

Sociology of Religion

Volume VI, Number 2

WINTER 2000

FROM THE CHAIR

Patrick McNamara

SOME THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

In re-reading Mary Jo Neitz's thoughtful and stimulating reflection of a year ago, "What is Distinctive About Studying Religion?" I was intrigued by her description of how she gradually moved from studying religion because "it was a site for looking at something else" to caring "about religion itself—as an institution, as cultural systems, as social and cultural movements. . . seeing religious traditions themselves as sources of cultural forms that provide ongoing resources to individuals and institutions in the United States." I suspect many of you have made this same journey, though I number myself among those who began with and have sustained an interest in religious institutions per se, valuing sociology as a resource for understanding conflict and change within religions and in their relationships with other institutions, e.g., the state, mass media, family.

I entertain the hope that researchers among us will turn their attention to an even larger canvas. While I find as tiresome as anyone the overuse of "globalization" in both sociological and everyday media discourse, my current reading suggests how valuable, even essential, some globally focused research can be. Scott Appleby's new book, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2000, paper) is a splendid piece of work I highly recommend. Though trained as a historian, Appleby knows his social science literature and how to utilize perspectives familiar to us in analyzing how some religious actors, individuals and collectivities, choose the path of violence while others seek justice and reconciliation through nonviolent means. His case studies and illustrations from Israel and Palestine, South Africa, Northern Ireland, Bosnia and Kosovo, the Philippines, Central and South America (to name a few) show the conditions under which religious actors justify violence as a sacred

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duty; but he also examines the other side, those who choose and promote nonviolent religiously-sponsored peace building. He shows how the experience of the 1990s makes clear that religious non-governmental organizations *can* collaborate fruitfully with secular governmental and NGOs to avoid conflict and seek ways of reconciliation. One of Appleby's major recommendations, which he calls "the missing piece of the puzzle," is the development of "coordinating institutions" or regional centers that "would serve both as the heart of the network of organizations involved in peace building-related activities and as training sites for local conflict resolution and transformation practitioners."

Given the transcendent importance, as I view it, of such efforts, I would like to see our section provide a clearinghouse or nodal point of connection for researchers with peace building interests. I think of the help these connections could provide to graduate (and undergraduate) students, especially (but not exclusively) those looking for topics of study. They could be aided in locating research sites, ongoing projects of peace building, and funding sources. If any of you have ideas for developing and clarifying such a focus, please share them with me and/or feel free to write something for the next Newsletter. If sufficient interest emerges, it might be possible (I'm acquainted with him personally) to invite Scott Appleby to speak and meet with those interested at this year's meeting in Washington, D.C.

Let me elaborate a bit on the broader idea of providing service to graduate students interested in the study raised above and others that may suggest themselves. If you would like to work on

of religion. A year ago in the Newsletter, Nancy Ammerman and Steve Warner reported results of an informal survey they conducted among colleagues. To what extent, they wondered, are religion graduate students with no sociologists of religion on their faculties served by sociologists elsewhere that they contact or who have been recommended? They even ventured "a safe guess that a fair number of students who would like to write dissertations in sociology of religion are discouraged from doing so." This situation may arise from members of their department; or their departments may lack a specialist or discourage outside advisors. As Ammerman and Warner put it, "decades of confining the study of religion to religion departments [may] have masked the need for specialists in religion in social science departments." They call for a "careful analysis of the committee composition of all recent sociology of religion graduates and a survey of all social science graduate students."

We will shortly have two sets of data making possible just such a study—and related ones—of graduate education in sociology of religion. I have on my desk a list kindly provided by ASA section office, of the 162 graduate students in our section by name, address and institutional affiliation. I will shortly have a list of over 700 faculty in four-year and graduate institutions in the USA that indicate they teach sociology of religion. I am ordering this list from CMG Direct, a college mailing list directory service (thanks to Bill Silverman, who called my attention to this source). I am hopeful that our section can put together a research design to respond to both the questions such a project, please let me know. I would like to appoint a research

committee reasonably soon. The outcome(s) could be an invaluable tool for improving the quality of graduate training in sociology of religion.

Other good news: Nancy Ammerman, Madeleine Cousineau, Scott Thumma, and Lynn Schofield Clark are working with ASA to activate our section website. We are all hopeful that it will be up and running sometime this spring. Joe Tamney and Nancy Annerman will supervise the e-mail discussion list for our section. This spring I will be appointing a new-member committee to replace the

existing one so capably run by Fred Kniss.

In summary, I invite you to respond to one or more issues I raised above: (1) peace building research; (2) a research design focusing on graduate education in the sociology of religion. Or anything else on your mind. I can be reached by e-mail: patmac@unm.edu or by phone (505) 898-5831. Mailing address is P.O. Box 966, Corrales, N.M. 87048. And remember - by all means plan to attend our year 2000 meeting in Washington!

Nominations Requested

**The ASA Section on Sociology of Religion Requests Nominations
(including self nominations) for:**

DISTINGUISHED BOOK AWARD

**Send nominations of books
published in the past two years in
the area of sociology of religion**

to:

Arthur (Larry) Greil
Division of Social Sciences
Alfred University
Alfred, NY 14802
Fax (607) 871-2114
E-mail FGREIL@BIGVAX.
ALFRED.EDU

**BY
MARCH 15, 2000**

DISTINGUISHED ARTICLE AWARD

**Send nominations of journal articles
published in the past two years to:**

Helen A. Berger
Department of Anthropology and
Sociology
West Chester University
West Chester, PA 19380
Fax (610) 436-2525
E-Mail Hberger@wcupa.edu

**By April 1, 2000
(If possible please send a hard copy of
the article)**

STUDENT PAPER AWARD

**PLEASE SEND THREE COPIES OF THE PAPER BY
MAY 1ST TO:**

DAVID YAMANE
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME
736 FLANNER HALL
NORTRE DAME, IN 46556

Publishing Opportunities

CALL FOR PAPERS: RELIGION AND RACE

We are seeking articles for an edited volume on religion and the social construction of "race" in the Americas. The volume explores the complex and unstable articulations of "race" and "religion" that have helped produce "black," "white" and other racialized identities and communities in the United States and selected societies throughout the Americas. This projected volume will explore: 1) how the shifting categories of race and religion have defined, and been defined by, relations of power and inequality; 2) how racial and religious identities shape the everyday lives and political struggles of selected movements and communities; and 3) how racialized and marginalized communities use religious discourses to negotiate or contest the persistent power of "race" and racism in societies structured by inequality.

Please send abstracts or inquiries to:

Elizabeth McAlister
Wesleyan University
Middletown, CT 06459
E-mail emcalister@wesleyan.edu

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Henry Goldschmidt
University of California
Santa Cruz, CA 95064
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Review of Religious Research

An interdisciplinary journal now co-edited by Christopher G. Ellison and Darren E. Sherkat, is seeking manuscripts on any topic dealing with religious beliefs, activities, and organizations. To submit, send 4 copies of manuscripts and an e-mail or disk version of the paper to: Darren E. Sherkat, 1811-B Dept. of Sociology, Vanderbilt University, Nashville TN 37235; sherkade@ctrvax.vanderbilt.edu. There is a \$15 processing fee for scholars who are not members of the Religious Research Association. Membership is only \$24, and information can be found at: <http://rra.hartsem.edu>.

NOTICE FROM THE ASA

Dear ASA Members:

I learned at the end of last week that Transaction Publishers has used a mailing list rented from the American Sociological Association to send to ASA members an abridged version of the book, *Race, Evolution and Behavior*, by J. Philippe Rushton. ASA processed a mailing list rental request from Transaction Publishers for mailing a promotional flyer. Such requests for mailing list rentals are processed routinely from well-known publishers of scholarly products. ASA did not authorize rental of its mailing list to distribute this book and has written a letter to the President of Transaction expressing grave concerns with this unauthorized use.

Apparently a large number of members of the American Psychological Association (APA) also received this book distributed on APA mailing labels. Other societies too may have been used by Transaction to facilitate this distribution. As we learn more, I will keep you informed.

Felice J. Levine
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Congratulations to our new Student Representative
Helen Rizzo of Ohio State University

Please Remember to Vote in the Upcoming ASA
elections!

FROM THE NEWSLETTER EDITOR

From time to time in this newsletter members have written thoughtful pieces to stimulate discussion or to initiate action. Steve Warner and Nancy Annerman's piece, which raised the issue of graduate students being underserved by the dearth of sociologists of religion in their departments has resulted in our section beginning a research project on this issue. I would like once again to suggest to our members that they write a short piece on a topic of their interest for the newsletter. Please also send me your personal news items—for example, new publications, awards you have won, and change of address .

PLEASE SEND NEWS ITEMS, SPRING
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