

## Center Receives \$507,000 Grant for National Study on the Bible

Lilly Endowment, Inc. has awarded the Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture a \$507,000 grant to support a study on how Americans relate to the Bible in their everyday lives. The three-year project, “The Bible in American Life,” is the first large-scale national study on the way individuals read and study scripture in everyday life.

Leading the study are three principal investigators and professors of religious studies at IUPUI: Philip Goff, Ph.D., executive director of the Center; Arthur Farnsley, Ph.D., associate director of the Center; and Peter Thuesen, Ph.D., chair of the Department of Religious Studies.

The Center, which is based at the IU School of Liberal Arts at IUPUI, is comprised of 40 scholars dedicated to examining the nation’s mainstream and non-mainstream religions within their cultural and historical contexts. Through its studies on Protestantism, Catholicism, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and other religious beliefs and behaviors in America, the Center increases scholarly and public understanding of the nation’s diverse faiths.

“We are gratified that Lilly Endowment has been at the forefront of recognizing the importance of the ever-changing way that we, as Americans, live and practice our many beliefs, and examine ourselves as people of faith,” said William Blomquist, Ph.D., dean of the IU School of Liberal Arts at IUPUI, in announcing the award. “This study of the Bible in America meets a critical need for information to address questions by clergy, research scholars, educators, and the public at-large,” Blomquist said.

According to a recent Gallup poll, Americans hold “strong differences” in their views of the Bible, yet the majority regard it as either the literal word of God or the inspired word.



Philip Goff

“We do not know enough about how, where, when, and why Americans use the Bible, especially any uses outside of worship services. Religious leaders are preaching and teaching it, politicians are quoting it, and many Americans say they believe it to be divinely inspired or even infallible, but claims about its use often contain conflicting information that can be difficult to interpret and reconcile,” Goff said.

“The project is driven by the recognition that the Bible has been central to Christian practice, and indeed to public life, throughout American history, yet not nearly enough is known about how people read the Bible for themselves, what publications

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# R&AC

*Religion & American Culture:  
 a Journal of Interpretation*

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**Rachel Wheeler**, Editor  
**Sylvester Johnson**, Editor

# R&AC

Religion & American Culture: a Journal of Interpretation

## Upcoming Issue

Forum: "American Religion and the Old and New Immigration," with contributions by Jenna Weissman Joselit, Timothy Matovina, Roberto Suro, and Fenggang Yang

Elisha, Coffman, "The Measure of a Magazine: Assessing the Influence of *The Christian Century*"

Adam Ferziger, "'Outside the Shul': The American Soviet Jewry Movement and the Rise of Solidarity Orthodoxy (1964-1986)"

Joshua Guthman, "'Doubts still assail me': Uncertainty and the Making of the Primitive Baptist Self in the Antebellum United States"

*continued from page one*

or resources influence their reading and interpretation, or how religious life and practice affect an individual's understanding of scripture," added Goff.

Lilly Endowment has awarded its grant during the 400th anniversary of the first edition of the King James Bible, published by the Church of England in 1611. Generally considered the best-read and most-cited text in the English language, the King James Bible has had an immeasurable impact on secular, as well as religious culture. Many different translations have appeared in the past century, and as part of this study the Center will be seeking to learn which versions of scripture have the greatest impact on Americans' everyday lives as well as on the larger culture.

"The King James Bible reigned supreme for more than three centuries," Thuesen said. "But since the 1950s, over 60 new translations, in even more editions and formats, have appeared. America is more biblically saturated than ever, but we still don't know how often, and in what ways, Americans are actually using scripture. We hope our project will begin to get at some of the answers."

Mindful of the influence, significance and importance of the Bible to Americans, the Center's principal investigators designed the comprehensive study to involve two national surveys and an in-depth analysis to explain and interpret the findings in the context of religious practices. What they discover will be released to journalists across the nation, as well as to the scholarly community.

The first stage of this study is the collection of data through two major social scientific surveys. Individuals will be queried as part of the National Opinion Research Council's 2012 General Social Survey, funded primarily by the National Science Foundation for non-commercial purposes. The principal investigators on "The Bible in American Life" applied to the Research Council to request that their questions on scripture be included in the General Social Survey. This section on how individuals use scriptures has been funded by Lilly Endowment. Additionally, the grant will support scriptural questions related to worship, which will be included in the National Congregations Study at Duke University.

"Our participation in these national studies is not meant as an end in itself, but as a beginning—we will be adding rock-solid data to the historical, cultural, and theological discussion we are already having," Farnsley explained. Because the U.S. Census does not ask questions about religion, the inclusion of our questions in these two national surveys, which are the gold standard in this field, will move us closer to understanding how individuals and congregations use scripture."

The second stage begins with a team of scholars specializing in the Bible in America. This team will provide cultural, theological, and historical perspectives on the data. Project advisors include Mark Chaves, Duke Divinity School; Thomas J. Davis, IUPUI; James Nieman, Hartford Seminary; Amy Plantinga Pauw, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary; and Ron Allen, Christian Theological Seminary. Project analysts include Mark Noll, University of Notre Dame; Paul Gutjahr, IU Bloomington; Valarie Ziegler, DePauw University; and Sylvester Johnson, IU Bloomington.

The results and interpretation with cultural and historical perspectives will be released in a White Paper in 2013, and a national conference for peer-reviewed papers on "The Bible in American Life" will be convened in Indianapolis in 2014. Additionally, the investigators will prepare two books—one on the surveys and analyses, and another on the broad range of conference papers by scholars of diverse religious disciplines.



*Art Farnsley and Peter Thuesen*

"Americans take for granted the Bible's foundational role in their individual lives, their faith communities, and in American public life. But we do not know much about how, when, why or how often they read it," Farnsley said. "This project provides a unique opportunity to assess the role of scripture today and to think about where that role is headed."

## Second Conference on Religion and American Culture held in Indianapolis

The Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture hosted the Second Biennial Conference on Religion and American Culture June 2-5, 2011, at the JW Marriott Hotel in Indianapolis.

The conference consisted of a series of roundtable discussions through presentations by top scholars from a variety of perspectives. Nationally known scholars from different backgrounds participated in each session. The panelists sat, quite literally, at a round table in the center of the room, surrounded by over one hundred scholars on risers so everyone could not only learn from the conversation, but also participate in it.



*Laurie Maffly-Kipp, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Panelist*

“The purpose of the Biennial Conference on Religion and American Culture is to bring together scholars in the humanities, social sciences, seminaries, and professional schools who study religion in America in order to continue working on big questions and themes we face in our fields,” said Philip Goff, Executive Director of the Center. “We established in 2009 that this is a worthy endeavor.”

At that first conference, considerable time was spent talking about the promise and challenges of interdisciplinary research. In 2011, the conference focused on the changing definitions of religion and culture, and what this means for the types of work scholars do. Conversations about changes in our understanding of religion—informed by various disciplines—can promote greater cross-fertilization of ideas and best practices in several fields. This second conference sustained and extended the conversation among different perspectives in ways that highlight the strengths and expose the weaknesses of disciplinary boundaries.

The conference included three parts: two opening sessions on changing definitions of religion and what this means for its study, four topical sessions where this question was considered in specific research areas, and finally, two sessions on what the future holds (or may hold).

Most crucial among the changes considered was the transformation over the past few decades toward thinking about religion as it is expressed in everyday life, religion as lived experience. Mirroring gradual changes in public perception—“spiritual but not religious”—new definitions of religion challenge older, top-down models in which religion is defined by large institutions and the ideas, practices, and organizations embedded within them. “Each discipline is working on how best to study religion as it is or has been lived,” said Goff. “So talking together makes sense as we change the way we study topics that are, themselves, changing in their nature.”



*Su'ad Abul Khabeer, Purdue University, Panelist*

Proceedings from the 2009 and 2011 conferences may be downloaded, at no cost, from the Center's website: [www.raac.iupui.edu](http://www.raac.iupui.edu).



*Robert Orsi, Northwestern University, Panelist*

“

Both times at this conference I have had the same experience of intellectual excitement. Surrounded by both well-established and up-and-coming scholars, issues relevant to historians, sociologists, and religious studies scholars were aired, analyzed, and adjudicated. Theoretical discussions, methodological debates, talk about values and politics in scholarship, and concerns with ethics and responsibilities to the people we study were all on the table. It was a treat to be involved.

**Rhys Williams, Loyola University of Chicago**

“

The Religion and American Culture Conference brings together all of us who work on American religions in true interdisciplinary fashion. Our conversations highlighted the tensions, new directions, and the promise of American religious studies. More importantly, I left the conference invigorated and excited to continue conversations begun there about methodology and our positions as scholars. I can't wait to attend in another two years!

**Kelly Baker, University of Tennessee, Knoxville**

“

I have never attended an academic conference where there was as much active interaction involving a broader range of people. The participants came from multiple academic fields, ethnic groups, theological persuasions, age groups, and genders.”

**William Ringenberg, Taylor University**

“

This conference stands out in several ways: It is distinctive in its interdisciplinary character, connecting scholars with a range of methodologies and a common interest in religion and culture. And it is unique in its choreography, with everyone participating in each session and with speakers at the center of true round-table discussions. The interaction was vibrant and built from session to session.”

**Charles Hambrick-Stowe, First Congregational Church, Ridgefield, CT**

## religion and american culture

*Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* is devoted to promoting the ongoing scholarly discussion of the nature, terms, and dynamics of religion in America. Embracing a diversity of theoretical perspectives, this semi-annual publication explores the interplay between religion and other spheres of American culture.

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# Young Scholars in American Religion

# 20yrs.

2011 marks the 20th anniversary of the Center's Young Scholars in American Religion program. Since 1991, 147 early-career scholars and senior faculty mentors have taken part in the program. To celebrate this anniversary, the Center hosted a reception and dinner in San Francisco on November 20 in conjunction with the annual meetings of the American Academy of Religion and the Society for Biblical Literature. Both former and current YSAR participants joined Center staff at the dinner, held in the Modernism West Gallery of Foreign Cinema Restaurant in the heart of San Francisco's Mission district.



*Modernism West Gallery, Foreign Cinema  
Restaurant, San Francisco*

*The thing that I have cherished most from my YSAR experience has been the lasting bond that I formed with my colleagues in the program. Many have continued to be a source of wisdom and inspiration for me, and I celebrate their many accomplishments.*

**Rodger Payne, YSAR 1991-1993**



*Sarah Taylor, Chip Callahan, Martha Finch*



*Rodger Payne, Valarie Ziegler*

*After over a dozen years, I still keep in touch with my YSAR cohort. We still share personal news, collaborate on research and exchange advice on teaching and writing. It has been one of the best professional experiences I've participated in and continues to influence my thinking today. We even still gather from around the country for reunions in Santa Barbara or at professional meetings.*

**Patricia Chang, YSAR 1997-1999**



*Spencer Fluhman, Matt Sutton*

*My experience at YSAR seminars was invaluable to me as I finished my book and began conceptualizing my upper-level history course in Religion in America. The combination focus on research and teaching is key to the program's success.*

**Karin Gedge, YSAR 1997-1999**

*YSAR is a wonderful program that has been the most rewarding experience of my career. Building relationships with some of the best "young" scholars in American religion and getting feedback, criticism, and support from them on my teaching and research has made me a much better historian.*

**Matthew A. Sutton, YSAR 2007-2009**

*As one of the few people who had the privilege of participating in the YSAR program as both a fellow and a mentor, I can truly say I had double the fun. A wonderful experience, both personally and professionally, all around.*

**Stephen Prothero, YSAR 1991-1993**



*Julie Byrne, Steve Prothero, Chip Callahan*

YSAR was an extraordinary experience for me as an early career scholar. Some of my most valued colleagues in the field of Religious Studies are the people I met through this program. Deborah Dash Moore led our group with vision and rigor and she helped us all stay in regular contact with each other. Over these many years we have continued to collaborate on all kinds of projects. Here is just one example: Tracy Fessenden and I are now editing the *North American Religions* series at NYU Press with David Watt, and we are currently in the process of publishing a book by our YSAR colleague, Ava Chamberlain.

**Laura Levitt, YSAR 1997-1999**



Jon Ebel, Heather Curtis, Laura Levitt

The YSAR program has been the most valuable professional experience of my career, and one of the most rewarding personal experiences as well. As a young scholar 1994-1996 and a YSAR mentor 2007-2009, I got to see the program at both ends, and in both cases I have made lifelong friends, scholarly collaborators for four books now, advice-givers, consolers through tough times, and celebrants for successes. There simply is no other program like it in the Humanities.

**Paul Harvey, YSAR 1994-1996**



Paul Harvey

The small size and the ongoing meetings meant that, unlike one-time conferences where the enthusiasm fades, the community and connections that resulted from the Young Scholars program have persisted in the years since our formal meetings have ended. While the mentors and colleagues in my cohort remain invaluable resources for my ongoing teaching and research, even more significantly, those mentors and colleagues have become important personal friends no less than professional colleagues. **James B. Bennett, YSAR 2004-2005**



Sylvester Johnson

The YSAR fellowship seminars created a tightly knit intellectual community that has continued to remain a vital part of my professional growth and scholarship. The two-year span of conversations and exchange of critique, insights, and strategies allowed us to develop a level of trust that is crucial to nurturing a willingness to be vulnerable and to count on constructive feedback. In addition, the ability to affiliate more closely with the Center has been enriching and has further integrated me into an extensive intellectual community. It is clear to me that the YSAR seminars provided a richly productive influence on my scholarly career at a pivotal moment.

**Sylvester Johnson, YSAR 2005-2006**

The YSAR is one of the engines behind American religion popping as a field. There is just no substitute for its interdisciplinary immersion experience.

I was terribly lucky I got the chance to participate at that key tenure-track moment of my career.

**Julie Byrne, YSAR 2003-2004**



Amy Koehlinger, Julie Byrne

The Young Scholars program was a transformative experience for me. I return often to what I learned from John Wilson and Skip Stout and my fellow scholars—about teaching and about how to think about American religion. Of course I think our cohort was the best, the brightest—and bonded for life!

**Winnifred Sullivan, YSAR 1994-1996**



Tracy Fessenden



Ed Blum, Matt Sutton, Spencer Fluhman, Susan Nishida, Amanda Porterfield, Paul Harvey, John Corrigan, Sylvester Johnson



Mike Pasquier

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## IMPORTANT NOTICE TO READERS

### Newsletter moving to electronic format

In the coming months, the Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture will collect e-mail addresses for migration to an e-newsletter format in 2012. If you wish to continue receiving *News from the Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture*, including announcements of upcoming YSAR programs, conferences, and lectures, please send your e-mail address now to: [raac@iupui.edu](mailto:raac@iupui.edu).