
REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS



Religion and Innovation in Human Affairs:

Exploring the Role of Religion in the
Origins and Diffusion of Innovation in
the Progress of Civilization

*Supporting Empirical, Conceptual, and Interpretive Work on the Interconnections
between Religion and Innovation in Human Affairs*

A research support program administered by the Historical Society
and funded by the John Templeton Foundation

Up to \$2,000,000 in Grants to be Awarded

DEADLINE FOR PRE-PROPOSALS

November 1, 2011

THE
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

TIMELINE FOR PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Preliminary Program Announcement	June 2011
Full Program Announcement	Aug.-Sept. 2011
#15576 Starts	Sept. 1, 2011
Pre-Proposals Due	Nov. 1, 2011
Invitations for Full Proposals Mailed	Dec. 15, 2011
Full Proposals Due	Feb. 28, 2012
Announcement of Winning Proposals	Apr. 30, 2012
Award Letters Sent	May 15, 2012
Projects Commence	Jun, 1, 2012
Mid-Project Review	May 15, 2013
Workshop	June/July 2013 (to be finalized)
Anthology Chapters Submitted	April 1, 2014
Projects End	May 31, 2014
Subgrantee Final Reports	June 15, 2014
#15576 Ends Final Report to JFT	Aug. 31, 2014

PROGRAM STAFF AND ADVISORY BOARD

Primary Contacts

- Donald A. Yerxa
Program Leader, RIHA
The Historical Society
656 Beacon Street, Mezzanine
Boston, MA 02215
USA
617-358-0768
617-358-0250 (fax)
historic@bu.edu
- Scott Hovey
Assistant to the Program Leader, RIHA
The Historical Society
656 Beacon Street, Mezzanine
Boston, MA 02215
USA
617-358-0768
617-358-0250 (fax)
historic@bu.edu
- Bill Nicols, Workshop Coordinator, The Historical Society

Religion and Innovation in Human Affairs Board of Advisors

- Ian Hodder
Dunlevie Family Professor of Anthropology
Stanford University
- William B. Hurlbut, M.D.
Consulting Professor, Department of Neurology and Neurological Sciences
Stanford University Medical Center
- David Livingstone
Professor of Geography and Intellectual History
Queen's University Belfast
- Wilfred M. McClay
SunTrust Bank Chair of Excellence in Humanities,
University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

- Patrick O'Brien
Professor of Global Economic History
London School of Economics
- William R. Shea
Galileo Professor of History of Science
University of Padua

OVERVIEW

The Historical Society is keenly interested in exploring meta-questions that cross disciplinary boundaries. One of the most intriguing of these is: To what extent does religion drive innovation and history? With generous funding from the John Templeton Foundation, the Society is launching the Religion and Innovation in Human Affairs (RIHA) Program that will provide up to \$2.0 million in research support to help answer this question by exploring the role of religion in the origins and diffusion of innovation in human affairs. The RIHA Program will support empirical, conceptual, and interpretive work on religion and innovation that enhances our understanding of the role of religion as a driving force not only of innovation in human affairs but for history itself. The Program encourages applications from investigators (individuals or teams) interested in undertaking conceptually-oriented research on the functions religion(s) may or may not play with regard to the generation and receptivity of new ideas and practices leading to progress in human history.

Investigators from a variety of disciplines (archaeology, history and the social sciences, religious studies, the philosophy of science, and other allied fields) may request up to \$100,000 for two-year projects that will enhance our understanding of how religion relates to innovation in human affairs. Exceptionally, larger amounts (up to \$250,000 for two years) will be awarded particularly for successful proposals that involve fieldwork. Appendix A provides an illustrative sampling of the kinds of questions we consider relevant. The questions are meant to be suggestive of what might be funded; they are not exhaustive. Approximately 17 projects will receive funding.

Innovation is invoked routinely in several academic fields. Although it has been examined, often with insight and depth, it remains a poorly understood concept, especially when it is employed to study the trajectories of civilizations. Scholars who have studied aspects of social, cultural, economic, technological, and scientific innovation are often reluctant to attribute any substantive role to religion in initiating or sustaining innovation. Historians are more prone to acknowledge that religion is important in understanding the unfolding of past societies, but they avoid concepts like innovation—indeed, generalizing schema of any sort—preferring instead the more general notion of change. Theologians and historians of religion seem to have given little attention to innovation and progress in religion. There is no overall model of innovation in history, much less of religion's place in it. This renders it difficult to answer a number of expansive questions such as:

- When, where, and why are religions promotional, neutral, or repressive toward innovation?
- What sparks innovation in religions themselves?
- What role does religion play in the enormous differences we see in the capacity of various societies to generate creativity and sustain innovation?

Lurking behind these is the equally substantive question: Does religion drive society in ways that are not adequately appreciated by scholars who tend to emphasize material and technological progress? Although the RIHA Program is designed to explore interconnections between religions and innovation, it may also contribute something significant toward a general theory of innovation—one that adequately accounts for religious as well as material and other cultural factors.

The Program aims at understanding the patterns of interaction between religion and innovation in human affairs. We hope to gain better understanding of how religion functions at a societal level in order to shed light on innovation itself. Anthropology, archaeology, economics, and history tend to see human societies as driven by material resources, technology, science, etc. These things shape religions and by extension innovation. The RIHA Program asks: Does religion drive human affairs, particularly in its ability to generate and engage with creativity, or is it mainly a conservative force? And what is the impact of religion-generated innovation? When is it beneficial? When is it not? What groups benefit from it? And what groups do not?

PURPOSE

The Historical Society, which was founded over a decade ago, is concerned lest over-specialization render academic history a self-referential enterprise that rules out many important questions. The John Templeton Foundation seeks to encourage scholars from different fields to engage the big questions of the living world and human affairs. Consequently, both organizations contend that the role of religion in the generation and the transmission of innovation is an important topic. A better grasp of the role of religion and innovation will not only improve our understanding of the dynamics of change in human affairs but also will add to our understanding of religion and stimulate the search for a general theory of innovation. The RIHA Program expects to shed light on such issues by supporting research that contributes to a deeper understanding of religion and the generation of creativity as well as the diffusion of innovation.

ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible for RIHA grants, projects should meet the following criteria, and the applicants or research teams must demonstrate their competence.

- Projects must conform to the goals of the program. Proposals are welcome from a wide range of fields, and cross-disciplinary proposals are encouraged. The Program does not fund projects in the arts, music, or literature, though projects using art, music, and literature as symbolic expressions pointing to religious ideas may be funded.

- Research grants will be awarded to projects that have the potential to significantly shape our basic understanding of the relationship of religion to innovation and the role of religion and innovation in human affairs and the development of cultures.
- Although the Program is designed to explore the interaction of religion and innovation, proposals that enhance our understanding of the processes of innovation will be considered provided they demonstrate that they are sensitive to the religious dimensions of creativity and innovation in human affairs and are not confined to the familiar run of material, political, or institutional factors.
- Successful applicants are expected to attend (or send at least a main representative) to a workshop in the summer of 2013 to present preliminary results of their research and to exchange ideas with other grant recipients.
- Successful applicants will be asked to submit a chapter for a volume that will highlight the key findings about religion and innovation no later than April 1, 2014.

CRITERIA OF MERIT

The RIHA Program will award grants totaling up to \$2.0 million. Proposals will be subject to a two-step process of confidential expert peer review. From the pool of pre-proposal submissions, approximately 40-45 will be selected to submit full proposals. From this group approximately 17 will receive awards. This translates roughly to a ratio just under 3:1.

Pre-proposals will be evaluated by a panel of experts who will rate the following factors on a 10-point scale.

- Clarity and relevance to the Program.
- Potential of the project to enhance our understanding of the role of religion and innovation in the progress of civilizations.
- Coherence and quality of design.
- Ability to complete the project within the time limit.
- Track record of applicant(s).
- Creativity and originality of the approach.

Co-funding from other sources (e.g., grants from the host institution, research grants from other funders, research assistance, course releases, etc.) will be seen in a positive light.

In addition to funding important and valuable research, a goal of the Program is to stimulate wide-ranging conversations among scholars and interested non-specialists. Consequently, the

panel of judges will be looking for projects that have the potential to change fundamentally how we understand religion's relationship to creativity, novelty, and innovation, and thereby enhance our understanding not only of innovation but of how religion affects cultures and their motivating beliefs. This kind of achievement should receive attention at major professional association meetings and in scholarly journals. It could also capture the popular imagination through coverage in media outlets. Modest but not insubstantial monetary incentives are available for funded researchers who publish articles for broader audiences in large-circulation, non-specialized publications or who organize sessions at major academic meetings on the program themes.

USES OF GRANT

Acceptable use of grant funds includes the following:

- Research assistance; student or postdoctoral salary and benefits for part of the academic year
- Summer salary and teaching buyout for the academic year
- Support for a leave or sabbatical extension in order to undertake specifically the proposed project
- Normal field, laboratory, or other expenses connected with gathering data needed for the research questions posed, including costs of dating or other scientific testing for archaeological projects if needed
- Assistance in writing or publishing books
- Modest allowance for justifiable equipment, such as computers, publication charges, and other supplies
- Modest travel allowance, including travel to access resources unavailable at the investigators' home institutions (such as visiting museum collections or archives), and travel for interdisciplinary teams to meet.

Indirect costs, overhead, or administration of the grant must be kept to a minimum. The Religion and Innovation in Human Affairs Program does not provide support for endowments, building, major equipment purchases, or general operating support for the host organization.

If your project-related support needs are not listed here, please contact the Program Leader for advice.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Pre-Proposals, consisting of the two elements below, must be submitted by November 1, 2011. Please submit both electronically as Word document attachments to historic@bu.edu indicating “RIHA Pre-Proposal” in the subject line of the email message.

1. **Three-page letter** (12-point font suggested) describing the scope of the proposed work, its relevance to the RIHA Program, and how it will further our understanding of religion and innovation and the underlying big questions. Applicants should use this opportunity to state the defining features of religion and innovation they will be exploring and the fundamental questions that will be addressed.
2. **Brief (two pages maximum) CV** for each applicant or member of the project team known at the time of application.

Full Proposals must include:

1. **Cover letter** specifying title, amount of funding requested, duration of project, people involved, and a brief statement of core research project elements and expected outcomes.
2. A **project summary** not to exceed 500 words, explaining the work and its greater significance to non-specialists, in a form suitable for publication on the Web or inclusion in press releases should the proposal be funded.
1. **Relevance to the Program’s goals:** approximately 500 words explaining how the research will further the goals of the Program.
2. A **detailed description of the proposed research** that does not exceed 20 single-spaced, 12-point-font pages. This should explain the question(s) the project will address, the methodology employed, and its broader significance for our understanding of how religion works in cultures.
3. A **statement of intended outcomes**, including publications, presentations, and other forms of disseminating research findings. This statement should indicate what will be accomplished during the grant term and what is expected to result after the grant term has ended.
4. A detailed **time-line** including proposed outcomes. All projects must be completed by May 31, 2014, and final reports submitted and final payments issued—no later than June 15, 2014.

5. A detailed **budget** over the life of the award, with justification and utilization distribution. Individuals and teams may propose up to \$100,000 for two years (\$50,000/year). Applicants for projects involving fieldwork or other empirical research expenses may propose up to \$250,000 for two years (\$125,000/year).
6. A brief **biographical summary** of approximately two pages (rather than full CV) for all senior personnel highlighting the accomplishments that are most relevant to the proposed research.
7. **Previous work.** Provide copies of the three publications that illustrate the applicant's preparation to carry out the research proposed.

JUDGING PROCESS

The RIHA Program will recruit a panel of judges covering the relevant expertise. The broad weighting of the merits of the application will be:

- 40% for the intellectual merit and the creative design of the proposed research
- 30% for the potential of the research to significantly advance our understanding of religion and innovation.
- 30% for the likelihood that the project will result in publishable manuscripts within the time-frame of the research grant.

All reviewers and judges are required to disclose any potential conflict of interest, and all reviewers will agree to confidentiality with regard to the material contained in the applications.

Applicants are not to contact directly the John Templeton Foundation (JFT) staff, JFT or Historical Society board members, or the independent evaluators.

Further inquiries should be addressed to:

Scott Hovey, Assistant to the Program Leader, c/o The Historical Society 617-358-0768 or historic@bu.edu.

APPENDIX A

A Sampling of “Big Questions” in Religion and Innovation in Human Affairs

While it is important to lay out the substantive questions we are addressing, the RIHA Program understands that it is not always possible to construct hypotheses that approach these big questions head-on. With this in mind, a series of questions is supplied. They are clustered in four general areas: Prehistory and Early Civilizations, Human Affairs, Creativity, and Progress. These questions lend themselves to a variety of research strategies: interpretative synthesis, methodologically- and conceptually-oriented research, empirical investigation, and fieldwork. Successful proposals will articulate research strategies that show promise of enhancing our understanding of religion and innovation. Since there is no unified theory of innovative systems, applicants are welcome to propose their own definition and explain what is suitable for the research they wish to undertake.

While the Program will entertain projects on either innovation or religion in the course of civilizations, our strong preference is for projects that relate the two. Some scholars may wish to choose an already well-documented example of innovation (such as the origins of agriculture or urban life) and propose research that examines the role of religion. Alternatively, researchers might select an instance where the religious elements are well known and explore the extent further innovations could be related to the religious changes.

These are merely suggestions; we welcome creative ideas for engaging the themes of this initiative.

Religion and Innovation in Prehistory and Early Civilizations

How valid is the thesis advanced by Jacques Cauvin in his *Birth of the Gods* that religious dynamics better explain the emergence of agriculture than economic-materialistic and environmental explanations?

What steps or methodological approaches are needed to refine our current understanding of the origins of religious behavior?

- *Since we have no direct evidence, how can we be confident that our necessary reliance on recovered material culture, as well as our interpretive assumptions about the nature of religion, does not reveal more about us than the distant past?*
- *Can we safely conclude, as some archaeologists have, that “spirituality and materiality cannot be separated” in prehistoric societies and that the roots of religion are to be found in ritual and symbolic practices?*

How do recent attempts to understand ancient civilizations as the products of sharing and mixing of cultural practices affect our understanding of the role of religion in shaping ancient cultures?

- *In this more dynamic understanding of ancient societies, what place does religion have alongside such factors as long-distance trade and the ways people organized their everyday lives?*

Religion and Innovation in Human Affairs

What role does religion play in helping to bring about or foster periods of creative explosion?

- *What role does religion play in providing a culture with tools for creative, unpredictable change?*
- *A number of writers who have addressed innovation from different perspectives have emphasized spatial factors, especially increased contacts (migrations, trade, networks of communication), interactions, densities of population, etc. How might these spatial and cosmopolitan factors relate to religion? How does the role of religion in more cosmopolitan societies (presumably more receptive to innovation) differ from that or more isolated ones?*

What involvement did religion play in well-documented instances of innovation such as the invention of the printing press?

Clearly, any attempt to come to grips with innovation also involves explaining when innovation does not happen. Some religions, cosmologies, or worldviews seemingly are more successful in providing the cultural contexts for open-ended development and human flourishing than others.

- *When does religion offer resistance to or stunt innovation?*
- *To what extent is the relationship of religion and innovation a two-way process?*
- *Why are some religious movements successful and others not? Are there intrinsic characteristics of religion that account for their successes or failures?*
- *What factors are operative when religion helps to generate such open-ended change that it becomes disruptive of culture and corrosive of religious understanding and practices?*
- *When do technological innovations—say, in medicine—alter religious understanding or practice?*
- *How does religious and ideological innovation differ from technological innovation?*

Religion and Creativity

What role, if any, does religion play in fostering genius or creative networks?

- *Some attempts to understand creativity and innovation tend to dismiss the view that break-through innovations occur when gifted individuals imagine ideas that transcend their time and place. This interpretation of innovation is almost exclusively focused on technology and invention. To what extent do these notions apply when religion becomes*

the investigative lens? For example, what role does religion play in the creation of networks that shape the flow of information and inspiration out of which innovation can occur?

- *Have religious practices and presuppositions fostered scholarly dispositions that resulted in scientific creativity?*

Religion, Innovation, and Progress

George Santayana's famous line, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it", is often dismissed as a cliché. But the lines that immediately precede the quote are worth keeping in mind: "Progress, far from consisting in change, depends on retentiveness. When change is absolute there remains no being to improve and no direction is set for possible improvement: and when experience is not retained— . . . infancy is perpetual." How does "progress" fit into the mix of religion and innovation?

- *Is religious innovation or innovation sparked by religion generally the wellspring of progress? What metric(s) should be used to demonstrate progress?*
- *What are the implications of a better understanding of religion and innovation? How would it advance our overall understanding of human experience or lead to the acceleration of progress and the betterment of humanity?*