

Obituary: Wade Clark Roof

The Department of Religious Studies announces with deep sadness the sudden passing of our colleague Wade Clark Roof on August 24th in his sleep. Professor Roof, who was J.F. Rowny Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Religion and Society from 2013, joined the department in 1989 as J.F. Rowny Professor of Religion and Society, at that time already a compelling figure in the sociology of religion. Previously, he had been Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Raised in rural South Carolina, he graduated *magna cum laude* from Wofford College in Spartanburg, went on to Yale Divinity School, where he received a master of divinity degree in 1964, and subsequently received a master's and then doctoral degree in sociology from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1971.

Professor Roof's record of publication, leadership, grant administration, and mentoring have been truly stellar, as has been his contribution to the public understanding of religion. He became a towering figure in the sociology of religion as he marked the growth of the "unchurched," the phenomenon of multiple memberships in religious or quasi-religious organizations, the religious odysseys of so-called "baby-boomers," and—always and especially—the impact of an increasing religious pluralism on the shape of religion in the United States. He excelled at the statistical research that characterizes sociological study, but he was also, and as much, engaged in the human stories behind membership statistics. He offered models to make sense of the data, and the models followed people into their public and political expressions of private commitments and beliefs. With funding to study religious pluralism in the baby boomer generation (born between 1946 and 1964), the resulting multi-year project led to two transformational works in the field. *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation* in 1993 and *Spiritual Marketplace and the Remaking of American Religion* in 1999 shed a new, clear light on American spiritual experience with their attention to "quest culture" and "reflexive spirituality." Professor Roof presented narratives that unpacked the statistical numbers, creating a ground-breaking paradigm for the sociological study of religion. Even before his books were published, his work with the baby boomers had attracted the editors of *Newsweek* magazine, who made Professor Roof's research a cover story. Later, *A Generation of Seekers* was reviewed in major national newspapers, with a *New York Times* profile for Professor Roof himself in 1993. His work sparked national conversations regarding the decline of organized religion in many quarters and the forms of spiritual seeking and renewal that were rising instead. President Bill Clinton quoted from the book in one of his State of the Union addresses.

As major as baby boomer research was, however, it existed as only part of Professor Roof's scholarly legacy. The author or co-author of five books since the 1970s, Professor Roof also co-edited six books, two encyclopedias, and five special issues of the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. With sixty journal articles and forty-five chapters in edited volumes, he contributed as well a plethora of book reviews to academic journals. His success in attracting grants became almost legendary in the department, with almost 2.2 million dollars awarded as principal or co-principal investigator for over twenty research grants. In addition, he presented his work over one hundred times at major academic conferences, universities, theological centers, and public policy forums. Meanwhile, Professor Roof became a

tireless advocate for the public understanding of religion, granting media interview after media interview in leading venues such as NBC Nightly News, CBS News, CNN, the BBC, Good Morning America, MacNeil-Lehrer News Hour, *U.S. News and World Report*, *Time*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post*, *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Economist*, and numerous others.

Professor Roof's seminal book from 1987, *American Mainline Religion: Its Changing Shape and Future* (with William McKinney) first signaled the emerging voluntarism that was growing in the nation, unraveling old boundaries and creating new ways of being religious. As he scrutinized the developing situation in the country, however, Professor Roof brought to it an abiding comparative perspective. He had had years of turning toward Europe—teaching and lecturing there and looking toward other cultures and their religious expressions. In these situations, he learned as much as he taught, and through the years he continued to be interested in the striking connections and differences between societies in their religious arrangements. As a natural outgrowth, he began to teach French high school teachers about religious pluralism in the United States through an annual university program that offered them a month-long visit. The project soon morphed into connections with the U.S. State Department and success in obtaining a continuing series of grants that brought foreign scholars to UCSB through the Fulbright Summer Institutes (Religion in the United States: Pluralism and Public Presence). So from 2002 until 2016, he directed (and from 2011 co-directed) month-long seminars for eighteen foreign scholars annually at UCSB. Subsequently, he took them on a road trip to religious sites throughout the nation, ending in Washington, D.C. The number of Muslim scholars in attendance was consistently high; people of color were a strong presence, and so were women. Professor Roof generated through these summer institutes an outstanding laboratory for studying American religious pluralism *and* for living out experimentally an international pluralism. Supported by some 3.5 million dollars in federal grants over the years, more than 250 people participated in the summer institutes representing over eighty nations in Africa, Asia, Europe, South America, and Oceania.

Alongside this achievement, Professor Roof, from 2002 to 2017, directed the Walter H. Capps Center for the Study of Ethics, Religion, and Public Life, housed in the Department of Religious Studies. The center was named for our renowned colleague Walter Capps, who became a member of the U.S. House of Representatives until a heart attack cut short his life in 1997. With the help of Capps's widow Lois Capps (who served in the U.S. House from 1998 to 2017), the center received an initial grant from the UC Office of the President and later a sizable grant from the U.S. Congress, help from local donors, and then support from the NEH, amassing a 4 million dollar endowment. With this aid, from 2002 the Capps Center began to offer a wide range of programming to improve the public understanding of religion and ethics in public life, to stress its importance, and to work to bridge the worlds of academia and the wider public. Programs featured public humanities lectures, bringing to campus and the larger community in off-campus venues over 400 pre-eminent speakers. These included such well-known figures as Bill Moyers, Martin Marty, Garry Wills, Diana Eck, Karen Armstrong, Elaine Pagels, Sister Joan Chittister, Rabbi Michael Lerner, Morris Dees, Eric Foner, Daniel Ellsberg, Jean Bethke Elshtain, Thich Nhat Hanh, Hans Küng, Richard Rodriguez, Gustav Niebuhr, Sandra Day O'Connor, and Nobel Peace Prize winners Sherin Ebadi and Towakkol Karman. With five named lecture series annually, the center also offered one-time lecture series as well as a host of other special events.

It sponsored undergraduate student internship programs with public officials and NGOs in Washington, D.C., Sacramento, and Santa Barbara, five undergraduate courses in social ethics, including the much-acclaimed Henry Schimberg-supported course on “Ethics, Enterprise, and Leadership,” and annual graduate fellowships in cultural literacy.

This ambitious record of national and international achievement did not lead Professor Roof to neglect the specific work of the department, the university, his professional societies, and—especially—his students. He chaired the Department of Religious Studies for five years from 1999 to 2004, leading the department through a period of strategic growth and increasing the department’s endowments. Likewise, he served on a host of university committees including the Graduate Council, the Interdisciplinary Humanities Center, and the Arts and Lectures Committee. Nationally, he held the office of president for the Religious Research Association from 1990 to 1992 and for the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion from 1995 to 1997. Moreover, he served on advisory committees for the American Academy of Religion and on the Advisory Council for the National Endowment for the Humanities. Professor Roof was also editor, reviewer, or referee for over two dozen journals and monograph series, as well as grant referee for the National Science Foundation, the Templeton Foundation, the Lilly Endowment, and the Swedish Research Council. At UCSB, he advised numerous graduate students who earned their PhDs with his mentoring, and he served as a committee member for another huge number of graduate students, all of whom remember him with deep appreciation, warmth, and enthusiasm. In his work with students, he trained a generation of scholar-teachers in religious and sociological studies to attend to fluidity in religious identity, and to look for reflexivity, experimentalism, self-expression, and the questioning of authority in contemporary American religion. He was the recipient of the Association for the Sociology of Religion’s Lifetime Achievement Award last year. He is the recipient, this year, of the American Academy of Religion’s Martin E. Marty Award for the Public Understanding of Religion, which will be presented to him posthumously in November.

Professor Roof is survived by his daughter Katherine Brandts, by six grandchildren, and by other family members. He lost both his wife, Terry, and a second daughter, Jennifer Guilford, to cancer, his wife only a year ago. Our hearts go out to Katherine, to the grandchildren and other family members, and to his many colleagues and friends on their loss.

(Catherine Albanese, Distinguished Professor Emerita, Department of Religious Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara)