

“Theorizing Religious Effects Among American Adolescents” Published in *JSSR*

Sociologists with the National Study of Youth and Religion, based at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, announce the publication of “Theorizing Religious Effects Among American Adolescents,” in the March 2003 issue of the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. In light of several decades of social scientific studies that have shown that religion appears to be a positive and constructive factor in the lives of young people, this article formulates a systematic theory of why religion might have this positive influence in the lives of U.S. adolescents.

The *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, a top-ranked international journal in the field of sociology of religion, is published quarterly. Christian Smith, professor and associate chair of sociology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, is the author of the article.

In the article, Smith suggests that religious organizations deserve particular theoretical and empirical attention for their role in the lives of youth. While recognizing that U.S. religion is not the only place where these kinds of social influences might affect the lives of youth, Smith observes that religious organizations are uniquely pervasive organizations in U.S. society that strongly encourage youth participation. In addition, religious organizations can provide cultural moral orders characterized by impressive scope, depth and authority often matching — if not surpassing — other kinds of U.S. voluntary associations or purchasable services.

The National Study of Youth and Religion, funded by Lilly Endowment Inc., is based at the Odum Institute for Research in Social Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. This four-year research project began in August 2001 and will continue until August 2005. The purpose of the project is to research the shape and influence of religion and spirituality in the lives of U.S. adolescents; to identify effective practices in the religious, moral and social formation of the lives of youth; to describe the extent to which youth participate in and benefit from the programs and opportunities that religious communities are offering to their youth; and to foster an informed national discussion about the influence of religion in youth's lives in order to encourage sustained reflection about and rethinking of our cultural and institutional practices with regard to youth and religion.