



# PLENARIES



## Religion Journalism and Religion Scholars: To 2020 and Beyond

Saturday, 11:45–12:45 PM

David Gushee, Mercer University, Presiding

We find ourselves in a moment in which journalism is changing rapidly, with a routine downgrading of coverage of religion, while the AAR has rewritten its mission statement to elevate enhancing the public understanding of religion to coequal status with fostering excellence in the academic study of religion. This panel gathers six of the most significant religion reporters/editors in the United States for a discussion of the current state of religion coverage in US media, the role of scholars of religion in contributing to sound public understanding of religion, and the ways scholars eager for access to media can learn how to play the media game as it is currently played.

Panelists:

Elizabeth Dias, *Time*

Laurie Goodstein, *New York Times*

Emma Green, *The Atlantic*

Jerome Socolovsky, *Religion News Service*

Niraj Warikoo, *Detroit Free Press*

Jeremy Weber, *Christianity Today*



Elizabeth Dias



Laurie Goodstein



Emma Green



Jerome Socolovsky



Niraj Warikoo



Jeremy Weber

## AAR Presidential Address: David Gushee — In the Ruins of White Evangelicalism

Saturday, 8:00–9:00 PM

Laurie Patton, Middlebury College, Presiding

David P. Gushee is the Distinguished University Professor of Christian Ethics and Director of the Center for Theology and Public Life at Mercer University in Georgia, where he has the privilege of teaching both college and seminary students. He is the author or editor of over twenty books, dozens of book chapters, and thousands of opinion pieces. His most important books include *Righteous Gentiles of the Holocaust: Genocide and Moral Obligation*, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*, *The Sacredness of Human Life: Why an Ancient Biblical Idea is Key to the World's Future*, *Changing Our Mind: The Landmark Call for Inclusion of LGBTQ Christians*, and *Still Christian: Following Jesus Out of American Evangelicalism*. Working with Colin Holtz, he has just completed *Moral Leadership for a Divided Age: Fourteen Leaders Who Dared to Change the World*, to be released in October 2018.

Raised Roman Catholic in northern Virginia, in high school Gushee wandered into a Southern Baptist church where he had a born-again experience that entirely changed the course of his life. Pursuing Jesus and the pastorate, he attended Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, serving in student ministry and eventually becoming an ordained Southern Baptist minister. In seminary, however, studying with the late Glen Stassen, Gushee also discovered the discipline of Christian ethics, which he pursued with a doctorate at Union Theological Seminary in New York.



David Gushee

For thirty-five years, Gushee attempted to be both a Southern Baptist Christian, and an evangelical Christian, while also serving faithfully as a Christian ethicist in the tradition he had learned at Union Seminary. He became well-known on the evangelical side of the Christian fence, writing and lecturing globally and gaining influence as one of progressive evangelicalism's most important moral thinkers. He also developed a following as a public theologian, with extensive media work and opinion writing in such places as *Beliefnet*, *Christianity Today*, *Huffington Post*, *Baptist News Global*, and *Religion News Service*. His scholarship, leadership, and activism against US-sponsored torture in the George W. Bush years drew national attention.

In 2014, Gushee fell from the evangelical firmament after publishing *Changing Our Mind*, an analysis of the LGBTQ question within Christianity that ended with his articulating a call for full and unequivocal inclusion, a position which he believed reflected core Christian ethical norms that he had applied to other questions throughout his career. Gushee's spiritual and intellectual reflection since 2015 has been deeply affected by his disillusionment with white American evangelicalism and his attempt to consider where he has been, what he has learned, and where he goes from here.

In this presidential address, Gushee will perform "religion in public" in a confessional vein. Beginning with the claim that the moral credibility of white American evangelicalism stands in ruins, that he has been complicit, and that white evangelicalism lacks the resources within itself to address its moral collapse, Gushee turns to historic and contemporary African-American intellectual resources, seeking within them an answer to two basic questions: What went wrong with white American (evangelical) Christianity? Where might redemption be found?

Panelist:

David Gushee, Mercer University

## Jim Wallis: A Theology of Public Discipleship

Sunday, 11:45–12:45 PM

David Gushee, Mercer University, Presiding

Jim Wallis is president and founder of Sojourners in Washington, DC, a non-profit faith-based organization, network, and movement whose mission statement calls for “putting faith into action for social justice.” He is editor-in-chief of *Sojourners* magazine and website which has a combined print and electronic media readership of more than a quarter million people with several million unique visitors to the website, *sojo.net*, each year.



Jim Wallis

Wallis is a bestselling author, public theologian, national preacher, social activist, and international commentator on ethics and public life. His latest book, *America's Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege, and the Bridge to a New America* was released in January 2016. Wallis has written eleven previous books, including *The (Un)Common Good* and the New York Times bestsellers *God's Politics* and *The Great Awakening*. He is a frequent speaker in the United States and abroad, has written for major newspapers, does regular columns for Huffington Post and TIME.com, and appears frequently on ABC, CNN, MSNBC, Fox News, and NPR; on shows from Jon Stewart's Daily Show to the O'Reilly Factor and Sunday shows like *This Week* and *Meet the Press*. Wallis also teaches at Georgetown University and has taught at Harvard University. He served on President Obama's first White House Advisory Council on Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships and as the chair of the Global Agenda Council on Values of the World Economic Forum.

In this address, Wallis will reflect on lessons learned during his fifty-year career attempting to bring Christian faith into action for social justice and the common good in the United States and around the world.

Panelist:

Jim Wallis, *Sojourners*

## The Public Religion Scholar in a Social Media Age: Risks, Rewards, Reverberations

Monday, 11:45–12:45 PM

David Gushee, Mercer University, Presiding

Today there are many scholars who still (attempt to) confine their work to the traditional venues of the classroom and the academy, while there are others who become public figures in the social media universe either as a career strategy or as a result of their work or embodiment becoming controversial in current socio/political conflicts. Whether visibility comes as a result of strategy or wholly unintentionally, scholars who become social media lightning rods often experience both personal and career risks, including job loss and threats to their safety and well-being. On the other hand, scholars who Go Large on social media also experience the opportunity to reach an audience for their work that would be unimaginable for traditional academics. This panel gathers together religion scholars who have experienced the risks, rewards, and reverberations of becoming public figures, and often lightning rods, in the new social media age.

Participants:

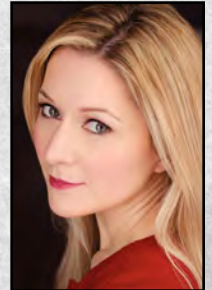
Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., Princeton University  
Larycia Hawkins, University of Virginia  
Candida Moss, University of Birmingham  
Simran Jeet Singh, Trinity University  
Najeeba Syeed-Miller, Claremont School of Theology



Eddie S. Glaude, Jr.



Larycia Hawkins



Candida Moss



Simran Jeet Singh



Najeeba Syeed-Miller