

# ASA SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

*Newsletter of the Sociology of Religion Section of the American Sociological Association*  
Kevin D. Dougherty, Editor

## From the Chair

Dear Colleagues:

Sometimes the mundane is important. Whereas the Spring Newsletter focuses on the excitement of the upcoming meeting and the Fall Newsletter announces new committees and a call for the next year's sessions, the Winter Newsletter reports on the more routine activities of the section. Although less exciting than the annual meeting, these activities are essential for maintaining an effective association. I want to direct your attention to two important annual routines that shouldn't be overlooked.

First, please vote in the upcoming section elections. This newsletter includes the slate of candidates (and a brief biography of each), but the official ballot will be sent by ASA. As you sort through the seemingly endless pile of junk mail from various organizations, one of those envelopes will contain your ASA section ballot. Use it.

Second, over the next few weeks consider submitting a nomination for one or more of the three major section awards: Distinguished Book Award, Distinguished Article Award, and the Student Paper Award. Self-nominations are welcome, of course, but I would encourage you to review other sources of brilliance as well. Reflect on the recent books and articles that you think will have the greatest impact on the field as a whole and upon your own work in particular. Ignoring the pedigree of the author, and even the source of the outlet, nominate work that represents the very best scholarship that our section has to offer. Eligibility criteria for the major awards are fairly simple. The Distinguished Book and Article Award Committees will consider works that have been published in the previous two years (2003 or later). For the Student Paper Award, authors must be students at the time the nomination is submitted and the papers must have been presented or published in 2004 or 2005.

Once again, Kevin Dougherty has assembled an informative and interesting newsletter. Review the remainder of the newsletter to get a listing of the candidates and more details on the nominations process and deadlines for section awards. Routines are often mundane. But they are so essential. I think I'll go have lunch.

ROGER FINKE, Pennsylvania State University

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## Section Officers 2004-2005

### Chair

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### Newsletter Editor

Kevin D. Dougherty, dougherty@calvin.edu

*The Sociology of Religion Section of the American Sociological Association encourages and enhances research, teaching, and other professional concerns in the study of religion and society.*

- Kevin J. Christiano, Department of Sociology, 443 Decio Faculty Hall, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN 46556-5644, Kevin.J.Christiano.1@nd.edu.
- Joy Charlton, Professor of Sociology and Associate Dean, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA 19081.
- Fenggang Yang, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, 700 W. State Street, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN 47907-2059.

### Distinguished Article Award

Peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters published during the calendar year of 2003 or later are eligible for the 2005 award. Self-nominations are welcome. Letters of nomination to Wendy Cadge, Chair of the Committee, and a copy of the nominated article/book chapter to each of the Committee Members must be received no later than April 1.

- Wendy Cadge, Center for Basic Research in the Social Sciences, Harvard University, 34 Kirkland Street, Cambridge, MA 02138, wcadge@latte.harvard.edu.
- Michael P. Young, Department of Sociology, University of Texas, Austin, 1 University Station A1700, Austin, TX 78712.
- James Beckford, University of Warwick, Sociology, Coventry, United Kingdom, CV4 7AL.

### Student Paper Award

Either published or unpublished papers are eligible, but if the paper is published, it may not compete for both the student paper award and the article award. Papers of 20-40 manuscript pages (including notes, tables, and references) will be considered. Authors must be students at the time the nomination is submitted and the papers must have been presented or published in 2004 or 2005 to be eligible for the 2005 award. Self-nominations are welcome. Letters of nomination to Daniel Olson, Chair of the Committee, and a copy of the nominated article to each Committee Member must be received no later than April 1.

- Daniel Olson, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Indiana University South Bend, South Bend, IN 46634, dolson@iusb.edu.
- Patricia Wittberg, Indiana University (IUPUI), Department of Sociology, 425 University Boulevard, Indianapolis, IN 46202.
- David Smilde, University of Georgia, Department of Sociology, Baldwin Hall, Athens, GA 30602-1611.

## 2005 Award Nominations

Nominations are invited for 2005 Sociology of Religion Section Awards. The Religion Section makes three annual awards for outstanding scholarly contributions: Distinguished Book Award, Distinguished Article Award, and Student Paper Award. All nominees are required to be members of the ASA section. Additional information on eligibility and nomination procedures follow.

### Distinguished Book Award

Books published during the calendar year of 2003 or later are eligible for the 2005 award. Self-nominations are welcome. Letters of nomination to Kevin J. Christiano, Chair of the Committee, and a copy of the nominated book sent to each Committee Member must be received no later than March 15.

## Religions and the Tsunami Disaster in Southeast Asia

BY GRAEME LANG and VIVIENNE WEE,

Southeast Asia Research Centre, City University of Hong Kong

When a great earthquake and tsunami destroyed Lisbon on All Saint's Day in 1755, there were philosophical, religious, and political reverberations long after the ground ceased to shake. The great earthquake and tsunami in the Indian Ocean on December 26, 2004, also stimulated reflections, fears, and speculations within the cultures of Southeast Asia. In this article, we begin to outline some of the religion-related responses to the disaster, and conclude with our comments on some of these responses.

### *Religious explanations of the disaster*

For religious thinkers prepared to attribute natural disasters to supernatural action, to explain a disaster is to try to describe the mentality of the god who caused or allowed it. Such beliefs and explanations can be found in many cultures, such as in the 'prophetic' writings about collective disasters in ancient Palestine, and the Chinese spirit-writings about disasters such as plagues in 19<sup>th</sup> century China (Lang and Ragvald, 1998).

One theme in such material is the claim that the disaster was "predicted" by the deity. But this is typically a retrospective interpretation of earlier ambiguous statements (see for example Lang and Wee, 2005, on the claim by a Hong Kong spirit-writing group that their Master-spirit had predicted 9/11 long before the event).

The most common explanation for god-related disasters is human sinfulness. A few exponents of this viewpoint suggest that it is the world's sinfulness, in general, which is being punished. For example, one rabbi claimed that the tsunami disaster is "an expression of God's wrath with the world... for wrongdoing, be it people's needless hatred of each other, lack of charity, [or] moral turpitude" (quoted in Broadway, 2005).

Other attributions of the disaster to God's wrath claim He had a more specific target. One conservative Christian activist in the U.S. said that "throughout history and reported early in the Bible, God has always used plagues, floods, and natural disasters as a source of punishment," and she went on to list reasons why God could be angry, including abortions, cloning, and homosexual marriage, and suggested that "god... will not be mocked" (MSNBC, 2005). However, she was unable to explain why sinfulness in America would lead to destruction in Indonesia.

Other theorists of supernatural retribution explain that sinfulness was concentrated in the areas hit by the disaster. At one Hindu temple in Sri Lanka, for example, a trustee attributed the disaster to the punishment of Lord Shiva for the drinking and drug use of foreigners along beaches in the region. To prove that Hindu gods had protected the devout, he pointed to a local Hindu shrine which had survived while the buildings around it were destroyed (Waldman, 2005).

In Aceh, some Imams claimed that the disaster was a test for Muslims. One said, "We are his beings. He created us. He will test us with all kinds of challenges. Maybe we forgot him. Maybe we forgot his teachings... now is the time to unite and learn from this test" (Agence France-Press, 2005). Others claimed that this punishment from God occurred because local Muslims are not sufficiently devout, neglecting their prayers, devoting too much attention to money rather than religion, and fraternizing too freely with the opposite sex. They also announced that God is angry because Muslims have been killing each other during the decades-long civil war between separatists and the Indonesia army. However, the disaster in Aceh disproportionately killed women and children.

A more subtle concept is *karma*, a kind of semi-mechanical retribution for bad action. For example, one explanation for the disaster in Phuket referred to the fact that the West had brought money, drugs, and decadence to Phuket, and the disaster was a kind of karmic retribution (Burdett, 2005). Karma also accounted for individual tragedies. It was said by some Buddhists in Sri Lanka that those who lost their children must have done something wrong in a previous life (Waldman, 2005). Other Buddhists attributed their own individual survival to their piety, while less pious neighbors perished. A farmer in Sri Lanka said that fishermen – who take the lives of fish – died, while farmers survived.

One of the most novel explanations is that the earth is striking back against humans, who have ravaged the environment and the seas. In some versions, this reaction from nature is linked somehow to God. In others, it is less intentional and more like a mysterious natural reaction to the human impact on the planet.

### *Ghosts and wandering spirits*

Folk belief and fears about ghosts led to many stories in Thailand, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka – of ghostly cries for help from the water or the beach days after the disaster, ghost-passengers who get into taxis and then disappear, and shades drifting around in devastated East Asia, where belief in ghosts is widespread, and the presence of tsunami-ghosts at a beach resort will deter tourists.

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"...to explain a disaster is to try to describe the mentality of the god who caused or allowed it."

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# Candidates for 2005-2006 Section Offices

## Chair-Elect

**Name:** Mark Chaves

**Present Professional Position:** Professor and Department Head, Department of Sociology, University of Arizona, 2001-present

**Education:** Ph.D. in Sociology, Harvard University, 1991

**Service for ASA:** Editorial Board, *Contexts*, 2004-present; Editorial Board, *American Sociological Review*, 2001-03; Member, Sociology of Religion Section Council, 1995

**Publications and Professional Accomplishments:**

- *Congregations in America* (Harvard University Press, 2004)
- "Does Government Funding Suppress Nonprofits' Political Activities?" with Laura Stephens and Joseph Galaskiewicz, *American Sociological Review*, 2004
- Program Chair, Society for the Scientific Study of Religion Annual Meeting, 2001
- Principal Investigator, National Congregations Study, 1998-2000
- *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations* (Harvard University Press, 1997)

**Name:** Paula Nesbitt

**Present Professional Position:** Visiting Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, University of California, Berkeley, 2001-present

**Previous Professional Positions:**

Director, Carl M. Williams Institute for Ethics and Values, University of Denver, 1999-2001; Visiting Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Denver, 1997-99; Assistant Professor, Associate Professor (on research leave), Iliff School of Theology, 1990-98

**Education:** Ph.D. in Sociology, Harvard University, 1990; M.A. in Sociology, Harvard University, 1987; M.Div., Harvard University, 1987

**Service for ASA:** Organizer of Thematic Session on "Public Religiosity and Transnational Space" for 2004 Annual Meeting; Nominating Committee, Sociology of Religion Section, 1998-99; Council, Sociology of Religion Section, 1995-98

**Publications and Professional Accomplishments:**

- Editor, *Religion and Social Policy* (AltaMira, 2001)
- *Feminization of the Clergy in America: Occupational and Organizational Perspectives* (Oxford University Press, 1997)
- ASA Sociology of Religion Section 1997 Distinguished Article Award for "First and Second Career Clergy: Challenging the Occupational Life Cycle Paradigm," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (June 1995)
- Program Chair, Religious Research Association Annual Meeting, 2000
- Co-President, Rocky Mountain and Great Plains Regions of the American Academy of Religion, 1995-96

## Council

**Name:** Carolyn Chen

**Present Professional Position:**

Assistant Professor, Northwestern University, 2003-present

**Previous Professional Position:**

Postdoctoral Fellow, Center for the Study of Religion, Princeton University, 2002-03

**Education:** Ph.D. University of California, Berkeley, 2002; A.B. Brown University, 1993

**Publications:**

- *Getting Saved in America: Taiwanese Immigrants Converting to Evangelical Christianity and Buddhism* (Princeton University Press, forthcoming)
- "A Self of One's Own: Taiwanese Immigrant and Religious Conversion," *Gender and Society*, 2005
- "Cultivating Merit by Cultivating Acceptance: The Public Engagement of A Chinese Buddhist Temple in American Society," pp. 67-86 in *Revealing the Sacred in Asian Pacific America*, edited by Paul Spickard and Jane Naomi Iwamura (Routledge Press, 2003)
- "Religious Varieties of Ethnic Experience: A Comparison between a Taiwanese Immigrant Buddhist Temple and an Evangelical Christian Church," *Sociology of Religion*, 2002, 63(2): 215-238
- Planning Committee, Asian Pacific American Religious Research Initiative Annual Meeting, 1999-2004

**Name:** Jen'nan Ghazal Read

**Present Professional Position:** Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, University of California, Irvine, 2003-present

**Previous Professional Positions:** Postdoctoral Fellow, Rice University and the University of Texas School of Public Health, Houston, Texas, 2001-2003

**Education:** Ph.D. in Sociology, University of Texas at Austin, 2001; MA in Sociology, University of Texas at Austin, 1997; BA in Sociology, Midwestern State University, 1995

**Service for ASA:** Sociology of Religion Section Roundtable Organizer, 2004

**Publications and Professional Accomplishments:**

- Carnegie Scholars finalist, 2005
- *Culture, Class, and Work among Arab-American Women* (LFB Scholarly, 2004)
- "Family, Religion, and Work among Arab-American Women," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 2004, 67: 1042-1050
- "Cultural Influences on Immigrant Women's Labor Force Participation: The Case of Arab Americans," *International Migration Review*, 2004, 38: 52-77
- "The Sources of Gender Role Attitudes among Christian and Muslim Arab-American Women," *Sociology of Religion*, 2003, 64: 207-222

Candidates, continued from p. 4

## Council, continued

**Name:** David Smilde

**Present Professional Position:** Assistant Professor of Sociology, University of Georgia, 2001-present

**Previous Professional Positions:** Residential Fellow, Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies, University of Notre Dame, Fall 2001; Research Fellow, Center for Development Studies, Universidad Central de Venezuela, Caracas, 1999-2001

**Education:** Ph.D., University of Chicago, 2000; M.A., University of Chicago, 1994; B.A., Calvin College, 1989

**Service for ASA:** Selection Committee, Student Paper Award, Religion Section, 2005; Newsletter Editor, Religion Section, 2002-04; Selection Committee, Distinguished Article Award, Religion Section, 2002-03; Organizer of Special Session on Religion and Development for 1999 Annual Meeting

**Publications and Professional Accomplishments:**

- "A Qualitative Comparative Analysis of Conversion to Venezuelan Evangelicalism: How Networks Matter," *American Journal of Sociology*, forthcoming
- ASA Sociology of Religion Section 2004 Distinguished Article Award for "Skirting the Instrumental Paradox: Intentional Belief through Narrative in Latin American Pentecostalism," *Qualitative Sociology* (Fall 2003)
- "Contradiction without Paradox: Evangelical Political Culture in the 1998 Venezuelan Elections," *Latin American Politics and Society*, Spring 2004
- Founder and organizer, Georgia Workshop on Culture and Institutions, (funded by the University of Georgia Center for Humanities and Arts), 2002-present
- U.S. Department of Education, Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Program, 1995

**Name:** Melissa J. Wilde

**Present Professional Position:** Assistant Professor of Sociology, Indiana University, 2002-present.

**Education:** Ph.D., University of California, Berkeley, 2002

**Service for ASA:** Sociology of Religion Section Membership Committee, 2004; Sociology of Religion Section Roundtable Organizer, 2003; Sociology of Religion Section Student Representative, 2002

**Publications and Professional Accomplishments:**

- *Catholicism Contested: A Sociological Analysis of Vatican II* (Princeton University Press, forthcoming)
- "How Culture Mattered at Vatican II: Collegiality Trumps Authority in the Council's Social Movement Organizations," *American Sociological Review*, 2004, 69(4): 576-602
- "The Demographic Imperative In Religious Change," with Michael Hout and Andrew M. Greeley, *American Journal of Sociology*, 2001, 107(2): 468-500
- "From Excommunication to Nullification: Testing and Extending Supply-Side Theories of Religious Marketing With the Case of Catholic Marital Annulments," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 2001, 40(2): 235-249

## Student Representative

**Name:** Mary Ellen Konieczny

**Present Professional Position:** Ph.D. Candidate, Sociology Department, University of Chicago. Dissertation title: *The Spirit's Tether: Orthodoxy, Liberalism and Family among Contemporary American Catholics*

**Education:** M.Div., Weston Jesuit School of Theology, 1985; B.S., University of Notre Dame, 1981

**Service for ASA:** Presenter in Religion Section sessions, 1999, 2002; book review author for *Contemporary Sociology*, 2001; Student Editor for *American Journal of Sociology*, 1997-98, 2002

**Publications and Professional Accomplishments:**

- "Sociology of Religion" with Martin Riesebrodt in *Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, edited by John Hinnels (forthcoming)
- "Resources, Race and Female-Headed Congregations in the US," with Mark Chaves, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 2000, 39(3):261-72
- Society of the Scientific Study of Religion Student Paper Award, 2003
- Dissertation fellowships from the Woodrow Wilson Foundation (Charlotte Newcombe Fellowship), 2002 and the Institute for the Advanced Study of Religion at Yale, 2001

**Name:** D. Michael Lindsay

**Present Professional Position:** Harold W. Dodds Fellow, Department of Sociology, Princeton University, 2004-05

**Previous Professional Positions:** National Science Foundation Graduate Fellow, Department of Sociology, Princeton University, 2002-04; Consultant for Religion and Culture, The Gallup Institute, 1998-2003

**Education:** Ph.D. Candidate in Sociology, Princeton University; M.A., Sociology, Princeton University, 2004; Postgraduate Diploma, Wycliffe Hall, Oxford University, 2001; Master of Divinity, Princeton Theological Seminary, 2000; B.A., Baylor University, 1994

**Publications and Professional Accomplishments:**

- Harold W. Dodds Honorary Fellowship, Princeton University, 2004-05
- Society for the Scientific Study of Religion Student Paper Honorable Mention, 2003
- Outstanding Teaching Award, The Graduate School and Association of Princeton Graduate Alumni, Princeton University, 2003
- *The Gallup Guide: Reality Check for Twenty-First Century Churches*, with George Gallup, Jr. (Group, 2002)
- *Surveying the Religious Landscape: Trends in U.S. Beliefs*, with George Gallup, Jr. (Morehouse, 1999)

## A Report on Section Membership Trends and a Survey of Lapsed Members

BY MELISSA WILDE, Indiana University, and DAWNE MOON, University of California, Berkeley

In 2003, the Sociology of Religion Section of the American Sociological Association had a total of 510 members, which marks a slight increase from the previous three years. But this is not the whole story. Since our membership peak of 541 members in 1997, our student membership has increased slightly, and today 35 percent of our members are students. This good news, however, is tempered by the fact that our regular membership has declined by 9 percent or 30 members during this same period (see Table 1).

Indeed, our drop of regular members may be sharper than it first appears – since we can expect at least some of our current regular members were students in 1997 (which is the case with at least the two authors of this article), and have thus helped mask an even larger decline in section membership!

Thus, while student members seem to be a consistent and strong part of our membership (a fact which bodes well for our future), we have not been successful in encouraging our regular members to maintain membership. This is particularly disturbing since one would expect student membership to fluctuate more than regular membership (if we were to assume that interest and research areas are less crystallized while individuals are still in graduate school). Why are we losing regular members? Is it simply cohort replacement, in that our older members have retired and left active membership in both ASA and our section (and we had a large percentage of older members in 1997)? Or, are we losing members who no longer have an interest in religion? Or, in the worst case scenario, are we losing members who are still sociologists studying religion, but who have found the section and section activities less than useful?

To answer these questions, we gathered information on and contacted lapsed members to find out why they are no longer section members. The data on the lapsed members, collected by ASA, though limited, resulted in one useful finding. Ten percent of lapsed members are over 65, and most likely lapsed as a result of retirement. However, that leaves more than 300 individuals who let their membership lapse for other reasons. The demographic information provided by ASA could not tell us why.

Thus, on December 14, 2004, we sent out 265 e-mail messages to former members of the section who had let their memberships lapse in 2004. The vast majority of individuals we e-mailed either did not respond (204), or were not successfully contacted because their e-mails were out of date (27). Fifteen percent (34) did respond and, though we cannot take their responses as representative of lapsed members, their responses were instructive.

First, one third of those who responded told us that their lapse was an accident, or a result of their ASA membership lapsing, and promised to renew their section

**Table 1: ASA Section on the Sociology of Religion Membership Information**

	1994	1995	1996	Past Decade		1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
				1997	1998					
Low Income		9	6	26	19	12	16	13	14	19
Student		116	139	171	173	162	170	160	172	177
Regular		308	348	344	343	338	316	308	310	314
Total	457	433	493	541	535	512	502	481	496	510

membership upon renewing their ASA membership. This alone suggests that simply institutionalizing the e-mail reminder for the section might help with retention.

The largest group (12 respondents<sup>1</sup>) who intentionally let their membership lapse consisted of those who had difficulties with the fees or who did not feel that the fees were worth the expense given their current position. Many of these respondents were graduate students or employed as temporary, adjunct or retired faculty. More than half of them stated that ASA membership costs were the key problem, not section dues per se, particularly when combined with other religion organizations (including SSSR, RRA, etc.). Some (4), dealt with this by rotating among associations from year to year to manage the energy, expense, and conference time. While ASA membership costs in general may not be possible for the section to address, the section could consider doing something to defray, or even eliminate, the cost of membership for graduate students, and temporary, adjunct and emeritus faculty.

Even though the respondents with critiques represented a small percentage of the total we queried, we felt a few in particular were worth mentioning. One expressed concern that the subfield itself was too “philosophical” and did not focus enough on religion as an independent variable. Two others expressed concern with the ways particular religions are dealt with by members. One, an Eastern Orthodox Christian, tentatively expressed that she thought the section might have “a bit of an anti-Christian bent,” but wanted to keep an open mind. Another, who had actually not been aware of her lapse in membership and planned to renew immediately, wanted to raise concerns not about the section but about the discipline’s treatment of Islam. In her view, sociologists who study Islam tend to do so at the expense of studying Muslims, and thus create totalizing stereotypes of the religion rather than nuanced approaches to its practitioners.

While our findings can not be generalized to the entire section or its lapsed members, we believe that they suggest that thinking about ways to address the issue of expense is in order.

<sup>1</sup>Note that since some members cited multiple reasons, the total number of responses cited adds up to more than 34.

## Member News and Notes

*Member News and Notes report assorted information about section members, including hirings and promotions, new books, articles published outside major sociological or sociology of religion journals, and any other notable achievements.*

**Wayne Baker**, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, *America's Crisis of Values: Reality and Perception* (Princeton University Press, 2005).

**Gary Bouma**, Monash University, was awarded the newly created UNESCO Chair in Interreligious and Intercultural Relations for the Asia Pacific region in the School of Political and Social Inquiry at Monash.

**Roberto Cipriani**, University of Rome 3, was elected President of the Italian Sociological Association (A.I.S.). Translations of his book, *Sociology of Religion: An Introduction*, are now available in Spanish, French, and Chinese. He is also Advisory Editor for 50 entries on religion in *Encyclopedia of Sociology* (Blackwell Publishing), edited by George Ritzer.

**Elaine Howard Ecklund**, Rice University, "'Us' and 'Them': The Role of Religion in Mediating and Challenging the 'Model Minority' and Other Civic Boundaries," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2005, 28: 132-150. In addition, the Templeton Foundation recently awarded Ecklund \$283,000 to fund a study of religion, spirituality and ethical decision-making among natural science and social science faculty at elite research universities.

**Cardell K. Jacobson**, Brigham Young University, edited *All God's Children: Racial and Ethnic Voices in the LDS Church* (Cedarfort Press, 2004); he also co-authored with Tim B. Heaton and Stephen J. Bahr, *A Statistical Profile of Mormons: Health, Wealth, and Social Life* (Mellen Press, 2004).

**Stephen Kalberg**, Boston University, edited *Max Weber: Readings and Commentary on Modernity* (Blackwell Publishers, 2005)

**Prema Kurien**, Syracuse University, "Multiculturalism and Ethnic Nationalism: The Development of an American Hinduism," *Social Problems* 2004, 51: 362-385; and "To Be or Not to Be South Asian: Contemporary Indian American Politics," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 2003, 6: 261-288.

**Victor Roudometof**, University of Cyprus, edited with Alexander Agadjanian and Jerry Pankhurst, *Eastern Orthodoxy in a Global Age: Tradition Faces the 21st Century* (Alta Mira Press, Forthcoming, 2005).

**Christian Smith**, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, with **Melinda Lundquist Denton**, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

**Ruth Wallace**, George Washington University, *They Call Him Pastor: Married Men in Charge of Catholic Parishes* (Paulist Press, 2003).

**Mike Welch**, University of Notre Dame, "But Everybody Does It... The Effects of Perceptions, Moral Pressures, and Other Counteractive Forces on Tax Cheating," *Sociological Spectrum*, 2005, 25: 21-52, with Xili Xu, Thor Bjarnason, Tom Petee, Patty O'Donnell, and Paul Magro.

## CALL FOR PAPERS

**2005 Pruitt Memorial Symposium**, "Global Christianity: Challenging Modernity and the West;" November 10-12, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

In light of the growth of world Christianity since the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the influence of Christian movements not only in North America, but increasingly in Latin America, Africa, eastern Europe, and Asia, this conference will gather an interdisciplinary group of scholars to discuss past manifestations and future trends of global Christianity. Abstracts of 250-500 words proposing individual papers or session proposals on specific topics, questions, or recent books should be submitted between January 1 and May 15, and include title, name of author(s), institutional affiliation and position, mailing address, and e-mail address. Send by mail to Baylor Institute for Faith and Learning, One Bear Place #97270, Waco, TX 76798-7270, or by e-mail to IFL@baylor.edu. For further details, see [www.baylor.edu/IFL/](http://www.baylor.edu/IFL/).

**Religious Research Association Annual Meeting 2005**, "Congregations, Denominations and Research on Religion: Promoting Cooperation;" November 4-6, Hyatt Regency Hotel, Rochester, New York.

Paper proposals (title and abstracts of 150 words or less) are due by March 15 to Keith Wulff, Research Services, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 100 Witherspoon St., Louisville, KY 40202; [kwulff@ctr.pcusa.org](mailto:kwulff@ctr.pcusa.org).

**Society for the Scientific Study of Religion Annual Meeting 2005**, "Multiplying the Study of Religion;" November 4-6, Hyatt Regency Hotel, Rochester, New York.

Paper proposals (title and abstracts of 150 words or less) are due by March 15 to Laura R. Olson, Department of Political Science, Clemson University, 232 Brackett Hall, Clemson, SC 29634-1354; [laurao@clemson.edu](mailto:laurao@clemson.edu).

Tsunami, continued from p. 3

### *Religion and help for victims and survivors*

Many people of all faiths, however, risked their lives during the event or devoted energy and time voluntarily later to help victims and survivors. In Thailand, Buddhism plays a role in some of their motivations – the phrase *nam jai*, or "consideration from the heart," is rooted partly in Theravada Buddhist ideas about suffering and the duty to where they could then be taught about Christianity. Although the plan was aborted when it became public, it contributed to increased suspicion of foreign and non-Muslim interventions by outsiders.

### *Relativism, values, and religious reactions to tragedy*

The most defensible religious responses, in our view, note that life in the world necessarily involves the risks of natural processes on a dynamic planet. They accept the impersonal realities of plagues and tectonic plates, and assert that "God" is found (if anywhere) in the responses of people to such disasters, and perhaps in supernatural comfort (Bates, 2005). Everything is impermanent, death strikes unfairly, and we must treasure and help each other while we can.

Can we also allow ourselves to comment critically on some of the religious reactions to the tragedy, and to set aside, for a time, our stance as "neutral" analysts of religious values and beliefs? We offer some reflections, for further discussion: (1) Religious explanations of a natural disaster which blame victims for causing the wrath of the gods are found in most religions, but they are reprehensible. (2) Religious worldviews which motivate believers to help victims, and to cooperate with unbelievers to do so, make a positive contribution to life on this planet. (3) Religious groups which take advantage of a natural disaster to try to draw children from one ethno-religious culture into another sow conflict. From within the worldview of an exclusivist religion, such action makes sense. But as sociologists, we cannot see the souls of children entering heaven. We can only see the increased tension and antagonism which are the inevitable result on earth. (4) Religious explanations which provide comfort to suffering survivors have value. But not all explanations are equally benign.

### References

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- Broadway, Bill. 2005. "Divining a reason for devastation." *Washington Post* 8 January.
- Burdett, John. 2005. "The ghosts of Phuket." *International Herald Tribune* 14 January.
- Lang, Graeme and Lars Ragvald . 1998. "Spirit-writing and the development of Chinese cults." *Sociology of Religion* 59 (4): 309-328.
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## From the Editor

"What exactly do you do?" asked my neighbor one day.

We had lived side-by-side for more than a year. He thought my two day per week teaching schedule represented a part-time job for which I received full-time pay. Although a college-graduate himself, he struggled to make sense of how I occupied myself when not teaching classes. College teaching he understood. The hours I spent in my basement "doing research" perplexed him. Even more perplexing was the joy I seemed to take in this process.

Yes, I love research. Students roll their eyes as I describe gleefully my weekend running statistical models or conceptualizing a new explanation for some social phenomenon. I delight in the process of discovery.

One of the most rewarding aspects of editing this newsletter is the opportunity it gives me to highlight your discoveries. The article submitted by Fenggang Yang in the fall and articles by Lang and Wee and by Wilde and Moon within this edition provide fodder for dialogue. I hope you will consider responding.

"Member News and Notes" may be my favorite section of the newsletter. You send good news of new positions, new publications, and other notable achievements. I marvel at the important work being done and, for some, the pace at which it gets done.

So, what exactly are you doing? I am eager to know. My desire is for the newsletter to serve as a conduit for scholarly exchange—researchers speaking to other researchers. Between now and June 1 (the deadline for the spring edition), send your responses to prior articles, new articles, and any other relevant professional news to me at [dougherty@calvin.edu](mailto:dougherty@calvin.edu). I look forward to more discoveries to celebrate.

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