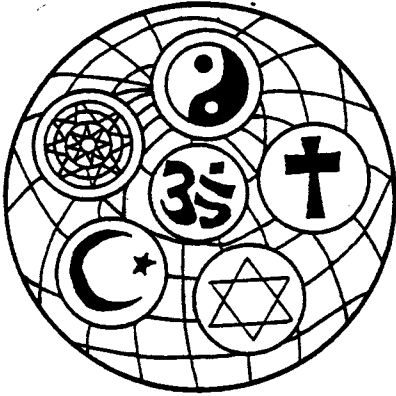


Geography of Religions & Belief Systems



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EDITOR'S NOTE

Many moons have passed since I last prepared a newsletter for the specialty group. First, and foremost, I extend a special thank you to Robert Kulkhen for putting together the Spring 1996 edition. Secondly, I must apologize for the delay in preparing this newsletter. As you might imagine I returned to my desk to find a mountain of work, and unfortunately, our newsletter was not on top of the pile. The good news is that I have finally arrived!

We have a great itinerary planned for the Fort Worth meeting, and I will fill you in on the details in the Spring edition. Nevertheless, you will find a lot of valuable information in this edition. Our homepage is up and running thanks to Chandra Balachandran, the geography of religion edition of the *Pennsylvania Geographer* is progressing, and I am enclosing information and application procedures for the David E. Sopher New Scholars Award. So my colleagues; sit back....relax....have a cup of mango tea with me.....and ENJOY!

FUNDING FOR THIS NEWSLETTER IS MADE POSSIBLE BY THE DEAN OF THE COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES AT SLIPPERY ROCK UNIVERSITY

GORABS Feature Essay

NEW STORIES AND OLD: DEVELOPING THE SACRED MEANING OF KAILAS is offered to us by Adrian Cooper, an independent scholar associated with Birkbeck College at the University of London. If you would like to correspond with Adrian his address is: 4 Estuary Drive, Felixstowe, Suffolk IP11 9TL England.

Mount Kailas has inspired sacred insights and wisdom for Hindus, Buddhists and followers of the Tibetan Bon faith from before the dawn of written history and scripture. Located on the high, desolate and windswept reaches of western Tibet, Kailas first appears to its visitors like a pedestal of striated rock covered with a dome of snow. Within both the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, Kailas is celebrated as an inspiration for intense asceticism as well as a source of legendary material wealth. The Mahanirvana Tantra describes Kailas as "the enchanting summit...resplendent with all its jewels...melodious with the song of many a bird,

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SOPHER AWARD WINNER

Alexei Krindatch, Academy of Sciences at Moscow, and visiting scholar at Columbia University, was the first recipient of the David E. Sopher New Scholar Award for his paper presented at the AAG meetings in Charlotte. According to Alexei Krindatch; throughout the past two centuries, a vast area was unified into a single state, the Russian Empire and subsequently the USSR, which was composed of a polyethnic and multireligious population. After the disintegration of the USSR, the Russian Federation has been attended by deep transformation in all socio-political and economic structures. This has been responsible, in part, for the redivision and restructuring of Russia's religious space. Continuing are the traditional religious communities of Russian Orthodox Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism; and to these were added in the early 20th century, the Baptists, Pentecostals, and Adventists. From 1990-1995, three main trends have been observed: 1) an overall numerical growth of religious communities, 2) a change in the relative strength of religions in different regions, as seen by a series of maps, and 3) an extremely dynamic territorial diffusion of "new" religious groups.

Association of American Geographers

GORABS HOMEPAGE

Great News! Chandra Balachandran, at NDSU, has created our homepage. Chandra explains:

I am pleased to announce that the WWW pages for GORABS are now up and available for our members. North Dakota State University is a proud sponsor of several geography web sites, including GORABS. Not all of the links are active at this time, mainly because there is little or no information to put them up. There will be things such as book reviews, non-juried articles, research notes, and the like to which people might want to put up links there. Please publicize the WWW GORABS page wherever you get a chance.

The address for the main page is:

http://www.ndsu.nodak.edu/~balachan/sp_grps/gorabs/

From there you can follow some links to the related pages. To access the main geography page of NDSU, access:

<http://www.ndsu.nodak.edu/~balachan/>

Following correspondence with Carol Prorok, I will put up two additional pieces:

(1) a listing of members of GORABS under three headings:

- a. member name, address, contact information.
- b. member profiles — these will be links to members' on-line vitae; members will maintain their vitae at their own locations, and we will merely provide a link to them under the aegis of GORABS.
- c. listing of members seeking employment — exactly same as (b) above, but under a different heading.

(2) newsletters on line:

- a. as of this newsletter, there will be a WWW version of the newsletter on line. The links will be provided from the main page listed above.
- b. past issues of the newsletter will be scanned and posted on-line in the "not-too-distant" future — depending on time constraints. We'll announce all this just as soon as we have the information.

I encourage members to visit the various web pages and send me helpful comments and feedback so we can not only devise, but also maintain, a strong and elegant web presence.

If you do not know how to use the WWW, or how to create your own WWW pages, check with your University computer folks and see if they have courses. Alternatively, sign up for the Virtual Geography Department workshop which, I hear, Ken Foote (U.T.-Austin) will be presenting at the AAG in Ft. Worth. Using the WWW is very easy and you can master it in next to no time.

GORABS FOCUS ON:

Richard H. Jackson

Richard Jackson is professor of geography at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah 84602. A graduate of Clark University (1970), Dick Jackson has distinguished himself in the following areas of study: water systems and settlement, the American West, Native American studies, Mormon culture, environmental perception, and especially the geography of religion. His legacy of work in these fields is extensive, thus the following notes are only a sample from his vita. In addition to maintaining a rigorous research schedule, Dick also performs a significant amount of university and community service. Not surprisingly, he has committed himself to leading GORABS and will assume the Chair's position at Fort Worth.

Look for these, and many other papers by Dick Jackson: 1995 Pilgrimage Tourism and English Cathedrals: The Role of Religion in Travel, *Revue de Tourisme*, 4:40-48. (with L. Hudman)

1994 Pilgrimage in an American Religion: Mormons and Secular Pilgrimage, in *Pilgrimage Studies: Sacred Places, Sacred Traditions*, ed. by D.P. Dubay, The Society of Pilgrimage Studies: Allahabad, India:176-199.

1994 *Historical Atlas of Mormonism*, ed. by Jackson, et al., NY: Simon and Schuster.

1993 Sacred Space and City Planning: the Mormon Example, *Architecture and Behavior*, 9:2:251-261.

1992 The Mormon Experience: The Plains as Sinai, the Great Salt Lake as the Dead Sea and the Great Basin as Desert-cum-Promised Land, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 18:1:1-18.

FORT WORTH Meeting

We are sponsoring or co-sponsoring at least seven sessions this year. Details will appear in the Spring edition of the newsletter. The Fort Worth meeting will be a good opportunity to meet each other and share our work, so we hope to see many GORABS members there---especially at the business meeting. Your input is crucial to the work of the specialty group. In addition, any one whose paper session has a discussant is requested to send their manuscripts to the discussant at least two weeks before the meeting. More details later.

See TIBET and NEPAL

Cultural Ecology trips are planned for the summer of 1997 to Tibet and Nepal. The organizers are seasoned travellers in this region and the experience will be outstanding. Contact them as soon as possible for more details:

You are invited to join one or both of the 1997 cultural ecology trips to Nepal and Tibet. These summer odysseys offer adventure in two Himalayan regions known for spectacular landscapes at high elevations.

1. **MT. KAILAS:** a rigorous 29 day trip to the sacred mountain during the time of Saka Dawa (Buddha's birth, death, enlightenment) in May/June. It is suited for experienced, hardy folks who have more time to spare. This trip requires physician and tour leader approval and must remain a small, select group of flexible pilgrims.

2. **Central TIBET:** a 20 day 'sampler' of Kathmandu and a mountain village as well as the major Tibetan cities and the sequestered mountain hermitage of Tridom Nunnery. This trip is best for a) students who want university credit, b) professionals with less time to spare, c) individuals who want to study Tibetan culture and ecology with writer Carole Elchert, artist Philip Sugden, and ethnobotanist Mark Cohen.

For more information about itineraries and costs (it's not as expensive as you might think) call Carole Elchert at 419-365-7131 or Phil Sugden at 412-422-0498.

ELECTION TIME!!!!

The positions of secretary-treasurer, two regular board positions and the student representative position are open. All positions are for two years of service. The secretary-treasurer position evolves into the chair position, and then into the past-chair position. Nominating yourself or a colleague is a wonderful opportunity to get involved and influence the future of your organization. Please send nominations to Carol Prorok.

NEW MEMBERS

We welcome the following new GORABS members: Mark Bjelland, Joanne Blewett, Travis Bradshaw, You-Sun Choi, John DiUbaldo, Adam Frazier, Emily Gilbert, Jennifer Hamelman, Scott Hoefle, Kevin Hoffpauir, Oscar Horst, Richard Hough, Donna Hurst, Gregory Jeane, Deonna Kelli, Il-Rim Kim, Adam Ley, Sean Metrick, Michael Monhart, Dan Mullaney, Robert Watrel, Ethan Yorgason

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NOTICE: JUNIOR FACULTY and STUDENTS

The David E. Sopher New Scholar Award will honor scholars for their outstanding contributions to the field of geography of religion. Award(s) will be given each year; one to a student and/or one to an untenured faculty member who presents a paper at an AAG national meeting. We reserve the right to not make an award in any given year. GORABS Board members are ineligible the year that they are serving the organization. Awardees will be honored at the AAG Awards luncheon with a certificate and cash prize of \$200. Deadline for application is March 1. Students or untenured faculty presently preparing to give a paper in Fort Worth should seriously consider applying. For a list of criteria and the official application, see enclosed insert.

Feature Essay

Continued from Page 1

scented with the fragrance of all the season's flowers..." (Avalon 1972:1). Tibetan Buddhist reverence for Kailas is further celebrated within other texts, including *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa* (Chang 1977). Finally, for Bon devotees, Kailas has been revered within their oral tradition recording the lives of Shenrab, the founder of Bon, as well as the priest, Naro Bhun Chon.

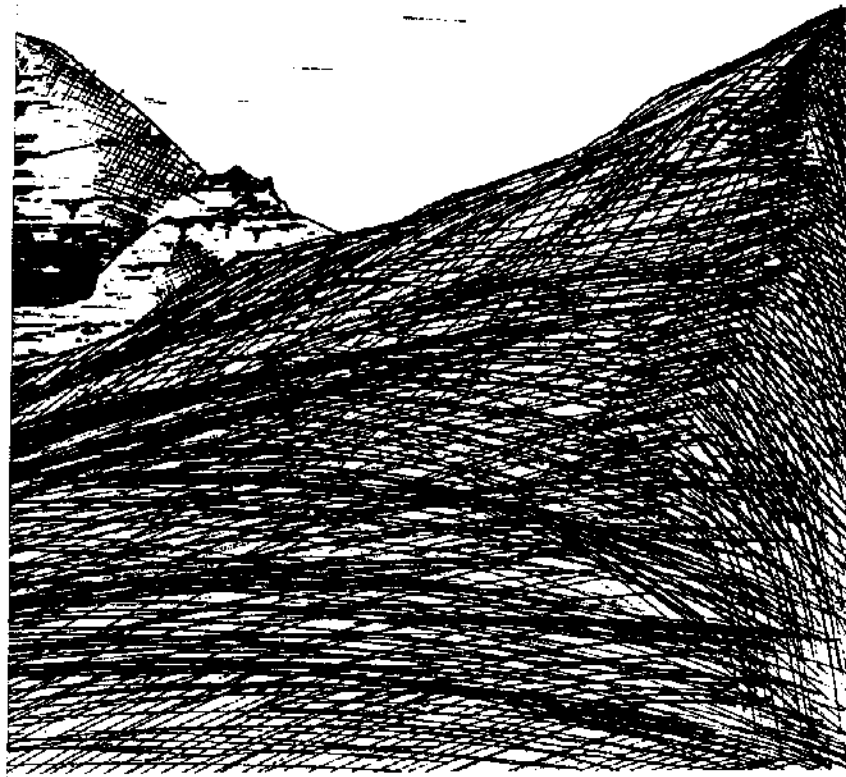
Within this discussion, I will consider how new narratives are being developed by travellers and pilgrims to Kailas which not only build directly upon the inheritance of this ancient wisdom, but which also build upon an eclectic collection of other sources, including contemporary literature and media references. In particular, I will consider how language can be regarded as the medium through which new meaning is invested into, and interpreted from, Mount Kailas. Consequently, the personal anecdotes and other narratives which continue to clothe the physical presence of Kailas with spiritual meaning can be regarded as collections of references with which visitors and believers navigate their individual and shared paths through all the numerous possibilities of experience and expression which Kailas can inspire. The selection of specific resonances of meaning which comprise these modern narratives are therefore the product of an almost continual attrition between the creative agency of the individuals themselves, and the structural context of their inherited spirituality, as well as these individuals' social, material and economic relations in which their lives are located. Through this attrition between private and public influences, these new stories of Kailas become created and developed. Language is the instrument through which the public and the private interpretations of Kailas become reconciled into specific stories and individual memories. Consequently, those narratives become part of the vast collection of resources from which other individuals can navigate their own paths through the possible interpretations of Kailas. That is, narratives can be regarded as both discrete texts which express their own meaning as well as specific contributions within the creation of subsequent narratives.

In order to consider this process of interpretation of creation and inspiration in greater detail, I will reflect upon a research project in which I have been engaged since August 1985. Within that project, I interviewed 144 individuals from Europe and North America with a view to understanding the ways in which they formed their spiritual interpretations



and narratives about the mountains they have visited. Seven of those interviewees also contributed to the Suffolk Parish Project (Cooper 1994, 1995). The other interviewees contacted me having heard of the Suffolk Parish Project through friends and family relations at the US Air Force Base at Mildenhall, the University of Essex and the University of London. Since each of these individuals had volunteered their interest in contributing their experiences to this project, the small-group and one-to-one interviews were almost immediately characterized with questions and themes which arose from these participants as opposed to being exclusively the product of my own curiosity. Consequently, this research can be regarded as a collaborative enterprise where my own role was defined as a facilitator of debate: ensuring that I understood precisely what each contributor intended to say, and also making sure that each member of an interview group was given sufficient opportunity to express each aspect of the experiences and stories which they wanted to share at that time.

The narratives and experiences to which all these interviewees referred within their descriptions of Kailas were never interpreted by them simply, rigidly or formalistically, as Levi-Strauss (1967) anticipated. Rather, these descriptions have been made dynamic and interactive with other references and narratives in ways which the authors of those supplementary elements might never have imag-



ined. Nevertheless, those eclectic collections of contributing references remain variously aligned with the new spiritual inspiration which the interviewees find in their interpretations of Kailas. The complete meaning of these new stories is therefore built up and extrapolated through an almost continual creative process within the contemporary lifeworlds of these modern travellers consciously as well as unconsciously. As such, these new stories of Kailas frequently accommodate a significant reappraisal of the ancient texts, some of which were identified above. Thus, while Levi-Strauss (1967) neglects much of the provocative potential in these ancient texts to excite and ignite modern imaginations, my interviews with modern travellers have directly engaged with that ignition, as well as its associations to other narratives. This was addressed by listening to the ways in which people recalled the construction of their new stories about Kailas. Explored also was the evolutionary process where these personal memories and inspiration have changed through time in ways which the interviewees found significant. Ultimately therefore, it has been possible to show how modern stories of Kailas's religio-geographical meaning have been born from specific seeds of inspiration, evolved within a context of attrition within individuals' lifeworlds, and then used to inspire other ways of thinking about Kailas for these individuals as well as others with whom they have shared their thoughts and stories.

This sustained negotiation under which new stories have developed, and the attention to significant sacred and secular details to which interviewees have attended, all strongly suggest that the modern meaning of sacred mountains, such as Mount Kailas, is neither secondary, marginal nor artificial within the spiritual commitments of the contributors to this research. Further, within the unanimous opinion of this interview-group, these struggles to understand and communicate personal responses to mountains are more widely experienced than simply within a group of 144 interviewees. Regarding that broader level of individual spiritual experience, many of the interviewees expressed their belief that conceptions of nature and spirituality are being increasingly found to transcend the relatively narrow, and therefore frustratingly restricting, limitations which many religious leaders place on the orthodoxies they teach. Thus, when interviewees individually discovered this reciprocity between natural landscapes and sacred inspiration, they found that it provoked a markedly wider set of narratives which they have been inspired to weave into their own spiritual lives. Given this rich, eclectic and almost continual dynamism within the development of new stories, this research project can therefore be regarded as offering a collection of detailed case studies within a defined period of time.

Notwithstanding alternative possibilities, the point which will undoubtedly arise from other research projects of this type will focus on the ways in which the development of new stories of Kailas, and other sacred mountains, rarely if ever develop as simple, linear progressions from inherited ways of seeing to the next. Rather, new stories of Kailas simultaneously look forward as well as backward. They are both progressive as well as being regressive. They incorporate resonances of the past, present and anticipated future. But further, where such new stories of Kailas, or new elements within established stories, cannot be reconciled with the challenge of subsequent experiences within travellers' lifeworlds, new narratives almost invariably become 'unpacked' again, re-examined, revised, and re-assembled as interviewees find new ways of fitting their interpretations of Kailas into the broader contexts of their lifeworlds. There is consequently, nothing neat or orderly about the ways in which the new stories are negotiated and re-negotiated alongside other narratives within individual's lives. Simple sequences of orderly and progressive meaning would therefore simply be an illusion introduced by poorly conducted interview techniques.

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Feature Essay

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A significant part of the situated messiness of these new stories can also involve individual encounters with dilemma. Through its inherent nature as a profound and sustained anxiety, dilemma acts as a further block to the untroubled, linear development of spiritual meaning and personal interpretations. Within the context of this research however, dilemma can also be defined as a realization by an individual or group that the integrity of their beliefs and interpretations may not hold as much persuasiveness as they once thought. Within the interviews of the 144 contributors to this research, however, it was noted that the ways in which dilemma can interact with their stories of Kailas and other sacred mountains can assume different degrees of intensity. Additional developments in these individual experiences of dilemma were also noted to occur through the interaction of new stories alongside the social and material references within travellers' lifeworlds. As a consequence of these complex, intense, dilemmic experiences, many individuals have found it necessary to re-appraise, and revise, their interpretations of Mount Kailas. Alternatively, other interviewees described how they have chosen to persist with their original interpretations of Kailas notwithstanding their awareness of significant problems with the ways they were trying to reconcile their response to that mountain with other aspects of their lifeworlds. Specific resistances and responses to changing interpretations are fundamental to understanding the evolution of new stories of Kailas and other mountains within this research. A particularly significant example of resistance to change arose where interviewees used intensely unsettling dilemmic experiences to re-appraise their spiritual commitments, such as finding added strength and conviction in their faiths by resisting strong challenges to the integrity of that devotion. Consequently, dilemma not only prevents the simple, linear development of new stories through its challenge to their integrity, but it can also provoke and inspire a search for new

Within the context of this research however, dilemma can also be defined as a realization by an individual or group that the integrity of their beliefs and interpretations may not hold as much persuasiveness as they once thought.

references with which an individual may choose to justify, strengthen and illustrate their beliefs.

A second form of dilemma also encountered in this research was informed by intergenerational anxieties. For the Jewish interviewees in particular, their sense of maintaining, or challenging, the integrity of their inherited identity remained a cause of individual and shared controversy. Consequently, intergenerational tensions contributed to ways in which mountains were discussed by interviewees as significant elements of the spiritual inspiration for successive generations of Jews. Thus, while the

first form of dilemma, introduced above, embodies a relatively short-term immediacy through its development for specific individuals, in specific ways, at specific times, the intergenerational dilemmas involve the direct concern of representatives from successive generations as they express their concerns, advice and challenges to the ways new inspiration is becoming a part of spiritual meaning for individual believers.

These dilemmas were found to be particularly intense since they frequently brought with them the emotional bonds of family relations.

In addition to the analysis of new stories which are being told and re-told about Kailas and other sacred mountains, this research is also intended to serve as an influence on the ways natural landscapes are seen by interviewees as being relatively neglected as a source of spiritual instruction within their chosen beliefs. Particularly among the followers of the three Semitic, monotheistic faiths who contributed to this research, there was strong feeling that their religious leaders could use mountains as a source of instruction to all generations concerning the virtues of contemplation, prayer, and a reverence for creation. Further, this research is also intended to challenge the ways in which media managers develop future programs and features combining the themes, which are usually kept apart, of religious devotion and natural history.

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Feature Essay

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The principal conclusion to draw from this summary, as well as the research project as a whole, is that no form of meaning can exist outside the limitations of language. That is, no meaning can ever be discussed, or even thought about, other than through the resource of language. As the medium through which meaning is learned, developed and shared, the language within new stories which are being told about Kailas is both limited and enhanced by forms of words which travellers have variously learned throughout their lives. With some travellers for example, it was not until they had read the Mahanirvana Tantra, or other literary texts, that they were able to find their own ways of expressing a personal understanding of the mountain. Previously, they had simply experienced a deeply frustrating inability of not having the linguistic resources with which to construct new stories.

The second major conclusion to draw here is that, through the medium of language, all the new stories of Kailas which the contributors to this research have described within their interview groups have been negotiated and reconciled within a broader context of social, material and political relations which form the structure to their lifeworlds. Subsequent publications, as well as my future broadcast projects, will examine in greater detail this rich development of religio-geographical meaning which surrounds sacred mountains.

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ADDRESS CHANGES

The editor appreciates notification of address changes as soon as they are known. From this point onward, any person's newsletter returned to due to change of address, will be eliminated from the mailing list immediately.

GORABS MINUTES

1996 Annual Business Meeting

Robert H. Stoddard, Chair

Richard Jackson, Secretary-Treasurer

The following is a condensed version of the minutes submitted by Robert Stoddard.

1. Barbara Weightman and Jeanne Kay have completed their term as board members, and Chad Emmet and Chandra Balachandran have replaced them.
2. Deadline for the Sopher Award was moved up to one month before the meeting.
3. The cash award for the Sopher award has been increased.
4. Discussion of plans for the Fort Worth meeting ensued.
5. Discussion of setting up a homepage resulted in Chandra Balachandran volunteering to create one.

MANUSCRIPTS WANTED

1. We have received a number of excellent proposals for papers and expect to receive manuscripts in due time. It is not too late to prepare your project for this publication, if you have not already contacted me. Remember, *The Pennsylvania Geographer* is a high-quality, refereed journal produced bi-annually by the PENNSYLVANIA GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY. A special volume devoted to the theme of GORABS is planned for 1997 with Carol Prorok as guest editor. Submissions will be refereed before being accepted for publication. Research on any GORABS subject is welcomed. Please contact Carol Prorok or Bill Kory (PG Editor, Geography Dept., U. of Pittsburgh-Johnston, Johnston, PA 15904) if you are interested. The deadline to send manuscripts is Aug. 15. We will accept them sooner.

2. Peter Lang Publishing, Inc. is looking for book length manuscripts on the topic of: *The Bible and the Third World*. The general editor is Hemchand Gossai (Dept. of Philosophy and Religion, Culver-Stockton College, Canton, MO 63435-hgossai@culver.edu). *The Bible and the Third World* brings together innovative interpretations from scholars who are reading the biblical text with a hermeneutics that is shaped by life in the Third World. It seeks to show how the Bible is used and understood in contexts of poverty and oppression and indeed the manner in which these experiences bring new platforms from which to address the biblical story. A particular interest in the series is to provide studies that are not shaped primarily by Western traditions and cultures. The series is open to and indeed encourages a variety of critical and scholarly methodologies.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

From the Editor's Desk:

Surinder Bhardwaj, past chair of GORABS, was honored this past year by receiving the distinguished President's Medal at Kent State University. He was recognized for his significant contribution to the fields of geography of religion and Asia.

Alexei Krindatch's new book, Geography of Religions in Russia, has just been published by Glenmary Research Center in Decatur, Georgia.

A new book may be of interest to you: THY WILL BE DONE: The Conquest of the Amazon: Nelson Rockefeller and Evangelism in the Age of Oil by G. Colby with C. Dennett (HarperCollins Publishers).

Scott Hoefle is working with the Brazilian National Agricultural Research Department (EMBRAPA) and the Interamerican Institute for Agricultural Cooperation in Rio de Janeiro. He writes: I am a few months into an 18-month consultancy in a multidisciplinary and international research project on sustainable rural development in the Atlantic Forest of southeast Brazil funded by the World Bank and the European Union. What might be of interest to GORABS members is the fact that my part of the overall project treats the interface between religious

worldview, environment perception, landscape domestication and sustainable development. It is also interesting to note that when the project only involved agronomists and physical geographers funding was turned down. But when I and a few other researchers on the 'social and cultural' dimensions of sustainable development were brought aboard, the project received funding. If you would like to correspond with Scott, his address is: Dept of Geographia e Meio Ambiente, Pontificia Univ. Catolica, Rua Marques de Sao Vicente, 225, Rio de Janeiro 22.473-100, RJ Brazil.

D.K. Singh and his wife, Professor Vijay Lakshmi Singh, from the department of geography at Utkal University in Bhubaneswar, India, toured the United States this past year.

OLDIES BUT GOODIES!!! The editor asks long-time GORABS aficionados to look into their files for the early newsletters that were produced before the present organization began publishing in 1989. Please send photocopies (or originals) for our archives.



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