

## Vice President

The Vice President serves on the Executive and Program Committees, as well as on the Board of Directors. He will be in line to be confirmed President-Elect in 2017 and President in 2018. During his tenure, the Vice President will have the opportunity to affect AAR policy in powerful ways; in particular, during the presidential year, the incumbent makes all appointments of members to openings on committees.

### David P. Gushee

Rev. Dr. David P. Gushee is Distinguished University Professor of Christian Ethics and director of the Center for Theology and Public Life at Mercer University. He is the author or editor of twenty books and hundreds of articles in his field. His books include *Righteous Gentiles of the Holocaust* (1<sup>st</sup> edition, Fortress Press, 1994; 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Paragon House, 2003), *Kingdom Ethics* (Intervarsity Press, 2003; translated into eight languages), *Religious Faith, Torture, and Our National Soul* (Mercer University Press, 2010), *The Sacredness of Human Life* (Eerdmans, 2013), *Changing Our Mind* (Read the Spirit, 2014) and *Evangelical Ethics* (Library of Theological Ethics, Westminster John Knox, 2015).

Gushee accompanies his scholarly production with church work (First Baptist Church, Decatur, GA, and speaking appearances at churches around the country), social justice activism (human rights, anti-torture, creation care, anti-death penalty, LGBT acceptance), opinion writing (*Washington Post*, *Huffington Post*, *Baptist News Global*, now a featured columnist for *Religion News Service*), board service (Sojourners, Center for Victims of Torture, past vice-chair of Public Religion Research), interfaith engagement (American Jewish Committee, Christian Leaders Initiative), and domestic and global media consultation. He has taught or lectured on every continent, with endowed lectures in New Zealand, Holland, and Switzerland in 2015.

### Statement on the AAR

There is no question that the American Academy of Religion is the world's premier organization for scholars of religion. Those who are elected to leadership positions in AAR bear considerable stewardship responsibility. They must protect what has been built, while passing along an even stronger organization for the next generation.

If I am elected to serve in leadership for AAR, I will pursue the following five priorities:

(1) *Improving placement opportunities for newly minted scholars.* The economic crisis of 2007–2009 is (supposedly) over, but by all reports it remains very difficult for most new graduates in our field to find academic placement. Besides creating considerable hardship for graduates, this placement crisis threatens the long-term viability of our guild, especially if we lose a generation of scholars who must go and find other work. We need to think creatively and globally about every conceivable way to increase placement opportunities for new religion scholars—preferably in full-time, tenure-track teaching posts, but in other types of placement as well.

(2) *Demonstrating the critical significance of the study of religion in contemporary higher education.* One reason for placement difficulties is because of cuts in religion faculty positions, in all kinds of different institutions. The reasons for these cuts vary, but what ought to be of greatest concern to us are cuts in religion faculty either as a) part of an overall diminution of commitment to the liberal arts and humanities, or b) the mistaken notion that religious studies in particular is not all that important in a supposedly more secular society and/or world. We need to contribute our share to the overall struggle of humanities scholars for the survival of liberal education, of course, while demonstrating every way we know how that our global context requires more rather than less understanding of the world's religions.

(3) *Ensuring that AAR is perceived as a valuable, central context for every kind of scholar in religion.* I think we have reason to be concerned that for many scholars the annual AAR meeting is becoming primarily important for its auxiliary or related meetings rather than for the AAR meeting itself. To the extent that this occurs because AAR is seen as not particularly hospitable to, say, confessional or constructive theology, or more conservative religious viewpoints, this is a matter worthy of our attention.

(4) *Challenging narrow understandings of scholarship and professional excellence in our particular guild.* The public significance of religion, and scholarship in religion, and communication about religion—these are truisms in our field. And yet many universities (and seminaries) still tenure and promote religion scholars based on a very narrow understanding of what kind of publication “counts” as scholarly. But this demands reconsideration. In our field, publication in religious presses is (or should be) significant, not just publication in university presses. Publication online and in short form matters, not just lengthy monographs in peer-reviewed journals. Social media matters—immensely. What might it look like for AAR to advance a new paradigm, or paradigms, of scholarship and professional excellence in religion?

(5) *Training religion scholars for contemporary public communication, and opening doors to those worlds.* One goal here would be to contribute to the placement of more and more religion scholars every year into religion news work, ranging from serving as sources for news stories to becoming regular bloggers or columnists. Another goal is to train religion scholars for contemporary national secular media opportunities and to midwife TV, radio, and online booking opportunities for scholars.

These five priorities share certain common themes. All speak to the ongoing and future relevance, vitality, and visibility of scholarship and scholars, in religion. All seek to maximize public understanding of our work and therefore better public engagement with religion—beginning with our students, and extending into the media-consuming public and the wider world. Success in achieving these goals would be very good for our scholars, and also very good for the various communities that we serve.

### R. Kendall Soulen

R. Kendall Soulen is professor of systematic theology at Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, DC. He also directs Wesley's Master of Theological Studies Program, including its dual degree offering in cooperation with American University's School of International Studies. A graduate of Yale (BA, '82; PhD '92) and Emory (MDiv '86), he has been active for over two decades in interreligious study, teaching, and publication, with special emphasis on Jewish-Christian and Jewish-Christian-Muslim relations. He is the author of many works that explore Christian supersessionism and the contours of a post-supersessionist Christianity, including *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Fortress Press, 1996) and *The Divine Name(s) and the Holy Trinity*, vol. 1: *Distinguishing the Voices* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2011). He has taught and lectured throughout the United States, as well as in the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, and South Korea. Institutions that have supported his research include the Louisville Institute, the Pew Evangelical Scholars Program, the Center of Theological Inquiry, the University of Göttingen, and St. Andrews University. His other book projects include a textbook coauthored with his father, Richard N. Soulen, and now in its fourth edition, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2011).

### Statement on the AAR

Founded in 1909, the organization we know today as the American Academy of Religion was five years old when planet Earth suffered its first global war. A century later, the family of nations teeters again on the edge of disaster. The present crisis differs from the earlier one in part because of the greater role played in it by differences of religious practice and conviction. Of course, we cannot separate this factor from many others, political, cultural, and economic. But neither can we reduce it to them, as though religion were merely the puppet of other forces. If this time the human family averts catastrophe, it will be, in part at least, a success of religious imagination, courage, and insight. If we fail, it will be a religious failure too.

The AAR is the premier organization capable of illuminating religion as a force that both shapes and is shaped by the whole of human experience, for good and for ill. Frankly, what we need at this moment in history are as many interesting and rigorous ways of studying religion as possible. Vital to this end, I believe, is the AAR's energetic embrace of scholarly perspectives that take their methodological stance both outside and within communities of faith and practice. This embrace is uncomfortable at times, but it is also the source of tremendous intellectual vitality. Descriptive approaches to religion and traditions of normative theological reflection each have their own integrity. But both gain by sustained, critical engagement with the other. The AAR should advocate vigorously and equally for both kinds of scholarship, and it should be strategic about creating greater opportunities for dialogue and cross-pollination between them.

Originally a mostly homogenous guild, the AAR has become more representative of the world's religions and their practitioners with each passing decade. This fact is the chief glory of the AAR over the first century of its existence, and one we must cultivate with zeal. But I believe we can do more to bring our diversity into fruitful interaction, not only along the methodological lines mentioned above, but in other ways as well. Younger scholars are increasingly expected to have competence in more than one religious tradition. Our students are increasingly interested in how religious traditions understand and interact with each other. The AAR can do more to encourage conversations that cross religious, disciplinary, and regional lines by focusing on common themes that resonate within our multiple constituencies. An example of what I mean is a session I took part in several years ago entitled “Election and Supersessionism in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.” Originally proposed by the Scriptural Reasoning Group, the session was ultimately cosponsored by the Study of Judaism Section, the Study of Islam Section, and the Interreligious and Interfaith Studies Group. Multiple cross listings in the program helped to ensure a large, diverse, and highly engaged audience.

Whatever our hopes for the AAR may be, they have good prospects for success only if our youngest scholars do too. The AAR must be a tireless and creative advocate on their behalf at every step of their vocational journey, including at the very beginning. I believe this must include urging greater transparency from PhD awarding institutions regarding their success rate in dissertation completion, job placement, and professional advancement after five years. The pilgrimage of the young religious scholar is arduous enough without beginning in the dark.

Like religion itself, the AAR is a precious and fragile mixture of body, mind, and spirit. It is worth cultivating for its own sake, and for the light it can offer in difficult times.