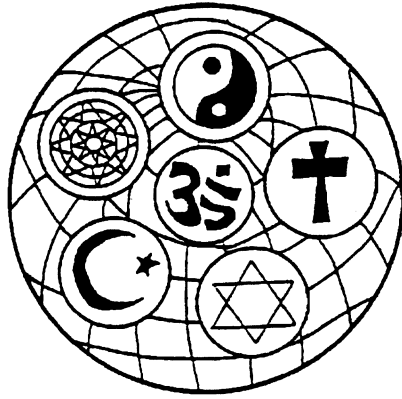


# Geography of Religions & Belief Systems



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## ELECTIONS 1999

In the very near future you will be receiving a ballot for our annual election of new officers. If you would like to nominate yourself or nominate a colleague for a position on the executive board we have the secretary/treasurer, two board positions and the student representative position open. Contact Dick Jackson at BYU right away. Even if there is not a race for a specific position, it is very important that you vote in order to validate the leadership of the specialty group. GORABS encourages and welcomes your participation.

## NEWSFLASH

We strongly encourage eligible applicants to submit their AAG papers for the **Sopher Award**. Graduate students and non-tenured faculty have an opportunity to have their work recognized for its contribution to our field. Don't allow procrastination to prevent you from applying. Note the application and guidelines are enclosed. Plan now for the February 1st deadline!

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

## GORABS Feature Essay

*The Sacredness of Nature: Fresh Paths in Radical Grass Root Politics*

Dr. Adrian Cooper. Independent Scholar c/o Dept of Geography, Birkbeck College, University of London, 7-15 Gresse Street, London. W1P 1PA

This paper was presented to the Education for Life Committee Meeting, chaired by Lord MacNair, at the House of Lords, London on 8 July 1998. It was prepared at the invitation of the International Institute of Peace Studies.

Critics of the religio-geographical agenda often suggest that our work has little or no relevance to the everyday lives of ordinary people. They also suggest that our work is incapable of contributing to the development of social policy, strategic planning or the management of social, political and cultural change. I am therefore delighted to present a summary of my recent work which demonstrates that the integrity of our critics' observations is not complete.

Since 1985, I have analyzed pilgrimage journeys across sacred mountains and other areas of wilderness where many-

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### HAWAII AWARD

Dick Jackson, our SG Chair, is pleased to report that Jeffrey Smialek will receive the GORABS Hawaii Travel Grant of \$200. Jeff is studying at Chicago State University, and his paper is titled: *The Protestant Reformation and the Study of Geography*. Congratulations Jeff.

Association of American Geographers

## GORABS ESSAY

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sided experiences of sacredness have been encountered. That research has been documented in a selection of academic papers as well as my book, *Sacred Mountains: Ancient Wisdom and Modern Meanings*, which was written for general readers as well as interested academics (1). But the story of sacred mountains and sacred nature does not stay in the wilderness of deserts, frozen landscapes, open oceans or tropical environments. Instead, the implications and memories of prayers, meditations, insights, visions and inspirations which pilgrims find in the sacred wilderness are often brought home and used to provoke significant changes in their social and political priorities. Prominent within those changed personal agendas are the problems, policies and practices of education. The purpose of this paper is to summarize the principal features of the lobbying, negotiating and implementation of changed educational practice among schools and colleges where the pilgrims with whom I have worked have children. These changes embrace curricula as well as extra-curricula activities, all of which have been inspired from experiences drawn from sacred mountains and the sacredness of nature.

The impact of these mountain and wilderness journeys has often been so profound that they have forced pilgrims to completely re-examine the foundations of their attitudes toward education and holistic personal development. Consequently, I have found that many of these travellers return to the etymology of the word education; to the Latin *educare*, often translated as the practice of bringing out from young people the enthusiasm and inspiration to learn. *Educare* is therefore a recognition that no human being is an empty vessel who demands little more than a stock supply of disconnected facts in the name of education. *Educare* suggests the basis of a radical teaching paradigm which seeks to inspire young people to learn, by being creative with educational opportunities in the same way that pilgrims have sought out fresh inspiration, information and understanding on their journeys. Upon this understanding of *educare*, PTA meetings and other discussion groups have been used by those parents who contributed to my research to lobby for changes in curricula and extra-curricula activities which draw directly from creation-centered mysticism encountered during wilderness pilgrimage. This lobbying for radical change is therefore an expression of mysticism and politics. It is mysticism in action: mysticism with a radical, social, practical and frequently persuasive voice. From the perspective of religio-geographical enquiry, this combination of mysticism and politics locates that research within a dynamic, wide-ranging and social context.

Following these extended periods of negotiation between parents, senior teachers and administrators, changed educational policy has been reported to me from parents in Japan, Germany, France, Ireland, the US and the UK. The most fre-

quently described change within curricula and extra-curricula activities has been increased attention toward individual and small-group creativity among pupils. That is, the skills of problem solving which include lateral thinking, systems modelling and brain storming, have been applied to new school projects concerning environmental impact analysis, mathematical modelling, bio-chemistry projects, drama, technology design work, as well as radical criticisms of history, philosophy and social theory which those young people encounter in their day-time classes.

The second set of educational reforms which I have found to be inspired by pilgrimage journeys through sacred wilderness areas concern the development of three inter-disciplinary subjects which have also been variously adopted within curricula and extra-curricula initiatives, and which follow persistent lobbying by the pilgrim-parents who contributed to my work. Although the names given to these subjects vary widely, each

*But the story of sacred mountains and sacred nature does not stay in the wilderness of deserts, frozen landscapes, open oceans or tropical environments.*

of their protagonists would recognize them as extolling the fundamental elements of Wisdom, Justice and Perma-Culture. Within mainstream curricula, I have found the study of these interdisciplinary subjects to be most easily accepted within what is variously called Religious Studies or Divinity. With the US at twelfth grade and above, and in the UK at A-Level, I know of increasing numbers of seminars which have directly studied themes in Wisdom, Justice and

Perma-Culture within time-tabled lessons on Sociology, Psychology and Politics. In each case though, the inspiration for bringing these subjects to those classrooms came from the experience of mountain and wilderness travel.

It is appropriate to summarize the specific themes which these three courses pursue.

In over 90% of the Wisdom courses which have been described to me, and which have been inspired by pilgrimages through sacred mountains and other wilderness regions, the implications of Sanskrit has been of fundamental importance. In particular, the roots of Sanskrit are studied as being the key to Vedic texts. Around that central core of the subject, Sanskrit influence is often traced through the dialogues of Plato, neo-Platonic metaphysics and the structure of Judeo-Christian thought. Seminars have then been instigated which variously follow, or take profound issue with, these undercurrents of modern thinking. Beyond this level of debate, these same extra-curricula groups have organized interfaith conferences and festivals between a wide variety of religious and educational communities.

The second educational implication of pilgrimages through areas of sacred wilderness has focused on the proctocolitis of justice - what it means to be just, and how justice can be achieved within a postmodern environment of soaring populations, mixed populations, aging populations and fragmenting populations. Practical Justice is discussed within the broader context of

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## 1998 SOPHER AWARD

At the Boston meetings this past spring the GORABS SG awarded Bruce Crew, a post-doctoral student at Michigan State University, the Sopher New Scholars Award for his paper entitled: *Israel-Palestine: Religious-Political Meeting Point Between Judaism, Christianity and Islam.* Congratulations Bruce. Here is his abstract:

The concept of religious perceptions toward land as sacred-place involves the study of space holding meaning and significance for human beings via their cultural-historical experiences with a god or deity. The three monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam all view the area formerly known as Palestine (now Israel) to be sacred. However, the foundation which undergirds their religious perceptions toward this area of land collide with each other in some way or form, despite a wide range of religious perceptions displayed by their respective adherents. These differences in turn affect the orientation of geo-political thinking in their perceptual realms. This paper entails an examination of the underlying foundation for religious-political perceptions towards Israel-Palestine as sacred-place within Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It explores the basic structure of their religious belief systems in regards to this area of space, the manner in which their initial attachment to Israel-Palestine transpired and continued existence of this religious-political attachment to the present day. In addition, it contrasts the religious-political patterns of the three monotheistic religions with ones from earlier times. The paper underscores the need for geographers to undertake studies dealing with religious-political meeting points at other locations upon the earth's surface such as the one between Judaism, Christianity and Islam over Israel-Palestine.

## 1995-1997 PhD & Masters Theses

The editor has culled these from several of the most recent editions of the Guide to Programs in Geography published by the AAG.

Anderson, K. 1997 Nature, Culture, and Big Old Trees: Human Relationships with Ceiba (Ceiba pentandra) and Live Oak (Quercus virginiana) in the Landscapes of Guatemala and Louisiana, Louisiana State U. (P)

Birkeland, C.L. 1995 Sacred Geography: Rock Sites in Northern and Central California, San Francisco State U. (M)

Blake, L.A. 1997 Let the Cross Take Possession of the Earth: Missionary Geographies of Power in Nineteenth Century British Columbia, U.British Columbia. (P)

Brumbaugh, C.D. 1996 Landscapes of Death: The Cemeteries of Warren County, Illinois 1830-1995, Western Illinois U. (M)

Buffone, J.G. 1997 Be Ye Not Unequally Yoked Together with Unbelievers: A Geography of Social Interaction in Southern Ontario, 1871, Carleton U. (M)

Cathcart, G. 1995 Religious Beliefs as Cultural Values: Mormon Cattle Ranchers in Arizona's Little Colorado River

Valley, Arizona State U. (M)

Christophers, B. 1995 Time, Space, and the People of God: Anglican Colonialism in Nineteenth Century British Columbia, U.British Columbia. (M)

Couch, S. 1996 Topophilia and Chinese Miners: Place Attachment in North Central Idaho, U.Idaho. (P)

Dobbs, R. 1997 Interpreting the Navajo Sacred Geography as a Landscape of Healing, U.North Carolina-Chapel Hill. (M)

Durr, J. 1995 Social Spaces and Sacred Places: Structuration Theory and Hindu Pilgrimage, Kent State U. (M)

Felts, E.C. 1997 The Wichita Mountains: A Spiritual Geography of a Sacred Place, Oklahoma State U. (P)

Forbes-Boyte, K.L. 1997 Indigenous People, Land and Space: The Effects of Law on Sacred Places, the Bear Butte Example, U.Nebraska-Lincoln. (P)

Genzinger, P. 1995 Mennonite Representations of Nature in the Nineteenth Century, U.Waterloo. (M)

Jauquet, R. 1997 Catholic Relief Services and Grassroots Development: A Spatial Analysis of Bolivian Development Efforts, George Washington U. (M)

Jeng, L. 1998 Under Worlds of Mythical Spaces, Temple U.

Keirse, D. 1996 A Pagan in Ireland: Postmodern Deconstruction of Landscape as Text, U.Toledo. (M)

Klasky, P. 1996 Ward Valley: Contested Territory, Critical Habitat, Sacred Homeland, or Nuclear Waste Dump, San Francisco State U. (M)

Marchin, L. 1996 A Spatial Analysis of African American Church Attendance in Fresno, California, California State U.-Fresno. (M)

McBrayer, W.E., Jr. 1997 The American Revival Camp Meeting: A Historical Geography and Case Study of Religious Community Formation and its Evolution from Camp to Institution, Ohio U. (M)

Mitchell, T.S.C. 1997 Moved by the Spirit: Protestant Diffusion and Church Location in Central America, with a Case Study from Southwestern Honduras, Louisiana State U. (P)

Munroe, M.P. 1997 Religious Teaching of Environmental Concern: A Survey of Clergy in Southeast Wyoming, U.Wyoming. (M)

Parr, E. 1997 A Case Study of Mennonite and non-Mennonite Farming Practices in Haskell County, Kansas, KSU (M)

Sarich, J.S. 1997 The Geography of Zoroastrianism: Cultural Evolution and Spatial Persistence, UC Berkeley. (M)

Sheers, S.A. 1996 Christian Mappaemundi and Jain Religious Maps Comparative Created Worlds, George Mason U. (M)

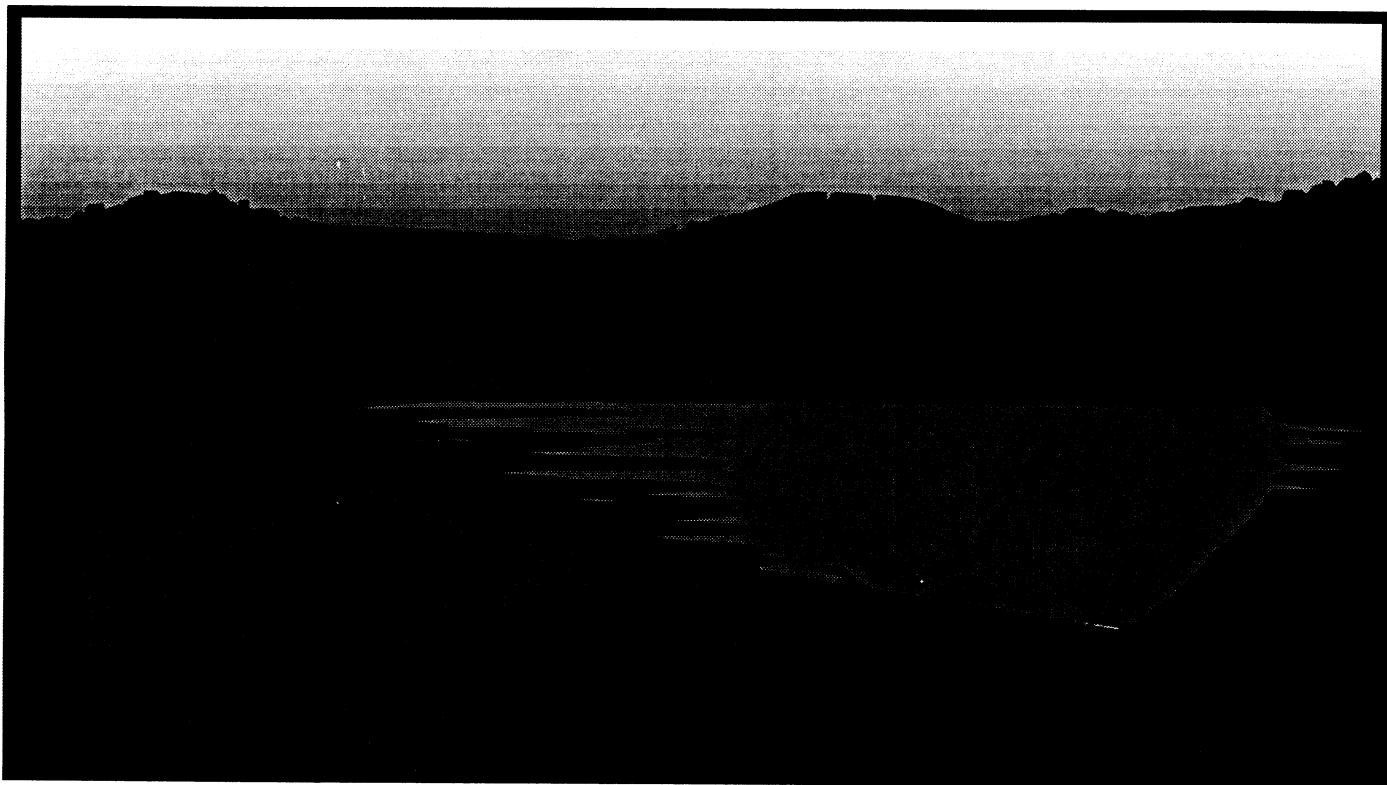
Sweeny, T.L. 1996 The Therapeutic Landscape of a Marian Apparition Site in Conyers, Georgia, U.North Carolina-Chapel Hill. (M)

Tharan, Z.J. 1996 Jewish American Environmentalism, U.Vermont. (M)

Wagner, S. 1997 Tenrikyo: The Establishment and Legitimization of Sacred Space in Tenri City, Japan, U.Hawaii. (M)

Wagh, R.A. 1995 Sacred Space and the Persistence of Identity: The Evolution and Meaning of an American Religious Utopia, U.Wisconsin-Madison. (P)

Wolfe, R. 1996 The Diffusion of Evangelical Abolitionism, U.Cincinnati. (M)



## GORABS ESSAY

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specific case studies of cosmopolitan culture. It is a recognition of cultural relativism and an objection to cultural absolutism. The study and application of Practical Justice offers students a basis for radical criticisms of social and political theory within their mainstream social science subjects. And parents in the US and UK have reported to me with pride and elation how their children have progressed significantly in their school work through the facility of having understood and applied this form of radical criticism as part of their classroom participation and essay writing.

Perma-Culture is the third of these new subjects to emerge from pilgrimage inspirations. Economic and social sustainability has been a popular term which is easy to define in abstract terms but which remains notoriously problematic to approach in a convincing and practical form. The challenge of addressing, defining and campaigning for practical sustainability is the subject matter of the Perma-Culture courses. These extra-curricula courses therefore draw connections across the pure sciences as well as social sciences and humanities. They involve students in projects which range from environmental chemistry, technology design work, broadcasting on local radio stations, campaigning and fund-raising.

Within each of these new interdisciplinary courses, it is significant that the classical wisdom and folk tales which parents, teachers and other interested campaigners have brought back from mountains and other areas of wilderness are quoted in almost all these seminars, either as part of the course leaders' introductory comments or during the exchanges of thought and

cross-questioning which take place during those classes. This application of ancient myth within a contemporary educational context is closely comparable with Bruno Betelheim's conclusions on the requirements for educational reform (2). Betelheim began his analysis of contemporary educational needs with the recognition that significant numbers of young people struggle to find any convincing meaning and purpose for their attendance at school or college. In many cases, this restlessness leads to a familiar pattern of poor effort and poor results. Betelheim therefore suggested that a contribution toward the solution of this growing problem can come from learning, discussing and developing ancient texts and folk tales in classroom environments. Specifically, it is the emphasis which those tales give to the opportunities and constraints within the human condition that can be learned by young people at multiple levels of conscious and unconscious appreciation. Indeed, in reviewing the content of mainstream curricula, Betelheim notes that "the idea that learning to read may enable one later to enrich one's life is experienced as an empty promise when the stories the child listens to, or is reading at the moment, are vacuous" (3). Betelheim also aligns his recommendations for educational reform with those of the German poet Johann Schiller who noted that "deeper meaning resides in the folk wisdom told me in my childhood than in the truth that is taught by life" (4).

Betelheim, Schiller and the parents and teachers who have learned to appreciate this educational value of classical wisdom from their pilgrimage experiences form a significantly close set of conclusions. They agree that classical wisdom, such as that encountered during mountain and wilderness pilgrimages, is effective as an educational resource at many psychological levels of the conscious and unconscious mind. Much of this

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wisdom exposes the cause of human anxiety, dilemma, fear, and lethargy as being the responsibility of mythical individuals with whom students can identify. Particularly, among younger children, their polarized ways of understanding is sympathetic to the narrative structure and content of folk tales as a basis for teaching.

Among teenage extra-curricula classes in which the agendas of Wisdom, Justice and Perma-Culture have been developed, the most frequently quoted application of classroom debate is for pupils from prestigious fee paying schools to approach and work with other young people from the comprehensive sector in the UK as well as similar schools in the United States. Together, English examples of this cooperation among school pupils has produced interschool fundraising for expeditions to Israel, Scotland, The Lake District and Yorkshire. In the United States, I have heard of similar forms of cooperation from Tennessee, Alabama, Michigan, Wyoming and California.

The conclusions to be drawn from this paper are two-fold. First, from a research perspective within the religio-geographical agenda, I believe it is important to note that by following the implications of pilgrims' journeying from their initial encounter with mystical insight through to a practical expression of that wisdom within schools and colleges is a recommendation for patient, detailed, and long-term research.

My second conclusion recognizes that the spiritual and practical inspiration of pilgrimage and other forms of journeying through the sacredness of mountains and other natural areas offers a distinctive and legitimate contribution to our thinking about the agenda for education in the 21st century. From the many-sided forms of inspiration which I have found these sacred mountain and sacred nature journeys to contain, there has been a significant degree of agreement among the people with whom I have worked concerning their excavation and construction of three new, provocative and fascinating interdisciplinary subjects: Wisdom, Justice and Perma-Culture. Each of these subjects has already withstood the rigorous examination of teenage minds on both sides of the Atlantic. They have also received the active support of parents and teachers from a wide range of social and educational background. Consequently, there is good reason to anticipate further debate, negotiation and implementation of Wisdom, Justice and Perma-Culture courses elsewhere in new forms and with fresh opportunities available for all participants.

## Notes

1. Adrian Cooper (1997) *Sacred Mountains: Ancient Wisdom and Modern Meanings* (Floris Books, Edinburgh). See also the forthcoming companion volume *Sacred Nature: Ancient Wisdom and Modern Meanings* (Capall Bann, Chieveley). Academic papers developing the theory and method used in this work are cited in the bibliography of each book.
2. Bruno Betelheim (1976) *The Uses of Enchantment* (Penguin Books, London)
3. *ibid* p. 4
4. Johann Schiller. *The Piccolomini III*, 4

## GORABS FOCUS ON:

## Janel Curry-Roper

Dr. Curry-Roper is professor of geography in the Department of Geology, Geography & Environmental Studies at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546. She earned a BA at Bethel College and the MA/PhD from the University of Minnesota. Professor Curry-Roper's has focused primarily on Christian geographies and agricultural studies (see below). You can contact her at [jcroper@calvin.edu](mailto:jcroper@calvin.edu) or 616-957-6648.

1999 *Worldview & Agriculture: A Study of Two Reformed Communities in Iowa*, in *Signs of Vitality in Reformed Communities* ed. by Luidens, et al., U.P. of America.

1998 *Christian Worldview and Geography: Positivism, Covenantal Relations, and the Importance of Place*, in *Geography & Worldview: A Christian Reconnaissance* ed. by Aay & Griffioen, U.P. of America.

1997 *Community-Level Worldviews and the Sustainability of Agriculture*, in *Agricultural Restructuring and Sustainability: A Geographical Perspective* ed. by Rickard, et al. CAB International.

1990 Christianity, Individualism, and Natural Resource Policy, *Perspectives* November:8-11.

1990 Contemporary Christian Eschatologies & Their Relation to Environmental Stewardship, *Professional Geographer* 42:2:157-169.

## American Religion Data Archive

The following announcement comes from the Anthropology & Religion section of the *AR News*:

Does your research touch on religion in the US or Canada? If so, you may be interested in the recently opened American Religion Data Archive (**ARDA**), a web-based source for statistical data supported by the Lilly Endowment. One of the persistent difficulties in the social scientific study of American religion has been a lack of reliable data about religious practices; while facile generalizations about religious trends have been easy to find, well-designed surveys have been rare and hard to obtain. ARDA aims to change that, by offering easy access to dozens of recent surveys on American religion, in a form that allows quick comparison between studies and regions. The studies contained include the 1996 Queens University Survey of Religion, Politics, and Social Involvement in Canada and the US; the 1996 Pew Center for the People and the Press Survey on Religion and Politics in America; and the 1995 National Survey of American Catholics conducted by J. Davidson of Purdue. Even if you don't use statistical material in your own research, the easy access to statistics and analysis may be useful in contextualizing field data or in teaching. Available at: <http://www.arda.tm> For more information contact the director, Roger Finke, at 765-494-4715, [finke@sri.soc.purdue.edu](mailto:finke@sri.soc.purdue.edu)

**\*\*GORABS NEWSLINE\*\***

Whenever space permits, the editor is happy to include in GORABS any news about you or your program that would be of interest to our members. Please type or print legibly. Also, send your vita to the editor if you would like to let the rest of us know a little more about you.

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