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Please send comments, questions, letters, and newsletter submissions to David J. Rutherford, Newsletter Editor, [dr1002@txstate.edu](mailto:dr1002@txstate.edu)

RECAP AND RENEW

This issue of the GORABS Newsletter focuses first upon a brief recap of GORABS activities that occurred during the 2004 AAG Centennial Meeting in Philadelphia and then presents the actions being planned for the 2005 Annual Meeting in Denver. The overall Centennial Meeting was clearly an extravaganza celebrating the 100 year history of our association. Reflecting the scale of the meeting, GORABS demonstrated an impressive presence as well, sponsoring nine paper sessions that spanned a range of topics, and expressed what has been called the vibrant heterotopia that characterizes scholarship in the geography of religions and belief systems.

In preparing for the 2005 Annual Meeting, the first important point is the **deadline for paper submissions – October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2004**. As detailed in this Newsletter, two special sessions are already being organized, and now is the time to either join those sessions or submit your ideas to the listserv and organize sessions focused on your topics of interest.

Yes, I know some people may be asking, "Denver in April? Isn't it just a snowy and leaf off landscape there in that 'cow town' out on the high plains that time of year?" Well Denver is ready to surprise you. See the article about Denver below for a brief prelude of what the city has to offer. And keep in mind, since Denver is near the center of the country, it's an equal opportunity air fare from any point in the lower forty-eight at least. So make your plans now. GORABS will be there, and we look forward to seeing everyone and renewing our friendships and fun as well as our scholarly discussions.

ABOUT DENVER

<http://www.aag.org/annualmeetings/Denver2005/denver.cfm>

Life is different a mile above sea level - water boils at 202 degrees, golf balls travel 10 percent farther, the sun's rays are 25 percent stronger, and the sky really is "bluer." But altitude is only one of the characteristics that make Denver unique. The Mile High City is set at the foot of the Rocky Mountains, with views of dozens of snowcapped peaks and fabulous sunsets. It boasts a great climate, the nation's largest city park system and major ski resorts just an hour away.

Denver has been called a "cow town," but it's actually a sophisticated city with the most highly educated population in the US. More than three dozen museums cover every subject from quilting to railroading to outer space. The Denver Performing Arts Complex, the largest performing arts center in the world under one roof, houses the symphony, the

*(continued on page 2)*

UPCOMING ANNOUNCEMENTS

Look for two exciting announcements to appear soon on the GORABS webpage and listserv:

- The launch of a GORABS sponsored scholarly journal
- A call for nomination of candidates for GORABS officers and board members to be elected at the Denver AAG meeting

VISIT GORABS ON THE INTERNET

Webpage:

<http://gorabs.org>

Listserv:

To subscribe to the gorabs listserv simply send an email to [listserv@listserv.wvu.edu](mailto: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](mailto:mferber@geo.wvu.edu)

**ABOUT DENVER** (continued from page 1)

opera, dance and theater. And, of course, Denver is a real sports town, with three new stadiums and great national teams.

While Denver is one of America's youngest cities, it has retained a surprising number of historical structures. Many of them are concentrated in lower downtown, known as "LoDo," where Victorian buildings have been transformed into a popular district with restaurants, jazz and comedy clubs, outdoor cafes, and brewpubs.

Our meeting headquarters, the Adam's Mark Hotel, is located right in the middle of it all, along the 16th Street Pedestrian Mall. You can walk down the Mall or take the free shuttle service to the LoDo district, museums, movies, shopping and all the city has to offer.

**CHAIR'S COLUMN**

by Mike Ferber

The Philadelphia meeting brought a tremendous opportunity to reflect upon the impact religious thought, belief, power, and passion has throughout our globalized world. As we reflect on the many high quality papers, posters, and panels which sparked creative new ways of studying, understanding, and even creating geographies of religions we should also seriously consider how our new ways of knowing should impact geographic education.

Anne Buttimer stressed this point as a discussant in the *Approaching geographies of religions and belief systems* session when she queried in regard to epistemic and ontological tensions, "What might one expect a 19-year old undergraduate student to gain from a course on geography of religion?" Similar questions could be posed based on other sessions involving religion and gender, Muslim and Christian identities, frontiers in the geography of religion, and sacred landscapes. However, such questions involving belief systems and geographic education also need to be addressed beyond geography of religion circles as these very issues strike chords in cultural, political, economic, regional, and numerous other geographies – not to mention disciplines outside of geography itself.

As we look toward the scholastic horizon, the discipline of GORABS has a tremendous responsibility to break through the walls of our academic village and impact a multi-faceted world which is trying to understand itself in all of its various religious faces. Geographic educators of religions and belief systems can and should rise at this time to meet this demand and provide the necessary tools for undergraduates, K-12 students, and even the general populace to better understand the religious dimension of their communities and worlds.

**CALL FOR SESSIONS**

The due date for papers and sessions for the 2005 Denver AAG is rapidly approaching. If you would like to participate in or organize a GORABS sponsored or co-sponsored session, please contact GORABS current chair Mike Ferber soon. The benefits of presenting in a sponsored session are significant compared to the frustrations associated with getting tossed into open sessions. The dates of the meeting are April 5-9, 2005, and the abstracts for the sessions are due October 21, 2004. However, the GORABS board will need to have copies of the abstracts and session titles at least a week in advance to coordinate the effort.

**Geography of Religions and Belief Systems  
(GORABS)**

**2003 Annual Report  
Submitted to AAG May, 2004**

**I. GORABS**

The central objectives of GORABS are to encourage and advance the study of the geographical dimensions of religious phenomena and belief systems. This includes, but is not limited to, the study of spatio-religious aspects of human behavior, socioeconomic and political issues, material culture, gender role, and human-environment relations from a religio-geographical perspective.

GORABS intends to achieve its objectives by organizing scholarly paper presentations and discussion of sessions at the professional meetings, developing strategies to facilitate teaching the geography of Religions, publicizing information about GORABS, establishing contact with scholars in other related disciplines, and by seeking funding for research pertaining to the geography of religions. (continued on page 7)

## REPORTS FROM SESSIONS CONDUCTED AT THE AAG 2004 MEETING

*Christian Identities*

Though questions of the relationship between Christian subjectivities and the production of geographical knowledge have occupied scholars previously (e.g. Clark, 1991), these questions have returned most prominently to the fore (Cloke, 1991, 2002; Aay and Giffoen, 1998; Pacione, 1999). Building on these debates, this session sought to engage with recent turns in theology towards a consideration of space and place in order to explore geographies of Christian identities. In particular, the session had two interconnected themes. One was to provide a space for the *theorising* of geographies of Christian identities, whilst the other was to encourage the *practice* and renegotiation of such theorising through *empirical* research. Overall findings of the session included a need to study the geographies of Christian identities at multiple scales, a need for a more critical appraisal of the epistemological claims religious beliefs may make in production and writing of sacred and identity geographies, and the need to engage critically with theologians in writing these geographies.

Four papers were presented at this session. This was followed by a more general discussion lead by Jeanne Kay Guelke of the University of Waterloo. First, Esther Long (Univ of Kentucky) discussed *Religious transnationalism and identity in contemporary Protestant Ukraine*. Long drew upon extensive qualitative analysis to argue not only that Ukrainian Baptist identities are being constructed across transnational spaces, but that there are also spatial variations with respect to the identities of Protestants living within the Ukraine. Though Western missionaries and financial aid have been integral to the development of many Ukrainian churches since 1991, Long found that Ukrainians from historic pre-Soviet Baptist churches placed great importance on constructing their identities as separate from their Western partners.

Second, David Hurford (Queen Mary, Univ of London) discussed how British evangelical Christians are reproducing their identities through the spaces of the domicile in contemporary London. Drawing on theologians such as Bouma-prediger (1999), Hurford elucidated how the 'home', for his respondents, signified the absence of sexual temptation. Evangelicals are adopting everyday practices that seek to separate bodies by gender. These homes are thus being constructed through the relative positions of sexualised bodies-in-space. Yet, whilst evangelical homes are being constructed through the position of bodies in space, Hurford also elucidated how home was, moreover, embodied and mobile for evangelicals. This was since, for evangelicals, 'home' primarily named a sense of belonging respondents found in a relationship with Christ.

Brett Stephenson (Baylor University) then reviewed some of the more recent connections made between geography and theology. He argued that an uncritical adoption of concepts of space and place by both theologians and geographers has substantiated a dichotomy between society and nature. Instead, Stephenson drew out the importance of Actor Network Theory as one way in which one might think theological geographies in more refined ways. These geographies would stress the folding, hooking, and unhooking of the organic and inorganic, the materiality, dynamism and perpetual becoming of a Trinitarian Creation.

Substantiating some of Stephenson's comments, Ed Davis (Emory and Henry College) focused on the work of feminist ecotheologian Sallie McFague (1993) in order to argue that the production of geographical knowledge indeed might be enhanced through a more thorough engagement with theology. Moving away from dichotomies between society and nature, Davis showed how McFague's theorising of the earth as God's spatial body provided a useful framework in understanding one sustainable agriculture project in Southwest Virginia. For McFague, the whole earth is God's body, whilst sin constitutes the refusal to 'keep in our place' – to share space with our fellow creatures. A theorising of sin as the refusal to restrain ourselves both spatially and economically offers itself as one way in which we might understand distinct geographical problems of sustainability and development.

Finally, Jeanne Kay Guelke of the University of Waterloo led a more general discussion of the geographies of Christian identities. Drawing out common themes between different papers, she usefully elucidated the significance of thinking Christian identities as the folding of different scales, including that of the body. Further, she encouraged geographers to reflect thoroughly on the importance of one's positionality in the production of discourses. Crucially, this session highlighted the need for a critical re-appraisal of the

ontological claims beliefs, including those of authors, may make in the production, writing, and thinking of everyday sacred geographies.

- Aay, H. and Griffioen, S. (1998) (eds) *Geography and Worldview*, University Press of America, Lanham.
- Bouma-Prediger, S. (1999) 'Yearning for Home: The Christian Doctrine of Creation in a Postmodern Age', in Westphal, M. (1999) (ed) *Postmodern Philosophy and Christian Thought*, Indiana University Press, Indianapolis, pp. 169-201.
- Clark, M. (1991) 'Developments in human geography: niches for a Christian contribution', *Area* 23, pp. 339-344.
- Cloke, P. (1991) 'A Brief Overview of the Philosophies of Geography: Niches for a Christian Contribution', *Christians in Geography Newsletter* 1991, pp. 7-15.
- Cloke, P. (2002) 'Deliver Us from Evil? Prospects for living ethically and acting politically in human geography', *Progress in Human Geography* 26, pp. 587-604.
- McFague, S. (1993) *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis.
- Pacione, M. (1999) 'The relevance of Religion for a Relevant Human Geography', *Scottish Geographical Journal* 115(2), pp. 117-131.

We would very much like to thank all of the participants, and especially Jeanne Kay Guelke for providing such an excellent discussion, notes of her comments, and for reading all of the papers at such short notice. We would also like to thank Mike and the rest of the G.O.R.A.B.S. organisation for sponsoring the session.

Ed Davis, Emory and Henry College  
David.R.Hurford, QMW, University of London

### ***Approaching Geographies of Religions and Belief Systems***

*Guiding questions:* What is meant by religions and belief systems? What are their geographic dimensions? How do they relate to other fields of geographical research? What kinds of ontological and epistemological frameworks should guide geographic exploration of religions and belief systems? What benefits and limitations are associated with various methodological approaches? What are the stated (or hidden) agendas in the study of geographies of religions and belief systems?

1. Michael P. Ferber - West Virginia University  
Critical Realism revisited: Potential applications in the geography of religions and belief systems
2. Adrian Ivakhiv - University of Vermont  
From "Geography of Religion" to "Geography of 'Religion' ": The Sacred in the Spatial Distribution of Value
3. Julian Holloway - Manchester Metropolitan University  
Sacred Space: Beyond Representation?
4. James D. Proctor - University Of California Santa Barbara  
In \_\_\_\_ We Trust: Religion Beyond Religions
5. Anne Buttimer - Discussant

*The following paragraphs are from Anne Buttimer's discussant notes:*

The two major axes of enquiry in this session were: 1) **Ontological**, what is "religion"? (Ferber: 'heart and soul') and 2) **Epistemological**, what can be known, or how might one analyse it? (Ferber: 'nuts and bolts') These are intimately intertwined, of course, especially in these post-modern times with distinctions less clear in the growing concern over representation. All four papers involve both axes of concern and all four echo the currently widespread tensions between ontological and "social-constructivist" interpretations in geographies of religion.

Mike Ferber's opening paper outlined recent developments within Critical Realism and their potential relevance to bridging tensions between politics and poetics, believers and observers, agencies and structures within geographies of religion. Accepting the reality of religion and belief systems he calls for dialogue about ontological complexities. Julian Holloway is perhaps closest in terms of ontological stance with Mike, but would not feel at ease with any static, or spatially-bounded notions of the "sacred". Moving beyond representation his paper confronts ghostly forces underlying the formation and performance of sacred space and time: those haunting spirits that fade even as one tries to grasp them - encouraging us to *read* them and thereby release them from Purgatory!

Papers by Adrian Ivakhiv and Jim Proctor show that good old empiricist "nuts and bolts" can still work effectively in elucidating geographies of religion and belief systems. Jim's factor-analytical approach to data derived from a questionnaire/survey in USA about what authorities people "trust" reveal that Americans have a higher level of belief in "theocracy" (religion, state and science) than folk in other 'European descent countries', ascribing a less authoritative role for 'Nature' than is given in other countries. But Jim also called attention to *reflexivity*, something we all need to remember, even as we comment. Adrian's topic lends itself well to a sociological analysis of ways in which landscapes have become layered with significance as they are viewed and experienced by different groups of consumers and producers. With examples from North America he illustrates well how landscapes have become sites for a nexus of competing significations which have emerged through the interaction of local communities, global networks, representational and technological media and living physical landscape. "Religion" is just one among these types of significance - a spatial auto-correlation or comparative distributions approach could reveal some interesting connections among these different kinds of significance.

*These papers are in the process of being published along with a significantly more detailed discussion by Anne. When accepted, we will inform the GORABS community.*

## CALL FOR SESSION PAPERS FOR THE 2005 AAG MEETING IN DENVER

### #1. Session Theme: Diffusion of Religions, Belief Systems, and Ways of Life

Papers treating the movement of religions, belief systems, ways of life, and/or parts of them are being solicited to shed some light on this important factor in cultural activity. Topics might be historical or contemporary, of any breadth of geographical impact, any degree of temporal influence, or of any range between the literary and the experiential. In keeping with the spirit of "religion" and related terms, the topic ought to address an attempt to create or to maintain a separation of the sacred from the profane. Some topics might be about conventional religions, while others might address lesser known or fringe groups (sects, cults) or even secular apotheosis in the context of potential religious development.

Interested writers are asked to submit proposals in the form of an approximately one-page abstract to the e-mail address below. If a proposal seems acceptable, the author will need to register according to the AAG guidelines that are detailed on page 6.

Simon Potter at [Yabanquin@aol.com](mailto:Yabanquin@aol.com)

### #2. Session Theme: Sacred Space

This session will deal broadly with places and spaces designated as sacred. They may be places set aside for religious or other sacred purposes, places associated with some important historical event, or places that individuals regard as special. Topics include but are not limited to:

- How places come to be considered sacred
- Places sacred to civic religions or popular culture
- Travel to sacred places (pilgrimage)
- Landscapes of sacred places
- Sacred places as contested space
- Changes in perception of sacred places over time
- Ontological and epistemological complexities regarding sacred space and place
- Methodological issues

This session is being organized by Michael Ferber of West Virginia University. If you have further questions feel free to contact Michael at [mferber@geo.wvu.edu](mailto:mferber@geo.wvu.edu). Otherwise follow the AAG guidelines for participating in an organized session that are detailed on page 6.

**CALL FOR SESSIONS (continued)****#3. Session Theme: Religion and the 2004 Presidential Election**

This session will consider the impact of religious issues on the results of the 2004 presidential election. Among the possible topics would be:

- voting patterns and religious adherence
- impact of issues considered to relate to morality
- commentary by religious and/or political leaders

If you have questions, please contact Elizabeth J. Leppman, at [ejleppman@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:ejleppman@stcloudstate.edu)

**AAG GUIDELINES FOR PARTICIPATING IN AN ORGANIZED SESSION**

1. Write an abstract according to AAG guidelines (see <http://www.aag.org/annualmeetings/index.cfm>)
2. Register online with AAG and obtain your presenter identification number (PIN) (See <http://www.aag.org/annualmeetings/index.cfm>)
3. Register for the conference.
4. E-mail the Presenter Identification Number (PIN) and abstract to the session organizer.

**DAVID E. SOPHER NEW SCHOLAR AWARD**

*Sponsored by the Geography of Religions and Belief Systems (GORABS) Specialty Group*

**Description:**

The purpose of the David E. Sopher New Scholar Award is to promote intellectual enquiry from new scholars into geographies of religions and belief systems through the presentation of papers at the AAG meeting. Papers will be judged on potential contribution to the field of Geography of Religions and Belief Systems, organization, and written composition.

**Eligibility:**

Both graduate students and untenured faculty who are not serving on the GORABS board can apply for the award.

**Award:**

The amount for the 2005 award is a travel grant of \$250. The recipient will also be given an official certificate at the AAG awards luncheon which they will attend as a guest with a GORABS representative.

**Disbursement:**

A check will be disbursed to the winner at the 2005 Geography of Religions and Belief Systems annual business meeting at the AAG event.

**Application Requirements:**

The paper and application form must be emailed to the GORABS chair in rich text or Microsoft Word format no later than midnight, February 15<sup>th</sup>. The paper must subsequently be presented at the national AAG meeting, though it does not have to be in a GORABS sponsored session. A panel of previous GORABS chairs will judge the papers and determine a recipient. The winner will be announced in time to attend the awards luncheon as a guest of GORABS. GORABS reserves the right to not make an award in a given year.

**More Information:**

For more information, please contact the current GORABS chair, Mike Ferber, at [MFerber@geo.wvu.edu](mailto:MFerber@geo.wvu.edu).

## GORABS Annual Report (continued from page 2)

II. 2003 GORABS Specialty Group Dues: \$5.00 (Student \$ 1.00)

III. 2003 GORABS Specialty Group Officers:

Chair:

Michael P. Ferber  
West Virginia University  
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Previous Chair:

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(936) 468-6605  
[dmcDonald@sfasu.edu](mailto:dmcDonald@sfasu.edu)

Board Members:

Ed Davis (2006)  
Elizabeth Leppman (2005)  
David Hurford (2005)  
Robert Stoddard (2006)  
Daniel Olsen (2005)

IV. 2002-2003 Accomplishments.

1. New Officers:

At the 2004 Philadelphia meeting the following officers were elected:

Board Member – Ed Davis

Board Member – Robert Stoddard

Nominating Committee:

Darrel McDonald (Chair)  
David Hurford  
Elizabeth Leppman  
John Benson

2. Website

The new 2003 board created a GORABS website at <http://gorabs.org>

3. Listserv

The new 2003 board enhanced the GORABS listserv which can be accessed from the above website. The listserv currently has 230 members and has fostered communication among the group with several fruitful discussions over the last year.

4. Newsletter

The new 2003 board renewed the GORABS newsletter. New editions as well as an archive are hosted at the above website. Three issues of the GORABS Newsletter were published during the last twelve months (Summer 2003, Fall 2003, Spring 2004). Various regular columns were established (Chairs Column, News from Elsewhere, and a Member News Section). Positive feedback has been coming from members about the usefulness of the newsletter for fostering community and providing helpful information.

5. AAG Sessions

The Specialty Group sponsored nine sessions at the Philadelphia meeting.

6. Centennial Field Trips

The Specialty Group sponsored two fieldtrips at the Philadelphia meeting.

7. David Sopher Award

Shankari Patel won the 2004 David Sopher award for her paper "Pre-Columbian Pilgrimage at Cozumel Island." The paper beat out several other high quality submissions to win the \$250 award.

V. Membership Participation.

According to the AAG report membership as of May 5, 2004 included a total of 159 members.

VI. Financial Report.

The GORABS savings account held at the Slippery Rock University Federal Credit Union has a balance as of April, 2004 of approximately \$2775.00.

VII. Future Activities.

The specialty group is presently discussing the creation and development of an online academic journal in order to further research in the field.

Addendum: Minutes from the 2004 GORABS Specialty Group Meeting (unapproved):

## **GEOGRAPHY OF RELIGIONS AND BELIEF SYSTEMS SPECIALTY GROUP (GORABS)**

### **MEETING MINUTES – ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING, TUESDAY 16 MARCH 2004. ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN GEOGRAPHERS ANNUAL CONFERENCE, PHILADELPHIA.**

#### **Call to Order**

Mike Ferber (GORABS Chair) called the meeting to order.

#### **Brief Introductions**

Eighteen GORABS members attended the business meeting. Mike Ferber stated that a key goal of the group is to build and develop the sense of community among people involved in the study of geography of religions and belief systems. As a step toward that end, Mike asked everybody in attendance to introduce themselves to the group and briefly state their interests in this sub-discipline.

#### **Minutes from 2003**

Minutes from 2003 were distributed at the door as members entered the room. Members were asked to review the minutes, then a motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes. A voice vote was conducted and the minutes were approved.

#### **Financial Report**

David Rutherford (GORABS Secretary/Treasurer) made the financial report. The current account balance is \$2,940.62. This does not include the soon to be posted deposit of \$336.00 for dues paid to the group. No funds were distributed or withdrawn from the account during the previous twelve month period. Four dividends were posted over the same period - \$7.23 on 3/31/03, \$7.33 on 6/30/03, \$5.57 on 9/30/03, and \$5.58 on 12/31/03.

#### **Report of GORABS Activities for the Year**

- Website and Listserv (Mike Ferber reporting) – During Spring 2003 a website and listserv were launched. The website has grown over the year and currently has a number of pages that provide useful information for members and non-members interested in the sub-discipline of geography of religions and belief systems. The listserv currently has approximately 155 members and has fostered communication among the group and several fruitful discussions over the last year.
- Newsletter (David Rutherford reporting) – Three issues of the GORABS Newsletter have been published during the last twelve months (Summer 2003, Fall 2003, Spring 2004). Various regular columns have been established (Chairs Column, News from Elsewhere, and a Member News Section). Good feedback has been forthcoming from members about the usefulness of the newsletter for fostering community and providing good information.
- GORABS Related Sessions at the 2004 Annual AAG Conference (David Hurford reporting) – A large number of sessions were sponsored by GORABS this year, sessions related to a broad range of topics related to the sub-discipline. This is a vibrant year for GORABS and demonstrates interest in the GORABS related topics and dynamic efforts underway by scholars in the sub-discipline.

- Field Trips at the 2004 Annual AAG Conference (Elizabeth Leppman reporting) – Two fieldtrips have been conducted (1. Churches and Cemeteries of Philadelphia, and 2. Exploring Masonic Philadelphia). They were both successful with good bus drivers, great guides, and good camaraderie.

### **Old Business**

- 2003 Sopher Award was awarded to Joy Ackerman
- 2004 Sopher Award was awarded to Shankari Patel

- Robert Stoddard Award

This issue has been unsettled for four years. Mike read the following report from the 2002 minutes:

“Discussion was conducted about the proposed Robert Stoddard award for service to GORABS. This was suggested in 2000, and discussed in 2001. However, no further information could be provided on the status of this proposal because the member(s) familiar with it were not in attendance.

Mike stated that we should address this proposal and make a decision about what to do with it. A motion was made and seconded that the award be given for “distinguished service to GORABS,” and discussion ensued. After discussion, the following motion was made and seconded:

An award titled the “Robert Stoddard Award for Distinguished Service to GORABS” will be established. As implied in the title, this award will be granted for service to GORABS that is substantial and long-standing. It will not be necessary to grant the award every year. Each year a call for nominations will be sent out on the listserv. GORABS officers will decide who, if any, of the nominees will receive the award, with the student member of the GORABS Board chairing the process.

The motion was passed by voice vote of the members in attendance.

### **New Business**

- Election of two board members to fill vacant positions. The GORABS by-laws state that the group should have 4 at-large board members and one student members. Elections that were held in 2003 only elected two at-large members and one student member. Consequently, two additional board members are needed. Bob Stoddard and Ed Davis were nominated and elected by voice vote of the members present. Since all board members serve two-year terms, this will result in the following cycle of board member elections:

Cycle 1 – 2 at-large board members and student board member elected at the same time that officers are elected.

Cycle 2 – 2 at-large board members elected.

- Nominating Committee established – Elections for officers will ensue in 2005. As per GORABS by-laws, the current Chair (Mike Ferber) will move to the Past Chair position and the current Secretary/Treasurer (David Rutherford) will move to Chair. Elections will be held for Secretary/Treasures, two board members, and student board member. To facilitate the election process, a nominating committee was elected by voice vote of the members present that will work during the year to identify and nominate candidates for the available positions. The nominating committee consists of Darrel McDonald (current Past Chair) as chair of the committee, and David Hurford, Elizabeth Leppman, and John Benson as committee members.

- 2005 Pre-Conference Suggestions. Mike Ferber summarized the idea that has been circulating through the listserv to conduct a one-day pre-conference for GORABS to be held the day preceding the 2005 Annual AAG Conference in Denver. The intent of the pre-conference is to have more time for members to get together and interact as well as consider topics related to the sub-discipline. Concern was expressed about the difficulty of spending an extra day at the conference and the need to really have a theme focus to the pre-conference that could provide unity. Then the concern is that attendees would have to prepare two papers, one for the pre-conference and a second for the full conference. Consensus emerged that the pre-conference would not attract sufficient support to make it viable. Consequently, the group will not offer a pre-conference, but instead will continue to pursue the strategy that worked so well

this year, organizing GORABS sponsored sessions. In addition, if some particular theme topic is developed, it will be possible to organize panel sessions at the full conference that can be scheduled back-to-back and provide the same type of venue as the pre-conference was designed to produce.

- Session Ideas for 2005. The following ideas were presented for possible GORABS sponsored paper or panel sessions for the 2005 Annual AAG Conference:
  - Different faith systems
  - Writing geography of religions and belief systems in different contexts such as the U.S., U.K., Canada, etc. (David Hurford)
  - Focus on the big questions and overarching themes related to belief systems that are not necessarily religious (Jim Norwine).
  - Role of personal belief in geography

The listserv will be used to discuss these ideas and put together the sessions. This will follow the model used in 2004 that produced such a dynamic presence of GORABS.

#### **Motions/Discussions from the Floor**

- Suggestion was made that we review the 2004 GORABS sessions in the newsletter because various scheduling conflicts prevented people from attending all the sessions that they wanted to.

**Meeting adjourned.**