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# MEDIA & RELIGION BULLETIN

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The newsletter of the AEJMC Religion & Media Interest Group

July 2001

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## RMIG in action: A look at the past year

By Daniel A. Stout  
Brigham Young University  
2000-2001 RMIG head

With this issue of the newsletter, another year draws to a close. It has been a productive time; RMIG members are doing their part to encourage the study of religion and media. I enjoyed serving as head of the interest group this year, and want to list some of the activities and projects accomplished by the Executive Committee and other members.

### Research

The goals of RMIG with respect to research are to: (1) encourage the study of the religion-media interface according to rigorous standards of the social sciences, (2) stimulate communication between faculty and student researchers working in this area, and (3) create forums where the nature and progress of research on religion and media can be shared publicly.

Debra Mason of Otterbein College was an outstanding research chair this year. From issuing the paper call to managing the peer-review process, her efforts bring credibility to RMIG. A number of outstanding papers on news coverage of religion in the secular press will be presented this year, as well as several dealing with theory and methodology.

This is an important development in that much work is needed both in terms of valid measurement of religiosity and theorization. Guy Golan of The University of Florida earned the "Top Paper" award for "Religiosity and the Third-Person Effect."

### Conference Program

Kyle Huckins of the Christian Institute of the West deserves much credit for the RMIG conference program this year. Panel discussions on how news media report religion and politics, as well as a session

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## Mentoring workshop: Learning from ethics and RMIG masters

By Kyle Huckins,  
RMIG co-chairman/program chair

Religion and media is a hot research field, and many graduate students and those new to the professorate are intrigued by the possibilities for publishing studies concerning the sometimes-volatile combination. Even some "old hands" at quantitative and qualitative study are becoming more and more interested. However, being intrigued and getting published often can be two entirely different propositions, as a number of us in RMIG ranks can attest. That's why the interest group has joined with the Media Ethics Division in sponsoring "Ethics and Religion Research Mentoring," 6-7:30 p.m. on Sunday, August 5 at the AEJMC convention in Washington, D.C.

Whitworth College's Ginny Whitehouse of the Media Ethics Division and Colorado State's Judith Buddenbaum of RMIG will preside. Their job is to guide interested persons to a mentor who can provide valuable research advice. Joining Buddenbaum on the religion side will be Daniel Stout of Brigham Young University and others who've gained tenure and acclaim for publishing religion and media research.

Having conducted research in the field as a graduate student at Baylor University and University of Texas at Austin, I can say that such an opportunity would have been quite helpful to me as someone at the master's or doctoral level. Even now, in my professorial days, I know I can learn a few things from the folks who have made such a great impact on our research area. This session can be an asset to anyone with a desire to hone his or her skills and turn ideas and papers into publishable material.

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## RMIG in Action: A Look at the Past Year

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on teaching religion and media feature a number of outstanding professionals and scholars.

Kyle's hard work has resulted in a program that includes not only interesting panels, but also mentoring sessions as well as an RMIG reception for *The Journal of Media and Religion*.

### Newsletter

All good organizations need regular communication vehicles for sharing information, and the newsletter was outstanding this year. Susan Willey of Florida Atlantic University created three strong issues of the "Religion and Media News," which contained many useful articles. The special issue on teaching was both impressive and relevant to the goals of RMIG.

### Other Projects and Accomplishments

RMIG participated in a number of additional projects this year:

1. *The Journal of Media and Religion*. Five members of the RMIG Executive Committee are involved in the start-up of this new peer-reviewed journal to be published by Erlbaum beginning in January, 2002. Although it is not yet officially sponsored by AEJMC, as both RMIG and the *Journal* become more established, a more formal relationship might be considered.

2. RMIG Participation in AEJMC Mid-year Conference at Fordham University. On Saturday, February 10, members of RMIG made a presentation to all conference attendees entitled, "Starting a Scholarly Journal: A Partnership Approach."

3. RMIG Listserv. Charles Marler of Abilene Christian has improved the listserv which members use a research tool. It is a vehicle for exchanging ideas and getting feedback on current research. Members share papers, projects, bibliographies and discuss new books and articles on media and religion. Currently, 74 persons are subscribers to the list.

4. Recruitment and Mentoring. Efforts have been made by a number of RMIG members to mentor and encourage young scholars in the area of religion and media. From an informal lunch at BEA to e-mails from members of the Executive Committee, small but significant efforts are being made to create a culture of support within RMIG.

Much more, however, can be done in this regard.

### Challenges for the Coming Year

Two goals not fully reached this year have to do with increasing paper submissions and diversity in the interest group leadership. Last year, paper submissions went up significantly and the assumption was that with the same promotional strategy, this trend would continue. With four fewer papers submitted in 2001, we must address this more assertively in the coming year.

In terms of diversity in the leadership, there is a need to attract more members to the annual business meeting and expand direct involvement across the membership.

It is also important that members of AEJMC have a clear understanding of the goals of RMIG. At last year's convention, a colleague asked if RMIG was associated with a particular religious denomination.

We must do a better job of clarifying the goals of the interest group which are to examine media and religion from a social science perspective and foster research that draws on interdisciplinary fields such as sociology and psychology of religion.

## ***Journal of Media and Religion Reception at AEJMC Convention***

A reception celebrating the new publication – *The Journal of Media and Religion* – will be held Monday, Aug. 6, from noon to 1 p.m. at the AEJMC Convention in Washington, D.C. Please check the program copy for the room location.

Join us for refreshments and find out more about this new scholarly publication. Daniel Stout (BYU), Judith Buddenbaum (Colorado State), and Linda Bathgate of Lawrence Erlbaum Publishers will be on hand to talk about the goals of the journal and answer questions.

# Research papers selected for presentation

By Debra L. Mason  
RMIG Research Chair

Judges for RMIG's refereed paper competition selected nine papers for presentation at the AEJMC national conference Aug. 5-8 in Washington D.C.

The papers range in methodology and theoretical basis, but the majority deal with media coverage of religion in the secular press.

A total of 14 papers were submitted for an acceptance rate of 64 percent, similar to last year's rate. However, the actual number of paper submissions this year was down by four from last year's 18 papers.

The papers will be divided among three research panel sessions. The research panels are in addition to the other panels sponsored or co-sponsored by RMIG.

Statistically, 12 of the paper authors are faculty or professionals and three are students — the numbers total more than 14 because one paper had two authors. Three of the authors are women and 12 are men.

Nine judges reviewed the RMIG research paper submissions. Of those, three are women and six are men.

The authors of the papers accepted, in alphabetical order, are: Guy Golan, University of Florida; Barry Hollander, University of Georgia; Peter Kerr and Patricia Moy, University of Washington; Min Soo Kim; Rick Clifton Moore, Boise State University; Mark Paxton, Southwest Missouri State University; Michael Smith, Regent University; Douglas Swanson, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse; Susan Willey, Florida Atlantic University.

## Research presentation schedule

**Sunday, August 5, 2001, 4:15-5:45 p.m.**

**Panel Title: From Jesse Jackson to Elian Gonzalez: Using Topoi to Analyze Religion in the News**

**Rick Clifton Moore**, Boise State University, "Religion and Topoi in the News: An Analysis of the 'Unsecular Media' Hypothesis"

**Douglas Swanson**, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, "'Where all things are pure and of good report': The Doctrinal Theology, Religious Practice and Media Manipulation of the Christian Science Church"

**Susan Willey**, Florida Atlantic University, "Jesus Sends Dolphins to Save Cuban Child: How the Press Played the 'God Angle' in the Elian Gonzalez Story."

**Tuesday, August 7, 2001, 1-2:30 p.m.**

**Panel Title: Media and Religiosity: Cases and Effects**

**Barry Hollander**, University of Georgia, "The Effect of Survey Mode on Responses about Religious Beliefs and Behaviors."

**Guy Golan**, University of Florida, "Religiosity and the Third-Person Effect." **Top Paper**

**Min Soo Kim**, The Seoul Catholic Archdiocese of Korea, "A Public Interest in Religious Broadcasting: A Case Study of Korean Religious Cable TV."

**Wednesday, August 8, 2001, 1-2:30 p.m.**

**Panel Title: Interpreting religion content: Frames and fantasy**

**Peter Kerr and Patricia Moy**, University of Washington, "Newspaper Coverage of Fundamentalist Christians."

**Mark Paxton**, Southwest Missouri State University, "Gone Fishin': A Framing Analysis of the Fight over a Small Town's City Seal."

**Michael Smith**, Regent University, "Fantasy Theme Analysis in the interplay of Charles M. Sheldon's *In His Steps* and his Jesus Newspaper."

## RMIG and ethics mentoring workshop *Continued from page 1*

Contact Whitehouse to sign up for the workshop and she'll match you with an ethics scholar, or contact me so that I may put you with an RMIG pro. Whitehouse may be reached by phone at the office (509-777-4704) or home (509-747-3412) or via e-mail ([gwhitehouse@whitworth.edu](mailto:gwhitehouse@whitworth.edu)).

Or, contact me, Kyle Huckins, at Christian Institute of the West (806-373-7490) or home (806-359-0232). My e-mail address is [khuckins@aboutchristiancollege.org](mailto:khuckins@aboutchristiancollege.org). Make sure to reserve your spot today!

## RMIG panels and meetings at AEJMC convention

**Monday, August 6, noon to 1 p.m. – RMIG Social Reception for *The Journal of Media and Religion***, Dan Stout, Brigham Young University, will preside with Judith N. Buddenbaum, Colorado St. University. Linda Bathgate, acquisitions editor, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, N.J., will discuss the new journal.

**Monday, August 6, 2:45-4:15 p.m. – “Teaching Religion and Media: Journalism and Spirituality”** RMIG, co-sponsored by the Media Ethics Division. Presiding/Moderating: Dr. Kyle Huckins, Christian Institute of the West, Amarillo, TX. Panels: Linda Henson, Asbury Theological Seminary (Wilmore, KY); Ed Lambeth, Missouri (Columbia, MO); Paula Matabane, Howard University (Washington, D.C.); Mark Silk, Trinity College (Hartford, CT); Susan Willey, Florida Atlantic University (Boca Raton, FL)

**Monday, August 6, 8-9:30 p.m. – RMIG Business Meeting**

**Tuesday, 8:30-10 a.m. – “Incivility in the Classroom;”** sponsored with CTM. Moderating, Cynthia Frisby, Missouri; Panelists: Walter Gantz, Indiana, Gerald Grow, Florida A&M, Kyle Huckins, Christian Institute of the West, Cathy Johnson, Angelo State.

**Tuesday, August 7, 2:45-4:15 p.m. – “Keeping (or Losing) the Faith: Media and the Role of Religion in Politics”** Sponsored by RMIG and Mass Comm & Society; Moderating: Debra Mason, Otterbein College. Panelists: David Anderson, editor, Religion News

Service (Washington, D.C.); Jason Campbell, director of communications, Christian Coalition of America (Washington, D.C.); Cecile Holmes, University of South Carolina (Columbia, S.C.); Kyle Huckins, Christian Institute of the West (Amarillo, TX); Molly Marsh, assistant editor, Sojourners magazine (Washington, D.C.); Mark Rozell, political science professor, Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.

**Tuesday, August 7, 7-8:15 a.m. – RMIG Executive meeting.** Presiding, Kyle Huckins, Christian Institute of the West.



## In the news...

### New book on religion and media to be released

Stewart M. Hoover and Lynn Schofield Clark, professors at the University of Colorado-Boulder, are editors of a new book, *Practicing Religion in the Age of the Media* (Columbia University Press), to be released in fall 2001. This book is an interdisciplinary cultural studies reader, designed for use in upper-level undergrad and graduate courses. Historians, social scientists, persons in religious and media studies, anthropologists, and scholars representing several other fields are included. Scholars such as Carolyn Marvin, Ronald Grimes, and Bruce Lawrence are a few of the contributors.

### Accreditation Earned

The Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at Abilene Christian University has earned accreditation by the Accrediting Council for Journalism and Mass Communication, a designation afforded only 108 JMC programs in universities nationwide and one in Latin America. The accreditation effort was spearheaded by Charles Marler, past chair of the department. Cheryl M. Bacon is the current chair. ACU's JMC Department is only the eighth in Texas to earn accreditation, the first among institutions nationwide affiliated with the Churches of Christ, and the first among the member schools of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities.

### *The Jesus Newspaper* to be published

Michael R. Smith, associate professor and chair of the School of Journalism at Regent University, has been notified that his book, *The Jesus Newspaper*, will be published by University Press of America. The work explores the way a Congregationalist minister – the Rev. Charles M. Sheldon – tried to reform a mainstream newspaper by asking the question, “What would Jesus do?” The research is a case study of one person's attempt to reform the press using biblical principles.

# Taking the pulse? Faith-based charities are bigger than the big dailies' grasp

By Michael A. Longinow,  
Associate Professor, Journalism Program Coordinator,  
Asbury College

When George Bush took the microphone under the Notre Dame fieldhouse in late May, some would say it was predictable that he'd mention faith-based work.

Bush made no secret of his faith in his campaign, and Bush had been touting the faith-based charities idea since the beginning of this year. "Without faith, I doubt I'd be here, today," he told a National Prayer Breakfast audience in February. America's president, he said, "serves people of every faith and serves some of no faith at all."

Yet the national news media to some degree has failed to take Bush at his word when it comes to placing social service and faith-based organizations in the same sentence.

In fact, what's interesting about media coverage of Bush in opening months of this year has been the tone of fear and misgiving about the president's approaches to faith.

Editorial boards of the biggest dailies across the country are taking a nervous "wait and see" attitude toward the Bush Administration's push for faith-based charities, said Dennis Hoover in the spring issue of *Religion in the News*.

But why the nervousness? And are the big dailies necessarily an indicator of how the rest of the American media – let alone the American people – feel about the president's initiatives? Perhaps a step back, and a step out on the sidewalk, are needed here.

Faith-based organizations have been assisting the poor through social services in this country for decades.

It can be argued that the notion of social service as a mandate for federal, state and local government arose out of two religion-based notions: Christian faith-driven volunteerism within the nineteenth century, and an urban socio-cultural explosion of ethnic minorities whose strongest cohesion was the faith they carried to the U.S. from overseas.

Religion in American life isn't something to be aared. In fact, it's so integral to what we're about as a

nation that it's a kind of socio-cultural wallpaper; It's as familiar as the very oxygen we breathe.

Religion in America "restricts itself to its own resources" argues Fred Krinsky in *The Politics of Religion in America* (1968). "Its circle is limited," says Krinsky, "but it pervades it and holds it under undisputed control."

Those least fearful of the president's initiatives appear to be those scooping soup, scrubbing floors, and scribbling forms in the offices that most help the needy. They want help in doing what they do.

They're willing to cooperate to get that help. Sure the faith-based initiatives are a delicate balance. Sure they could be the stuff of upcoming tests of Supreme Court doctrines about Free Exercise and Establishment of Religion. But the bottom line is whether or not the door stays open and the homeless people can keep coming in when it's cold.

National media might take a while to unpack it, but if the Bush administration succeeds in helping the poor by tapping into the religious impulse for compassion, it will not be a new victory.



## Check it out!

If you don't have time to check out all the religion news in newspapers, magazines or websites, you might want to subscribe to The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life's listserv. Subscribers receive notices each week of the important religion stories with easy links that connect you directly to the article. In addition, the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life provides listserv subscribers with special alerts. For example, a recent "alert" provided information on President Bush's faith-based initiative along with links to the bill, H.R. 7. Regular notices provide readers with links to stories from major newspapers, magazines and wire services.

It's free and a helpful service for those of us interested in religion news. You can go to the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life website at [www.pewforum.org](http://www.pewforum.org) or check the news clips at <http://pewforum.org/news/list/php3>. For further information, you may call them at 202-955-5075 or e-mail them at [info@pewforum.org](mailto:info@pewforum.org).

# Religion & Media Interest Group Officer Roster

## Head

Daniel A. Stout  
Brigham Young University  
801 378-7551  
E-509 Harris Fine Arts Center  
Provo, Utah 84602  
daniel\_stout@byu.edu  
fax 801 378-6016

## Vice-Head & Program Chair

Kyle Huckins  
Christian Institute of the West  
806 373-7490  
Amarillo, TX 79105-9693  
khuckins@aboutchristiancollege.org  
fax 806 352-6730

## Research Committee Chair & Secretary

Debra Mason  
Otterbein College  
614 823-3377  
Department of Communication  
Westerville, OH 43081  
rnastuff@aol.com  
fax 614 891-9774

## PF&R Committee Chair

Judith M. Buddenbaum  
Colorado State University  
765-284-7429  
Department of Technical Education  
Fort Collins, CO 80523  
Jbuddenbaum@Yahoo.com  
fax 970 491-2908

## Newsletter Editor

Susan Willey  
Florida Atlantic University  
561-799-8718  
5353 Parkside Drive  
Jupiter, FL 33458  
swilley@fau.edu  
fax 561 799-8535

## Teaching Standards Committee Chair

Ken Waters  
Pepperdine University  
24255 Pacific Coast Highway  
Malibu, CA 90263  
kwaters@pepperdine.edu  
fax 310 456-3083

Susan Willey,  
RMIG Newsletter Editor  
Florida Atlantic University  
5353 Parkside Dr., MLC 246  
Jupiter, FL 33458



Debra Mason  
111 Spring Creek Drive  
Westerville, OH 43081-2549

M0350

