
SCS Keynote Speaker



TITLE: *Simulation in the Scientific Study of Religion*

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Simulation and modeling techniques have been applied with increasing success to human social processes. They have also been applied to human behaviors involving complex cognition. During the last few years, moreover, social scientists and cognitive scientists have also been building sophisticated theories pertaining to the origins and functions of religious beliefs, behaviors, and experiences, often supported by experimental or demographic studies. The combination of these developments has made it possible to apply simulation and modeling techniques within the scientific study of religion in a useful way for the first time. It is early days but the effects have been, and promise to be, three. First, otherwise highly speculative and often abstract theories about religion can be expressed more precisely. Second, theories about religion can be tested against complex datasets. Third, competing theories about religion can be compared meaningfully. All three effects can foster consensus and revolutionary advance in the scientific study of religion.

SHORT BIO:

Wesley J. Wildman, PhD, is Convener of Boston University's PhD program in Religion and Science. He co-founded the Institute for the Biocultural Study of Religion, a non-profit research institute dedicated to the scientific study of religion. He co-founded and continues to edit one of the leading peer-reviewed journals in the field, *Religion, Brain & Behavior*. Author of many books and articles in the academic study of religion, he is currently leading the Institute's effort to increase the visibility of simulation and modeling techniques in the scientific study of religion.