

Editorial Vision for *Sociology of Religion*

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This, the first issue of *Sociology of Religion* to appear under my editorship, has been a long time coming. I began preparing for my tenure as editor in the fall of 2004, shortly after I was appointed by the Association for the Sociology of Religion (ASR) council, and have been receiving manuscripts since September 2005. This long lead time allowed me to initiate a few significant changes to the journal, some obvious—like the new design you see on the cover—and others less so—like the new “Notice to Contributors” and website (www.sorjournal.org). These changes reflect my central aspiration for the journal: that it is seen as a vibrant and professional outlet for the best sociological thinking about religion. *Sociology of Religion* is a journal with a distinguished history and exciting future. My goal as editor is to build on the former while looking to the latter.

Building on the distinguished history of the journal means living up to the high standard set by previous editors. *Sociology of Religion* has published work by renowned scholars from Ammerman to Wuthnow. Robert Bellah, Niklas Luhmann, Talcott Parsons, and Pitirim Sorokin all published in the pages of this journal. More recently, articles published in *Sociology of Religion* have won the ASA Religion Section’s Distinguished Article Award (Rhys Williams in 2000) and the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion’s Distinguished Article Award (Matthew Lawson in 2000 and Fred Kniss in 1998). As editor, I feel the weight of the responsibility to live up to this standard.

This journal has also been a valuable outlet for well-known scholars just getting started in their careers. This is true of Nancy Ammerman and Andrew Greeley and James Davison Hunter and Mary Jo Neitz and on and on. Although I am definitely not in their league, it was also true of me. I published the first peer-reviewed article of my career in *Sociology of Religion* in 1994. So, as editor, I also feel the weight of the responsibility to provide opportunities for younger scholars.

Looking to the exciting future for me means being open to work that is on the cutting edge of the field, regardless of its substantive focus, theoretical orientation, or methodological approach. It means being open to work by people or on topics or from perspectives with which I am unfamiliar. Of course, the backbone of *Sociology of Religion* will continue to be theoretically-driven, empirically-

grounded research reports. But I also encourage—and will solicit—people to submit articles that go beyond the standard journal article. To invoke the well-worn cliché, I'm looking also for people who “think outside the box.”

On this last point, I would like to share two particular ideas I have for essays I would like to publish in *Sociology of Religion*. The first goes under the heading “The Craft of Research.” These are essays offering critical reflections on the research act—e.g., tales from the field or lab—designed to increase reflexivity and sophistication in our empirical work as sociologists of religion. The second goes under the heading “Improving the State-of-the-Art.” These essays are surveys of and interventions into substantive areas or theoretical debates intended to push the field ahead. These are pieces that may later become touchstones for anyone working in a particular field or on a particular problem.

In general, I trust you will be thoughtful and meticulous in crafting the articles you send to *Sociology of Religion*. But I also hope you will be creative and bold, even provocative. After all, has there been any more influential article in the sociology of religion in the past 20 years than R. Stephen Warner's “New Paradigm” essay? A standard research report it was not, but as an intervention and programmatic statement, it was brilliant. It is already a landmark for our field. I want *Sociology of Religion* to publish the next generation's “New Paradigm” essay.

Like you, I am swamped with reading material. Academic journals and books, student exams and papers, the *New York Times* and *Chronicle of Higher Education*, and (let us not forget) *Tennis Week*, *Esquire*, *Vibe*, etc. I even try to treat myself to a novel from time to time! Given this competition, as editor I feel the weight of the responsibility to produce a journal that compels your attention. So, please help by sending me your most compelling work. And if you have an idea for a special essay, please be in touch. I have only about 400 pages a year to work with and I want to make them the most intelligent, memorable, and useful pages possible.

Finally, a word about turn-around time. When I am looking for an outlet for my work, I consider three things. The focus of the journal; its status in the field (and, relatedly, the likelihood that the journal will accept my paper); and turn around time. This last factor is one that I can try to affect immediately as editor. It is my goal for *Sociology of Religion* that an editorial decision is made within 16 weeks (about four months) of receiving a manuscript. By comparison, journals like the *American Sociological Review*, *Sociology of Education*, and *Sociological Theory* average about 12 weeks of editorial lag. So, I am giving our editorial team and reviewers a month longer than those flagship American Sociological Association journals. I think this is a reasonable expectation. I am happy to report that, over our first 10 months of processing manuscripts here, our average editorial lag time was just 9.6 weeks. For this, I owe a great deal of thanks especially to very hardworking reviewers. I am also aided greatly by highly committed associate editors and a number of highly competent Wake Forest undergrad-

uates who serve as editorial interns (these individuals are listed on the inside front cover of the journal).

To conclude, a few more words of gratitude. To Bill Swatos, who as a former editor of *Sociology of Religion* nominated me for this position and as executive officer of the ASR has helped me enormously in the transition. To the previous editorial team of Nancy Nason-Clark and Barbara Fischer-Townsend, who have stood ready to answer my many questions for almost two years now. To Jerome Baggett, who has generously agreed to serve as book review editor and who I know will provide excellent service to our community. To Rhys Williams and Ryan Cragun, the editorial brains behind the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, for sharing their insights about and technology for running a journal. To Fred Kniss, chair of the ASR's publication committee, who has listened to my ideas and offered sound advice on a number of occasions. And to everyone at Wake Forest University who has provided essential support for my editorship, especially Dean Deborah Best, former sociology department chair Earl Smith, current chair Ian Taplin, my colleague and fellow journal editor Charles Longino, and our indispensable administrative assistant Joan Habib.

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