

# RELIGION AND NATURE NEWS

INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGION, NATURE AND CULTURE

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## *Upcoming Pre-AAR Planning Meeting at Swarthmore*

A mini-society conclave will be held at Swarthmore College on 17 and 18 November 2005, in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania. This event is being organized by executive committee member Mark Wallace, immediately before the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Philadelphia. This meeting will provide updates on the progress that the various committee's have made over the past few months, and provide a space for people unable to attend September's Cocoa Beach meeting to add their voice to the planning process. Please contact Mark Wallace, mwallac1@swarthmore.edu, for further details.

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## *"Exploring Religion, Nature, & Culture" An Inaugural Conference for the International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*

### **Preliminary Call for Papers and Panel Sessions**

You are cordially invited to submit paper and session proposals for the Inaugural Conference of the International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture, with the theme "Exploring Religion, Nature, & Culture," to be held at the University of Florida, in Gainesville, 6-9 April 2006.

We are especially interested in proposals that explore the history of scholarly inquiry into the above-mentioned relationships, and that reflect on where this increasingly interdisciplinary field should go from here. All papers and sessions that cohere with the mission of the society are welcome. These can include research grounded in at least four broad areas of inquiry, including:

*(continued on page 2)*

## *Planning Meeting Report from Cocoa Beach, FL, September 8-11, 2005*

About 20 people gathered at the planning meeting in Cocoa Beach. Amidst the threat of Hurricane / Tropical Storm Ophelia and plenty of breaks to enjoy the beach, we made a lot of progress toward the formation of the society.

Below is the executive summary from the September's meeting. For more information, visit: [www.religionandnature.com/society](http://www.religionandnature.com/society)

### *Background and Introduction*

After inviting a wide variety of scholars to participate in discussions regarding the creation of a Society for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture, and receiving a significant positive response from a diverse set of scholars, the Religion and Nature program at the University of Florida offered to host the first planning meeting. The aim of the meeting was to consider the feasibility of creating such a society by working toward a consensus on the mission statement and purpose of such a society, establishing a tentative infrastructure including draft bylaws and an administrative structure for the Society (both during the interim and after formal establishment), and to consider what sort of an interim leadership was needed to carry forward the initiative. This executive summary reports on the progress made at the Cocoa Beach meeting along these lines.

### *In attendance*

Bradley Ackroyd (University of Florida)  
Whitney Bauman (Graduate Theological Union)  
Rick Bohannon (Drew University)  
Eleanor Finnegan (University of Florida)  
Amanda Holmes (University of Florida)  
Lucas Johnston (University of Florida)  
Bill Jordan (New Academy for Nature and Culture)

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*Inaugural Conference... (cont'd from page 1)*

1) Biophysical Sciences. Research exploring through any branch of the natural sciences the connections between humans and the living systems upon which they depend, including research grounded in cognitive science, evolutionary biology, sociobiology, analyses of the role of natural science in religious thought, or critical reflections on the theoretical, philosophical, practical aspects of ecological science for religious traditions and ethical debates.

2) Social Sciences. Qualitative or quantitative analyses spotlighting the role of belief systems in human/environment relations, including research grounded in anthropology, geography, political science, psychology, or sociology. Other possibilities include analysis of human valuations and behaviors that impact the biophysical environment (i.e., studies of consumption, population, or political mobilization), and the role of nature-related religion in environmental protection or restoration, conflict exacerbation or resolution.

3) Humanities. Studies exploring the religion in nature/human relationships in philosophy, literature (including sacred texts), art, and history.

4) Constructive and Normative Studies. Religious and ethical perspectives concerning human obligations to ecosystems and other living things, including research on religious and philosophical investigations of the human/nature interface, or ethical analysis or argument rooted in some aspect of nature religion or world religious tradition. Papers and Panels (including unusually or creatively structured sessions) are also encouraged in areas that do not directly fall into the above categories.

Yale University's Stephen Kellert and Carolyn Merchant of the University of California, Berkeley, will be two of the featured speakers, and a complete list of confirmed speakers will be provided and updated at the society website.

Paper proposals should be submitted with a title and

an abstract of no more than 250 words. Session proposals should include a title, a maximum 500 word description, and if individual papers are proposed, individual titles and abstracts for them. Session length may vary, but plan on two hour sessions.

For questions, or to request further information, please contact either one of the conference co-chairs:

Laura Hobgood-Oster (Southwestern University):  
hoboster@southwestern.edu; 512-863-1669

Rick Stepp (University of Florida): stepp@ufl.edu,  
352-392-0299

Please send all paper and panel proposals to Laura Hobgood-Oster as soon as possible and no later than 15 January 2006: hoboster@southwestern.edu

Online registration and housing information be available by January 1, 2006, at [www.religionandnature.com/society](http://www.religionandnature.com/society).

The cost of registration is yet to be determined and will be affected by fundraising and attendance projections. The current estimate is \$150.00. Lodging will be available at the University of Florida/Hilton Hotel for \$129.00/night. Grants for partial reimbursements may be available, especially for international participants.

Sponsors include: The University of Florida's College of Letters, Arts, and Sciences, School of Nature Resources and the Environment, Land Use and Environmental Change Institute, Center for African Studies, Center for Latin American Studies, Department of Religion (and its Graduate Program in Religion and Nature), and FOREST (The Florida Organization on Religion, Environmental Science, and Technology).

Further information and background on the Society initiative and this planned conference are available at [www.religionandnature.com/society](http://www.religionandnature.com/society).

To receive future announcements or to contact Society organizers, send an email to [society@religionandnature.com](mailto:society@religionandnature.com).

## *Planning Meeting Report... (cont'd from pg. 1)*

Laurel Kearns (Drew University)  
Gayle Lasater (University of Florida)  
Michael Lemmons (University of Florida)  
Bridgette O'Brien (University of Florida)  
Kevin O'Brien (Emory University)  
Bobbi Patterson (Emory University)  
Whitney Sanford (Iowa State University)  
Sam Snyder (University of Florida)  
Kristina Tiedje (University of Lyon, France)  
Gavin Van Horn (University of Florida)  
Mark Wallace (Swarthmore College)  
Joseph Witt (University of Florida).

In addition, a number of other scholars from other institutions and disciplines, including members of the Board of Advisors, provided extensive input before the meeting, by telephone during the meeting and immediately following. A number of scholars did not attend due to the nearby presence of Tropical Storm/Hurricane Ophelia, but have remained involved in the process in various ways.

To fully understand the current state of the initiative, this executive summary should be read in concert with the most recent draft of the society's prospective bylaws, which are available, and will continue to be updated until formally adopted, at [www.religionandnature.com/society](http://www.religionandnature.com/society).

### *Society Name*

The first meeting included discussion of the Society name, and the broad tropes implied by the relatively amorphous terms "religion," "nature," and "culture."

Decision: the group agreed that the Society for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture was a good name, and agreed this should be the name of the society, very possibly with "International" modifying before "Society" if that made sense after talking with more colleagues outside of the United States.

### *Mission Statement*

The mission statement was discussed. Minor additions were made, including the word "interdisciplinary," in an effort to highlight the intention to move the scholarly conversation into broader orbits.

Decision: The group agreed that the mission statement was a good one, as modified through

discussion, and thought it would likely remain amended, while expressing openness to additional suggestions for improved language.

### *Membership*

The question of who qualifies for membership in the Society was discussed. Most of the discussion focused on whether there should be open membership, or specific, scholarly criteria for members. All present agreed that the Society's primary aim should be to establish itself first and foremost as a scholarly society, but some suggested that activists and others should have more ready access to membership. The criteria themselves, and the specific mechanisms for obtaining membership were briefly discussed.

Decision: by a 15 to 2 vote, a decision was made to require scholarly credentials as well as to have a nomination process so that independent and lay scholars could be admitted. College and University faculty and graduate students would be automatically eligible for membership. The membership committee was empowered to develop and propose a nomination process for approval by the interim executive committee, which would establish review procedures for lay scholars to be nominated and considered for membership. The procedures established would not be in the bylaws in order to facilitate changes to membership criteria, if needed.

Reflecting the shared desire for non-scholar involvement in society endeavors, discussion indicated that such participation would still be possible through society-sponsored events, such as those envisioned by the program committee and approved by the Board of Directors. Society members may also consider a unique membership category of "society supporter," or some other formal way for religious people, environmental activists, and others engaged with religion and nature dynamics to be informed of society events, participate short of voting, and to contribute in other ways, including but not limited to program activities.

### *Board of Directors*

The consistency of the Board of Directors was discussed. According to the existing draft by-laws, the Board would allow the past president, the editor of the journal, and at least one scholar from four different disciplines (a religion scholar, one natural scientist, one social scientist, and one

interdisciplinary).

Decision: The Board of Directors, as described in the draft Society Bylaws, was an acceptable governing body, including specific elected officers (President, President-Elect, Secretary, Treasurer), and four at large members (one natural scientist, one social scientist, one religion scholar, one interdisciplinary). Moreover, regional and other affiliate groups are envisioned as voting members to help ensure international representation.

#### *Regional, Topical, and other Affiliated Groups*

Discussion occurred over whether and which groups engaged in scholarship related to the aims of the Society should be officially affiliated with the Society. Groups like The European Network on Religion and Ecology and the U.S.-based Forum on Religion and Ecology, and other similar organizations, it was agreed, seem to be a natural fit for affiliation with the Society. Their members are already involved in the Society initiative and these organizations will be invited to apply for affiliate status, through means and procedures discussed in the bylaws. Participants agreed that a "A Frequently Asked Questions" section on the website could clarify the ways in which the society was related to, different from, and synergistic with, such affiliated groups.

Decision: Affiliated groups, including but not limited to environmentally concerned religious organizations and regional scholarly groups devoted to the Society's aims should be invited to become official affiliates, linked to on the Society website, and encouraged to be involved with society programs. Five to six regional groups were envisioned, with twenty-five members normally required to achieve official affiliation. Whether such groups would have voting members on the Board of Directors was a decision left for the Board of Directors (or interim executive committee) but this possibility was not ruled out. At the very least these groups should have a liaison to the Board of Directors to ensure the inclusion of their views on voting matters.

#### *Administrative Hub*

There was discussion about where to house the administrative offices for the Society.

Decision: There was unanimous agreement that the University of Florida's Department of Religion should house the administrative hub of the Society because of their exceptional departmental support

and cadre of active graduate students. It was agreed that the Board of Directors can relocate the hub and legal address of the Society and that this would be clarified in the subsequent draft of the bylaws.

#### *Committees*

Committees met with the intention of discerning the important structural details of each. It was decided that each standing committee would require a chairperson, as well as a student liaison to facilitate discussion and action among the committee members and with the interim executive committee and administrative hub.

#### *Membership, Outreach, and Diversity Committee*

The benefits of membership were discussed, with major emphasis on outreach to scholars and other organizations. Specific membership criteria for those not in academic positions or graduate programs were not established. Discussion of the benefits of membership mentioned reduced subscription rates on affiliated publication(s), access to a networked database to be hosted on the Society website of associated scholars and activities.

Discussion of society outreach efforts mentioned plans to announce and introduce the Society and its goals at various Academy meetings in the coming 24 months.

No formal leadership of this committee was established during this meeting. Several scholars were mentioned as potential faculty heads for this committee. Whitney Bauman agreed to be the student liaison for this group.

Decision: Development of guidelines for prospective members who do not have the normally-required scholarly credentials (academic positions or graduate student status) was delegated to the membership committee to make a proposal to the interim executive committee (or if post-bylaws adoption, to the Board of Directors). It was agreed that whatever guidelines for nomination and evaluation were established, they should promote diversity and the inclusion of scholars whatever their national, disciplinary, or other identities.

#### *Program Committee*

The discussion centered primarily on the feasibility and structure of an official kickoff and incorporation conference in 2006.

Decision: It was decided that a conference should ideally take place in May 2006, which would include an experiential bioregional activity as well as

presentation of scholarly research. A broad call for papers should be issued by no later than the end of October. The committee will produce a brochure suitable for dissemination at outreach activities, and a periodical newsletter to be created by participants from Drew University. In addition, a content manager will be needed for the Society website. No faculty representative was decided upon for this committee, though a number of scholars were mentioned as potential leaders. The student liaison for this group is Amanda Holmes.

#### *Publications Committee*

This committee discussed the possibility of an official Society journal, and the necessity of website and newsletter outreach.

Decision: There was unanimous agreement that the Society should officially affiliate with the provisionally titled Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture, slated to begin publication in 2007. Volunteers from Drew University agreed to be responsible for the publication of newsletters, with website content to be managed through the administrative hub at the University of Florida's Department of Religion. All Society business will be posted to the website to encourage transparency and participation. Becky Gould and Roger Gottlieb were considered as faculty leaders for this committee. The student liaison for this committee is Rick Bohannon. On 13 September, shortly after the meeting, and after further communication with the publisher of Equinox Press, prospective Editor Bron Taylor provided in an email to meeting participants and the wider circle of those involved intensively in these discussions containing further pertinent details, as follows:

- Equinox publisher Janet Joyce indicates that if the Society makes this journal its official journal the price she will offer to members will be a steeply discounted \$40.00 (or equivalent amounts of other currencies). Members will also have a privilege currently extended only to institutions, password access to the electronic version. This will be especially a benefit to those without institutional access to the journal.
- Ms. Joyce indicated that the Society could list the price at something more than this \$40.00 (say \$45.00 or \$50.00) with the difference earmarked for the Society's projects, and that she would be flexible about how to do this administratively.
- Non-Society individual subscriptions will be

\$90.00 in 2006, she indicated. If the Society wishes not to have the journal as the official journal, Equinox Press will offer members a 20% discount, making the price \$72.00.

- Ms. Joyce underscored the value of cross promoting the Society and journal, if they are to become affiliated, and being ready to do so as soon as possible.

This will be something for the executive committee to consider further, following up on this past weekend's conversations, and given the sentiment of the publication committee, as endorsed in the general meeting that followed, it is likely that the executive committee will explore this possibility and possibly act on this question expeditiously.

#### *Development Committee*

The development committee's discussion focused on how to bring funds into the Society, and how these funds should be used and distributed.

Decision: After consultation with development experts, a letter will soon be drafted to invite interested parties to become "Founding Members," "Founders Circle Supporters," or some other special category contributor to this initiative. The committee will also endeavor to form and begin to think about how to pursue grant monies.

In addition, a list of potential monetary needs will be drafted before the Swarthmore meeting, for the purpose of dissemination and discussion there. The faculty representative for this committee has not been determined, although Stephen Mulkey was considered and will be approached. The student liaison for the development committee is Eleanor Finnegan.

#### *Interim Executive Committee*

There was discussion of the need for an interim executive committee to serve between the Cocoa Beach meeting and the official incorporation meeting, which may take place as early as May 2006. Discussion ensued concerning the number of representatives on such a committee and from where they were to be drawn.

Decision: An interim executive committee would be formed and empowered to move the vision forward as expeditiously as possible with the goal to enact/create bylaws (as voted on by members) by May 2006, and preferably, by no later than the end of 2006. Once the bylaws are formally established this interim executive committee was also empowered to

then organize elections for officers (according to the enacted bylaws).

Upon the election, the executive committee will be dissolved. The executive committee will consist of two European representatives (Kristina Tiedje and Kocku von Stuckrad), the heads of each standing committee that have such heads in place, plus Mark Wallace, Lucas Johnston, Bron Taylor, and at least one scholar from the four disciplines to be included in the Board of Directors (natural sciences, social sciences, religion, and interdisciplinary studies). Several scholars were mentioned as possible recruits to the executive committee, and it was indicated they would be approached by existing executive committee members.

Lucas Johnston was asked and agreed to continue to continue his work as the interim executive director of the prospective Society, and to coordinate his efforts with the Chair or co-chairs of the Executive Committee, who will be elected by the members of the executive committee as soon as is feasible.

The need to establish the other standing committees was discussed, including education, nominations, awards, and student outreach. No chairs for these committees were decided upon during the meeting. But it was also understood that the executive committee would work on building the Standing Committees, but that some would likely not be formed or begin their work until the Society was formally established.

*Interim Leadership and Committee Chairs*

Luke Johnston (Executive Director)

luke@religionandnature.com

Bron Taylor (President)

Brontaylor@religionandnature.com

Kristina Tiedje (Secretary)

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Mark Wallace (At Large, Humanities)

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Kocku von Stuckrad (At Large, Social Science)

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Adrian Ivakhiv (At Large, Interdisciplinary)

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Robin Wright (Membership chair)

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Laura Hobgood-Oster (Program co-chair)

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Rick Stepp (Program co-chair)

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If you would like to be involved in a particular area, please contact the appropriate committee chair to find out more information.

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*Job Openings*

**Carleton College.** The Department of Religion and the Program in Environmental and Technology Studies are offering a joint tenure-track appointment in "Religion and Ecology." For more information visit: [www.carleton.edu](http://www.carleton.edu)

**University of Florida, Gainesville.** The Department of Religion invites applications for a tenure-track position in "Religion and Nature." For more information visit: [www.religion.ufl.edu](http://www.religion.ufl.edu)

**Clemson University.** The Philosophy and Religion Department announces a tenure-track position in "Environmental Ethics." For more information visit: [www.clemson.edu](http://www.clemson.edu)

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