INTRODUCTION

SCOPE OF THIS VOLUME

The dozen articles in this volume continue the well-established policy of providing contributions to the social scientific study of religion that are current, as well as “interdisciplinary and international in scope, ‘ecumenically’ encouraging contributions from scholars of diverse religious and ideological orientations, and theoretically eclectic rather than committed to a particular school of interpretation and explanation.”

This edition is interdisciplinary with articles by authors who come from the fields of sociology, psychology, religious studies, the ministry, and pastoral care. It therefore can bring to the readers many creative impulses that emanate from encountering aspects of religion that are either outside or atypical of one’s specialized field of investigation. Much fruitful thought emerges from the pondering, hypothesizing, and theorizing stimulated by such exposures.

This volume is international, for its authors reside in Belgium, Canada, France, Japan, Wales, and the United States, and their research covers other parts of Western Europe, El Salvador, and Iceland, in addition to their countries of residence.

Volume 7 is ecumenical in the best meanings of that term, for as a whole, it reflects a general or universal orientation from the perspective of both religious faiths and the international and interdisciplinary qualities already mentioned.
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Volume 7 is eclectic, drawing upon numerous theoretical and pragmatic orientations, including the newly emerging approaches of postmodernism.

Finally, this volume is research-based, carrying both original reports of research findings and critical interpretive summaries of previously published research. Empirical research methodologies in this volume span a range from content analyses of informant interviews to fairly advanced multivariate approaches.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF CONTENTS

A confusing but significant recent development in contemporary anthropology and sociology has been the rise of postmodernism. Linked in many ways with deconstructionism and symbolic interactionism, it is easily misinterpreted and misconstrued. Lorne Dawson's paper, with its extensive bibliography, constitutes an excellent overview of this subject and of the many related issues relevant to religion. Especially noteworthy are his analyses of differences between the sociological and anthropological approaches to postmodernist ethnography, of its contributions to the understanding and study of religion, and of methodological issues in the postmodernist approach to fieldwork and the writing of ethnographic reports.

Yves Lambert's comparative analysis of several measures of religiosity in 11 Western European nations compared with those for Canada and the United States has many implications for church-state and person-society relationships worldwide. Readers who assume immutable patterns will be surprised. Trends toward increasing relativism and individualization in society at large are clearly related to denominationalism and church attendance in the nations studied, but not always in anticipated directions.

Jon Stone's report on interviews with Protestants in El Salvador provides information on their cooperative efforts with Catholics to end their nation's bloody civil war. His findings not only provide us with some generally unpublicized field data on the religious situation in that Central American country, but they also suggest that some forms of "Christian ecumenism" overarching the Protestant-Catholic divide are far more advanced than most people realize.

The central importance of fishing and whaling to the social life, symbolism, and implicit religion, as well as to the economy, of Icelanders is probed in William Swatos' research on their interrelationships and especially their relevance to the environmental movement. Considerable insight is gleaned from this study of the surprising strength of "the whale's tail."

Environmental issues also are a focus of attention in the analysis of survey findings by Eric Woodrum and Beth Davison. They use General Social Survey data to test the popular assertion that only androgynous and nurturing images
of God are conducive to environmental concern. The results of their research will surprise most feminists and environmentalists.

Many of Japan’s new religions have adopted world peace as a major theme in the belief that it can be attained through moral cultivation of individuals. Robert Kisala’s interpretive reports on the development of the concept of peace in six of the new religions and his more detailed examination of two of them clarify how they link together a doctrine of Japanese cultural superiority and an ethic of personal moral cultivation.

Three articles pertain to the clergy. The first comes from Christopher Harris and Richard Startup at the University of Wales. They point to differences between the British and Welsh Anglican Churches that contribute to differences in the roles of their clergy. Their survey provides data for comparisons with research in other nations on sacred and secular uses of time and energy, pressures the clergy feel, and their perceptions of both hope and despair.

Casual observation has long suggested that theological and faith differences among the clergy make a difference in their styles of professional practice. Some confirmation is offered by the survey research of Larry VandeCreek and Barbara Cooke, who describe pastoral care practices at one very large hospital: visits to hospitalized parishioners and in relationship to a clergy age, faith tradition, and driving distance to the hospital.

A summary and evaluation of six instruments frequently used to assess the effectiveness of ministers is presented by Allen Nauss. He provides a critique of the strengths and weaknesses of those measures, a review of some results of past research, a discussion of six significant problems of the measurement process, and an extensive bibliography.

Rene Molenkamp, Joanne Greer, and William Sneck, describe the construction and validation of a new instrument to discriminate spiritual desolation from clinical depression. The LMMI uses religious language and images and retrieves the constructs of spiritual desolation and consolation from the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola. The authors claim, with some evidence, that the LMMI can be used in many settings by a range of faith traditions.

The transition from secondary school to a college or university is a time of new experiences and, for many students, stress. Bruce Hunsberger and his associates explored this transition period with questionnaires before, at, and after the students’ arrival at a university, including several measures of adjustment, personality, and young adulthood, and complement their earlier article on “Religious Doubt” in RSSSR, Volume 5.

The final article in this volume is an analytical interpretation of empirical political data in the United States from two different perspectives: a culture war that divides conservative and evangelical Christians from religious liberals and secular humanists, and an ethnoreligious model assumes denominational membership is a major determinant of political preferences and voting
behavior. Through their analysis of the voting records of the members of the 101st Congress, James Duke and Barry Johnson show the relevance of both positions to explaining the American political scene.

SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS

We hope our readers will enjoy this collection at least as much as we have while we were putting it together. As usual, it reflects the work of numerous anonymous referees besides that of the authors and editors. Their recommendations and suggestions for improving the manuscripts have contributed much to the final revisions.

All three of us as editors have received support from our respective academic institutions—Loyola College in Maryland, Abilene Christian University, and Marquette University—for which we are grateful. In addition, special thanks are due to our editorial assistants, Agnes Jo Tepe and Valerie Lester, of Loyola College in Maryland.

As editors, we are always eager to receive good manuscripts for consideration for publication in future RSSSR volumes. Subject matter can be quite diverse, provided it relates to religion and is based upon some social research methodology, whether conventional or innovative, qualitative or quantitative. The social scientific approach to the study of religion is not limited to the work done by social scientists. It is found within a wide range of behavioral, organizational, human service, clinical, and other professions and scholarly disciplines, and within the humanities as well.

Especially appropriate are empirical reports of research and its findings, articles that review and critique the state of the art of research on particular topics having either theoretical or applied relevance, and methodological recommendations for future investigations. (Although history is often classified as a social science, and good social research always recognizes the historical background and antecedents of any subject investigated, “purely historical” accounts of past events are outside our domain.) Length limitations are not as strict as those of many journals and other serial publications, so some publishable manuscripts have as many as 50 double-spaced pages. All submitted papers that appropriately fit within our frame of reference are evaluated by editors and reviewers, for this is a refereed publication.

We are pleased to dialogue with persons considering development of a manuscript for future submission to RSSSR. Prospective authors may communicate about the appropriateness of potential submissions with either co-editor: Dr. David Moberg, Department of Social and Cultural Sciences, Marquette University, P.O. Box 1881, Milwaukee, WI 53201-1881; or Dr. Joanne Greer, Pastoral Counseling Department, Loyola College, 7135 Minstrel Way, Columbia, MD 21045-5255, Fax (410) 312-7644. Completed
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manuscripts may be submitted in quadruplicate at any time to Dr. Greer at the Loyola address.

Upon acceptance of an article, the author(s) will be asked to prepare the article on a WordPerfect 5.1 disk conforming with the publisher’s requirements. Instructions will be sent with the letter of acceptance.

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