

CARTOONING AND GOOGLING GOD AND NATURAL DISASTERS: ICELAND'S VOLCANIC ERUPTION AND HAITI'S EARTHQUAKE

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with 3 Fig. and 2 Tables in the text

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Zusammenfassung

Das Karikieren und Googeln von/nach Gott und Naturkatastrophen: der Vulkanausbruch auf Island und das Erdbeben auf Haiti

Eine der beständigen Linien in der geographischen Forschungsgeschichte ist die Untersuchung der Beziehungen zwischen Mensch und Umwelt. Viele richtungsweisende Studien wurden von Kollegen mit Interesse an historischer und Kulturgeographie durchgeführt, von denselben, die auch Pioniere im Bereich der Religionsgeographie waren. In jüngerer Zeit blühte die Beschäftigung mit Themen der Religion innerhalb der Geographie durch Untersuchungen zur Geopolitik, zu gesellschaftlichen Praktiken und Institutionen, zum Alltagsleben und zu neuen, durch Migration entstandenen Mischsituationen. Untersuchungen des religiösen Gehalts von Berichten über Naturkatastrophen sind ein Beispiel für ein Thema an der Schnittstelle von Religion und Umwelt. Ich untersuchte in diesem Beitrag Leitartikel oder Hyperlinks über das

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Erdbeben in Haiti im Jänner 2010 und über den Vulkanausbruch in Island im April 2010, die mithilfe der Google-Suchmaschine erreichbar waren. Ich untersuchte und dekonstruierte auch den religiösen Gehalt von Zeitungskarikaturen über beide Katastrophen, die auf größeren Karikatur-Datenbasen zu finden waren. Es ergaben sich deutliche Unterschiede zwischen den Hyperlink- und Karikatur-Analysen. Die führenden Hyperlinks bezogen sich auf die Kommentare von Rev. Pat ROBERTSON über den angeblichen Pakt des Landes mit dem Teufel. Weniger zahlreich waren Artikel über Hilfsmaßnahmen. Konservative klerikale Kommentare dominierten auch die Hyperlinks von Google über den Vulkanausbruch auf Island. Religiöse Karikaturen über das Unglück auf Haiti handelten hauptsächlich von ROBERTSON, indem sie sich über ihn lustig machten. Die Karikaturen über Island waren weniger zahlreich und zeigten mehr Humor. Es werden schließlich auch weitere Forschungsthemen unter Verwendung von Hyperlinks und Karikaturen vorgeschlagen, die unsere Studien über Themen an der Schnittstelle von Religion und Umwelt ausbauen könnten.

Summary

One of the sustained threads in geography's disciplinary history is the study of human/environment relationships. Many landmark studies were conducted by those with interests in historical and cultural geography, the same groups that pioneered the study of religion in geography. More recently, the study of religion and religious topics within geography has blossomed with investigations into geopolitics, social practices and institutions, everyday life, and new migration mixes. Studying the religious content in the reporting of natural disasters illustrates one example of a topic where the religion/environment interfaces exist. I examine lead articles or hyperlinks about the January 2010 Haitian earthquake and April 2010 Icelandic volcanic eruption on the Google search engine. I also accessed and deconstructed the religious content of editorial cartoons about both disasters from major cartoon databases. Distinct differences occurred in the hyperlink and cartoon analyses. The leading hyperlinks about Haiti related to the comments Rev. Pat ROBERTSON made about the country making a pact with the devil. Fewer were stories about aid and relief efforts. Conservative clerical comments also dominated Google's hyperlinks about Iceland's eruption. Religious cartoons about Haiti's adversity were predominantly about ROBERTSON, mostly poking fun at him. The cartoons about Iceland were fewer and displayed more humor. This study suggests additional research topics using hyperlinks and cartoons that would enhance our studies into theological/environmental issues on the Internet as well as visualization.

1 Introduction

The study of human/environmental relationships has a long and rich tradition in geography, including the pioneering and enduring works of Karl RITTER (1822–59), Alexander VON HUMBOLDT (1845–46), George Perkins MARSH (1864), Ellsworth HUNTINGTON (1915), Harlan BARROWS (1923), Carl SAUER (1925), Ellen SEMPLE (1931), W.L. THOMAS (1956), Eric ISAAC (1960), Clarence GLACKEN (1967), Lynn WHITE (1967), Gilbert WHITE (1974), Yi-Fu TUAN (1978), B.L. TURNER et al. (1990), BUTTIMER & WALLIN (1999) among others. Many of our discipline's discussions about environmentalism, environmental determinism, possibilism and other "isms" were couched in the context of human/environment paradigms. Those interrelationships were mostly the focus of historical and cultural geographers, much less those interested in economic, social, and political topics and processes. In regards to religion, the human/physical interfaces have been studied, until recently, also mainly by those interested in historical and cultural topics. These would include the pioneering work by DEFFONTAINES (1948) on human transformations of the earth, FICKELER's (1962, pp. 108–112) discussions about ceremonial spaces and sacred natural and cultural landscapes, and SOPHER's (1967) treatise on the geography of religion. All three of these pioneers in the geography of religion considered the role that religion and belief systems played in studying human use of the earth.

In recent discussions, the geography of religion has moved from what was considered a marginal area of inquiry into a more acceptable and stronger position in the discipline. The reasons for this evolution may be the blurring of subfield boundaries within geography, the emergence of social and behavioral geography looking at contemporary society, the acceptance of scientific paradigms within geography, and the introduction of postmodern constructs and social theory in geography and in related fields. Whatever the reasons, the result has been a blossoming of geographic research on religion at all scales (see lengthy disciplinary literature reviews by KONG 1990, 2001, 2010). There are several foci of this evolving interest in religion, including the role of religious institutions, ideology, and social class (LEVINE 1986), membership patterns, ethnicity, architecture, elections, sacred spaces, missionaries, gender, post colonialism, globalization and secularization.

The human/environmental interfaces remain one of the dominant threads in much of the current research. Writing in 1990 KONG (1990, p. 367) concluded after reviewing the geography of religion research that "There is more room for geographical exploration than thus far has been attempted." She suggested that geographers look at conservation and green issues (p. 362), religious ecology and environmental attitudes (p. 365) and "environmental experience and sense of place" (p. 367). She mentioned "environmental theology," a theme addressed by DOUGHTY (1994), and noted the innovations in information and communications technologies that appeared in the early 1990s. Regarding these KONG recommended that geographers look at the effects of these technologies (E-mail, listservs, websites) on religion, moral geographies, and ecological movements.

More recent studies also echo KONG's plea. Examples include the nine articles in *GEOJOURNAL* (2006) and the four articles in the *ANNALS OF THE ASSOCIATION OF AMERI-*

CAN GEOGRAPHERS (2006). In the latter journal issue PROCTOR (2006, pp. 165–168) calls for increased theorizing when studying religion. BUTTIMER's (2006) *Afterward* challenges geographers to think about the importance of religion/environment issues at all scales and different cultures. She notes the need to study the true believers and fanatics, those committed to dialogue and those "misguided, as potential threats, targets for conversion or conquest" (p. 200). BUTTIMER asks whether geographers studying religion might also help us understand issues about "religion, politics, and poetics ... economy vs. ecology in sustainable development" (p. 200). AGNEW (2006) in his editorial introduction to a thematic issue of *GEOPOLITICS* devoted to religion wrote that geographers need to examine those scholars and religious thinkers who talk about the "cosmic struggle between good and evil" (p. 183), those apocalyptic writers who see "the EU as the Devil's work" (p. 186) or global warming serving as "a Divine purpose by hastening the melting of the polar icecaps that, in this account, will be an important part of the Tribulation" (p. 186). These comments illustrate that the geography/religion interface is recognized as a legitimate and current topic of interest to several geography communities.

2 Need for continued study on religion and the environment

While KONG, BUTTIMER, PROCTOR, AGNEW and others acknowledge the substantial and innovative contributions that enhance our understanding of the environment and religion, there remain many other topics to be studied, other datasets to be mined, and other approaches to be introduced. This study accepts this challenge to expand our thinking about religion/environment interfaces in geography by using an innovative technological database, and second, at visual representations of human responses to recent major natural disasters. The two disasters are the 12 January earthquake in Haiti and the 15 April volcanic eruption in Iceland. Both disasters received global attention for their magnitude and impacts, immediate and later, on local and regional economies and populations.

The first perspective extends the points elucidated by KONG (2001, p. 221) where she states the need to examine how "technology has influenced religious activities through religious broadcasting and computer-mediated communication (E-mail, discussion lists, websites, etc.)." She mentions the growing role of the Internet at all scales (KONG 2001, p. 226). All these innovations in virtual religious communities and communication are different from the networks, power relations, and poetics (KONG's term) of real space. In this study I examine the hyperlinks about both disasters using the Google database. The second focus is on the content of editorial cartoons about both disasters, an examination that ferrets out salient themes and images in the visual content. In short, the words or electronic text form the basis for the hyperlink analysis while the visual content comes from interpreting the cartoons.

Five main overarching questions guided this research. First, what kinds of topics were expressed on websites about these natural disasters and religion in Iceland and Haiti? Second, what type of theology or religious thought (evangelical, indigenous, agnostic, etc.) was evident in the leading stories on the Internet and in the cartoon

drawings? Third, how important were both of these global-reaching events? The answer to this question can be given by comparing the volume or number of hyperlinks in the Google search engine about each disaster and the number of cartoons accessed. Fourth, were there any differences in the religion/environmental stories on the Internet and the content of the cartoons? And, fifth, what can we conclude about these religion/environmental inquiries, not only from the use of the Internet to disseminate religious perspectives about major disasters, but also the editorial cartoonists whose major objective is to present in a small space the “visual essence” of an issue?

3 The World Disaster Map and gatekeepers and producers of knowledge

Before answering the above questions, it is important to consider the environmental and theological setting for this geographical inquiry. A hypothetical annual World Map of Natural Disasters would reveal a variety of catastrophes affecting rich and poor countries, democratic governments and military regimes, and adherents to many different faith/belief systems. Hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis, fires, volcanic eruptions, and anomalous weather conditions are but a few examples where one could plot their epicenters and destruction. Some of these disasters have minor and short term impacts on local economies and populations, while others would have devastating regional effects on urban areas, productive farming areas, and coastlines.

When major natural disasters occur and affect populations and economies, many of those impacted will seek explanations for what occurred and why. For example, why was one community spared violent storms and another obliterated? Why did the earthquake devastate one region and leave another unscathed? And why are some regions perpetually affected by megadisasters while others are untouched? Meaningful and “correct” answers to these tough questions are not easy to be provided, but as humans, we want to try and find out *the* reason or at least *a* reason that satisfies our curiosity about natural processes. While some cultures may resort to superstitions or find solace in folk wisdom, still others may see their belief/faith systems tested by plausible scientific evidence or alternative religious interpretations. It would not only be the affected populations who would seek answers, but also leaders and followers of religious and science communities. Religious leaders and believers, whether firm or agnostic in their beliefs, may seek ways to disseminate their views on global electronic networks (which is easily accomplished these days) and enter the fray with explanations for “what happened and why.” Christianity is not alone among major world and regional religions in providing or seeking explanations for horrific disasters. As DOUGHTY (1994) illustrates in his discussion of environmental theology there are many different traditions and views, even within Christianity, about creation, sacramental theology, dualistic and polycentric citizenship, the divine, process theology and deep ecology. I agree with DOUGHTY (1994, p. 361) that “Geography must embrace theology, especially in shifts from universal and absolute approaches to local theologies mindful of actual cultural settings.” In this study, I seek to unravel or detect the degree and kind

of religious expression being used by those using the Internet to inform, advocate, or pontificate their views and by cartoonists whose major goal is to inform and influence their viewing readership with some degree of humor and satire.

All cultures and societies have those individuals who are ready and willing to provide answers to the “why” questions regarding natural disasters and catastrophies. Among these especially willing to provide answers or “reasoned explanations” are those in some recognized leadership or authority capacity. The list would include earth scientists in the scientific community, for example, those who study earth history and catastrophic events and climate change scientists who map trends in greenhouse gas emissions, ice cap melting, environmental degradation, and shifting ecozones. There would also be panels of scientific communities and government environmental watchdogs which would provide some answers. There would also be leaders in the faith or religious communities who seek answers not in the scientific realm, but in a supernatural being or divine creator who they believe and/or preach is responsible for all natural processes occurring anywhere and everywhere on the planet, whether devastating to some people and regions, or exhibiting favor to others.

Religious/environmental debates are often just as much a part of the religious scholar’s worldview as they are of the environmental and earth scientist. In this context both are considered as information providers or gatekeepers of knowledge about the “whys and wherefores” of natural disaster. Their information is usually presented to their respective audiences in the form of words, charts, graphs, numbers, and maps. Articles in scientific journals and presentations at scientific conferences represent the platforms earth scientists use to provide “why” answers. They may leave to members of the social science scholarly community the task of assessing the human/societal impacts and recommending measures to alleviate any harm coming from future megadisasters. Members of faith based communities, on the other hand, will usually couch their explanations in words, including words (holy or divinely inspired) from religious documents and other texts that justify or explain why certain peoples and regions were adversely affected (or punished) while others were favored (or blessed). Religious explanations, including those couched in superstition, folk wisdom or specious logic may appease or satisfy some who are affected and also those seeking explanations for adversity. For others, religions’ interpretations or explanations may not fit their belief systems or philosophical outlook on life. Likewise, scientific explanations may satisfy some, but leave others skeptical and conflicted.

Other professionals besides scientists and members of faith communities also weigh in to provide perspectives and interpretations. These would include editorial writers, documentary reporters, film producers, photographers, poets, and cartoonists. Editorial cartoonists are also information gatekeepers; they express their worldviews or thoughts in a different way than scientists and religious leaders; they use caricatures, symbols, familiar images, and humor. Words, when used (in speech bubbles) are few and appropriate to the graphic messages. Many professional cartoonists are editorial cartoonists. That their caricatures appear alongside editorials reflects the importance they have in informing the public about timely issues. In short, it is in the visual imagery (that small “box” of symbolic imagery) where the reader sees a quick “visual” for “what happened when and why.”

4 Methodology

In studying the two different databases, viz., hyperlinks and cartoons, I used two different sources. For hyperlinks, I entered on 30 June 2010 several key words in the Google search bar to identify the lead stories. The words “Iceland volcano + religion” yielded 4.3 million hits or hyperlinks, for “Iceland volcano + God” 164,000 hits, and for “Iceland volcano + God + punishment” 46,900 hits. The “Haiti earthquake + religion” search the same day yielded 11.7 million hits, “Haitian earthquake + God” 17.9 million, and “Haitian earthquake + God + punishment” 191,000. Some of the same links, not surprisingly, appeared in both the “God” and the “God + punishment” searches. The formula Google uses in its page ranking is confidential; it is not based solely on the number of times an item is accessed, but has a quality component built in. I examined the ten lead stories in each search.

For cartoons, I accessed several websites, including Daryl Cagle’s Political Cartoons, politicalcartoons.com, CartoonStock.com, and the AAEC (Association of American Editorial Cartoonists) website. I entered the same phrases used in the Google searches: Haitian earthquake and Iceland volcano. I did not specify religious content cartoons in either search, but opted to obtain as large a base from which to identify those with a religious content. The Cagle and AAEC websites daily publish cartoons about a wide variety of different topics. On some days, there are many about a current or hot topic, for others, the “life span” is only a few days, as is frequently the case with sensational political, sports, or media topics. Both listservs also have databases from which one can obtain cartoons on a specific topic and within a specific time frame, including the day before or six months earlier. I accessed the data base from 12 January through 27 June for Haiti from 15 April to 30 June for Iceland. Both databases include some cartoons from other countries besides the U.S. I also entered in the Google Search Bar these phrases: Haitian earthquake + cartoon and Iceland volcano explosion + cartoon. I downloaded cartoons of appropriate cartoons for further analysis.

What is sought in “reading” or deconstructing cartoons are key words, symbols, images, and familiar phrases and code words associated with these two disasters. These may portray destruction and devastation, the voices of the affected and outside agencies, explanations and judgments. The pioneering source for undertaking qualitative analyses of images is Gillian ROSE (2007), especially those appearing in advertising, photographs, and museum displays. Visualization inquiries have been done using the websites of different countries, including BRUNN & COTTLE (1997) on small states and JACOBSON & PURCELL (1997) on former Yugoslavia. Other examples of visual images include studies on propaganda maps (PICKLES 1992), on popular images in National Geographic (LUTZ & COLLINS 1993), the designs of maps for new states (ZEIGLER 2002), 19th century images of Africa by Finnish missionaries (KOKKONEN 1999), banknotes and coinage (GILBERT 1999; UNWIN & HEWITT 2001; RAENTO et al. 2004), postage stamps (BRUNN 2000; RAENTO & BRUNN 2006) and flags (LEIB & WEBSTER 2007; WEBSTER & LEIB 2010). Many of these studies on visual iconographies and images are examples of what DODDS (2000) refers to as “popular geopolitics.” As ROSE and others acknowledge, one scrutinizes/reads these images carefully several times not only to extract the most useful (correct?) images, but also to classify them because of multiple

and overlapping major themes. This task is challenging whether examining postage stamps, official websites, or cartoons. What one looks for in “reading the visual” are key images, symbols, words, phrases, and familiar features about peoples and places.

Several geoinformation and geopolitical studies by geographers have looked at the content of cartoons; one by GILMARTIN & BRUNN (1998) examined how women who attended the International Women’s Congress in Beijing were depicted; another by DODDS (1996, 1998) used visual geopolitical iconography to examine the political and moral issues surrounding the Falklands War and the Bosnian War through the eyes of one cartoonist, Steve BELL. BERG (2003) looked at some of the unexpected (unintended) consequences of Estonia’s government in regards to foreign policy experts, especially in regards to discussions about border negotiations and maps. FALAH, FLINT & MAMADOUH (2006, pp. 152–166) examined the content of Arab newspapers’ cartoons in months following the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Finally, RIDANPÄÄ (2009) discussed the place of humor in geopolitical discourses and uses a Finnish comic strip about the 2005 Danish cartoon controversy regarding MOHAMMED to tease out the hypocrisy of the Finnish government’s policies. These studies suggest that cartoons are emerging as an important feature in geopolitical discourses and that geographers can make substantial contributions to the study of cartooning and visual learning.

Content analyses of websites have been done by BRUNN & LONG (2000) on the worldviews of seminaries in the U.S. South, by BRUNN (2002) on the World Council of Churches, by DAHLMAN & BRUNN (2003) on websites of nongovernmental organizations following 11 September, by KINGSBURY & BRUNN (2003) on fantasy and tourism websites following the 11 September attack, by MAMADOUH (2003) on websites by Dutch Moroccans following 11 September, by BRUNN (2004) on the websites of capital cities, by WILLIAMS & BRUNN (2005) on the major hyperlinks for Asian cities, by DEVRIENDT et al. (2009) on leading hyperlink topics associated with global climate change and the current global economic recession in 100 major world cities and in European cities by BRUNN et al. (2010b). The innovative work by ZOOK & GRAHAM (2007a, 2007b) on cyberspace and DigiPlace also is seen as an intriguing way to use the Internet to map locations of distinguishing features. Discourse analyses have been studied by BRUNN (1999) on the United Nations speeches of small states, by O’LOUGHLIN & GRANT (1990) on U.S. State of the Union addresses, by WEBSTER & SUTHERLAND (1994) on key words in U.S. presidential debates, by MYERS et al. (1996) on the news coverage of the Rwandan and Bosnian conflicts, by BRUNN & LEPPMAN (2002) on the content of a missionary magazine, and by TAYLOR & JASPERO (2003) about editorials and op-ed pieces about the causes of 11 September terrorist attacks in the U.S. These discourse analyses are important in that they scrutinize speeches for key words about issues, events, places and larger regions. EMLs (electronic mailing lists) of ethnic groups and networks of electronic scholarly communities have been studied by BRUNN, JONES & PURCELL (1994) and by BRUNN, HUSSO & PYYHTIA (1999) to illustrate the global networking of electronically disseminated information.

5 Results: Hyperlinks

5.1 Haiti

The lead hyperlinks about the “Haitian earthquake and religion” can be grouped into four major categories (see Table 1): relief efforts, televangelist Pat ROBERTSON’s comments about Haiti’s pact with the devil, the role of voodoo religion in the crisis, and probing spiritual questions about why this event occurred. There were also stories of human interest, religious aid missions, and spiritual topics. However, the tenor of the lead hyperlinks changed once “God and punishment” were inserted into the Google search bar. Over half of the stories made reference in some way to Pat ROBERTSON’s comments, either reporting on them or stating how ludicrous they were. The second leading category related to spiritual questions including “Where is God? God, were are you? And Did God Cause the Haitian earthquake?” These stories appeared within a week of the disaster striking Port au Prince.

Rev. Pat ROBERTSON, a conservative (and controversial) evangelist preacher and founder of the Christian Coalition of America and “the 700 club,” blamed the earthquake on “Haiti’s pact with the devil.” His pronouncement was far and away the leading source of stories about the earthquake and religion and about “earthquake and God” references. ROBERTSON made similar controversial comments in September 2005 following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, claiming that the hurricane was God punishing the residents for their sins.

Rank	Date Appeared	Major Theme
1.	24.1.10	Religion fills the voice left by aid organizers.
2.	21.2.10	Voodoo religion’s role in helping quake victims.
3.	14.1.10	Pat ROBERTSON’s comments about the Devil’s pact with Haiti.
4.	17.1.10	The Blame Game: God or the Devil? Faith and Reason.
5.	15.1.10	Religion and the earthquake.
6.	14.1.10	Viewpoint: the earthquake, religion and the U.S.
7.	13.2.10	Earthquake leads to increased tensions about religion; voodoo Followers see Christians spearheading donor relief efforts.
8.	13.1.10	Earthquake blamed on Haiti’s “pact with the devil.”
9.	5.6.10	United Methodist Church honors pastor killed in the earthquake.
10.	14.1.10	Why did God let people die in the earthquake?

Table 1: Most highly ranked websites on Google Search Engine about Haiti earthquake + religion. 30 June 2010.

5.2 Iceland

There were far fewer results for Iceland on all searches, perhaps because the initial human impacts of the earthquake were more severe and long lasting. The lead stories in a generic category of “volcano + religion” could be grouped into four major and overlapping categories (see Table 2): transportation delays for those traveling to and from Europe, a Palestinian cleric’s comments about God punishing the Icelanders for being a secular society, Icelanders’ freedom of religion in a secular state, and efforts to read religious “signs” about what happened and why. When the “God and punishment” phrase was included in the Google search bar, nearly all the websites included judgmental comments by clerics (in the U.S. and Palestine) as well as a popular ultraconservative and anti-OBAMA radio broadcaster. These comments railed against the Icelanders, the British, and also America, all seemingly fair game in providing an explanation for the ash that blanketed northern Europe.

Rank	Date Appeared	Major Theme
1.	17.4.10	Volcano erupts; flights over Europe stranded
2.	15.4.10	Volcano erupts; flights over Europe stranded
3.	20.4.10	Orthodox cleric: eruption a sign
4.	21.3.10	Icelanders enjoy freedom of religion
5.	1.10	Eruption was Allah’s punishment of infidels ...
6.	28.4.10	Palestinian cleric: eruption a retribution by Allah
7.	N.d.	What does the eruption have to say about being gay or religious?
8.	16.4.10	The face of the angry Iceland volcano revealed
9.	N.d.	Nightmarish face seen in the Iceland volcano
10.	N.d.	Iceland volcano “Katla” close to failure: sociocide

Table 2: Most highly ranked websites on Google Search Engine about Iceland volcano + religion. 30 June 2010.

Just as ROBERTSON’s comments about Haiti’s “pact with the devil” appeared in the Google searches about the country’s earthquake, those by religious clerics explaining Iceland’s eruption need to be presented. MARCUS & CROOK (2010) report that a Palestinian cleric preached a sermon on Hamas tv that stated the “volcano in Iceland the volcanic ash that paralyzed European air travel were sent by Allah to punish infidels and polytheists with fear and terror.” The sermon continues with attacks on America and likening the eruption to the floods in NOAH’s time:

As Allah lives, dear brothers, America – with its numbers and its equipment, with its might and its scepter, with its planes and missiles, with its war ships and with its destroyers – it has no more power against Allah than do spider webs against His power...He who made the volcanic eruption in Europe is He who brought the flood in the times of Noah (MARCUS & CROOK 2010).

Other accounts of God punishing the certain peoples for their beliefs and actions were reported by Omar SACIRBEY (2010) of Religious News Service, a major international and impartial listserv. Judgmental statements were not limited to members of one religious faith or group; rather a number seemed to want to enter the fray. SACIRBEY reports these items:

Moscow's Interfax newswire reported that the Association of (Russian) Orthodox Experts blamed the April 14 eruption – whose gigantic cloud of ash grounded transatlantic flights for more than a week – on gay rights in Europe and Iceland's tolerance of "neo-paganism."

[American] Conservative commentator Rush Limbaugh, meanwhile, said God was angry over healthcare reform.

San Antonio megachurch [Cornerstone Church] pastor John Hagee, the founder of Christians United for Israel, said God was unleashing his wrath on Britain for deciding that Israeli tourism ads actually featured parts of disputed Palestinian territories, not Israel.

Iranian cleric Hojatoleslam Kazerm Sedighi recently told his Shiite Muslim followers that immodestly dressed and promiscuous women are to blame for earthquakes.

In February, Rabbi Yehuda Levin of the Rabbinical Alliance of America warned allowing gays in the military could cause natural disasters to strike America. "The practice of homosexuality is a spiritual cause of earthquakes."

The judgment hyperlinks were accompanied by several other leading stories (HALL 2010). One took issue with these judgment preachers; it was entitled "Trust wins out – Iceland volcano apparently not God's punishment." Another was about flights being canceled and still another about Icelanders' enjoyment of their religious freedom, a story obviously on another side of the eruption than the judgment clerics.

6 Results: Cartoons

Four questions were asked in regards to the cartoons: (1) How many cartoons depicted God/Nature or God/Natural Disaster as central themes? (2) How was religion or God depicted? (3) Were there any differences in God/supernatural visualizations between those depicting the earthquake and the volcano explosion? And (4) if there were differences, what were they?

The database includes 118 cartoons of the Icelandic explosion and 193 for the Haitian earthquake. The major underlying themes for the eruption were: inconveniences especially travel disruptions (36), the eruption itself and the impacts of the resulting ash (23), the economic impacts on banking and finance (15), and Mother Nature and Global Warming (13). Only 7 had a religious content. The cartoons about the earthquake were mostly about aid to victims (74), individual and collective misery (34), and the earthquake itself (27). Religion was the main subject of 26 cartoons. When comparing the cartoon totals for the two disasters, it is clear there were sharp contrasts in the way a megadisaster is depicted in a rich country (Iceland) versus a

poor country (Haiti). Economic impacts and inconvenience are paramount in the case of cartoonists depicting Iceland and its impacts beyond Iceland, whereas devastation, misery, and aid were central themes for Haiti, one of the poorest countries, if not the poorest, in the Caribbean.

6.1 Haiti

The religious themes in the Haitian earthquake cartoons can be grouped into two major categories. Most (14) of the cartoons were about Rev. Pat ROBERTSON, the controversial television evangelical preacher mentioned above. There are various images about ROBERTSON and his claims; most cartoonists poke fun at him. In one cartoon by Jeff KORTUBA of the Omaha World Herald, ROBERTSON is standing on a pile of rubble and pointing a finger at a child reaching out for help; ROBERTSON is depicted as delivering a word from God. Others by Richard BARTHOLOMEW of Aritzans.com and Mike KEEFE of the Denver Post have ROBERTSON being struck by lightning (considered an Act of God) for such pronouncements. The man in the cartoon says “Pat Robertson’s lips just got fused together.” The woman with folded hands as in prayer looks heavenward and states “There is a God.” Mike LUCKOVICH of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution has God placing a cork in his mouth (à la MICHELANGELO and his depiction of “The Creation of ADAM”) to stop speaking (see Fig. 1), and by making a pact with the devil or some terrorist leader. In another by freelance cartoonist Deb MILBARTH, ROBERTSON is seated in front of a sign for his 700 Club and he states “Disaster because Haiti made a Pact to the Devil.” In yet another posted by Macleodcartoons entitled “Haiti Earthquake: God’s Problem,” an angel is standing on a cloud speaking with a God-like figure and stating “Earthquake worked well Lord. City Destroyed. Thousands Dead. Unfortunately Pat ROBERTSON has given all the credit to Satan.” Cam CARDOW, a Canadian cartoonist for The Ottawa Citizen, has one with a smiling ROBERTSON and the word IDIOT across his forehead. He is saying: “So, that was my sermon on how Haiti sold its soul to the devil and now I’d like to say a few words about the mark of Cain.” CARDOW has another cartoon with a religious message; this one depicts a Taliban looking fellow telling Uncle Sam, who is digging through a pile of rubble: “Die American swine! For you are immoral sons of Satan and evil beyond redemption.” To which Uncle Sam replies “Quick, give me a shovel.” In one by Paul FELL, ROBERTSON and ultraconservative talk show radio commentator Rush LIMBAUGH are seen “hanging themselves” for similar comments they made following the earthquake. In another by Jimmy MARGULIES of the Record of Hackensack, New Jersey, ROBERTSON is at table with a box of Haitian Earthquake Emergency Food Relief and in front of him on a plate is a dead crow. A cartoon by Rex MAY (or BALOO) of CARTOONSTOCK.COM has a violinist stating “Rush Limbaugh said not to donate to Haiti Disaster Relief using the White House link; so is he guilty of a “Haiti” crime?” One by Brian FARRINGTON, author of Drawing Cartoons and Comics for Dummies, has a two panel cartoon about ROBERTSON; the top half shows pile of rubble and this phrase “200,000 men, women and children buried under TONS of rubble.” The lower half has a smug looking ROBERTSON with a halo on his head saying “They were CURSED by Gawd ... He told me personally.” The

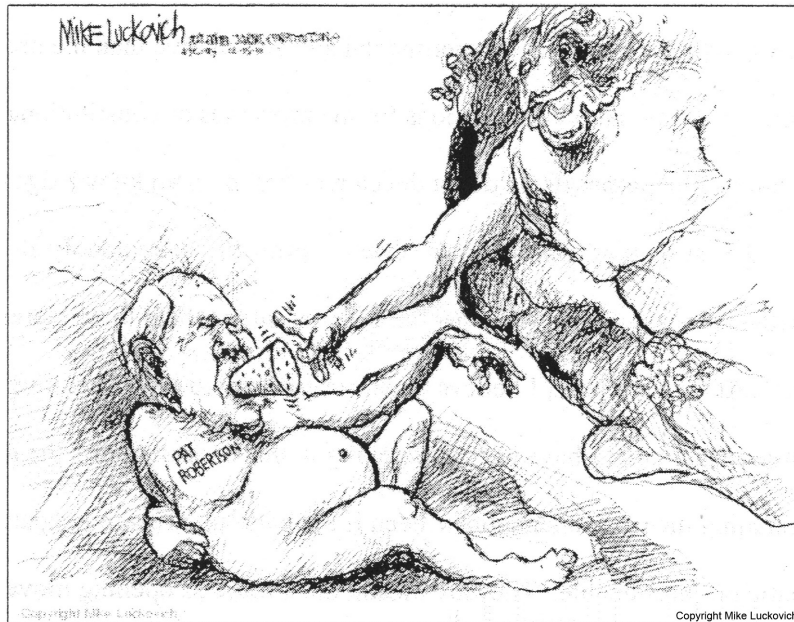


Fig. 1: Mike LUCKOVICH, Atlanta Journal-Constitution, January 15, 2010

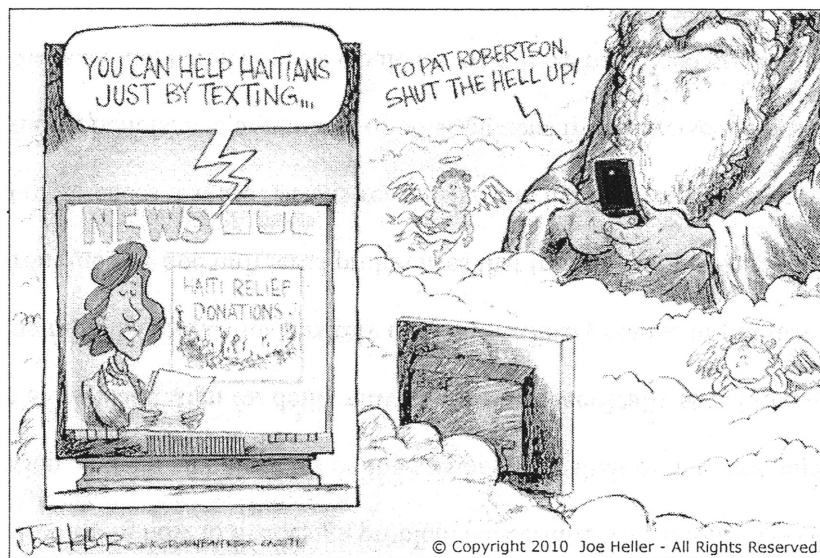


Fig. 2: Joe HELLER, Green Bay Press-Gazette, January 15, 2010

box at ROBERTSON's right reads: "One jackass buried under TONS of narrow minded ignorance." And another by Joe HELLER of the Green Bay Press-Gazette has a woman reporter on a tv screen who is asking for aid; she says "You can help Haitians just by texting ..." and at the right is a bearded grandfatherly figure (obviously God) reading from his iPod "to Pat ROBERTSON to shut the hell up" (see Fig. 2). And John COLE of the Scranton Times-Tribune has at two framed cartoon about ROBERTSON. The left frame has ROBERTSON speaking: "A nation that makes a pact with the devil deserves suffering and catastrophe. Can I get an Amen?" The right frame has a jihad looking terrorist next to ROBERTSON saying: "Amen, brother."

A second category of cartoons depicts the earthquake as an Act of God. One cartoon by Nate BEELER of the Washington Examiner has a huge pile of rubble with the left side of the cartoon acknowledging "Act of God" and the right side an image of Uncle Sam reaching out to a survivor's hand with as an "Act of Humanity." The Act of God theme is also apparent in the cartoon by Ed FISHER of the Rochester Post Bulletin who shows the destruction on the island and stairs to heaven and these famous words by the poet William COWPER: "God moves in a mysterious way. His wonders to perform. He plants his footsteps in the sea. And rides upon the storm." A third God cartoon by Mike LUCKOVICH of the Atlanta Journal Constitution is similar to MICHELANGELO's painting of God reaching out to ADAM. God in the cartoon by Steve BREEN of the San Diego Union-Tribune has God (hand extended with word "Aid" on it) reaching out to Haiti, with one arm of Haiti being the peninsula in south Haiti. The third category relates to voodoo religion on the island. John COLE of the Scranton Times-Tribune has a huge stake stuck in the midsection of a Haitian body as if to imply that the earthquake itself struck at the heart of those who believe voodooism was responsible for the earthquake. Another BREEN cartoon, similar to the MICHELANGELO painting has the "hand of God" (with the word AID on the arm) reaching out to a map of Hispaniola, with the Haiti southern peninsula reaching to touch God's hand.

6.2 Iceland

In regards to Iceland there were many fewer cartoons related to religion. In one by Signe WILKINSON of the Philadelphia Daily News, two pilots are flying a Euro Airlines plane. The man states that "Unfortunately, God is my co-pilot" (see Fig. 3). The woman is holding up a sign that reads "Hephaestus, God of Volcanoes." In another cartoon by Tom WILLIAMS from CartoonStock.com, two insurance agents are lounging on a tropic beach with a dark volcanic cloud approaching. One remarks: "I can see the Hand of God in that one." Both of these may be considered rather fatalistic. In another from CARTOONSTOCK.COM two indigenous peoples are watching the eruption from a distance. One remarks: "God is Angry. Or else the plates along the San Andreas fault have slipped again," a cartoon in which both the superstitious and scientific sides of eruption are acknowledged.

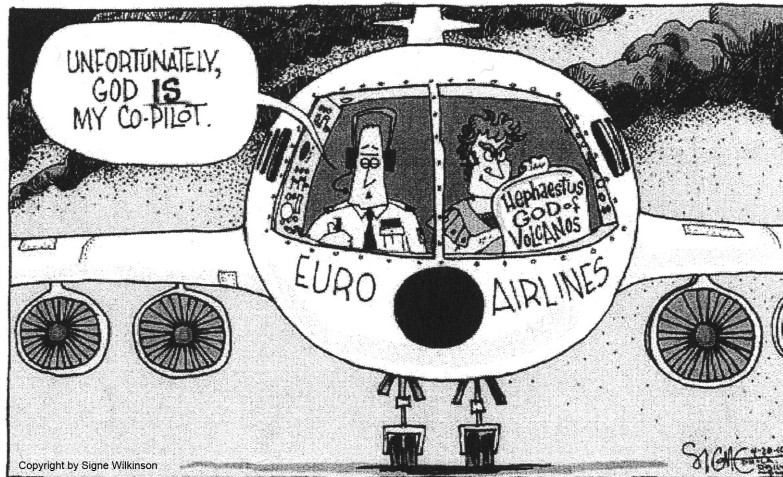


Fig. 3: Signe WILKINSON, Philadelphia Daily News, April 20, 2010

7 Discussion

Deconstructing the cartoon images of Haiti and Iceland and the Google hyperlinks about their religion and natural disasters yields four salient findings. First, there are marked differences in the religion/disaster websites about each country. The highest ranked websites for Haiti discuss one major theme, Pat ROBERTSON's controversial and highly publicized comment about the reason for the earthquake was that Haitians signed a pact with the devil. These websites far outnumbered those discussing religious/humanitarian aid efforts or even voodoo religion and Christianity as the prevailing faith/belief systems in the country. Religious agencies, including Evangelicals, Catholic priests and voodoo priests were important in providing aid (PHILLIPS 2010). The ROBERTSON sites clearly illustrated the global (at least on English language listservs) coverage of his comments and also highlighted sensational news stories about the disaster rather than any contemplative coverage of the "whys" from different faith perspectives. Religion was much more covered in websites about Haiti than Iceland. Many Haitians found their religious beliefs, whether voodoo or Christian, a comfort in the days immediately following the disaster (DREHER 2010).

Second, religious leaders contributed to the discussion of both disasters. However, there was not a vast spectrum of religious differences. Rather, the judgmental comments clearly outnumbered those of reasoned, thoughtful, and caring contributions. What is noteworthy is that there were different contributions about religion in both cases. Whereas ROBERTSON's views were dominant about Haiti's devastation, his voice was absent on the leading hyperlinks about Iceland's volcanic eruption. Rather a Hamas cleric and another American televangelist, John HAGEE, had the most religious comments. These, as mentioned above, blamed the eruption on Iceland's secular state

and especially its support of gays. One other commentator entered the Icelandic fray, American radio commentator, Rush LIMBAUGH, who blamed the ash that reached Europe as God's punishment for the American health care program.

Third, the mention of God and Satan and references to God and Satan appear in different forms. In the case of the Haitian cartoons, there are two distinctly different caricatures. One has, not surprisingly, ROBERTSON using his devil's comment to express wrath and judgment on the Haitian people. A number of other cartoonists express God as a lightning bolt that struck ROBERTSON for his comments. The mystery of God in trying to make sense of the earthquake is expressed by one cartoonist in the words of COWPER's poem "God moves in mysterious ways." Another cartoon has two frames, one frame showing destruction and labeled "An act of God" and other those working to save survivors that was labeled "An act of humanity." A few of the Icelandic cartoons made reference to God in somewhat different ways, including seeing the hand of God in the clouds of an impending disaster and God in the heavens. The Icelandic cartoons clearly reflect mixed images about God and disasters; they also made references to God in humorous contexts, as the God of Fire is one's co-pilot and another declaring that "God is angry," hence the eruption. Both are expressions of many people living in both traditional and postmodern societies who retain beliefs in superstitions, including seeing the hand of fate or supernatural operating in destructive natural events.

Fourth, what is surprising is that there were less than a handful of discussions and illustrations about science/religion issues. One may have thought that when mega-disasters occur of the magnitude they did in both countries, that there would be more websites and cartoons depicting either conflicting or corroborative accounts about the science/religion interfaces. Very few websites looked at God/nature/compassion themes, rather the judgment (ROBERTSON et al.) view prevailed. Almost none of the nearly two dozen cartoons about Haiti expressed these interfaces. This topic is one that could be examined in historical or contemporary contexts (LIVINGSTONE 2002).

While the judgmental side of the religion/disaster relationships is paramount in the hyperlinks and editorial cartoons, there are other issues about these relationships that are somewhat below the surface. Bits and pieces of the "why/so what" questions appear in the websites and can be subtly detected in some of the cartoon captions. SACIRBEY (2010) succinctly and thoughtfully sums up some of the major questions, which I consider are not dissimilar from those geographers with interests in environmental theology and religious environmental movements. He writes that what many scholars find fascinating about "nature's fury that attracts theological interpretation" is that it presents an opportunity to bring in new converts. SACIRBEY quotes biblical professor Steven FRIESEN from the University of Texas, Austin:

Natural disasters are disruptive. When there's a disruption, people's worldviews are shaken and need to be repaired. . . . It's a long running theme in American culture that God works to bring people into changing their worldview.

SACIRBEY also notes that "Who accepts these proclamations and who doesn't often depend on how a believer views God: benevolent, wrathful, active, passive or maybe something less defined, like a cosmic force." One can certainly discern this "mix" of religious/spiritual thought in the websites and cartoons.

Writing about the notion that our worldviews about disasters tend to confirm our own beliefs, FRIESEN wrote this about HAGEE's comments:

There's no logical connection (between Britain's ad policy and the volcano), but because he is already convinced that God works to protect Israel, he believes that God made the volcano erupt to punish Britain.

Those who use divine judgment claim to have special powers, a position not all clergy would find agreement. BRESSEN (2010), a geologist who studies disasters, wrote that: "Natural events or presumed catastrophes will always lure from their hideouts religious fanatics and other self declared experts." SACIRBEY quotes Joel HUNGER, board member of the National Association of Evangelicals, as stating that "Speculating that disaster happens because sin has reached a certain level puts God in a really bad light." Rabbi Michael LERNER, president of the Network of Spiritual Progressives, wrote that: "You start blaming the victims of a process that is a result of something that they had nothing to do with." This message comes across in many of the Haitian cartoons about aid, including a powerful one by Swedish cartoonist Ollie JOHANSSON of a woman holding a baby amidst destruction and asking "Why?" LERNER does reject specific cause-effects between "specific behaviors and specific disasters," but does acknowledge that:

Human actions can still cause natural calamities. In short, global warming isn't an early taste of the fires of hell sent by God, but rather a very natural reaction to human action. God has communicated to us that there is a connection between the physical world of the planet and whether we follow the command to be good stewards of the planet.

Finally, amidst the serious nature of the discussion regarding religion's role in these disasters, humor has crept in, especially in the case of Iceland's disaster. KIM (2010), a Methodist minister in Wales, provides some interesting commentary in his log:

It is a mistake to think that the volcano is not God's judgment. It most certainly is. It is just that it is not retributive judgment, the default position of false prophets, but a restorative judgement. How so? Here are five reasons:

- 1) *The unprecedented shutdown in air traffic has resulted in jet-free blue skies, less atmospheric noise, and a stunning display of the Northern Lights. "Chill," says the Lord; "be still; listen; look!"*
- 2) *Despite the fact that the volcano has been a pain in the ash, nevertheless, some scientists are claiming that the pace of global warming will be marginally slowed. God is green!*
- 3) *Iceland – Iceland! – this tinpot icebox of a country hits the news. God raises the humble!*
- 4) *The unpronounceable name of the volcano, Eyjafjallajökull, has turned normally word-perfect newsreaders into a laughingstock. God humbles the proud!*
- 5) *The sulphuric smell of the volcanic gases is suggestive of egg farts. One woman in the path of the fumes said that at first she thought they emanated from her young daughter or the animals in the field. God has a sense of humor!!*

8 Concluding remarks

This inquiry into the religious content of two recent natural disasters introduces new perspectives and databases for those interested in nature/society and human/environmental studies. Underlying the coverage of two major disasters on the World Wide Web and in editorial cartoons illustrate a number of related topics on Iceland and Haiti and beyond that might be pursued. I suggest six.

First, I think it would be worth examining the timing of the key items ranked by Google and also the appearance of cartoons. For example, what were the highest ranked sites that appeared in the first week following the 12 January earthquake in Haiti and the 15 April eruption in Iceland? How did the ranking of these top entries change after the first two weeks, the first month, and the first six months? A similar time inquiry could be directed at the coverage of Iceland's eruption. It can be noted that a review of the same key words in late October 2010 yielded many of the same top reports/stories that appeared four months earlier; and many had exactly the same ranking. One exception was that the link about Pat ROBERTSON's declaring "Haitians pact with the devil" went from a number three to a number seven position. And the Orthodox and Palestinian clerics whose positions were among the top six items for the Icelandic eruption in June were absent from the top ten links four months later. It appears that the sensational stories of these clerics with outspoken views were replaced by videos and Wikipedia entries.

Second, it would be interesting to compare the websites and cartoon content with major disasters in other regions, for example, tsunamis in Southeast Asia, tropical cyclones in South Asia, and major earthquakes in China, Iran and Chili. Is the "mix" of lead stories and cartoon themes similar to those coming from Europe and North America? Could it be that there is less international coverage of disastrous disasters outside Europe and North America, even when there are more deaths and destruction? Could it be that extensive website and cartoon coverage is mostly a First World phenomenon? An indepth analysis into other disasters in other world regions should also investigate the religious content of websites and cartoons. I would expect the coverage will be substantially different both in the number of websites about the natural disaster and the themes of cartoons.

Third, we would benefit from knowing more about the editorial cartoonists themselves. Where do most live? How many live in First World countries? How many cartoonists from Japan, China, Russia, India, Brazil, and Mexico depict natural disasters and especially with any religious reference? I would expect that the majority of cartoonists live in the First World and contribute to the global content of any cartoon topic; the worldviews and caricatures of Third World cartoonists would likely be quite different.

Fourth, it would be worth comparing religion/environment interfaces in light of major technological disasters, such as the December 1984 gas explosion at Bhopal, India, the April 1986 Chernobyl [Čornobyl'] nuclear reactor explosion, or the 20 April 2010 BP explosion and spill in the Gulf of Mexico (36 million hyperlinks as of 7/7/10 and 12 million on 10/28/10). This explosion was headline news in Britain and the U.S., but also a source of editorial cartoons from around the world. What were the key images?

Fifth, research on cartoons about disasters as well as hyperlinks should be conducted in languages other than English. Cartoonists outside the country of the event are likely to have a different perspective on the event, including the personalities or guilty parties involved. In a similar fashion entering words in German, French, Spanish or Chinese into the Google Search Bar would likely yield not only a different number of total hits than in English, but also different rankings.

Finally, there are questions about “morality about place” that also might be considered. SACK (1997, 1999) looks at this morality/geography interface. BRADEN (2002) considers this thinking from a Christian perspective, especially places or settings associated with good and evil. While she does not focus on natural disasters, we could consider the moral qualities of places that are affected by persistent or aperiodic disasters from Christian and other belief perspectives. JEWETT & LAWRENCE (2003) address an interesting perspective on American religion, viz. that Captain America (their term) or a fantasy-driven civil religion is associated with a zealous nationalism built on fantasy and superheroes who are basically antidemocratic and associated with Old or First Testament prophets (EDWARDS 2003; JOHNSON 2004). Perhaps ROBERTSON’S messages about environmental judgments resonate with those seeking or seeing linkages between a judgemental religion and anti-democratic values.

There is no question that there are additional topics, approaches, and perspectives that can be pursued by using print and visual archives and databases and new technological sources, such as the Internet. Whereas a number of geographers studying religion previously lamented the lack of research being conducted on religion and faith based communities or saw the field as not on the “discipline’s radar screen” (PROCTOR 2006, p. 166) or of “moribund interest” (KONG 2010, p. 1), from my perspective the study of religion is one of the rapidly evolving, creative, and interdisciplinary foci of inquiry by human and human/environment geographers. HENKEL (2006, p. 38) states that even with the events of 11 September 2001 many geographers “still regard it [the study of religion] as a marginal field.” I agree with KONG (2010), HENKEL (2006) and PEACH (2006) that these are exciting times to study religious topics, because of global migration shifts, new demographic mixes (gender, age, income), emerging sacred and secular landscapes, and new urban caring mosaics. PEACH extends this optimism in his statement that “religion may now be a more important variable for socio-geographic investigation than race or ethnicity” (PEACH 2006, p. 353).

Much of this optimism comes from recent books (PARK 1994; MORIN & GUELKE 2007; STUMP 2008) and the recent extensive and rich literature reviews by STODDARD & PROROK (2003), HARVEY (2006), and KONG (2010), but also thematic issues of sections of journals, including four articles and an Afterward in the ANNALS OF THE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN GEOGRAPHERS (2006), nine articles on historical and contemporary church-state relations in Europe published in GEOJOURNAL (2006), seven articles in GEOPOLITICS (2006), seven and eight articles in The PENNSYLVANIA GEOGRAPHER (1997 and 1998 respectively), 18 articles in an International Geographical Union publication edited by WARDENGA & WILCZYŃSKI (1998), three articles in the SOUTHEASTERN GEOGRAPHER (2000), five articles in the CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR’S REVIEW (2002), three articles in the INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR URBAN AND REGIONAL RESEARCH (2002),

seven articles in *SOCIAL AND CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY* (2002), five articles in *POPULATION, SPACE AND PLACE* (2005), twelve articles in *GEOJOURNAL* (2006), nine articles in *ACTA UNIVERSITATIS CAROLINAE GEOGRAPHICA* (2009), and three articles in the electronic journal of *GORABS* (Geography of Religion and Belief Systems) of the Association of American Geographers. There are many path-breaking scholarly inquiries that move beyond earlier and valuable works on cultural and historical dimensions into new subject areas that include geopolitics, tourism, knowledge production, gender, sustainability and also large-scale civil and social engineering projects (BRUNN 2010).

Geographers with interests in environmental topics would be advised to pursue geography's interfaces with religious studies and theology. WUNDER (2005) advances this dialogue with his examination of the interfaces between the geographies and sociologies of religion, with a focus on the meanings of secularization. Similar mentions of the need for religion/geography scholars have been made by STENMARK (1995) on environmental sciences/religion themes in everyday life, by HANEGRAFF (1996) and BELYAEV (2008) looking at New Age religion in western societies, and by BILLINGE (1986) more than two decades ago. Geographer DOUGHTY (1994, p. 321) writing more than a decade ago has also expressed continued efforts to promote the geography/theology bridge "as theology shifts from universal and absolute approaches to local theologies mindful of actual cultural setting." But both fields must ground themselves in stories that are historically and spatially satisfying and fulfilling" and provide "a dialogue about our growth in "cosmic consciousness." BOYLE (2010) raises intriguing questions about Christianity's challenges facing interfaith and intercultural worlds that are basically non-Western. I also agree with PROCTOR (2006, p. 192) when he writes that theocracy and ecology, especially as related to power, are important to examine in any society. Religion, he believes, is just as important as postcolonialism in "building a more peaceful and equitable world" (p. 165). KONG (2010, p. 16) also stresses the need for geographers to engage with religious scholars (see KNOTT 2005; TWEED 2006; PROROK 2007). She also makes the point that in future research, geographers would be advised to not only look at macro/global topics, but also what is happening in everyday life at local scales (p. 10). The importance of the local communities is illustrated by BRUNN et al. (2010a) in their study of promoting conflict tourism along the Catholic/Protestant divide in Belfast, by PACIONE (1990) and also by STUMP (2008, p. 384), who acknowledges in his concluding paragraph that "religious systems serve in basic ways to ground the sacred within the world of everyday life." And "religion in its many different expressions represents a complex and vital issue in the geographical study of humanity." SACK (1997) writes that as moral agents "we must understand the consequences of our actions on nature and culture, locally and globally" (p. 2). This "geographic awareness focuses our will on our common purpose as geographic agents – transforming the earth and making it our home" (p. 257). Secularization, however defined, is another topic of interest to those interested in faith/belief systems and postmodern; however KONG (2010, pp. 9–11) and WILFORD (2010) suggest we proceed cautiously in our interpretations of these often ephemeral and fragmented "sacred archipelagos" in religious landscapes. The calls for geographers to pay more attention to the issues about theology, scale, and everyday experiences in "the geographical

contexts of religious thought and practice” (p. 200) and also to address global harmony with a religious face are summarized well by BUTTIMER (2006, p. 201):

Geographers today might well reflect more carefully on global evidence of ways in which religion is today influencing the emerging patterns of human behavior on the surface of the earth. To seek better understanding of indigenous modes of understanding nature, seasonality, and sacredness does not in any way imply a celebration of pseudoscience or superstition. On the contrary, it amounts to admitting that contemporary humanity needs to remember that harmonious ways of dwelling on Planet Earth.

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