

My name is Rachel McCleary and I would like to welcome you to the conference/workshop on “New Technologies and Interdisciplinary Research on Religion.” We are truly interdisciplinary today with speakers representing various fields in the social sciences and humanities.

Interdisciplinary research requires the synthesizing of ideas as well as theoretical assumptions derived from distinct methodological approaches. Often, the methodology we use determines the way in which we ask questions of our material. Interdisciplinary collaboration pushes researchers into overcoming assumptions to interpret data from a different analytical perspective. For example, the emphasis on operations (how is that possible) that comes with technologies and quantitative studies de-emphasizes the why questions about meaning. Yet, the collaborative relationship between, for example, a "content" discipline such as the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament and a quantitative/technology oriented field such as archaeology produces a more nuanced, accurate understanding of an historical event.

The social science approach to religion, although intellectually grounded in the work of Max Weber, became a “scientific” field of inquiry when quantitative, mathematically-based social-survey methodology developed during and after World War II was applied to sociological issues. Market research and public-opinion polling after the war evolved into an academic pursuit, viewed by scholars as an objective means of measuring human behavior and institutions. Centers of survey research such as the National Opinion Research Center (University of Chicago, founded in 1941), Bureau of Applied Social Research (Columbia University, founded in 1944), and the Survey Research Center (University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, founded in 1946) were run by scholars such as Clyde W. Hart, Paul Lazarsfeld, Rensis Likert, and Angus Campbell, who sought to improve statistical measurement and probability sampling. Sociologists Andrew Greeley (National Opinion Research Center), Charles Young Glock (Bureau of Applied

Social Research), and Gerhard Lenski (Survey Research Center) perceived the relevance of survey research methodology for measuring individually-held religious beliefs and attitudes on personal, social, political, and religious activities.

By the end of the 1960s, quantitative survey data collection had reinvigorated social-science research on religion along Weberian lines. Scholars were interested in measuring attitudes, opinions, and levels of religious commitment, the nature of religious group identity, and membership participation. It is not surprising, given the historical evolution of social quantitative measurement and statistical analysis, that the primary subject matter was the U.S. religion market.

In the mid-1980s, an approach to the study of religion based on Adam Smith's ideas began to take off. Known as the economics of religion it is defined by two theoretical schemes: rational choice and market theory. Economic concepts (for example, supply and demand) and models of the market are applied to the study of religion. Advocates of the economics-of-religion approach look at ways in which the religion market (sometimes referred to as a religious economy) influences individual choices as well as institutional development. For example, economics-of-religion scholars would argue that people choose among religions and when a denomination declines, the religion is not supplying the right kind of religious good that appeals to the faithful. Like firms, religions compete and supply goods.

Critics of the Economics of Religion approach argue that rational-choice theorists are begging the question by primarily focusing on the U.S. religion market. The U.S. market is predominantly Christian and congregational in ecclesiastical structure. Other religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam tend to function along communal organizational structures.

Economics of religion scholars are analyzing aspects of world religions from their theoretical perspective. But, at the same time, a broader swath of religion scholars are examining global dimensions of world religions across space and time, thereby incorporating new technologies such as GIS into their analytical toolkits.

Much of the extension of our research to international topics is in large part due to advances in data-set construction, increasingly sophisticated measurements, and accessibility of data. To give you an idea of the wealth of data available let me quickly name some sources. The *World Values Survey* (WVS) at the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) offers five waves of surveys (1981-84, 1990-93, 1995-97; 1999-2001, 2005-2007), now covering 97 countries. A new wave of surveys is currently under way for this year and next. Another useful data set is the *International Social Survey Program* (ISSP) which incorporates the General Social Survey GSS I mentioned earlier at the University of Chicago. The ISSP covers 43 countries, mostly in the northern hemisphere. The *Association of Religion Data Archives* (ARDA), under the leadership of Roger Finke at Penn State University, has been an important source for scholars of American and Canadian religion and now of cross-country data. Roger is here and will speaking about the ARDA this afternoon. David Bodenhammer is going to discuss the North American Religion Atlas, an interactive website that allows users to view data on religion at national, state or county levels.

Todd Johnson and Brian Grimm's *World Religion Database* (WRD) contains detailed statistics on religious affiliation for every country of the world. It provides source material, including censuses and surveys, as well as best estimates for every religion to offer a definitive picture of international religious demography. Brian Grim will be discussing the World Religion Database this afternoon. The U.S. State Department *International Religious Freedom* (IRF) has

been providing survey data since 2001 on religious freedom in 198 countries and territories. Jonathan Fox's *Religion and State Project* housed at Bar Ilan University, Israel, measures the extent of government involvement in religion (GIR) or the lack thereof for 175 states on a yearly basis between 1990 and 2002. Several speakers presenting their work at this conference are new to me and although I have not mentioned their research here I am looking forward to leaning about their work.

New technologies, such as GIS, are offering new means of collaboration. Why do I say this? Where there has been discipline-bound resistance to quantifying aspects of religion, new technologies permitting temporal-spatial mapping and text-mining, for example, do not require the researcher to jettison their methodological assumptions but rather to broaden them by introducing new analytical tools. The real-life questions confronting scholars today may be addressed within disciplines, but interdisciplinary collaboration will only intellectually enrich our disciplines, rather than dilute or weaken them.