

## Journalists Name Top Ten Religion Stories of 2005

**R**ELIGIOUS DISAGREEMENTS over the end of life, intelligent design, and fights over ordaining gay clergy were among the top religion stories of the year, according to a poll of religion writers released December 13, 2005.

But the overwhelming first and second choices for top stories were Pope John Paul II's death and the election of his successor, Pope Benedict XVI.

Members of the Religion Newswriters Association (RNA), who are journalists writing about faith and values in the mainstream press, ranked the top stories in an online survey December 7–12. The 28 religious events in the poll were ranked by 100 RNA members, or just over one-third of the membership.

In addition to ranking the top stories, 68 percent of the survey respondents voted the former pope as the top religion newsmaker of the year. The new pope was named top newsmaker by 21 percent of those voting.

The top stories in order are:

1. The world mourns the death of Pope John Paul II after his eventful reign of 26 1/2 years. His attitude toward death inspires many. The movement begins for his canonization, and major biographies reach TV screens.
2. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, top aide to John Paul II, is elected by the cardinals to succeed him as Benedict XVI as the world looks on. Vatican watchers see conflicting signs as to what his papacy will bring.
3. Terri Schiavo dies in a Florida nursing home after her feeding tube is finally removed. Many demonstrators stage high-visibility protests for weeks before her death, as Congress and the Florida Legislature join faith-based groups in the debate over the right to die.
4. Churches and faith-based agencies respond to Hurricane Katrina disaster in Louisiana and Mississippi, as well as damage from lesser hurricanes. Earlier they had responded to the tsunami in Southeast Asia, and later to the earthquake in Pakistan. The hurricanes also spur discussions about the roles of God and of environmental shortcomings in such disasters.
5. Debate over homosexuality continues to roil mainline denominations. Episcopal Church and Canadian Anglicans officially absent themselves from Anglican Consultative Council, as exodus of some Episcopal churches continues. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America defeats recommendation for ordination of gays. United Methodist Supreme Court reaffirms the defrocking of a lesbian pastor and reinstates a pastor removed for barring a gay from membership. Pacific Southwest churches take first steps toward leaving American Baptist Churches.
6. Debate on evolution vs. intelligent design heats up, especially in Kansas and Dover, Pennsylvania. Decision is awaited in Dover case, but the school board that favored inclusion of intelligent design is voted out. In Kansas, the board of education approves standards that cast doubt on evolution.
7. U.S. Supreme Court approves posting of Ten Commandments outside state capitol in Texas and disapproves their posting inside courthouses in Kentucky, both by 5–4. The high court also upholds the rights of prisoners to practice their religion and of municipalities to take private property for public benefit. The court hears arguments on two abortion cases and Oregon euthanasia law. Meanwhile, a federal judge reinstates ban on "under God" in Pledge of Allegiance in three California school districts; case is expected to return to the Supreme Court.
8. Faith-based groups speak out on Bush's three nominees to the Supreme Court; evangelicals help to derail Harriet Miers. Earlier they weighed in on both sides of the question of filibustering judicial appointments; a compromise was eventually reached.
9. Vatican releases long-awaited statement on homosexuality, the first major instruction issued by Benedict XVI. It bars from seminaries those who are actively homosexual, have deeply rooted tendencies toward it, or support gay subculture. Reaction is predictably mixed.
10. Billy Graham holds his farewell evangelistic campaign in New York City. 

## Survey Gives Insight into Religion Taught at Community Colleges

**T**HE AMERICAN ACADEMY of Religion developed a survey instrument on the teaching of religion and philosophy in U.S. community colleges to map the "whether, where, and what" of such teaching. AAR partnered with the Community College Humanities Association in administering the survey.

In the fall of 2005, the CCHA sent 956 surveys to presidents of American Association of Community Colleges members. These presidents were instructed to give the survey to the appropriate academic unit where religion and philosophy were being taught. CCHA sent the 458 responses (a 47.9% response rate) to the AAR for analysis.

"We are delighted to begin this new AAR initiative," Barbara DeConcini, AAR executive director, said. "Thanks to the survey results, we are getting a first concrete sense about the teaching of religion in American two-year colleges — the courses that are being offered, the academic preparation of faculty teaching them, and enrollments. We will use these data in developing programs for this increasingly important constituency within our field."

Of the colleges reporting, about 40% indicate they teach religion courses. The courses most frequently taught, in descending order, are:

- Introduction to Religion/World Religion/Comparative Religion
- Bible (Old/New Testament; Survey of the Bible)
- Christianity (Life of Jesus, History of Christianity)
- Eastern Religions (Asian Religions, Buddhism, Hinduism)
- Other (Life, Death, and Dying; Women and Religion; Latter-Day Saints; Black Church in America; Anthropology of Religion; Religion in the United States)
- Judaism
- Islam

The philosophy courses were primarily Introduction to Philosophy/Ethics/Logic or area studies (Western philosophies, Eastern philosophies).

Enrollment trends for religion courses are reported to be steady (53%) or rising (38%). In philosophy, the trends are roughly similar: steady (51%) or rising (42%).

Respondents report that religion is taught primarily in humanities or social science departments. Only 3 colleges reported a free-standing department of religion/religious studies, and 14 reported combined religion and philosophy departments. Religion courses are part of an honors program in 14% of respondent colleges, and 3% offer a degree program in religion. In these latter colleges, the average number of majors for the 2003–2004 academic year was 7.8.

AAR also collected information on faculty appointments and degrees. Of the 964 reported as religion faculty members, 266 (28%) are full-time, while 698 (72%) are on adjunct or part-time appointments. For philosophy faculty (1,741), 29% are full-time, and 71% are on adjunct or part-time appointments. The highest earned degrees reported for full-time religion faculty are: PhD (42%), MA (38%) and MDiv (13%). For part-time and adjunct religion faculty, the highest earned degrees reported are: PhD (18%), MA (43%), and MDiv (31%).

The degree fields for full-time religion faculty were from a broad range:

- Philosophy (35%)
- Religion (20%)
- English (12%)
- Social Sciences (8%)
- Humanities (7%)
- Theology (6%)
- History (6%)
- Other (5%)

For adjunct and part-time religion faculty, religion was the top degree field:

- Religion (34%)
- Philosophy (26%)
- Theology (19%)
- Humanities (5%)
- Social Sciences (4%)
- English (4%)
- History (3%)
- Other (6%)

"The discrepancy in degree fields between full-time and part-time faculty is not surprising given that the highest degrees earned for part-time and adjunct faculty were MAs and MDiv's," Kyle Cole, AAR director of college programs, said. "This study gives us wonderful insight into these colleges and their faculty, and will help us find ways to serve this community. The AAR will be using the data to work with the Wabash Center on possible programs." 

The Committee on Teaching and Learning seeks nominations for the AAR Award for Excellence in Teaching.

Nominations of winners of campus awards, or any other awards, are encouraged.

Procedures for the nomination process are outlined on the AAR Web site at [www.aarweb.org/awards/teaching.asp](http://www.aarweb.org/awards/teaching.asp).

### RELIGION COURSE BREAKDOWN BY SUBJECT

