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A GORABS Revival

by David J. Rutherford

A rather amazing and quite unexpected resurgence of interest and enthusiasm welled up among the attendees at the GORABS business meeting during the annual AAG conference in New Orleans. In a flurry of renewed interest, members volunteered to create a website and listserv, to forge links with other specialty groups, to produce a newsletter, to collaborate on developing GORABS sponsored activities for the AAG 2004 conference, and to pursue several other interesting and exciting ideas. Underlying it all seemed to be a sense that working to improve understanding of the geography of religions and belief systems possesses increasing importance and relevance in our contemporary world. Testimony that the depth of this sentiment extends beyond the momentary elation of talk in a meeting can be found within the pages of this newsletter. Produced through a collaborative effort, this newsletter contains the seeds of a revitalized specialty group. The authors who contributed to this newsletter are following through on the thoughts shared in New Orleans, and hopefully, their excitement and commitment to this specialty group and its disciplinary domain will well up through their words to show the potential of the new things to come.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE GORABS BUSINESS MEETING IN NEW ORLEANS

(Look inside for details)

- Election of new officers and board members
- Ideas for GORABS sponsored activities at the 2004 AAG annual meeting (paper sessions, potential GORABS keynote speaker, field trips)
- Details of website and listserv
- Opportunities for publication
- Ideas for fostering increased interaction and communication among the GORABS membership.

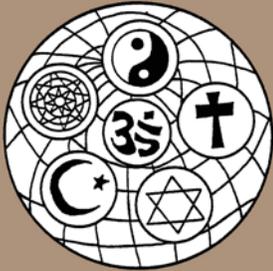
VISIT GORABS ON THE INTERNET

Webpage:

<http://gorabs.geo.wvu.edu>

Listserv:

To subscribe to the gorabs listserv simply send an email to listserv@listserv.wvu.edu with "subscribe gorabs firstname lastname" in the body of the message or send your request to Michael Ferber at mferber@geo.wvu.edu



MEMBER NEWS

A suggestion at the GORABS business meeting in New Orleans that was greeted with enthusiastic support was to include a section on *member news* in the newsletter. Please feel free to contribute items for future newsletters. The categories found in this newsletter are useful but not exhaustive, so you can suggest other categories related to any information that may be of interest to the group.

Publications

Stanley D. Brunn and Elizabeth J. Leppman. 2003. America's Learning about Foreign Places through the Eyes of Missionaries: Writings in The Friends' Missionary Advocate, 1885-1933. *Quaker Studies* 7, no. 2: 165-192.

Rutherford, David J. 2003. The Growing 'Nonreligious' Population of the United States: Generating Questions for Geographic Research. *The North American Geographer*, forthcoming.

McDonald, Darrel L. 2003 (forthcoming) is guest editor of a special issue of *The North American Geographer* that is related to the geography of religion in North America.

Opportunities

Roger Stump and Elizabeth Leppman are gathering papers for a contributed volume on the geography of missions. They still have room for a few more papers, and interested geographers should contact Elizabeth at (ejleppman@stcloudstate.edu).

Elizabeth Leppman would like to help organize a field trip for the AAG 2004 meeting in Philadelphia that focuses on Philadelphia as the birthplace of religious freedom in the United States. The idea is to visit historic churches, synagogues, and other houses of worship. Depending on how the itinerary shapes up, this could be a walking tour. The Episcopal cathedral has recently undergone major renovation and would be an interesting stop on the trip.

Opportunities exist for GORABS sponsored sessions at the 2004 AAG annual meeting. The following ideas have been suggested, and the listed persons can be contacted for information:

- o Perception of sacred space (Elizabeth Leppman - ejleppman@stcloudstate.edu)
- o The links between geography and theology (Ed Davis - ehdavis@ehc.edu)
- o Politics and religion (Elizabeth Leppman ejleppman@stcloudstate.edu)

Travels

From Carol Prorok:

Last fall I visited Australia and New Zealand. I especially enjoyed my visits to Hindu and Buddhist temples and indigenous sacred sites, most importantly of course, Uluru (Ayers Rock) in Australia and the Rotorua region in New Zealand. While a tremendous effort is being made to protect the area around Uluru from overdevelopment, Rotorua has been overrun by cheap hotels and restaurants to serve the countless people who come to enjoy the mineral baths and hot springs.

This past spring (January to April) I completed sustained fieldwork in the Hindu community of Trinidad (of Trinidad and Tobago in the eastern Caribbean). I have been visiting Trinidad for twenty years and I feel very much at home there. During this field season, I revisited a sample of the temples in my original study for my dissertation along with many new temples for the purpose of documenting changes in architectural form and decorative elaboration. I also spent more time visiting some of the non-Sanatanist sectarian communities (Arya Samaj, Kabir Panth etc) and learning more about them. Trinidad's Indian population has been experiencing a renaissance in the building and decorating of their religious buildings (Muslims, Christians and Sikhs are also experiencing this) and so I have a ton of material to work with for my next presentation/publication.

In May I will be in Ireland with the sole purpose of visiting as many holy wells and stone circles as possible. I can't wait to go!!!

From David Rutherford:

Over the semester break (December 2002 and January 2003) I visited the Olympic Peninsula in the Pacific Northwest, Washington state, USA. While the primary purpose was to backpack along the Pacific shore wilderness trail, I spent time in the Makah Nation. The Makah, a Native American people, make their home around Cape Flattery, where the Puget Sound meets the Pacific Ocean, and they have strong spiritual links to the sea. The Makah Cultural and Research Center is an excellent tribal museum that also conducts research and works to preserve and teach about Makah culture. Their website is available at <http://www.makah.com/>.

Some Potential Interdisciplinary Directions for the Geography of Religion

by Edward H. Davis
Emory & Henry College

I cannot presume to survey the vast scholarship among non-geographers to which geographers of religion may turn for ideas. Nonetheless, having read and contemplated a number of recent works along those directions, I offer the suggestions that follow. I am certainly no expert, but rather, I approach the topic as a geographer with lots of questions and a commitment to making bridges. So here goes:

Anthropology: Studying religions outside English-speaking culture is very difficult, given the problems of translation. The prescience of studying Islam today, however, is especially obvious. A Lebanese Muslim scholar recommended that I read the book titled: Safiur-Rahman Mubarakpuri's *The Sealed Nectar: Biography of the Noble Prophet*. The American Anthropological Association has a group called the Society for the Anthropology of Religion, located on the WWW at <http://www.uwgb.edu/sar/links.htm>. A very useful site on the many religions and cults around the world is <http://www.adherents.com/>. A strain of research already linked to geography is the work on early American ecology. Scholars of religion might find a new link with Hugh Brody's *The Other Side of Eden: Hunters, Farmers, and the Shaping of the World*. For ideas regarding place in Navajo spirituality, geographers might turn to Maureen Trudelle Schwarz's *Navajo Lifeways: Contemporary Issues, Ancient Knowledge*. Catherine Bell's *Ritual: Perspective and Dimensions* is an important recent study of the power of ritual symbolism across many religions.

History: Geographers can find much on the history of Judaism at the Jewish Studies Network website located on the WWW at: <http://www2.h-net.msu.edu/~judaic/>. For example, here I learned of a great book – Lee I. Levine's *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years*. Another good read I found here was Hugh Macmillan and Frank Shapiro, *Zion in Africa: The Jews of Zambia*. In a much-neglected area, Native American religion, we might look at Richard White's *The Middle Ground* or Russell Bourne's *Gods of War, Gods of Peace*.

Philosophy: Edward Casey's *The Fate of Place* has surely

brought much attention outside geography to place and space, and his *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* will also play a key role in linking philosophers to geographers. Already some geographers have been applying concepts from Alasdair MacIntyre, including his *Whose Justice? Whose Rationality?*

Political Science and Theory: Roger Stump's *Boundaries of Faith* should stimulate much more dialogue with political science. In Britain, there is a Politics and Religion Academic Network that can be found on the WWW at: http://www.psa.ac.uk/spgrp/paran/politics_and_religion.htm. In the USA, the American Political Science Association has a section (specialty group) on Religion and Politics, whose website is <http://www.denison.edu/~djupe/relpol/index.html>. We might find use for the late political philosopher Eric Voegelin's work on the nature of modern ideology, H. Richard Niehbur's *Christ and Culture* on culture, politics and faith, Audi and Wolterstorff, *Religion in the Public Square*, and John Howard Yoder's *For the Nations*, on political theology. Hamid Algar's *Wahhabism: A Critical Essay* is receiving much attention as a serious critique of one political aspect of Islamic thought.

Sociology: The big-selling sociological analysis of American religion, *Spiritual Marketplace*, by Wade Clark Roof may not apply the most current social theory, but it could still be of use to geographers trying to find ideas for studies in the USA. There is a large database on the sociology of religion at <http://bib.library.hartsem.edu/>. Another database is the American Religion Data Archive, maintained by Roger Finke, at <http://www.thearda.com/>. For those studying current Jewish communities in the USA, there is a database at <http://www.jewishdatabank.com/>.

Theology: The recent work by Sheila Davaney, *Pragmatic Historicism: A Theology for the Twenty-first Century* seeks to escape the errors of essentialism found in most theology. Geographers like David Hurford are looking closely at her work. Another scholar with potential application in geography is the feminist theologian Sallie McFague -see *The Body of God*, where she focuses on place.

**Keep your eyes open for ideas, collect them, and send them to me.
I'll be happy to include them in the GORABS newsletter!**

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News from Elsewhere

by David R. Hurford

In the last month, the sessions concerning geographies of religion at the IBG/RGS annual conference in London in September have been announced. They can be viewed in full at www.rgs.org/ACLondon2003. There are three sessions coalescing around themes of religion and identity, with two sessions on Muslim identities and a third inclusive of Christian identities. Discussants and speakers include Claire Dwyer (UCL), Deborah Phillips (Leeds), Ceri Peach (Oxford), Lily Kong (NUS) and Susan J. Smith (Edinburgh). These sessions build upon the “New Landscapes of Religion” conference held at Oxford University in 2000.

Elsewhere, continuing trends in the so-called “new geographies of religion” (Kong, 2001), recent critical contributions, which seek to move the production of religious space into more theoretically adventurous areas include the work of Orna Blumen (2002). Drawing on the writings of LeFebvre, Blumen’s research has enquired into the production of geographies of work through the everyday lives of ultraorthodox Jews in one city in Israel. She focuses on the social construction of work as the production of (negotiated boundaries between) domestic and occupational spaces. Her enquiries are part of broader engagements with the writings of Lefebvre by geographers of religion such as Fraser McDonald (2002)

References:

- Blumen, O. 2002: Criss-crossing boundaries: Ultraorthodox Jewish women go to work. *Gender, Place and Culture*, 9 (2), 133-151
- Kong, L. 2001a: Mapping ‘new’ geographies of religion: politics and poetics in modernity. *Progress in Human Geography* 25 (2), 211-233.
- MacDonald, F. 2002: Towards a spatial theory of worship: some observations from Presbyterian Scotland. *Social and Cultural Geography* 3 (1), 61-80.

Newsletter News

by David Rutherford

This issue of the GORABS newsletter marks a new beginning. As with most beginnings, this newsletter also marks an ending, an ending to the hiatus of newsletter publication that has occurred during the last few years. Several factors appear to have contributed to the lack of a newsletter, but chief among these was the absence of the able services of Carol Prorok as editor. Carol edited excellent newsletters from 1993 through 1999, but stepped down due to health issues. It is wonderful to see that Carol is doing well now and pursuing her scholarly interests in the geography of religion and belief systems (See page 2 of this newsletter), and I am grateful to Carol for providing copies of archive newsletters and helping me to get the newsletter started again.

During the GORABS business meeting in New Orleans, I volunteered to take on editorship of the newsletter, and after reviewing the archived newsletters I’m feeling both hesitant and excited. My hesitancy arises from seeing the high quality of the prior newsletters. They are full of featured essays, special focus sections, bibliographies, lists of completed theses, and more, and I hope the newsletter can attain similar quality under my editorship. One thing I would like to do soon is to publish an index of prior newsletters so that if someone has interest in previously published items I can send them a photocopy of the newsletter or newsletter item.

The excitement I feel after reading the prior newsletters comes from the anticipation of diving in and coordinating the efforts of GORABS members to produce a newsletter that will keep us informed of the interesting and variegated topics of study that we are all pursuing. I’ll be sharing more on this in the future, but for now it’s safe to say that I would love to see the newsletter serve as a forum for GORABS members to present insights or developments that are emerging from their work and study. Please feel free to contact me if you have even a short piece to contribute. We’d love to hear about what you’re doing, even if it is only preliminary.

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Newsletter Numbering:

The last issue of the newsletter of which I am aware is Volume 21, Issue 2 published in the summer of 1999. I don’t know if anything was published between then and now, so I have continued with the same numbering sequence, designating 2003 as Volume 25.

**GORABS Business Meeting at the Annual AAG
Conference in New Orleans – March 7, 2003**

As discussed earlier, the meeting witnessed an exciting interest in GORABS and its activities, and some of the fruit of that interest have been evident on the pages of this newsletter. The items discussed below comprise a partial list of more specific outcomes that resulted from the business meeting.

New Officers and Board Members Elected

Chairman – Mike Ferber
Co-chairman – Ed Davis
Secretary/Treasurer – David Rutherford
Board Member #1 – David Hurford
Board Member #2 – Elizabeth Leppman
Board Member #3 – Dan Olsen

Comments Heard from the Floor

David Hurford emphasized the growing importance of religion in the contemporary world, and he encouraged the group to focus on the “big questions” of religion. David Rutherford endorsed this thought, and emphasized the importance of including “belief systems” as well as “religions” in studying the “big questions.”

Announcement

Jon Kostelnick made an announcement that he is a cartographer doing visualization work with the Glenn Mary data. He needs input on what he is doing and will be sending out requests for such input from time to time in the future. He also thanked anybody who participated in the survey he sent out a while back.

Website and Listserv

Mike Ferber volunteered to set up a website and listserv for GORABS. This was greeted by hearty approval of all attendees. These are available at:

Webpage:

<http://gorabs.geo.wvu.edu>

Listserv:

To subscribe to the gorabs listserv send an email to listserv@listserv.wvu.edu with "subscribe gorabs firstname lastname" in the body of the message or send your request to Michael Ferber at mferber@geo.wvu.edu.

Newsletter

David Rutherford volunteered to be editor of the newsletter. The newsletter will be published monthly even if it is only a one-page newsletter. The seventh of each month was set as the deadline for submissions to the newsletter.

Comments, suggestions, contributions, or any other communications about the newsletter can be sent to David Rutherford at dr1002@swt.edu.

Final Thank You and an Invitation

Many thanks to Darrel McDonald, immediate past GORABS Chair, for carrying the group’s torch during the last two years when volunteers were scarce. The new officers look forward to your continued involvement even after helping out with the bureaucratic transition to a new chair and a full compliment of officers. Your work to maintain the group has paid off with this new wave of renewed member interest.

Speaking of the bureaucratic transition, it is underway and moving ahead. Before long, we will have the appropriate reports filed with AAG and be up to speed on the minimal but necessary requirements for operating a specialty group. Names and contact information for officers and board members will soon be up on the website, so please don’t hesitate to contact any of us if you wish to contribute or participate in the Geography of Religions and Belief Systems Specialty Group.