

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a stone archway. The arch is made of dark, rough-hewn stones with lighter mortar. Through the arch, a paved walkway leads to a green lawn with several trees, some of which have white blossoms. In the distance, a brick building is visible. Two black lantern-style light fixtures are mounted on the stone walls on either side of the arch.

North American  
Undergraduate Conference  
*in*  
Religion and Philosophy  
*2008*

Friday, March 7  
Saturday, March 8  
Sunday, March 9

McKelvey Campus Center, Westminster College  
New Wilmington, Pennsylvania

# The North American Undergraduate Conference *in* Religion and Philosophy 2008

This year's conference was made possible with the support of Westminster College, St. Francis University, The North American Association for the Study of Religion (NAASR), the Consortium for Educational Resources in Islamic Studies (CERIS), and the Heinz Endowments.

The event was coordinated by Dr. Bryan Rennie, Westminster College; Dr. Arthur Remillard, St. Francis University; and Dr. David Goldberg, Westminster College.

Judges for the conference are:

- Bryan Rennie, Westminster College
- David Goldberg, Westminster College
- Art Remillard, St. Francis University
- James Leiner, St. Vincent College
- Ann Wetherilt, Emmanuel College
- Maureen Crossan, Carlow University

~ GUEST SPEAKER ~  
**Dr. Robert Abernethy**  
*“Talking about Religion”*

Veteran television news correspondent Bob Abernethy is the executive editor and host of *Religion & Ethics Newsweekly*, which he developed and created for PBS in 1997. The half-hour newsmagazine has been widely praised by critics and has won numerous awards for its thoughtful and insightful coverage of all religions, all denominations and all expressions of spirituality in American life, as well as for balanced presentation of the profound moral issues facing the nation.

Abernethy’s original proposal for the program grew out of his longtime interest in religion and in response to widespread criticism of American television’s lack of attention to religion news. Currently, *Religion & Ethics Newsweekly* airs on more than 240 public stations nationwide with a weekly audience of 570,000 viewers.

Abernethy is also the co-editor, with William Bole, of “The Life of Meaning,” published in 2007 by Seven Stories Press in New York. It is a collection of edited excerpts from some of the many insightful and eloquent observations made by those interviewed for *Religion & Ethics Newsweekly*.

Before launching *Religion & Ethics Newsweekly*, Abernethy served as a correspondent for NBC News for more than four decades, reporting from Washington, Los Angeles, London and Moscow — between 1989 and 1994 — where he covered the end of the Cold War, the collapse of communism and the Soviet Union, and the struggle to create a new political and economic system. In 1984, he took a one-year leave from NBC to study theology and social ethics at the Yale Divinity School.

Abernethy is an alumnus of Princeton University where he received bachelor’s and master’s degrees from the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. Abernethy has also received the 2003 “Distinction in Ministry Award” from the Alumni Association of Yale Divinity School and honorary doctorates from Knox College in Illinois, San Diego University, Westminster College in New Wilmington, Pa., and St. John’s University in Collegeville, Minn.

Abernethy is married to the former Marie Cheremeteff Grove and has two daughters, one stepdaughter and three stepsons. He lives in Jaffrey, N.H., and in Washington, D.C. and is a member of the United Church of Christ.

~ GUEST SPEAKER ~

**Dr. Justin L. Barrett**

*“Cognitive Science of Religion:  
What is it and why does it matter?”*

Dr. Justin L. Barrett’s primary research interests concern how natural human cognitive structures inform and constrain religious expression, making some kinds of beliefs and practices more recurrent than others. Evolutionary perspectives may broaden and deepen findings in the cognitive science of religion. Current research foci include the development of God concepts in children, cultural evolution and transmission, and philosophical implications of bio-psychological explanations of religion.

Barrett completed his bachelor’s in psychology at Calvin College and his Ph.D. in experimental psychology at Cornell University. He served on the psychology faculties of Calvin College and the University of Michigan and as a research fellow of the Institute for Social Research. He was the associate director of the International Culture and Cognition Consortium and a founding editor of the *Journal of Cognition and Culture*.

His cross-cultural, developmental, and experimental research on religious concepts has appeared in numerous books and scholarly journals, including his recent book, *Why Would Anyone Believe in God?* (2004, AltaMira Press).

Barrett co-directed Douglas County (Kansas) Young Life with his wife, Sherry Barrett, and held a position as the International Coordinator of Experimental Research Programs for the Institute of Cognition and Culture at the Queen’s University, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

He is currently senior researcher for the Centre for Anthropology & Mind, Institute of Cognitive & Evolutionary Anthropology, University of Oxford, United Kingdom. Barrett lives in Oxford with his wife, son Skylar, and daughter Sierra.

## Schedule of Events

All events will be held in the Lakeview Witherspoon Room of the McKelvey Campus Center unless otherwise indicated.

### FRIDAY, MARCH 7

**5 p.m.**

**Faculty Roundtable**

Business meeting of attending faculty to discuss the conference, particularly the criteria for judging the student presentations.

**7 p.m.**

**Guest Lecturer: Robert Abernethy**  
"Talking about Religion"

**8:30 p.m.**

**Socrates Café**

Student-led discussion following Robert Abernethy's talk, with the participation of Robert Abernethy and Justin Barrett

### SATURDAY, MARCH 8

**9-10:30 a.m.**

**Session I**  
**Student Presentations**

- Veronica Geretz, Westminster College  
"Evolution"
- Justin Lane, The University of Vermont  
"David Koresh: the Omega Alpha"
- Knut Melvaer, The University of Bergen, Norway  
"Salvaging the Savage: Talking about Primitive Religion"

**10:45-11:45 a.m.**

**Guest Lecturer: Justin Barrett**  
"Cognitive Science of Religion:  
What is it and Why Does it  
Matter?"

**Noon-1:30 p.m.**

**Session II  
Simultaneous Sessions**

**Session II-A (Lakeview Room)**

- Amanda Miller, Westminster College  
“Gender Roles within the Church”
- Natalie Suzelis, Carlow University  
“Waiting for Free Will: Existentialism’s Roots in Hellenism and Christianity”
- David Nowakowski, Saint Vincent College  
“Interreligious Dialogue as Invitation to Conversion”

**Session II-B (Mueller Theater)**

- Anastasia Wypasek, St. Francis University  
“Polish Romanticism, 1795-1863: Creating a National Identity through Messianism and Christian Universalism”
- Zoe Anthony, Westminster College  
“Eastern Orthodoxy in Current Study”
- Ronald Baumiller, Duquesne University  
“*Del Sentimiento Trágico de la Vida and die Ewige Wiederkehr*: an Essay Concerning the Immortality of the Soul”
- Dawid Karapuda, Mercyhurst College  
“The Mystic’s Mind in an Extended Examination: How Knowledge, Health and the Good Merge”

**1:45-2:45 p.m.**

**Lunch (Duff Dining Hall)**

**3-4:30 p.m.**

**Session III**

- Douglas Alan Robinson, The University of Vermont  
“Ritual, Relics, and Cognitive Theorizing: Reflections on Method in an Emerging *Wissenschaft*”
- Robin Zheng, Washington and Lee University  
“The Universe as Explained (and Unexplainable) by Science”
- Yufanyi Nshom, The University of Pittsburgh  
“Islam in North Africa”

**4:45-6:15 p.m.**

**Session IV**

- Rennie Greenfield, Westminster College  
“The Celluloid Campfire: Implicit Religion and Film”
- Amber Thompson, Waynesburg University  
“The Problem of Suffering in Judaism and Buddhism”
- Ian Pike, Emmanuel College, Boston  
“The Desire Paradox: Suffering, Salvation and Puritan Mysticism in *Paradise Lost*”

**6:30-8 p.m.**

**Awards Dinner (Duff Dining Hall)**  
Conference participants only. The winners will be announced and prizes awarded.

**8:30 p.m.**

**Socrates Café**  
Student-led discussion of the proposed topic and emerging themes of the conference.

**SUNDAY, MARCH 9**

**9 a.m.-Noon**

**Faculty Consultations**  
Attending faculty members will be available to discuss their areas of expertise with students and others.

**12:15-1 p.m.**

**Lunch & Closing Comments**  
**(location to be arranged)**

# The North American Undergraduate Conference *in* Religion and Philosophy 2010

This year's conference was made possible with the support of Westminster College, St. Francis University, The North American Association for the Study of Religion (NAASR), the Consortium for Educational Resources in Islamic Studies (CERIS), and the Heinz Lecture Series at Westminster.

The event was coordinated by Dr. Bryan Rennie, Westminster College; Dr. Arthur Remillard, St. Francis University; and Dr. David Goldberg, Westminster College.

Judges for the conference are:

- Bryan Rennie, Westminster College
- David Goldberg, Westminster College
- Arthur Remillard, St. Francis University
- Jeffrey Timm, Wheaton College
- Jeff Kisner, Waynesburg University
- Laurie Preston, Randolph Macon College



~ GUEST SPEAKER ~

**Mark Oppenheimer**

*“Scientologists and Mormons?”*

*How Two Religions Sought Legitimacy”*

Mark Oppenheimer is one of our country’s leading writers and professional speakers about contemporary religion. A frequent contributor to *Slate*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The New York Times Magazine*, and regular columnist for *The New York Times*, Oppenheimer is also the author of two cutting-edge studies of religion and popular culture. The first, *Knocking on Heaven’s Door: American Religion in the Age of Counterculture*, describes how the tumult of the 1960s affected Protestants, Catholics, and Jews in America. The second, *Thirteen and a Day: The Bar and Bat Mitzvah Across America* (2005), tells the story of Oppenheimer’s cross-country trip in search of unique bar and bat mitzvahs, from the Ozark Mountains to rural Louisiana to Alaska.

Oppenheimer takes a special interest in the spiritual lives of young people, from teenagers to people in their thirties. As a former rock music critic and a practicing review of fiction, Oppenheimer also enjoys showing how popular culture affects American religion. Whether it’s a baptism in the Coen Brothers’ movie “O Brother Where Art Thou?”, a bar mitzvah on “The Simpsons” or a funeral on “Sex and the City,” religion is everywhere on our TVs and movie screens, and Oppenheimer watches with his keen journalist’s eye.

As the former editor of *In Character*, a thrice-yearly journal of everyday virtues, Oppenheimer offered thoughtful commentary on the moral state of America. From lying in the White House to cheating in our schools, Americans constantly struggle with how to be moral in a land that sometimes seems to permit anything. Oppenheimer enjoys challenging audiences with questions and strategies about how to lead ethical lives, and he offers critical appraisals of American politics, including how elections bring out the best and worst in politicians.

Oppenheimer holds a Ph.D. in religious studies from Yale University. He has been an NPR commentator, a newspaper editor, and a visiting professor at Stanford and Wesleyan universities and Hartford Seminary. He has delivered his humorous, accessible, intellectual speeches at colleges, high schools, churches, synagogues, and civic group meetings across the country.

~ GUEST SPEAKER ~

**Ruth Mas**

*“Can We Speak of a Secular Tradition of Islam”*

Ruth Mas was born in Madrid, Spain and was raised in Montreal, Canada. While completing a B.A. degree in French-English Translation, she found herself traveling through Europe and Morocco and decided to pursue graduate studies in the field of Islam and Religion. After thorough training in classical Islamic thought with Michael E. Marmura and other scholars, she specialized in the thought of contemporary secular-liberal Muslim intellectuals. Her dissertation, “Margins of Tawhid: Liberalism and the Discourse of Plurality in Contemporary Islamic Thought,” was completed in 2006 under the supervision of Charles Hirschkind and James DiCenso. It draws on the work of Michel Foucault, Talal Asad and Judith Butler to think through the question of the constitution of modern Islamic subjects, and issues of secular-liberal governance and contemporary Islam in France.

Mas’ focus on critical and interdisciplinary thinking was recognized by Massey College at the University of Toronto in 2002, when she was awarded the Morris Wayman Prize for Interdisciplinary Research for her work on liberalism and Islam. In 2003 and 2004 she was a post-doctoral research fellow at the Institute for the Advanced Study of the Humanities, Essen, Germany, where she joined an interdisciplinary research group, “Europe: Emotions, Identities, Politics,” directed by Luisa Passerini. In 2007, she was invited to Berlin as a visiting scholar by the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at Viadrina University.

Most recently, she has pursued her critical and theoretical approach to the study of Islam at Cornell University’s School of Criticism and Theory in Ann Stoler’s Seminar “The Logos and Pathos of Empire: Durabilities of Matter and Mind.” She has also participated in the Seminar in Experimental Critical Theory, Cartographies of the Theological Political at the University of California, Irvine. Her current work focuses on the connections between liberalism and affect, and their implications for Muslim subjects.

Mas is a 2008-2009 Fellow at the Centre for Humanities and the Arts at CU-Boulder for the project “Apocalyptic Sensibilities in the Futures Past of Secular Liberal Islam.” Also the 2007-2008 recipient in the CU-Boulder IGP Seed Grant Program for the project “Transnational Discourses of the Global Islamic Community,” Mas shares project leadership with Carla Jones of the Department of Anthropology.

# Schedule of Events

All events will be held in the Lakeview Witherspoon Room of the McKelvey Campus Center unless otherwise indicated.

## FRIDAY, MARCH 26

**5 p.m.**

### **Faculty Roundtable**

Business meeting of attending faculty to discuss the conference, particularly the criteria for judging the student presentations.

**7 p.m.**

**Guest Lecturer: Mark Oppenheimer**  
*“Scientologists and Mormons? How Two Religions Sought Legitimacy”*

**8:30 p.m.**

### **Student Symposium**

Student-led discussion following Mark Oppenheimer’s talk.

## SATURDAY, MARCH 27

**9-10:30 a.m.**

### **Session I Student Presentations**

- Michael Rogers, University of Vermont  
“The Separation of Church and Sport”
- Andrew McKee, St. Francis University  
“Running into the Unknown: The Religious Dimensions of Distance Running”
- Ghady al-Rahal, State University of New York, New Paltz  
“The Duty of Generation Z”
- Timothy Rothaar, Duquesne University  
“An Exploration of Two Possible Ways of Living in Similar Societies”

**10:45 a.m.-12:15 p.m.**

**Session II  
Student Presentations**

- Matthew Longacre, University of Kentucky  
“After Peace: How an American university peace home would contribute to the reintegration of a post-treaty Israel and Palestine”
- Darius Mallon, State University of New York, Buffalo  
“Violent Conflict in the Modern World: A Comparison between Islam and the West”
- Sarah Markwardt, Waynesburg University  
“Worldviews and a Peaceful World Vision”
- Samantha Karasik, Long Island University  
“The Legitimacy of the Theology of Sin”

**12:30-1:30 p.m.**

**Lunch (TUB)**

**1:45-3:15 p.m.**

**Session III  
Student Presentations  
Maple Room**

- John Allison, Westminster College  
“Religious Pluralism and the Paradox of Choice: A Response to Dread”
- Erika Link, St. Francis University  
“Plato’s Satire: The Truth behind the Noble Lie”
- Seth Robinson, Wheaton College  
“Lured into the Court of Poetic Appeals: Toward a Creative Hermeneutics in a Dialogue between Whitehead and Vallabha”
- Zachary Piso, Allegheny College  
“Culture and Creature: A Pragmatic Defense of Interspecies Cosmopolitanism”

**3:30-5 p.m.**

**Session IV  
Student Presentations  
(Maple Room)**

- Mark Gonnella, Waynesburg University  
“The Human Predicament in Buddhism and Judaism”
- Michael Gorman, Westminster College  
“Are Cargo Cults Legitimate Religions?”
- Ashley Hampton, Randolph-Macon College  
“Randolph-Macon College and the Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church: An Exploration of Our Methodist Tradition in Student and Campus Life”
- Mitzi Steiner, Barnard College  
“Prophetic Partnership: The Shared Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Abraham Joshua Heschel”

**5:30-6:30 p.m.**

**Guest Lecturer: Ruth Mas  
(Maple Room)**

“Can We Speak of a Secular Tradition of Islam”

**6:30-8 p.m.**

**Awards Dinner**

Conference participants only. The winners will be announced and prizes awarded.

**8:30 p.m.**

**Student Symposium**

Student-led discussion of the guest lecture and emerging themes of the conference.

**SUNDAY, MARCH 28**

**9 a.m.-Noon**

**Faculty Consultations**

Attending faculty members will be available to discuss their areas of expertise with students and others.

**12:15-1 p.m.**

**Lunch & Closing Comments**

### **About Westminster College**

Founded in 1852 and related to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Westminster College is a top tier liberal arts college and a national leader in graduation rate performance, according to U.S. News Guide to America's Best Colleges. Westminster ranked third among liberal arts colleges in social mobility, according to the Washington Monthly College Guide, and is one of the most affordable national liberal arts colleges in Pennsylvania. Westminster is also honored as one of "The Best 371 Colleges" and "Best in the Northeast" by The Princeton Review, and is named to the President's Honor Roll for excellence in service learning.

Nearly 1,600 undergraduate and graduate students benefit from individualized attention from dedicated faculty while choosing from 41 majors and nearly 100 organizations on the New Wilmington, Pa., campus.

### **About Saint Francis University**

Saint Francis University, located in Loretto, Pa., offers higher education in an environment guided by Catholic values and teachings, and inspired by the example of its patron, Saint Francis of Assisi. The oldest Franciscan institution of higher education in the United States, Saint Francis University has an enrollment of 2,100 undergraduate and graduate students.

### **About the North American Association for the Study of Religion**

The North American Association for the Study of Religion (NAASR) was initially formed in 1985 by E. Thomas Lawson, Luther H. Martin, and Donald Wiebe to encourage the historical, comparative, structural, theoretical and cognitive approaches to the study of religion among North American scholars; to represent North American scholars of religion at the international level; and to sustain communication between North American scholars and their international colleagues engaged in the study of religion.