

Context of Religious Research

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

What a wonderful time we had in Boston! Meeting with SSSR, we celebrated a half-century of research by RRA members dealing with religion, society, and the individual. Program Chair Joy Charlton, assisted by Bill Silverman, organized a delightfully varied program focused on the theme, "What Do We Know About Religious Institutions? And How Have We Come to Know It?" Special anniversary sessions explicitly reviewed aspects of RRA's collective history, producing useful analyses of our past activities, such as Bill Swatos's examination of continuity and discontinuity in articles published in the *Review of Religious Research* between 1959 and 1999, and Jack Carroll's challenge to applied research in denominational organizations. Dave Moberg analyzed the competing research paradigms of RRA and SSSR. Peter Beyer and Karel Dobbelaere expanded those analyses to other religions and the global scene. Ruth Wallace examined the role of gender in our research. Great stuff!

This year was the time for another H. Paul Douglass lecture. Loren Mead, founder and former president of the Alban Institute, discussed the issue for which he is best known, i.e., how can researchers find ways for their work to have impact at the grass-roots level: the local congregation? Drawing on his experiences in struggling with that question during his years at the Alban Institute, Mead compared social scientists' typical modes of thinking about research with more recent alternate approaches, implicitly chastising the research community for ignoring the realities of thought and action that characterize people in the pews. So, you see, if you missed the Boston meeting, you missed a good one. 

RRA turned some corners this year and is seeking some new ones to navigate. Corners offer pluses and minuses. I am told by a race-car driver that the turns (corners) on a race track can be very tricky. In both entering and leaving turns, the driver is simultaneously changing speed and direction. Cars must decelerate going into a turn and accelerate coming out of one. Turns offer opportunities to pass another car, and they threaten loss of control. RRA is turning some corners involving its relations with other organizations. In Boston the Board of Directors dealt with two very important matters affecting the future of RRA and its relationships with SSSR: (1) whether to explore merger between the two organizations, and (2) conducting joint annual meetings. As a consequence of addressing those two issues, the Board also (3) is seeking ways of reinforcing RRA's applied mission by identifying ways to serve new populations of applied religious professionals.

Possible merger: You will recall receiving a survey instrument from RRA several months ago. One of the issues on which it focused was RRA's relations with SSSR and other organizations, including the question of possible merger. The survey data have been analyzed, and the results on the question of merger are fairly clear. A majority of those responding indicated a preference NOT to merge with SSSR. After comparing the replies to that question with several other factors, the Board acknowledged the sentiment of the majority of members and voted NOT to pursue merger at this time. The members of RRA have spoken, so we now drop the matter for the foreseeable future. We are indebted to the RRA members who did the survey work: Paul Johnson (chair), Ben Johnson, Craig This, Dan Olson, Cynthia Woolever, and Pat Wittberg.

The annual meetings: During roughly the last two years, SSSR has raised some questions about the manner in which the costs of joint annual meetings have been allocated. They wanted to modify the existing agreement covering meeting costs, and they submitted to the RRA Board a specific proposal for changes. The proposal created a joint RRA/SSSR committee to develop a new set of understandings for covering meeting costs. That committee met during the Boston meeting, and they developed a new framework for this. The interests of both RRA and SSSR appear to be protected very well under those new guidelines, so we say, "Well done!" to the RRA members of that committee: Jack Carroll, Bill Swatos,

and Dave Roozen. The full report of the committee, which also covers details other than finances, will be discussed by the Board at next year's annual meeting in Houston. 

RRA's applied mission: The committee responsible for the recent member survey also recommended to the Board that we seek to broaden our base of possible members interested in applied concerns of the churches. The Board accepted that recommendation. To implement the Board's decision, I have asked the survey committee to constitute itself as a committee to identify and contact new populations of professionals concerned with research on the churches. They are to present recommendations to the Board at the annual meeting in Houston. Dan Olson has elected to leave the committee, and he will be replaced by Carl Dudley and Jim Wellman. (I always knew it would take at least two people to replace Dan.) The committee needs your help. If you can offer suggestions, please contact any member of the committee with that information.

Assisted by members of RRA, the Board of Directors has navigated these two recent turns well. With your continued support, the officers and Board will continue to address the challenges of the future, seeking all the while to meet your needs effectively.

Now it's on to Houston. The Y2K meeting of RRA and SSSR will be held at the Doubletree Hotel in Houston, Texas, on October 19-22. Note that for the first time in our joint history, sessions begin on Thursday and continue, as usual, through mid-day Sunday. Our theme for that meeting is "Gender, Religious Organization, and Practice." Paula Nesbitt is the Program Chair. Please contact her and tell her how you would like to participate. In the meantime, I hope you have a prosperous and healthy year.

Edward Lehman 

SUNY, Brockport

FUNDING

Constant H. Jacquet Award -- for more information see the [Award page](#).

The 1998/99 awardees were Harriet Hartman, Ronald Lawson, Margarita Suarez, and Jim Wellman.

 Other sources of funding are listed on the ["Other Associations" page](#)

MEETINGS

 A complete listing of the meetings of other professional associations can be found on the ["Other Associations" page](#)

ELECTIONS AND NOMINATIONS

Results of the 1999 RRA general elections are: President-elect, D. Paul Johnson; Secretary, Dan Olson; Directors-at-Large, Jack Carroll and Nancy Eiesland; Nominating Committee, Joy Charlton and Mark Chaves. The Board expresses its appreciation to all those who allowed their names to stand.

The 2000 Nominating Committee seeks member input. This year a new nominating committee chair, two board members, and two nominating committee members will be elected. If you wish to offer a name (including your own), contact Paula at Department of Sociology, University of Denver, 2040 S. Race Street, GCB 433, Denver, CO 80208; pnesbitt@du.edu. The Committee will be happiest to hear from you as close after the start of 2000 as possible.

MOVING BUSINESS



The RRA Business Office has been moving for some time, but not as quickly as some of you think it has! Lorraine D'Antonio will retire as RRA business manager at the end of 1999. In August, however, we were "evicted" (gently, but still evicted) from CUA, and Lorraine has been working at home ever since. Nevertheless, until the end of 1999 all business matters are being handled by Lorraine. Sending materials to the Executive Office during this period only delays their processing and complicates our work. After 1 January 2000, business matters will be handled from Holiday. Please try to observe these dates in your correspondence. If you need to reach Lorraine, her email is wvda@doubled.com. The executive office is William_Swatos@baylor.edu.

We were happy to be able to honor Lorraine at the Boston meeting for her many years of dedicated service to the RRA. She has been a trooper through many tough times, serving often as de facto Executive Officer, while caring devotedly for our financial well-being. We wish her and Bill great happiness in their well-deserved retirement.

WEB SITE/RRX

You are reminded that RRA has a web site: <http://rra.hartsem.edu>. It is very well maintained by Scott Thumma, and we urge you to check it. Occasionally we post material there that is too time sensitive to get into a Context issue. During this year our RRX discussion group will also move, in all likelihood, to the Hartford site. We appreciate the contributions both Hartford and Scott make to this aspect of RRA life. Email Scott at sthumma@hartsem.edu if there are specific items you would like to see on the web site.

THE RRR -- [Visit the RRR web page](#)

Your first edition of the "new" RRR was a bit late getting out, but you should have it by now. We had difficulties with an initial new printer, but now have the journal placed at Vanderbilt and are confident the quality of the new product will justify the delay. Please note that books for review should also be sent to Vanderbilt. For the foreseeable future, book review editing will remain in the hands of the journal editors themselves. Send all materials to Darren Sherkat at 1811-B Department of Sociology, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN 37235