www.aarweb.org/jump/jobcenter.

Annual Meeting Tours

Registration for tours is available in the online Annual Meeting registration process or by faxing or mailing the form in the registration brochure. Space is limited on all tours, so please register early.

Toxics to Treasures: Environmental Justice Tour of Lake Calumet

Saturday, November 1, 9:00 AM

The Lake Calumet region on the far south side of Chicago provides a stunning example of the extremes of nature and culture in our industrialized world. Once the heart of a vast wet prairie system spanning 22,000 acres in Illinois alone, the area became the preferred dumping ground for Chicago's industrial and municipal waste in the nineteenth century. Today just 500 acres of wetland remain, sandwiched between legal and illegal waste dumps, including a Superfund toxic waste site, and 2,000 acres of abandoned industrial lands. Yet nature does not give up so easily, and the area is also home to one of the greatest concentrations of threatened and endangered birds in Illinois, including the Midwest's largest breeding colony of Black-crowned Night Herons. The City of Chicago and the State of Illinois are collaborating on a new Calumet Initiative to preserve natural areas and provide economic development for the Calumet, one result of which is a new Ford Calumet Environmental Center that will be built with recycled steel from abandoned industrial sites nearby.

On this bus tour led by community activists, we will see the lows and highs of

the Calumet region's industrial and natural history, and hear about the efforts of local residents to fight dumping and advocate for sustainable development of their neighborhoods. Sites to be visited on the tour may include Dead Stick Pond (familiar to fans of mystery writer Sara Paretsky), Big Marsh and the adjacent Acme Steel Coke Plant, the abandoned but soon-to-be-redeveloped U.S. Steel South Works site, as well as numerous dump sites and wetlands in the process of being restored. Tour fee: \$30.

Architecture and Urban Planning: The Ethical and Environmental Functions of Architecture

Saturday, November 1, 9:00 AM

The Society for the Arts in Religious and Theological Studies (SARTS) invites the AAR membership to join them on a tour of new Chicago landmarks. The tour has been organized by SARTS member Judith Dupré, noted author of *Skyscrapers* (1996), *Bridges* (1997), *Churches* (2001), and *Monuments* (2007). The morning program will begin with a brief reception and talk about Chicago architecture, held at the offices of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM), led by SOM design partner Leigh Breslau, whose work focuses on arts and public assembly projects. SOM has designed and engineered landmark structures around the world, including, in Chicago, the Sears Tower, John Hancock Tower, Trump International Hotel and Tower, and the master plan for Millennium Park. The firm's houses of worship include the United States Air Force Academy Chapel in Colorado, the Islamic Cultural

Center in Manhattan, and the forthcoming Cathedral of Christ the Light in Oakland. They also have designed four of the ten tallest buildings in the world, including the Burj Dubai and the Freedom Tower at the World Trade Center in New York.

Following this presentation, a walking tour of nearby Chicago landmarks will include Millennium Park (Chicago's award-winning center for art, music, architecture, and landscape design, which features the work of world-renowned architects, planners, artists, and designers including Frank Gehry's Jay Pritzker Pavilion and Anish Kapoor's Cloud Gate sculpture on the AT&T Plaza), the Chicago Tribune Tower, Marina City, and Chicago's newest skyscraper, the Trump International Tower. The tour is free, but registration is limited.

Sacred and Religious Sites of Chicago Bus Tour

Monday, November 3, 1:00 PM

Tour Guides: Daniel Sack, University of Chicago; Jeanne Halgren Kilde, University of Minnesota; and Peter Williams, Miami University. Located at the crossroads, Chicago is a city of great religious diversity. Even if you've been on a sacred sites tour in Chicago before, this year you'll visit the south side, seeing three religious landmarks you may have missed.

KAM Isaiah Israel is the oldest synagogue in Chicago, and very possibly the oldest in the Midwest, founded in 1847 as Kehilath Anshe Maarav (KAM), the Congregation of the Men of the West. In 1971, KAM merged with Temple Isaiah Israel to

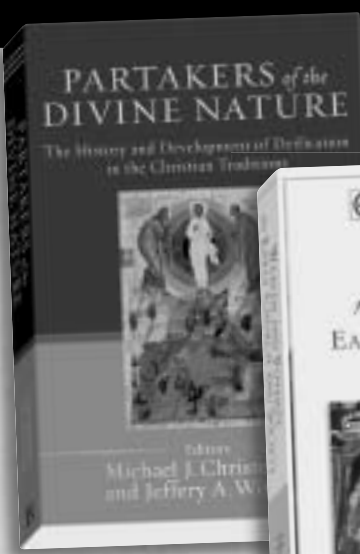
become a leader in the Reform movement. The current structure, built for Temple Isaiah Israel in 1924, was designed by Alfred Alschuler. After viewing photographs of fragments of a second-century synagogue unearthed at Tiberias by Professor Nahum Slouschz, Alschuler adapted its motifs resembling those used in architecture of the Byzantine period and incorporated them in his ornamental designs for the building.

Rockefeller Memorial Chapel opened in 1928 as the spiritual and ceremonial center of the University of Chicago. It was a gift of John D. Rockefeller and designed by Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue. It combines Gothic, Byzantine, and Romanesque features in a style designed to serve as both a Christian and nonreligious place of meeting, a place for sacred arts, and a place of worship. The chapel's carillon, the second largest in the world, is named in honor of Rockefeller's wife, Laura Spellman Rockefeller.

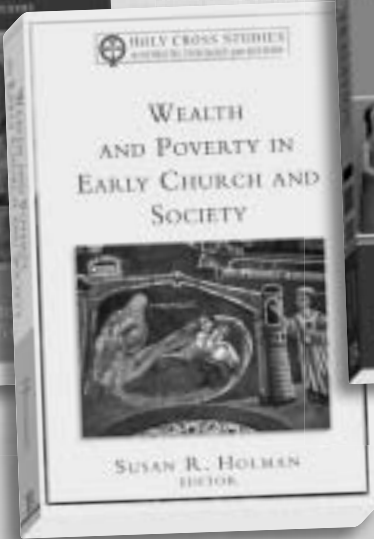
Trinity United Church of Christ, in the Princeton Park neighborhood, since its start forty-five years ago has become the largest congregation in its largely white denomination. Declaring itself "Unashamedly Black and Unapologetically Christian," Trinity is dedicated to the Black religious experience and to its community. Its now-retired pastor Jeremiah Wright has long been a religious leader in the city and a mentor to Senator Barack Obama.

These three places, with differing histories and differing spaces, offer a valuable window into the richness of religious life in Chicago. Tour fee: \$15. RSN

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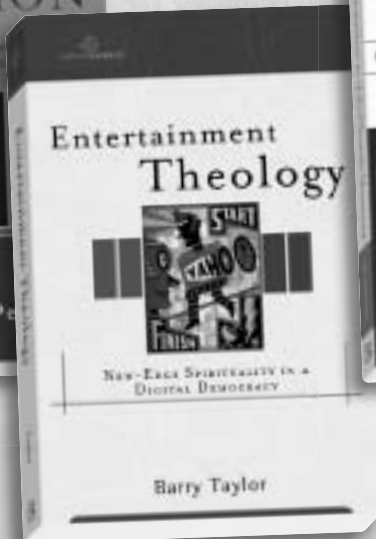
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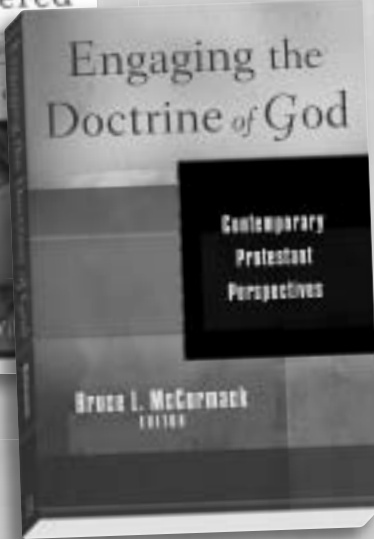
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Actions of the Board

Dear Fellow Members of the American Academy of Religion:

I write today to alert you to an action taken by your Board of Directors at its meeting this past weekend.

In light of the scheduling and logistical problems connected with the proposed Independent Annual Meetings, and given the views our members expressed in our recent member survey, the Board, in its April 12, 2008 meeting, approved a recommendation that the AAR begin scheduling concurrent, yet independent Annual Meetings with the Society of Biblical Literature as soon as is feasible. Assuming that the SBL is agreeable to meeting concurrently, it is our intention that such meetings would feature:

1. A return to the traditional meeting time, on the weekend before the U.S. Thanksgiving holiday;
2. An AAR Program (and Program Book) that is entirely separate from the SBLs;
3. If desirable, a single, jointly sponsored Book Exhibit and a single, jointly sponsored employment interview center;
4. The invitation to and inclusion of other scholarly groups that may wish to meet concurrently with the AAR;
5. An arrangement whereby AAR members could participate freely in sessions and programs of the SBL (and other scholarly organizations with which the AAR has

entered into concurrent meeting arrangements), and vice versa, with no additional registration fees; and

6. Consultation with the Finance Committee, prior to entering into jointly sponsored ventures with the SBL, to ensure that the AAR's financial interests are protected.

The Board concluded that such a plan:

1. Supports the views of the majority of our members;
2. Represents a genuine compromise among the views of our members on this contentious subject;
3. Fosters many of the goals sought in Independent Annual Meetings;
4. Allows departments, schools, universities, and other societies to use concurrent meetings for breakfasts, receptions, and other special events aimed at both AAR and SBL members; and
5. Promotes the continuing health of our organization.

I will share additional developments about concurrent meetings with you as they are available. Until then, thank you for your participation in the work of our Academy.

Sincerely yours

Jack Fitzmier
Executive Director



Job Placement Task Force

Deanna Thompson, Hamline University,

THE JOB PLACEMENT Task Force was created in fall 2007 and charged by the Board of Directors with the following four-pronged task: 1) To review the full experience of the placement process for candidates and to recommend improvements in AAR Career Services and other aspects of the process; 2) To review current graduate program reporting on graduates and to create guidelines for best practices regarding public disclosure of placement records; 3) To create a list of recommendations for how graduate programs in religion can realign their curricula to respond to current (and future) job placement realities; and 4) To investigate how the AAR might best assist people being trained in religious studies to prepare for and find jobs outside of religion and theology departments, seminaries, and divinity schools. Since its creation, the task force has met twice, and is moving forward on several of these issues.

First, in terms of the AAR Annual Meeting Job Center (formerly known as the Employment Information Services Center), we are currently rethinking the form and function of the Career Services Advisory Committee (formerly known as the EIS Advisory Committee) and are working toward a new structure that will lead to more active engagement with all aspects of the job placement process. Beyond that, in response to concerns expressed by institutions and candidates about the great variety of institutional approaches to the job search, the task force is finalizing guidelines of best practices for both hiring institutions and candidates as they move through the job search process.

Second, we also are investigating how many graduate programs publicly report graduation and job placement data. In addition, we hope to create guidelines for institutions for how that information might be posted. For instance, publicizing a 96 percent placement rate does not necessarily inform prospective students

about average length of time in the program, or what kinds of positions graduates actually occupy. We hope that the AAR's upcoming recommendations for posting such data will assist graduate programs in equipping prospective students with knowledge to make informed decisions about further schooling.

The third aspect of our charge is perhaps the most daunting. We know job placement realities for graduate students in the field of religion are rapidly changing. We also know that graduate programs — indeed institutions in general — do not always adapt quickly enough to meet the changing demands. To better understand where graduate education in religion stands today, we created a survey for all AAR student members that was sent out in March. This instrument measured students' perceptions on how well graduate programs are preparing them to be faculty members in the twenty-first century, and whether or not programs are equipping students to think about employment possibilities beyond the academy. After the survey results are tallied, the task force will work on next steps that move to address the most pressing areas of concern. One programmatic offering the AAR is considering is a workshop for graduate department chairs and deans to think collectively about how to address these changing realities.

Finally, the task force is beginning to imagine new ways in which the AAR can attend to the lives of scholars in positions other than traditional faculty roles. Our goals include expanding the AAR job placement offerings beyond the academy, and to introduce a new column in *RSN* that would focus on the lives of scholars in nontraditional roles.

As we hope is evident, the Job Placement Task Force is engaged in the important work of attending to the present and future job placement realities of AAR members. The task force

New Associate Director of Professional Programs

JESSICA DAVENPORT joined the American Academy of Religion in February 2008 as the Associate Director of Professional Programs. She is responsible for the new AAR Career Services, which includes *AAR Job Postings*, the AAR Annual Meeting Job Center, and other items related to careers for our members. Jessica also works on various professional programs with Kyle Cole, Director of Professional Programs. "We are very excited about Jessica joining the staff," Cole said. "With her background, she is a perfect fit for our expanding program offerings."

Prior to working at the AAR, Jessica was a student at the Candler School of Theology in Atlanta, Georgia. While a student at Candler, Jessica worked for the Black Church Studies and Women in Theology and Ministry Programs, where she planned academic programming that focused on gender and theology and black religious traditions.

During her time in seminary, Jessica was also involved in her local church as the proposal writer and co-director of The Purpose Project, a grant-funded initiative designed to provide young people with empowering programs

that enable them to reflect on the ways that their sense of vocation can inform their civic duty and social action within their communities. In addition, she worked for the Spelman College Sisters Chapel WISDOM Center as well as the Emory University PREP Program. Jessica earned an MDiv from Candler School of Theology and a BA in Political Science from Spelman College in Atlanta, GA.



Task Force on the Status of LGBTIQ Persons in the Profession

Melissa M. Wilcox, Whitman College

THE TASK FORCE on the Status of LGBTIQ Persons in the Profession was established in spring 2007 to provide the AAR with information and policy recommendations regarding lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans scholars of religion (the task force has since expanded its own goals to include the status of queer-identified and intersex people as well). Task force members Joe DeRose of the AAR, Jennifer Harvey of Drake University, Mark Jordan of Emory University, Laurel Schneider of Chicago Theological Seminary, Melissa Wilcox of Whitman College, and Mark Wilson of the Pacific School of Religion first met in Atlanta in September 2007 to begin working out what the priorities of the task force should be, and how we should go about addressing these priorities. We held a brief follow-up gathering at the San Diego Annual Meeting, and met in February 2008 to begin acting on some of the goals we had set, while continuing to explore new ones as well.

Among the guiding principles of the task force are, first, a firm belief that our constituents — that is, LGBTIQ scholars in religious studies — should play a central role in determining our priorities, and second, a profound awareness of the need for confidentiality among some of our constituents. In an effort to address both of these concerns, Task Force members held listening sessions at an off-site location during the San Diego Annual Meeting. Task Force representatives also attended the LGBT Caucus meeting in San Diego to request feedback.

As a result of these conversations and our own observations of the needs of LGBTIQ scholars, the task force has identified and begun to work on several projects. These include:

- Working with the Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession and the Committee on the Status of Racial and Ethnic Minorities in the Profession to assist the AAR in drafting a comprehensive antidiscrimination policy for AAR-sponsored activities, in providing space for reports of policy violations, and in developing guidelines for institutional responses to such violations;

- Adding information in the AAR's job-listing service on each hiring institution's anti-discrimination policy, domestic partner benefits, and required statement of faith (if any);
- Adding questions on sexual orientation and gender identity to the demographics section of any surveys conducted by the AAR in the future, and to the evaluation of session and steering committee diversity that is a part of each program unit's annual report;
- Petitioning the AAR to refrain from scheduling any further meetings in states that have passed constitutional bans on same-sex marriage; and
- Learning more about and attempting to address the specific needs of LGBTIQ scholars of color and graduate students.

Over the longer term, the task force is interested in sparking conversations about a professional code of ethics for scholars of religion similar to those adhered to by philosophers, sociologists, psychologists, and others; sponsoring a mentoring program for LGBTIQ scholars and a chairs' workshop on LGBTIQ issues; and supporting the development and breadth of impact of LGBTIQ studies within the field.

The task force has an exciting slate of events lined up for the 2008 Annual Meeting in Chicago. We will be holding off-site listening sessions on Saturday, November 1 from 2:30–4:00 PM and Monday, November 3 from 8:00–9:30 PM, and will be sponsoring this year's reception for LGBTIQ scholars and scholars of LGBTIQ studies. There will be a brown bag lunch for LGBTIQ scholars of color, and a workshop on mentoring LGBTIQ students. Finally, we will also sponsor a Special Topics Forum this year.

The members of the LGBTIQ Task Force are both excited and honored to be serving our colleagues in this way. We look forward to hearing from LGBTIQ and non-LGBTIQ scholars alike about what else we can do to improve the status of LGBTIQ scholars within our field.



membership — Alice Hunt of Vanderbilt University, Davina Lopez of Eckerd College, A. G. Miller of Oberlin College, Wayne Proudfoot of Columbia University, Tim Renick of Georgia State

University, and Deanna Thompson of Hamline University — invites you to contact us with any questions or suggestions you might have. Contact: dthompson@gu.hamline.edu.



In August 2008, renewal notices will go out for calendar year 2009. To ensure that you receive this and other correspondence, take this opportunity to confirm your contact information. Log in to "My Account" (www.aarweb.org/Members/My_Account), select "Change Contact Information," and make your updates automatically. Those without Internet access should call (1-404-727-3049) or write to the Executive office to make those updates.

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Questions?

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Greetings Members,

We are excited to debut a new area in *Religious Studies News* called the "Membership Corner." This will be the place where you can get information about navigating your membership. Each issue's "Membership Corner" will feature a helpful hint about some aspect of membership. In this issue we will focus on how to get receipts for your membership dues, donations, and Annual Meeting registration. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any comments, questions, or ideas about future helpful hints.

Myesha D. Jenkins
Director of Membership Development
mjenkins@aarweb.org

Membership Corner

RECEIPTS

Did you know that you can generate a receipt for your membership dues from your membership account? Simply log in to "My Account" (www.aarweb.org/Members/My_Account) on the AAR website using your last name and membership ID number. Select "Your Renewal History" or "Your Giving History" to generate receipts for the desired year.

Annual Meeting Housing and Registration receipts are mailed to members with name badges, or generated immediately if you register onsite. Since Annual Meeting Housing and Registration is managed by Experient, you should contact them for duplicate receipts. They can be reached at:

Experient Housing and Registration Bureau

E-MAIL: aarreg@experient-inc.com

PHONE: 1-800-575-7185 (in the U.S. and Canada)
+1-330-425-9330 (outside the U.S. and Canada)

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\$90,000 – \$104,999	150	120	120	90
\$75,000 – \$89,999	135	108	108	81
\$60,000 – \$74,999	115	92	92	69
\$50,000 – \$59,999	95	76	76	57
\$40,000 – \$49,999	80	64	64	48
\$30,000 – \$39,999	60	48	48	36
\$20,000 – \$29,999	45	36	36	27
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BRIEFS

Former AAR President Jane Dammen McAuliffe Named Bryn Mawr's President-Elect

The Board of Trustees of Bryn Mawr College has appointed Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Georgetown University and an internationally known scholar of Islamic studies, as its eighth president. She will succeed Nancy J. Vickers, Bryn Mawr's current president, on July 1, 2008.

McAuliffe is an internationally respected specialist in Islamic studies whose expertise is in the Qur'an and its interpretations, early Islamic history, and the interrelationships between Islam and Christianity. In addition to publishing numerous books and journal articles, she recently completed the six-volume *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, the first reference work of its kind in a Western language.

Her scholarly work has been supported by several prestigious fellowships, including one from the Guggenheim Foundation, and she was recently elected to the American Philosophical Society. She has served on the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims, as well as on the boards of the American Academy of Religion (of which she was president in 2004), the Association of Theological Schools, and Trinity University. She has been Dean of Georgetown College since 1999 and, before that, held faculty and administrative positions at Emory University and the University of Toronto.

Union Theological Seminary Appoints First Woman President

Serene Jones has been selected to become the 16th president and first woman president of the historic Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York. Jones will assume the presidency of the independent, nondenominational seminary on July 1, 2008. She will succeed Joseph C. Hough Jr., who is retiring after serving as Union's president since 1999.

Jones, the Titus Street Professor of Theology at Yale Divinity School, will come to Union after 17 years on the Yale faculty. She is a prolific and popular scholar in the fields of religion and gender studies. In addition to publishing 37 articles and book chapters since 1991, she has delivered a long list of professional papers and public lectures across the United States and around the world. She is the author of *Feminist Theory and Theology: Cartographies of Grace* (2000) and *Calvin and the Rhetoric of Piety* (1995). She co-edited *Feminist and Womanist Essays in Reformed Dogmatics* (2006); *Constructive Theology: A Contemporary Engagement with Classical Themes* (2005); *Liberating Eschatology: Essays in Honor of Letty Russell* (1999); and *Setting the Table: Women in Theological Conversation* (1995).

Chicago Theological Seminary Names Alice Hunt Its 12th President

Alice Hunt, previously Associate Dean of Vanderbilt University's Divinity School, and a noted Hebrew Bible scholar, will be installed as CTS president in fall 2008. Her appointment culminates a yearlong search by a committee of trustees, faculty, students, and friends of CTS, one of seven United Church of Christ seminaries.

"In our president, we sought a partner in our quest to question, teach, and transform church

and society," said Donald Clark Jr., chair of the board of trustees and member of the search committee. "We sought an individual who shares our dedication to academic excellence, passion for social justice, and courage in response to great challenge. We found all this and more in Dr. Alice Hunt."

"CTS is a vibrant institution with a remarkable history," Hunt responded. "In its mission, vision, and commitments, CTS is both well-grounded in traditions and fully aware of contexts in which we live and work. As the nature of religious life is changing, CTS is a model in preparing transformative religious leaders to live out their roles in their many contexts, with a view toward a flourishing of life for all."

Hunt was ordained at the historic Fifteenth Avenue Baptist Church, National Baptist Convention, in Nashville, Tennessee. She holds a PhD in religion, with an emphasis on the Hebrew Bible, from Vanderbilt University. Her published work includes *Missing Priests: The Zadokites in Tradition and History* (2006) and essays in works such as *Approaching Yehud: New Approaches to the Study of the Persian Period* (2007), *Israel's Prophets and Israel's Past* (2006), and *Methods of Biblical Interpretation* (2004). A vital leader in religious affairs and theological education, Hunt chairs the American Academy of Religion Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession as well as the Historical Books section for the Society of Biblical Literature's international meeting. She also serves on the board of directors and executive committee for the American Academy of Religion.

Dow Jones Indexes and Dharma Investments to Launch New Faith-based Indexes

Dow Jones Indexes, a leading global index provider, and Dharma Investments, a leading private investment firm pioneering the development of faith-based investment, have announced the launch of the Dow Jones Dharma Indexes. The new indexes measure the performance of companies selected according to the value systems and principles of Dharmic religions, especially Hinduism and Buddhism.

The indexes are designed to underlie financial products such as exchange-traded funds and other investable products that enable investors to participate in the performance of companies that are compliant with Dharmic religious traditions. To be included in the Dow Jones Dharma Indexes, stocks must pass a set of industry, environmental, corporate governance, and qualitative screens for Dharmic compliance.

Emory's John Witte Receives 2008 National First Freedom Award

John Witte Jr., Jonas Robitscher Professor of Law and Director of the Center for the Study of Law and Religion at Emory University, has recently received the 2008 National First Freedom Award for his contributions to advancing religious liberty in the United States. The award was presented January 16, 2008, by the Council for America's First Freedom. The mission of the council is to increase understanding and respect for religious freedom in diverse communities worldwide through education about this core human value: the freedom of thought, conscience, and belief.

A specialist in legal history, marriage, and religious liberty, Witte holds a law degree from

Harvard University and has published 150 articles, 10 journal symposia, and 21 books. Recent book titles include: *Law and Protestantism: The Legal Teachings of the Lutheran Reformation*; *Religion and the American Constitutional Experiment*; *The Teachings of Modern Christianity on Law, Politics, and Human Nature*; and *The Reformation of Rights: Law, Religion, and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism*.

New Religion and Politics Blog

A new blog on religion and the 2008 election campaign has been launched by the Leonard E. Greenberg Center for the Study of Religion in Public Life at Trinity College in Hartford. The blog, *Spiritual Politics*, at www.SpiritualPolitics.org, features outside contributors as well as members of the Greenberg Center staff.

Among those joining Mark Silk on the blog are such well-known commentators on religion in American public life as John Green, Jan Shipps, Gary Dorrien, and Jerome Chanes. Recent postings cover everything from Mitt Romney's speech on religion and politics, to Barack Obama's appeal to religious voters, to the ways Mike Huckabee's religious populism has unsettled the Republican establishment.

Results of Landmark Survey on Religion in the United States Recently Released by Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life

The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life has released the first report of the U.S. Religious Landscape Survey. The report details the religious affiliation of the American public and explores the remarkable dynamism taking place in the U.S. religious marketplace.

Based on interviews conducted in English and Spanish with a nationally representative sample of over 35,000 adults, the report describes changes in religious affiliation and analyzes the relationship between religious affiliation and various demographic factors, including age, ethnicity, nativity, educational and income levels, gender, family composition, and regional distribution (including state breakdowns).

In conjunction with the release of this report, the Pew Forum is introducing new features on its website at <http://religions.pewforum.org>. The online presentation of the findings includes interactive mapping, dynamic charts, and a variety of other tools that are designed to help users delve deeper into the material.

Council of Societies for the Study of Religion

The Council of Societies for the Study of Religion (CSSR) has announced the following changes in leadership. Andrew O. Fort of Texas Christian University is now the Executive Director. Russell McCutcheon of the University of Alabama remains President of the CSSR Board.

The CSSR publishes *Religious Studies Review* and the *CSSR Bulletin*. After many years of exceptional service, Richard DeMaris of Valparaiso University has stepped down as Editor of *RSR*, and has been replaced by two Co-editors: David Gray of Santa Clara University, Editor for review essays; and Deepak Sarma of Case Western Reserve University, Editor for booknotes. Elias

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Bongmba of Rice University continues as Managing Editor. The *CSSR Bulletin* is now edited by Craig Martin of Syracuse University, replacing Scott Elliott of Drew University.

Theologos Book Awards

The Association of Theological Booksellers recently announced the 2007 winners of the Theologos Awards. The awards represent the unique, professional evaluations of people who sell academic religious books. The Association of Theological Booksellers is a collaborative organization of diverse theological bookstores and publishers working together to enhance the quality and ensure the future of theological bookselling. Only the bookseller members of the association are eligible to vote.

Best General Interest Book

Take This Bread: A Radical Conversion
Sara Miles
Random House

Best Academic Book

The Gospel of Matthew
R. T. France
Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Best Children's Book

Four Feet, Two Sandals
Karen Lynn Williams and Khadra
Mohammed
Illustrated by Doug Chayka
Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Book of the Year

Jesus of Nazareth
Pope Benedict XVI
Doubleday

Publisher of the Year

Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 

JAAR Call for Papers

China and India in the Euro-American Imagination

The JAAR invites papers that explore the specific ways in which knowledge of China and India has shaped understandings of religious thought and practice in the Euro-American West. While much scholarship in the past three decades has focused on the construction of "Hinduism," "Buddhism," and "Chinese Religions" in the context of Euro-American colonial ambitions, relatively less has been said about the role that burgeoning knowledge of the religious traditions of China and India played in the construction of the analytic categories of "religion" and "ethics." Topics might include, but are certainly not limited to the role of Confucianism in the shaping of European notions of altruism; Jesuit interpretations of Confucius; the influence of the Upanishads on German Romanticism; Theosophical and New Age appropriations of the religions of the East; the place of Chinese thought in the development of Comparative Ethics; and Hindu Renaissance thinkers and the birth of the idea of interreligious dialogue.


Deadline for submission is March 1, 2009. Please direct queries to jaar@virginia.edu. 

Religion Newswriters Identify Year's Top Ten Religion Stories

Editor's Note:

Information for this article was provided by RNA Extra Online, the newsletter of the Religion Newswriters Association www.rna.org.

IN DECEMBER, the Religion Newswriters Association conducted an online poll of its active members, who identified the following as the top ten religion news stories of 2007. Eighty people, or 27 percent of its membership, responded.

1. Evangelical voters ponder whether they will be able to support the eventual Republican candidate, as they did in 2004, because of questions about the leaders' faith and/or platform. Many say they would be reluctant to vote for Mormon Mitt Romney.
2. Leading Democratic presidential candidates make conscious efforts to woo faith-based voters after admitting failure to do so in 2004.
3. The role of gays and lesbians in clergy continues as a deeply dividing issue. An Episcopal Church promise to exercise restraint on gay issues fails to stem the number of congregations seeking to leave the mainline denomination, while in a close vote, Canadian Anglican bishops vote to nullify lay and clerical approval of same-sex blessings. Meanwhile, Conservative Jews become more open to gay leadership.
4. Global warming rises in importance among religious groups, with many mainline leaders giving it high priority and evangelical leaders split over its importance compared to other social and moral causes.
5. The question of what to do about illegal immigration is debated by religious leaders and groups on both sides of the issue. Some take an active role in supporting undocumented immigrants.
6. Thousands of Buddhist monks lead a pro-democracy protest in Myanmar, which is brutally crushed after a week.
7. Some Conservative U.S. Episcopalians realign with Anglican bishops in Africa and elsewhere in the global South, initiating legal disputes about church property ownership.
8. The Supreme Court by a 5-4 vote rules on the conservative side in three major cases with religious implications: upholding a ban on partial-birth abortions; allowing schools to establish some limits on students' free speech; and denying a challenge to the Office of Faith-based and Community Initiatives.
9. Death takes evangelical leaders known, among other things, for their television work: Jerry Falwell, Rex Humbard, D. James Kennedy, plus Billy Graham's wife, Ruth, and Jim Bakker's ex-wife, Tammy Faye Messner. Other deaths include Gilbert Patterson, presiding bishop of the Church of God in Christ, and Bible scholar Bruce Metzger.
10. The cost of priestly sex abuse to the Roman Catholic Church in the United States surpasses \$2.1 billion, with a record \$660 million settlement involving the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, and earlier settlements this year totaling \$100 million in Portland, Oregon, and Spokane, Washington. 

AAR

AAR RESEARCH GRANT PROGRAM

DID YOU KNOW THAT you could receive up to \$5,000 in research assistance from the AAR? Since 1992, the Academy has awarded over \$500,000 to members for individual and collaborative research projects. The application deadline is August 1st of each year. For application information and eligibility requirements, see www.aarweb.org/grants.

2007-2008 RESEARCH GRANT WINNERS

COLLABORATIVE

Adele Reinhartz, University of Ottawa
Heart (Transplant) and Soul: How Movies Mediate Meaning
Collaborator: Sam Shemie, University of Ottawa

INDIVIDUAL

Julius Bailey, University of Redlands
Making a Homeland: Race, Religion, and the Meaning of Africa in the Nineteenth-Century African Methodist Episcopal Church

Jennifer Eichman, Seton Hall University
Buddhist-Inspired Contemporary Art: Zhu Ming and His Network

William P. Harman, University of Tennessee, Chattanooga
Suicide Bombers Become Goddesses: Women, Apotheosis, and Sacrificial Violence in South Asia

Steven Heine, Florida International University
Sacred High City, Sacred Low City: A Tale of Religious Sites in Two Tokyo Neighborhoods

Jennifer G. Jesse, Truman State University
There's a Methodism to His Madness: William Blake as a Religious Moderate

Greg Johnson, University of Colorado at Boulder
Religion in the Moment: Contemporary Lives of Indigenous Traditions

Frank J. Korom, Boston University
From Guru to Shaykh: Bawa Muhaiyyaddeen and the Making of Transnational Sufi "Family"

Leela Prasad, Duke University
Annotating Pastimes: Oral Narrative and Religion in Colonial India

Miranda Eberle Shaw, University of Richmond
Buddhist Goddesses of Tibet and Nepal: Final Phase of Fieldwork

Kerry Martin Skora, Hiram College
Recollecting Minling Thrichen Rinpoche's Vision: The History and Contemporary Lived Experience of a Seventeenth-Century Mindrolling Monastery and Its Holy Landscape in Central Bhutan

Manuel A. Vasquez, University of Florida
Performing Identities and Spaces among Brazilian and Congolese Immigrants in London and Atlanta: The Case of Two Transnational Religious Networks

THE COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING SEEKS NOMINATIONS FOR THE AAR AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING.

Nominations of winners of campus awards, or any other awards, are encouraged.

Procedures for the nomination process are outlined on the AAR website at www.aarweb.org/programs/awards/teaching_awards.

The Association for Jewish Studies is pleased to announce the recipients of the

2007 Cahnman Publication Subvention Grants

IN SUPPORT OF FIRST BOOKS

Serguei B. Dolgopolskii, University of Kansas
What is Talmud? The Art of Disagreement (Fordham University Press)

Adam Shear, University of Pittsburgh
The Book of the Kuzari and the Shaping of Jewish Identity, 1167-1900 (Cambridge University Press)

Karen B. Stern, University of Southern California
Inscribing Devotion and Death: Deciphering Jewish Culture of Roman North Africa, 2nd-6th centuries, C.E. (Brill)

The AJS is now accepting applications for the **2008 Cahnman Publication Subvention Grants.**

DEADLINE: JUNE 18, 2008

Further information can be found at: www.ajsnet.org/cahnman.html.

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FOCUS ON

The Undergraduate Study of Religion

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AAR Undergraduate Departments Survey Shows Increases in Religious Studies

IN 2005, THE AAR conducted its own undergraduate survey of the 2004–2005 academic year. Two and one-half years later, the results show that courses, enrollments, majors/degrees, and faculty have grown steadily. The last such survey was conducted for the 1999–2000 academic year, and it also collected limited data from the 1996–1997 academic year. With this final survey, the Academy now has trend data showing changes — mostly growth — in a field influenced after the events of September 11, 2001.

The survey of the 1999–2000 academic year was conducted by NORC, utilizing approximately \$250,000 of a Lilly Endowment-funded “Strengthening College and University Programs in Religion and Theology” (SCURT) initiative. Additionally, several other entities joined with the AAR in sponsoring the 2000 survey: the Association of Theological Schools, the Auburn Center for the Study of Theological Education, the Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion, the Canadian Society for the Study of Religion, the Council of Societies for the Study of Religion, the Fund for Theological Education, the Council on Graduate Studies in Religion, and the Society of Biblical Literature.

The new survey was conducted online by AAR alone with residual funds from the original Lilly–SCURT initiative. By going online, the AAR was able to collect data without having to rekey it into another system before analysis. David Brewington, an Emory sociology PhD candidate who has worked on the past surveys, conducted the data analysis. Please see the accompanying articles in this Focus section for methodology details.

Institutional Findings

For this undergraduate survey, institutional data was collected regarding Carnegie classification, institution and program type, academic calendar, and whether the program offered a major or minor, among other data.

The Carnegie classification respondents were as follows:

- Baccalaureate colleges – liberal arts (35.5%)
- Doctoral/research – extensive (17%)
- Master’s colleges/universities I (13.4%)
- Master’s colleges/universities II (12.7%)
- Baccalaureate colleges – general (10.8%)
- Doctoral/research – intensive (5.7%)
- Theological/specialized faith institutions (2.3%)
- Baccalaureate/associate’s colleges (1.5%)
- Associate’s colleges (0.8%)
- Other (0.2%)

Only 3.5 percent and 0.2 percent respectively reported they were accredited by either the Association for Biblical Higher Education (ABHE) or the Transnational Association of Christian Schools (TACS).

The institution type respondents were as follows:

- Protestant (29.8%)
- Public (28%)
- Private, nonsectarian (24.3%)

- Catholic (15.2%)
- Other Religion (2.5%)
- Jewish (0.2%)

Eighty-five percent of the respondents reported they were on the semester academic calendar; 4.9 percent reported a 4-1-4 calendar; 3.7 percent reported a quarter calendar; 3.7 percent other; and 1.9 percent reported a trimester calendar.

The program types were as follows:

- Free-standing department (53.4%)
- Combined department (32.3%)
- Program that borrows faculty (7.5%)
- Humanities or social science department (6.6%)
- Research center (0.2%)

Courses

Course offerings in the field showed overall growth of 23 percent. The survey asked whether courses were offered, how many were offered in 2004–2005, whether the course was offered as a major, and whether the courses fulfilled a general education/distribution requirement for the institution. The table on the next page illustrates these findings in percentages reporting “yes,” excluding the number offered during the 2004–2005 year as it can only be reported in raw numbers.

Enrollment and Majors

Enrollment increased by 22 percent in 2004–2005 when compared with 1999–2000; the respondents reported 68,864 more students enrolled in the 2004–2005 academic year. Public schools reported the largest growth increase at 40 percent.

Of the responding institutions, 83 percent offered a religion major and 81.5 percent offered a religion minor. Most of the growth came within public institutions, which reported a 53 percent increase in majors and 44 percent increase in bachelor’s degrees conferred (cross-tabulation tables for institution type, region, and department type will be posted online at www.aarweb.org in the summer).

Bachelor’s degrees increased overall by 22 percent; the number of BAs awarded to women increased by 26 percent and the number of BAs awarded to men increased by 18 percent.

The survey also asked what program activities are offered at the institution:

- Internships available (46.3%)
- Grants/scholarships/prizes (45.9%)
- Public lecture series (45.5%)
- Honors program (45.3%)
- Website (38.8%)
- Associations/clubs for majors (35.5%)
- Visiting scholar program (15.5%)
- Alumni newsletter (15.5%)
- Partnerships with primary/secondary schools (4.7%)

(continued on page 12)

Course	Offered	Required for Major	Gen Ed/ Distribution
American Religion	36.7	10.8	29.8
Arts, Literature, and Religion	25.1	5.9	20.4
Bible Languages	30.2	11.6	14.3
Buddhism	32.2	9.0	26.5
Christian Cultural	22.9	7.6	18.0
Christian Ethics	37.8	23.1	28.4
Christian Historical	60.0	31.4	41.0
Christian Theological	48.0	33.1	35.7
Church Administration	8.2	7.8	1.6
Comparative	36.1	17.3	30.4
Confucianism/Taoism	15.3	3.3	13.1
Counseling	8.4	6.3	2.4
Ethics	36.3	15.5	27.6
Gender and Sexuality	29.2	5.7	21.6
Hinduism/Jainism/Sikhism	26.5	6.7	22.0
Indigenous Religions	13.1	2.9	12.0
Intro – Bible	51.2	34.9	48.8
Intro – Eastern Religions	27.6	14.7	25.1
Intro – Sacred Texts	6.9	4.5	6.5
Intro – Western Religions	21.0	14.3	21.0
Intro – World Religion	49.0	30.6	41.0
Introduction to Religion	39.8	28.0	35.3
Islam	34.1	10.4	28.8
Judaism	31.4	8.6	27.6
Missions	12.2	10.4	3.7
Music	3.7	2.0	2.0
New Religious Movements	11.0	4.1	8.2
New Testament	68.2	40.8	53.1
Old Testament	63.7	38.2	50.8
Other	13.9	6.1	9.2
Other Practical	4.7	3.7	2.9
Philosophy of Religion	31.6	13.1	21.2
Preaching	9.2	7.8	2.7
Racial and Ethnic Studies	12.0	3.1	11.2
Religious Education	12.4	11.4	3.7
Ritual and Performance	9.6	3.1	7.6
Social Scientific Study	14.9	5.3	11.2
Women's Studies	24.3	5.7	18.8
Worship	10.2	8.8	3.9
Youth/Family Ministry	14.1	11.2	3.3

(continued from page 11)

Ten was the most commonly reported number of religion courses required for a major, followed by 12; 11 courses was the third most-cited course number required.

Beyond coursework, programs required a variety of projects:

- Seminar or capstone course (52.7%)
- Thesis (21.6%)
- Comprehensive exam (9.6%)
- Portfolio (9.2%)
- Other (5.9%)

Faculty

The faculty data indicated growth in all areas from the 1999–2000 survey; however, as national data has shown, the total tenure and tenure-track lines grew at a slower rate than the nontenured and part-time positions.

The tenured positions grew by 18 percent, with men in tenured positions increasing by 15 percent and women in tenured positions increasing by 32 percent. While the

increase for women was dramatic, there is still a huge discrepancy between men and women in actual number of tenured positions occupied: 3,067 reported for men compared with 678 for women.

The data showed a similar pattern for tenure-track positions. Growth was a robust 30 percent, with men showing a 28 percent increase and women a 34 percent increase. Again, the actual number belies the continued imbalance: 961 are men and 437 are women.

Full-time nontenure-track positions grew by 43 percent, topping both the tenure and tenure-track growth. The number of men in nontenure-track positions increased by 39 percent and the number of women in nontenure-track positions grew by 55 percent. Men again held the vast majority of these positions, with almost triple the number that women held: 877 to 276.

Part-time positions grew the most (44 percent). Additionally, of the four categories (tenured, tenure-track, full-time nontenure-track, and part-time), only the

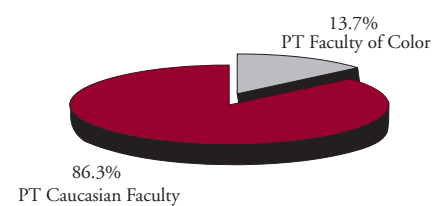
tenured positions outnumbered the part-time numbers: 3,745 to 3,486. The number of women in part-time positions grew by 48 percent compared with the last survey, and the number of men in these positions increased by 43 percent.

The faculty trends of moving toward more nontenure-track and part-time faculty supports the trend reported in a 2006 study by the American Association of University Professors that shows percentage growth in these areas far outpacing tenure and tenure-track lines.

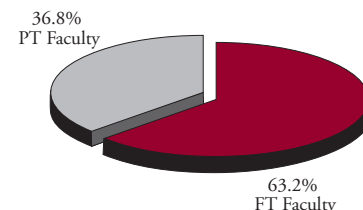
The data also indicates that while a gender gap continues to exist, women are securing positions at much greater rates than in the past.

There continues to be a great discrepancy, however, between faculty of color and white faculty. Among full-time faculty, just 10 percent are people of color; with part-time faculty, the figure is 14 percent.

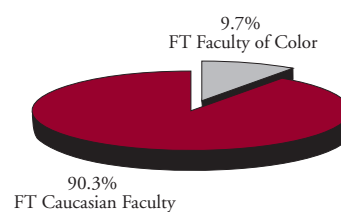
Ratio of PT faculty of color to PT white faculty



Ratio of PT to FT faculty



Ratio of FT faculty of color to FT white faculty



Next Steps

This summer, the AAR will be posting the data from the survey online. There, cross-tabulations of all data along multiple types — program, institution, regional, and others — along with the entire frequency tables and survey instrument will be available for members to see. Additionally, the data set will be posted nationally for other social science researchers to use for further studies. An announcement will be sent to all members when the complete data is posted.

1999–2004 Numbers for Comparison to Humanities

Change from 1999–2000 to 2004–2005 academic years

Raw change indicates raw numeric increase from 1999–2000 to 2004–2005 academic years

Growth change indicates change BASED on raw growth from 1999–2000 to 2004–2005 academic years

Example: a growth change of 1.26 indicates that a particular category has increased 126% from 1999–2000 to 2004–2005

	2004–2005	1999–2000	Raw Change	Growth Change
Number of undergraduate courses offered	16,067	13,076.5	2,990.5	23%
Total enrollment in undergraduate courses	379,565	310,701	68,864	22%
Number of undergraduates majored in religion	14,918	12,230	2,688	22%
Number of bachelor's degrees received				
All	4,179	3,428	751	22%
Male	2,141	1,816	325	18%
Female	2,038	1,612	426	26%
Number of positions (i.e., salary lines) supported				
FT Tenured	4,405	3,745	660	18%
FT Tenured – Male	3,513	3,067	446	15%
FT Tenured – Female	892	678	214	32%
FT Tenure track	1,813	1,398	415	30%
FT Tenure track – Male	1,227	961	266	28%
FT Tenure track – Female	586	437	149	34%
FT Nontenure track	1,649	1,153	496	43%
FT Nontenure track – Male	1,222	877	345	39%
FT Nontenure track – Female	427	276	151	55%
Part-time	5,019	3,486	1,533	44%
Part-time – Male	3,513	2,465	1,048	43%
Part-time – Female	1,506	1,021	485	48%

AAR Undergraduate Departments Survey Methodology

THE AMERICAN ACADEMY of Religion fielded a second wave of its Undergraduate Survey on September 29, 2005, covering the academic year of fall 2004 through spring 2005. The survey was live for over a year, with final data collection ending on September 30, 2006.

While the first wave of the survey (1999–2000 academic year) was fielded as a mailed paper instrument, for the second wave the AAR utilized online surveying techniques to host the survey and communicate with respondents electronically. The survey was hosted on AAR’s web servers, and e-mail communications were used to notify respondents of the survey.

Out of 1,202 departments and programs across Canada and the United States invited to take the survey, 490 responded to the survey, making for a 40.8 percent response rate. This rate, although lower than the 1999–2000 surveying period of 78.8 percent (897 responses out of 1,148), it is well within normal response rates for surveying. The difference in response rates is largely attributable to the fact that the first survey was fielded by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago, and NORC used its considerable resources to contact programs and departments who had not completed the inaugural survey repeatedly by phone, mail, and e-mail. For the second wave, the AAR decided to conduct the survey in-house with residual funds left over from the original Lilly-SCURT grant, using Internet technology to facilitate the process. The AAR staff did contact nonresponders multiple times, using multiple avenues of communication including e-mail, E-bulletin reminders, telephoning by AAR Regionally Elected Directors, telephoning by AAR interns, e-mail reminders from AAR officers, and a final mailed letter from AAR Executive Director Jack Fitzmier near the end of the survey period. In all, a total of eight points of communication were used throughout the survey period to bolster response rates. These points of communication are summarized in the following:

- September 29, 2005 – First e-mail letter sent to departments, signed by then AAR Executive Director Barbara DeConcini
- September 29, 2005 – Survey goes live
- October 31, 2005 – E-mail reminder letter from Kyle Cole, AAR Director of Professional Programs
- March 2006 – E-bulletin reminder
- April 2006 – E-bulletin reminder
- April 21, 2006 – E-mail reminder letter from AAR officers Diana Eck, Jeffrey Stout, and Emilie Townes
- April 27, 2006 – Telephoning request of Regionally Elected Directors to departments in the regions who had not responded
- May 2006 – E-bulletin reminder
- May and June 2006 – Upper Midwest, Midwest, Southwest, and Western Regionally Elected Directors complete their lists by the end of June. Summer intern at AAR offices called departments in the other six regions during the summer of 2006
- August 2006 – E-bulletin reminder
- August 30, 2006 – Letter from Jack Fitzmier went out for final push to end data collection
- September 30, 2006 – Data collection ends

The survey instrument for 2004–2005 replicates the survey instrument from 1999–2000, with several important additions. The most important additions to the survey instrument are questions concerning the race and ethnicity of both full-time and part-time faculty. Other additions include questions regarding accreditation with ABHE and TACS, Carnegie Classification (this data existed in the AAR databases from the previous survey wave), minor concentrations in specific religious traditions, course data on practical training associated with applied programs, and whether and what other departments provide faculty to teach in a program.

Survey results have been analyzed for information about the second wave survey period of 2004–2005, as well as for changes between the first wave period of 1999–2000 and the second wave period of 2004–2005. Additionally, the second wave instrument asked questions about the previous period of 1999–2000. This is a fruitful continuation of the practice of asking for data from a previous period — the first wave of the Undergraduate Survey asked for data from the 1996–1997 academic year.

Together, the results from the two survey waves provide three periods of data. Several caveats need to be specified in understanding these data. Because of the difference in response rates between the surveys, comparing raw numbers across the two survey waves will appear to denote significant reductions in almost all areas, such as number of majors, enrollments, number of tenured female faculty, and so on. This interpretation is inaccurate — it does not take the relative population sizes of the number of respondents for each wave of the survey into account. For example, when examining the total number of courses offered in the 2004–2005 period (16,067 courses) versus the 1999–2000 period (30,924 courses), it appears that there is a large reduction in courses offered. This runs counter to intuition and anecdotal evidence. The issue is that this is not an “apples to apples” comparison — more departments submitted information in the first wave of the survey. The pool of potential departments submitting data on total courses for the 2004–2005 survey wave is almost half that of those departments submitting data for the 1999–2000 survey wave.

Fortunately, we do have the ability to make an “apples to apples” comparison for some questions across survey waves. Both survey waves asked departments for historical data; in the case of the 2004–2005 survey wave, this data was prepopulated in the online survey fields using data supplied by respondents in the 1999–2000 wave. Such data exist for number of courses, total enrollments, majors, male and female BAs, and male and female faculty. These data allow us to limit comparisons to only those institutions that answered the 2004–2005 survey. This allows us to utilize the raw numbers in the survey for these questions for comparative purposes. For instance, where there appeared to be a large decrease in the number of courses offered by religion departments between 1999–2000 and 2004–2005, we see that there is actually an increase when using the technique outlined above. The

2004–2005 total number of courses offered is 16,067 courses. In 1999–2000, the institutions that responded to the second wave of the survey reported a total of 13,076 courses, an “apples to apples” increase of over 3,000 courses (see Figure 1 below).

There is a legitimate technique for comparing all the survey data from all periods asked for in the two survey waves (i.e., the 1996–1997, 1999–2000, and 2004–2005 periods). We utilize the data analysis technique of cross-tabulation, or examining two or more sets of survey data by “crossing” them. For example, we can cross the type of institution by how many courses are offered across the three periods covered by the two survey waves. When we examine the resulting output (Figure 2 below), we immediately see the issue outlined above. The raw numbers across the three survey periods indicate the same drastic decrease from 1999–2000 to 2004–2005.

However, we can compare the ratio of the raw number where a time period and institute type cross with the total for that time period with corresponding ratios for the same category across time periods. This technique controls for the large changes in raw numbers. For example, if we examine Figure 2 again, we see that for public institutions, there were 4,186 courses in 2004–2005, 6,969 courses in 1999–2000, and 6,781 courses in 1996–1997. If we just examine these numbers, we see a modest upward shift from the first period to the second, and a distinctive drop in number of courses in the last period. But this is an “apples to apples to oranges” comparison. If we examine the ratio of the number of courses offered in public institutions to the total number of courses in each survey period, however, we can compare in an “apples to apples” fashion because we are mathematically accounting for the large difference in total response rate between the survey waves. Using this approach, we see that courses at public institutions dip slightly between the first and second survey period and then rebound by 3.5 percentage points from the second to the third survey period.

Throughout the analysis of data we present both types of comparisons across time periods where we have the information. We provide cross-tabulation tables for institution type, program type, appropriations, and AAR region. These data will be posted on the AAR website this summer.



Figure 1

Institution Type	# Courses 2004–2005	Col%	# Courses 1999–2000	Col%	Raw Change	Percent Change
Public	4,186	26.05	3,321.5	25.40	864.5	0.65
Private, non sectarian	2,644	16.46	2,369.0	18.12	275.0	-1.68
Catholic	3,574	22.24	2,831.0	21.65	743.0	0.59
Jewish	8	0.05	0.0	0.0	8.0	0.05
Protestant	5,124	31.89	4,342.0	33.20	782.0	-1.31
Other religion	531	3.30	213.0	1.63	318.0	1.68
Total	16,067	100.00	13,076.5	100.00	2,990.5	0.00

Figure 2

Institution Type	# Courses 2004–2005	# Courses 1999–2000	# Courses 1996–1997
Public	4,186 26.1%	6,969 22.5%	6,781 24.0%
Private, nonsectarian	2,644 16.46%	5,108 16.5%	4,725 16.7%
Catholic	3,574 22.24%	6,163 19.9%	5,687 20.1%
Jewish	8 0.0%	106 0.3%	89 .3%
Protestant	5,124 31.9%	11,801 38.2%	10,274 36.3%
Other religion	531 3.3%	777 2.5%	746 2.6%
Total	16,067 100.00%	30,924 100.00%	28,302 100.0%

AAR Undergraduate Departments Survey Comparative Analysis of Wave I and II

David V. Brewington, Emory University

WITH THE SECOND WAVE of the Undergraduate Department Survey the AAR now has a set of data over time, allowing us to begin to understand how the field of religious studies has changed in the last decade. In some cases we have three periods to compare because the original 1999–2000 survey asked for data from the 1996–1997 academic year.

An issue that affects analysis of the data across survey waves is the difference in response rates between surveys. The first wave garnered a response rate of 78 percent while the second wave response rate was 40 percent. This difference affects comparative analysis over time because we do not know if one or other of the survey results are statistically representative of the entire population of over 1,200 religious studies departments and programs in the United States and Canada.

To resolve this issue, we identified 267 programs and departments that responded to both waves of the survey, and answered a substantial number of items in the survey to allow for comparison. By restricting the following analysis to these programs and departments, we can conservatively analyze how these 267 religious studies departments have changed in the last ten years without making inferences about the entire population of departments for which we do not have accurate measures. It is important to stress, then, that the following analyses should be taken as a measure of what has changed to only these 267 departments.

Undergraduate Education and Students

For the most part, total courses offered, enrollments, numbers of majors, and bachelor's degrees conferred increase between 1996 and 2005. For example, consider total courses offered in Table 1.

Table 1 shows the number of courses, enrollments, majors, and bachelor's degrees conferred segmented by time period. This table shows changes in categories from the 1996–1997 to 2004–2005 academic years, using 1996–1997 as a baseline. Raw change (Raw ▲) is the current survey period total minus prior survey period total, and percentage change (%▲) is raw change divided by previous period total. Net change (Net ▲) is ending period total minus baseline total, and net percentage change (Net % ▲) is net change divided by baseline total.

Between the first (1996–1997) and second (1999–2000) periods there is an increase of 996 courses, or 10.7 percent. Between the second and third (2004–2005) periods, there is an increase of 1,256 courses, or 12.2 percent. The net effect is an increase of 2,252 courses, or 24.1 percent from 1996–2005. The story is about the same for enrollments and majors: each of these categories increases in the period between 1996 and 2000, between 2000 and 2005, and shows a net increase overall from 1996 levels.

Baccalaureate degrees conferred show a net increase overall from 1996 levels to 2005 levels as well: there were 601 net, or 27.4 percent more, degrees conferred in religious studies. However, males receiving degrees increased by much less than did female degrees: males increased by 17.9 percent over the entire period, while females receiving degrees increased by nearly 37 percent. The trend for BA degrees for males peaks in 2000 at 1,473, but then declined by 70 in 2005.

With the exception of number of courses offered, these categories showed stronger increases between the 1996–1997 and 1999–2000 period over the 1999–2000 to 2004–2005 period for these 267 departments.

Undergraduate Education and Faculty

Table 2 shows changes in faculty rank for the period 1996 to 2005. From the 1996–1997 to 1999–2000 periods, all ranks show increases. With the exception of tenured faculty, all ranks also show increases from 1999 to 2005. Faculty at the tenured rank showed a slight decrease of -0.5 percent in this period. All ranks showed net increases over the entire period from 1996 to 2005. Increases of tenure-track

Table 1: Period to period and net change for Undergraduate Education/Student categories.

	1996–1997	1999–2000			2004–2005			1996–2005	
	Totals	Totals	Raw ▲	% ▲	Totals	Raw ▲	% ▲	Net ▲	Net % ▲
# Courses	9,334	10,330	996	10.7%	11,586	1,256	12.2%	2,252	24.1%
Enrollments	228,478	261,635	33,157	14.5%	279,961	18,326	7.0%	51,483	22.5%
Majors	6,872	8,572	1,700	24.7%	8,972	400	4.7%	2,100	30.6%
BAs	2,195	2,739	544	24.8%	2,796	57	2.1%	601	27.4%
BAs – Male	1,190	1,473	283	23.8%	1,403	-70	-4.8%	213	17.9%
BAs – Female	1,005	1,266	261	26.0%	1,393	127	10.0%	388	38.6%

Table 2: Period to period and net change for Undergraduate Education/Faculty categories.

	1996–1997	1999–2000			2004–2005			1996–2005	
	Totals	Totals	Raw ▲	% ▲	Totals	Raw ▲	% ▲	Net ▲	Net % ▲
Tenured	1,007	1,092	85	8.4%	1,086	-6	-0.5%	79	7.8%
Tenure-track	331	354	23	6.9%	487	133	37.6%	156	47.1%
Joint appointments	57	65	8	14.0%	106	41	63.1%	49	86.0%
Full-time nontenure	205	261	56	27.3%	296	35	13.4%	91	44.4%
Part-time faculty	750	967	217	28.9%	1,016	49	5.1%	266	35.5%

Table 3: Period to period and net change for Undergraduate Education/Faculty categories.

	1996–1997	1999–2000			2004–2005			1996–2005	
	Totals	Totals	Raw ▲	% ▲	Totals	Raw ▲	% ▲	Net ▲	Net % ▲
Tenured – Female	203	231	28	13.8%	257	26	11.3%	54	26.6%
Tenured – Male	804	861	57	7.1%	829	-32	-3.7%	25	3.1%
Tenure track – Female	112	116	4	3.6%	168	52	44.8%	56	50.0%
Tenure track – Male	219	238	19	8.7%	319	81	34.0%	100	45.7%
Joint Appointments – Female	11	14	3	27.3%	34	20	142.9%	23	209.1%
Joint Appointments – Male	46	51	5	10.9%	72	21	41.2%	26	56.5%
Full-time nontenure – Female	52	63	11	21.2%	75	12	19.0%	23	44.2%
Full-time nontenure – Male	153	198	45	29.4%	221	23	11.6%	68	44.4%
Part-time faculty – Female	241	300	59	24.5%	322	22	7.3%	81	33.6%
Part-time faculty – Male	509	667	158	31.0%	694	27	4.0%	185	36.3%

and joint appointed faculty were strongest in the second period from 1999 to 2005.

Nontenured full-time faculty positions grew less in the 1999–2005 period versus the 1996–1999 period (13.4 percent versus 27.3 percent). Part-time faculty positions increased similarly with much lower growth in the latter period (5.1 percent) versus the 1996–1999 period (28.9 percent).

Interestingly, females tended to do much better than males at tenured ranks: female tenured ranks increased over both periods and showed a net gain of 26.6 percent over the entire period while male tenured positions increased 7.1 percent over the 1996–1999 period and decreased by 3.7 percent over the 1999–2005 period. Female tenured faculty gained 26.6 percent over the entire survey period, while males showed only a 3.1 percent net growth. See Table 3 for more comparisons between females and males.

Undergraduate Education and Course Work

Most courses showed increases by percentage in counting toward the major. New Religious Movements, Indigenous Religions, and Women's Studies were the three courses showing the largest increase for percentage of classes counting toward the major (with increases of 171.4 per-

cent, 140 percent, and 84.6 percent respectively). By contrast, the Social Scientific Study of Religion, Introduction to Sacred Texts, and Ritual Performances showed the steepest declines in courses that count toward the major, with -28 percent, -20 percent, and -15.4 percent respectively.

Most course topics that count toward general education credit increased, with the exception of Introduction to Sacred Texts, which declined by 32.3 percent. The top three increases in course topics by percentage are New Religious Movements (126.7 percent), Indigenous Religions (140 percent), and Islam (70 percent). The smallest three increases in course topics by percentage are Introduction to Religion (1.7 percent), Christian Ethics (2.1 percent), and Introduction to Eastern Religions (2.3 percent).

In terms of the number of courses offered, New Religious Movements (69 percent), American Religion (62.3 percent), and Islam (52.8 percent) showed the three highest increases by percentage. Ritual and Performance, Introduction to Sacred Texts, and Confucianism/Taoism suffered the steepest declines in numbers of courses offered with -37.1 percent, -27.3 percent, and -21.1 percent respectively.

	Offered		Majors		General Education?		How Many?	
	Raw ▲	% ▲	Raw ▲	% ▲	Raw ▲	% ▲	Raw ▲	% ▲
Intro to Religion	-25	-16.0%	-1	-1.1%	2	1.7%	-13	-1.4%
Intro to World Religions	-32	-17.1%	4	4.0%	6	4.7%	84	14.0%
Intro to Bible	-17	-9.6%	18	19.6%	29	21.8%	215	25.3%
Intro to Sacred Texts	-49	-70.0%	-4	-20.0%	-10	-32.3%	-21	-27.3%
Intro to Eastern Religions	-33	-26.2%	3	6.5%	2	2.3%	20	8.7%
Intro to Western Religions	-33	-30.8%	5	11.1%	6	8.8%	-8	-3.5%
Christian – Old Testament	-17	-7.8%	-8	-6.1%	11	6.9%	44	7.1%
Christian – New Testament	-17	-7.2%	0	0.0%	15	9.2%	76	10.0%
Christian – Historical	-19	-9.0%	-5	-4.6%	24	19.8%	67	12.6%
Christian – Theological	-26	-14.6%	1	0.9%	13	12.1%	106	12.7%
Christian – Ethics	-28	-19.3%	11	17.2%	2	2.1%	23	5.1%
Christian – Cultural	-9	-10.8%	7	35.0%	24	58.5%	82	51.3%
Buddhism	-10	-8.4%	12	48.0%	27	37.0%	47	22.5%
Confucianism/Taoism	-19	-25.7%	-1	-7.1%	10	27.0%	-24	-21.1%
Hinduism/Jainism/Sikhism	-9	-9.1%	10	55.6%	32	60.4%	54	39.1%
Indigenous Religions	-19	-32.8%	7	140.0%	24	114.3%	11	16.9%
Islam	-4	-3.5%	18	78.3%	42	70.0%	95	52.8%
Judaism	-26	-20.8%	10	41.7%	18	22.0%	17	5.9%
Comparative	-27	-17.8%	5	9.3%	30	34.9%	144	47.8%
American Religion	-12	-9.0%	7	19.4%	31	39.2%	142	62.3%
Arts, Literature, and Religion	-20	-20.0%	0	0.0%	12	20.7%	2	1.1%
Ethics	-23	-16.0%	3	6.0%	8	8.6%	40	11.3%
Gender & Sexuality	1	1.0%	3	16.7%	28	53.8%	22	16.2%
NRMs	-13	-22.8%	12	171.4%	19	126.7%	29	69.0%
Philosophy of Religion	-25	-18.8%	2	4.5%	15	25.0%	42	29.2%
Racial and Ethnic Studies	-29	-42.0%	1	8.3%	7	20.6%	-7	-6.4%
Ritual and Performance	-22	-41.5%	-2	-15.4%	3	13.0%	-26	-37.1%
Social Scientific Study	-30	-35.7%	-7	-28.0%	6	16.2%	31	28.7%
Women's Studies	-19	-17.9%	11	84.6%	13	21.3%	46	31.3%
Other	-53	-51.5%	-5	-16.7%	-2	-5.3%	-140	-40.2%

Table 4: Course change between survey periods. Table shows the raw and percentage change between 1999–2000 and 2004–2005 for courses offered, whether courses qualified for general education requirements, whether courses qualified towards the major, and how many courses or sections of courses were offered.

Previous and Related AAR Surveys of the Undergraduate and Graduate Study of Religion and Theology

2000 Survey of Departments of Religion

www.aarweb.org/Programs/Department_Services/Survey_Data/Undergraduate

2002 Survey of Graduate Programs

www.aarweb.org/Programs/Department_Services/Survey_Data/Graduate

Group Examines Undergraduate Research in Religious Studies

Robin Rinehart, Lafayette College



Robin Rinehart is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Lafayette College, where she teaches courses on Asian religions, theories of religion, gender and religion, and alternative religious movements in the United States. Her research focuses on the religious literatures of the Punjab region of South Asia, and she is currently working on a controversial Sikh text called the Dasam Granth. She travels to India regularly for research. She is co-chair of the Religion in South Asia section of the AAR, and a steering committee member of the newly formed Sikh Studies Consultation.

COLLEGES AND universities are promoting undergraduate research and highlighting it for prospective students as an opportunity for educational growth and improved career prospects. Faculty at many institutions are encouraged or even required to mentor undergraduate research projects. In 2005, the Council on Undergraduate Research (CUR) and the National Conferences on Undergraduate Research (NCUR) endorsed a joint statement that read in part, “We believe

that undergraduate research is the pedagogy for the twenty-first century” (www.cur.org/SummitPosition.html).

The initial impetus for undergraduate research, however, developed in the natural and social sciences, and most descriptions of the undergraduate research process use the language of scientific experimentation. CUR, for example, which focuses primarily on work in the natural and social sciences, defines undergraduate research as “an inquiry or investigation conducted by an undergraduate student that makes an original intellectual or creative contribution to the discipline” (www.cur.org/about.html). But is this the appropriate model for undergraduate research in religious studies? Rebecca Todd Peters of Elon University and Bernadette McNary-Zak of Rhodes College both mentored undergraduate research projects and were curious to learn more about how our discipline has addressed the topic. They were surprised to find that there is very little literature on undergraduate research in the humanities in general, and virtually nothing on it in religious studies. Thus they applied to the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Religion and Theology for a grant to host a consultation on undergraduate research in religious studies.

At the first consultation meeting in April 2007, religious studies and theology faculty participants from colleges and universities in the United States and Canada discussed a range of questions about undergraduate research. We asked what an undergraduate research project should look like — is it simply an extended research paper, somewhat longer and more in-depth than one might do for a course? Or is it

more involved? We also discussed the reservations that many humanities faculty have about undergraduate research in their disciplines. Many of us reported conversations with colleagues who argued, for example, that undergraduates have neither the breadth and depth of knowledge nor sufficient methodological sophistication for such research. Another frequent objection, especially among religious studies faculty, is that students are unlikely to have the necessary language skills. Given such reservations, many faculty members would argue that undergraduates are not ready to undertake a research project that will fit the CUR criterion of an “original intellectual or creative contribution” to our discipline.

Nonetheless, many religious studies faculty are mentoring undergraduate research through independent study projects, honors theses, and other programs. The problem, it seems, is that while undergraduates are in fact conducting research in our discipline, the prevailing models of what undergraduate research should be, largely derived from the natural and social sciences, do not fit the type of research that students in religious studies are doing. There are virtually no resources for faculty who wish to learn more about mentoring undergraduate research in our field.

Realizing how much work remained to be done to create such resources, Peters and McNary-Zak successfully applied to the Wabash Center for a second grant to support a Working Group on Undergraduate Research in Religious Studies. That group, somewhat smaller than the initial consultation, met at Elon University in September 2007, and began crafting a statement on the recommended ele-

ments and learning goals of undergraduate research in religious studies. Our discussions included the contentious issue of undergraduate research as “original,” the distinctive features of undergraduate research in religious studies, types of undergraduate research projects, learning goals, best practices for the mentoring relationship, assessment and evaluation, and recommendations for institutional and disciplinary support. Some schools offer stipends or course reduction for mentoring undergraduate research; others have no formal means of crediting faculty mentors. Few schools appear to have systems in place for assessing the quality of faculty mentoring. Some schools offer students credit for undergraduate research, others have programs that provide stipends and other benefits. When it comes to venues for students to disseminate their research, some schools sponsor annual undergraduate research conferences on their own campuses, others support print and online publications, and many schools send students to present their work at the annual NCUR meeting. Clearly, however, there need to be more venues for dissemination of religious studies undergraduate research.

Several members of the working group presented synopses of our work at a panel sponsored by the Academic Teaching and the Study of Religion Section at the 2007 AAR Annual Meeting in San Diego. We have discussed plans to design a website dedicated to undergraduate research in religious studies, and are at work on a volume to be edited by Peters and McNary-Zak tentatively titled *Teaching Undergraduate Research in Religious Studies*.

In the Public Interest

The Public Understanding of Poverty

Diane Connolly, Religion Newswriters/ReligionLink



Diane Connolly is editor of ReligionLink.org, an online news resource on religion, public policy, and culture.

RELIGION IS an obvious factor in many political debates: abortion, same-sex marriage, the war on terror, immigration, and many issues in public schools.

The economy doesn't make the list, but now that it has emerged as voters' top concern — in a presidential election year, no less — that may be changing. The public profile of poverty is heightening as more Americans fear they are losing ground financially. All major religions teach care for the poor and needy, and nearly nine in ten Americans identify with one of them. That may not translate into a tidal wave of support for the one in eight Americans who are poor, but there are signs that religious motivation stands a chance of significantly impacting the lives of the country's 36.5 million poor.

Economic fears are closely tied to the perception that the divide between the haves and have-nots is becoming more stark:

- The income gap between the wealthiest and poorest Americans is at its widest level since the 1920s.
- Some groups are hit much harder by poverty: one in four blacks, one in five Hispanics, one in six children under 18, and almost one in four households headed by a single woman. The aftermath of Hurricane

Katrina put a spotlight on an underclass many Americans weren't aware of.

- Mortgage problems, housing prices, rising health care, and gas costs disproportionately affect people with lower incomes.

At the same time, the interplay between religious groups and government is changing in ways that open new avenues for religious voices to influence public policy:

- The Democratic presidential candidates — the political party most closely associated with concern for the poor and least associated with religion — are embracing religion as a motivating factor for policy change. Senators Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton are both explicitly tying some of their policy proposals to their faith.
- Many evangelicals — the religious group most closely associated with the Republican Party — have broadened their political agenda and are embracing poverty as a top concern. Groups such as the Sojourners, led by Jim Wallace, have bolstered their activism and visibility.
- Religious groups have become more aggressive about lobbying for changes in public policies that affect the poor. A Religious Working Group on the Farm Bill, led by Bread for the World, spearheaded lobbying for changes that would fight poverty, reduce hunger, and improve nutrition.
- Religious congregations, denominations, and organizations — a major provider of food and shelter for the poor and needy — are spending more effort lobbying for political change instead of increasing the charity they offer.
- Moderate and liberal people of faith are forming and expanding organizations that connect policy agendas to faith. Faith in Public Life, Faithful America, and the Catholic Alliance for the Common Good are among groups promoting faith-based responses to poverty, connecting like-minded groups, and offering resources.
- President Bush's faith-based initiative firmly established a precedent for increasing the availability of government funding for social services provided by faith groups.

Religious teaching rarely directly translates into public action. The vast majority of Americans support the death penalty even though most religious groups oppose it. The pope tells Catholic elected officials that they have a responsibility to back policies that reflect church teaching, but many support abortion rights.

And sometimes the greatest strides on an issue connected to faith are made by someone for whom religion is not a motivation. When President Lyndon B. Johnson declared a "war on poverty" in 1964, when the poverty rate was a whopping 23 percent, religion wasn't a contributing factor.

Might 2008 — and beyond — be different? Is it possible that national and state elected officials will decide to reduce poverty and actually find a way to do it — and that religious advocates will be partly responsible?

The possibility exists because of an intersection of factors.

Americans think the government should help poor people. In surveys, a majority of Americans say the government should do more to help poor people, even if it means raising taxes. The public cost of poverty is becoming more clear. One recent study found that it costs the nation \$90 billion a year to shoulder the effects of hunger, which increases health, job, and school problems. And in the last decade there has been greater acknowledgment that religion deserves a place in public policy discourse — even though there is deep disagreement over what it should be.

As the economy teeters, more people experience the vulnerability of poverty or know people who are scrambling to put food on the table and pay the rent, whether they are downsized white-collar workers or the "working poor" — those who work full-time or more in lower-paying jobs and still can't make ends meet. By government standards, you're poor if you live in a household of four that earns less than \$20,614.

Poverty is a complex issue that requires complex solutions. You can't single out wages, education, job training, the rise in single-parent households, the lack of affordable housing, the effects of imprisonment, or the loss of factory

jobs, although all of those are factors, along with many others.

Which gets us back to religion. The major religions do indeed teach care for the poor and needy, and people of faith are on the frontlines of the soup kitchens, homeless shelters, and other charities that extend a hand to the poor every day. But religious teaching is as complex as poverty itself.

Think back to 2003, when Alabama Governor Bob Riley proposed reforming the state's tax structure so that it raised taxes for the wealthy and cut taxes for the poor. He said he had a moral obligation that was inspired by Christian teaching. Voters — most of whom were Christian — rejected the plan by a two-to-one margin, for a variety of reasons.

Just because Christians, Jews, and Muslims are taught to help the poor doesn't mean they agree on how to do it. Theology matters. Is poverty primarily caused by social structures or by individual choices? How does the balance between personal responsibility and society's responsibility play out in policy? Is there a "preferential option" for the poor, or not? There are honest disagreements.

Religion is just one strand of the debate on how to reduce poverty in one of the richest and most religious countries in the world. It is a potentially powerful strand, however, if people feel a moral urgency to make a difference.

Perhaps the role of religion in this issue is to increase the public understanding of poverty and explore the curious disconnect between religious belief and public priorities. The professors who teach, research, and write, the clergy who preach, the activists who organize and lobby, and the people who serve sandwiches may all disagree on what causes poverty and what can be done about it. But they can help others see the public and personal dimensions of poverty, the costs to the country in a global economy, and the cost in individual lives whose potential goes unfulfilled. And they can insist on the debate and then help deepen and sharpen it until it yields concrete policy that makes reducing poverty a priority. RSN

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Research Briefing

Medieval Lay Piety and Anti-Heretical Movements

Donald Prudlo, Jacksonville State University



Donald Prudlo received his PhD in European Religious History from the University of Virginia. He is currently Assistant Professor of Ancient and Medieval History at Jacksonville State University in Alabama. He recently published *The Martyred Inquisitor: The Life and Cult of Peter of Verona (1252)* with Ashgate Press.

I WAS FORTUNATE to receive an AAR grant that allowed me to pursue the study of new documents I found in relation to my research on Peter of Verona, a thirteenth-century Dominican inquisitor in northern Italy. This find, I believe, will be of interest to scholars of lay piety, heresy, and religious orders in the medieval world.

Thanks in part to this generous grant I was able to spend nearly a month at the Archivio di Stato in Milan, Italy, going through a large portion of their collection of medieval records

pertaining to the activities of the Dominican order. In particular, I was focused on a brief mention of a *Scuola dei Fedeli* or a "School of the Faithful" in a handlist of manuscripts. This was significant because it seemed to indicate that there was a third alternative to previously recognized groups aimed at aiding the inquisition. Besides societies of armed men who served as the inquisition's retainers and pious sodalities who served as spiritual supporters (usually Marian in orientation), this discovery possibly meant that there was an active attempt on the part of the Dominicans to mold the laity intellectually to battle heresy with persuasion. Such an endeavor would have been a unique attempt in medieval Italy.

“ . . . this discovery possibly meant that there was an active attempt on the part of the Dominicans to mold the laity intellectually to battle heresy with persuasion. Such an endeavor would have been a unique attempt in medieval Italy. ”

When I arrived I was very pleased to discover the existence of this society in four previously unknown documents, two of them from Masters General of the Dominican order, and two letters from Pope Innocent IV and Pope Alexander IV, respectively. I was able to distinguish it from previous societies founded by Peter of Verona, and in a letter of Master General Humbert of Romans, I was able definitively to prove that Peter founded the order. Before his death it was called the Society or School of the Faithful, dedicated to Saint John the Baptist.

The documents were preserved in Archivio di Stato: Pio Albergo Trivulzio, Orfanotrofio Maschile, Inquisizione di Milan, Cart. 3. I believe that these documents have gone unnoticed because they were not in the standard inquisition collections, but were rather inserted in records of male orphanages. The first letter was from Innocent IV in 1252, a month after Peter's murder, where he praises the school's uprightness of life and pious conversation, and grants them the indulgence to participate in ecclesial services during an interdict. The next two letters were written in 1255 by Humbert of Romans, around the General Chapter held in Milan that same year. In the first, Humbert states that their purpose is the "extirpation of heresy and the edification of the faithful" and grants them a share in the prayers and masses of the order. The second letter, written a month later, was specifically directed to the Society of St. Peter Martyr, formerly the Society of the Faithful, clearly distinguishing them from the school, and granting them a share in the prayers of the order as well. The final letter is the most interesting because it is a lengthy bull from

Pope Alexander IV in 1260 confirming the statutes of the school. In order to enjoy the privileges of the newly confirmed school, Alexander commands that any postulants must be ready to fight against heretics, to defend the Catholic faith "either with weapons or without them," and that they obey the pope or his deputies to attack receivers or abettors of heretics. He also commands that they are to influence the commune to insert antihetical laws into the city statutes. For so doing he grants them a three-year indulgence. The existence of the school is also confirmed by a series of letters in 1310 by the provincial priors of most of the Dominican world, which included the school in their prayers.

I was able to include some of this material in my new book on Peter of Verona, but I also am planning a comprehensive article about the above discoveries. In this I will be more than happy to include my gratitude for the kind support of the American Academy of Religion, which has aided me in looking into a new area of medieval lived religion. RSN



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From the Student Desk

The Demons (and Delights?) of Dissertation Writing

Tovis Page, Harvard University



Tovis Page is a PhD candidate in the Religion, Gender, Culture program under the Committee on the Study of Religion at Harvard University. She is finishing her dissertation while living in the San Francisco Bay area and can be reached at tpage@fas.harvard.edu.

“ALMOST DONE with your paper?” a well-meaning relative asked me recently. “One more year,” I answered, not bothering to clarify that said “paper” is actually — *excuse me* — a dissertation. In such situations I used to explain that, really, and rather unfortunately, the dissertation is more like a book than a paper. But I no longer do. The people who ask me this question don’t want information about *what* I’m doing, they just want to know whether or not I’m *still doing* it.

Many of my friends and family members have never asked what the dissertation is actually about, and those who do rarely remember for long. I’m always amazed when I hear my mother explaining to other people what I study: “Something

about animals,” she often says, searching for words, “and women and oppression.” While this bears some resemblance to the nexus of interests that I took with me to Harvard Divinity School as a master’s student nearly a decade ago, it hardly represents the focus of my research now. Recently she asked me, registering surprise that I would be applying for jobs in the field of religion, “But how much do you really study *religion*?” “A lot, Mom,” I sighed, “I’m getting a *PhD in religious studies*.”

While such questions from family and friends are well meaning, they often exacerbate the sense of isolation and existential angst faced by dissertation writers. Does my research matter? Am I ever going to finish? What am I really *doing* in this project? Does it make any sense? Will I get a job, and if so, where? Will I earn enough to cover student loan repayments *and* living expenses?

Dissertation writing is a lonely process. You spend countless hours by yourself, in your head: reading, thinking, and — on good days — writing. Deadlines and feedback are few and far between. It requires a huge amount of self-discipline and offers ample opportunities to “face your inner demons,” such as self-doubt, anxiety, and a whole host of other lovelies. Some demons you meet for the first time during the dissertation process, such as, in my case, procrastination.

Before I started the dissertation process, I didn’t think of myself as a procrastinator. I had no reason to: I kept up with course readings and turned in assignments on time. As a teaching assistant, I prepared diligently for class and promptly returned student work. But the dissertation is dif-

ferent. The deadlines are my own. My meeting them or not seems only to affect me. Evidently, I think it’s okay to blow off deadlines if I’m the only one to bear the consequences (in reality, of course, those close to me *also* suffer the consequences . . . my partner George, for one, will be as relieved as I will be when I finish!).

“*Does my research matter? Am I ever going to finish? What am I really doing in this project? Does it make any sense? Will I get a job, and if so, where? Will I earn enough to cover student loan repayments and living expenses?*”

It’s not that I don’t mind letting myself down by missing my own deadlines. I do, and I take myself to task for it. In fact, self-chastisement is just one of the many forms of internal dialogue that characterize the dissertation process. The internal

dialogue can be so consuming that at times I don’t even notice what’s around me. As I walk my dog, for instance, I might be rearranging chapters, working out an argument, making a mental list of books and articles to read. If I’m in the midst of a writing surge, I’m writing in my head as I go about my daily affairs, even as I sleep. During these intensely creative periods, I often wake up working over the same thought, even the same sentence, with which I fell asleep.

For better or for worse, these intense periods don’t last, and they are inevitably followed by a slump. During these slumps, I read — reading that pertains to the dissertation, and that needs to be done, but feels passive and somehow rather like *shirking* in comparison to writing. And I surf the Web, check e-mail incessantly, run errands, do lots of laundry, and day-dream about fantastic adventures and alternate career paths.

Despite all these difficulties, at times I really do appreciate the dissertation phase. Especially this year, when fellowships cover my expenses, there are moments when I am keenly aware of what a great privilege it is to have as my main task reading, thinking, and writing. To have the *luxury* to procrastinate. To spend 24 hours a day with my dog. To be able to work in my pajamas. To fall asleep on my desk, drooling even, without anyone seeing. To wrestle with demons that are, when it comes right down to it, immaterial. That doesn’t mean they aren’t nasty buggers with real effects, but heck, it could be worse. *A lot* worse. In fact, when I really think about it, who am I to complain? I should be grateful. And sometimes, I really and truly am. RSN

Seeking Applications for the From the Student Desk Editor Position

The AAR Student Director, Nichole R. Phillips, seeks an editor for the *From the Student Desk* feature column published three times a year in *Religious Studies News*. The *From the Student Desk* editor will solicit articles for the March, May, and October issues of RSN based on established submission guidelines. The editor will work closely with the Student Director and the AAR Staff Liaison to the Graduate Student Committee. The editor will also submit an annual status report to the Student Director.

The term of service is November 2008 to November 2010. The qualifications include: 1) Current student membership in the AAR for at least one calendar year prior to applying; 2) Previous editing experience; and 3) Current enrollment in a PhD program.

To apply for this position, please send a brief statement of interest with biographical sketch and current CV to Student Director, Nichole R. Phillips, via e-mail (phillipsnr@gmail.com). As part of the selection process, candidate finalists will be asked to copy edit a sample column. All applications must be received by Monday, June 30, 2008. RSN

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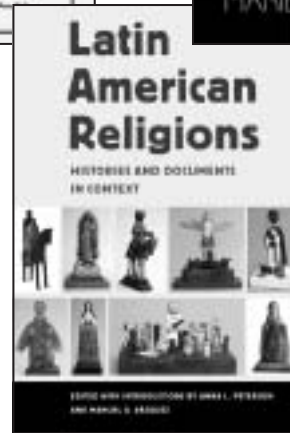
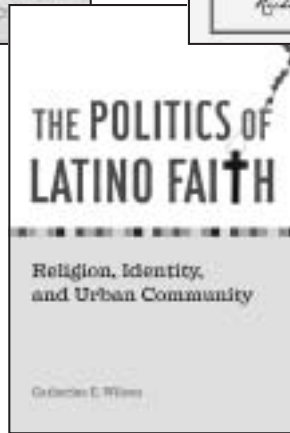
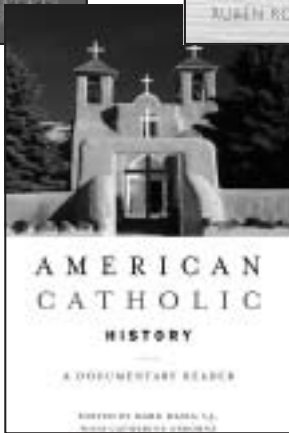
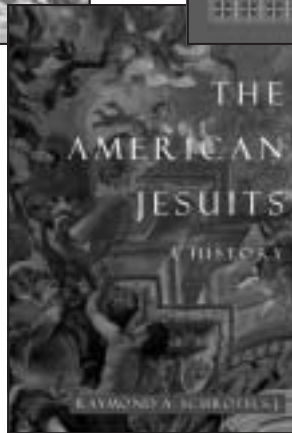
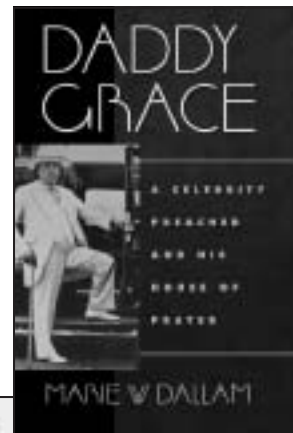
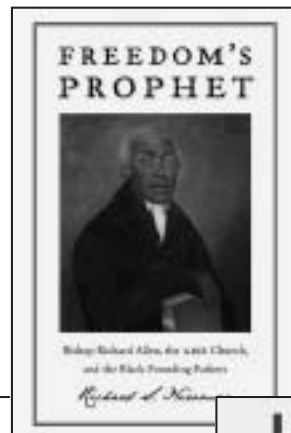
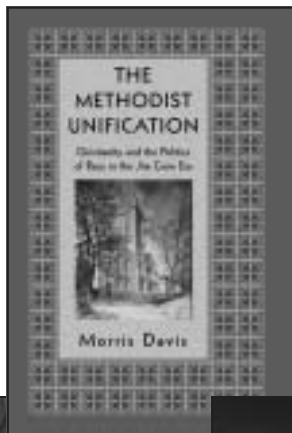
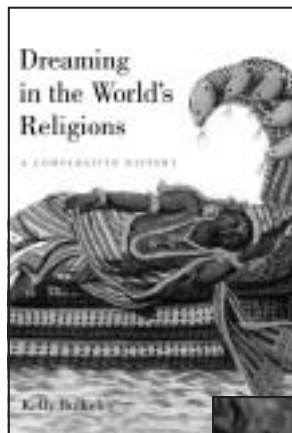
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