

Sarah Breger of *Moment Magazine* placed first in the 2012 American Academy of Religion Award for Best In-depth Newswriting on Religion. Brett Buckner, writing for the *Anniston (Ala.) Star*, placed second, and Daniel Burke of Religion News Service placed third.

The annual award recognizes "well-researched newswriting that enhances the public understanding of religion," said John R. Fitzmier, Executive Director of the AAR.

Breger submitted articles on Father Patrick Desbois, a French Catholic priest who documents eyewitness accounts of mass executions of Jews during World War II; Houda Nonoo, the first female Bahraini ambassador to the United States and the first Jewish ambassador posted abroad by an Arab country; and Yossi Leshem, a world-renowned ornithologist and bird-plane collision expert. "This is the kind of carefully written, insightful religion reporting that there's simply not enough of. It's not only well researched and thorough, but it also offers readers a necessary sense of context — historical, theological, and even geographical. And it anticipates readers' questions and makes sure they're answered," summed up one judge in praising Breger's work.

Buckner submitted articles on Satan in American culture; Mormonism becoming part of the American mainstream; congregations striving to be more racially diverse; concepts of Hinduism widely accepted in the United States; and a pastor's stance on homosexuality and church teachings that put him at odds with his congregation. Commenting on Buckner's entry, one judge noted, "Whether describing the devil as a pop culture icon or parsing the 'Mormon moment,' this reporter contextualizes strong religion scholarship with vivid writing and in-depth reporting. The result is a body of work that's smart and enjoyable to read."

Burke submitted articles on the resurgence of Catholic exorcisms; Holy Smoke LLC, a company that loads cremains into shotgun shells; the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Unitarian Universalist Association; Joseph Smith, the first Mormon presidential candidate; and Michele Bachmann and other politicians who are reluctant to identify with a specific church or denomination. Burke's "compelling writing shows great skill in combining accessibility and detailed research while addressing intriguing, timely, and diverse topics that take readers beyond the ordinary," remarked one judge.

Thirty-three journalists entered the contest, which was for articles published during calendar year 2011. Names of contestants and their news outlets were removed from submissions prior to judging. The first-place winner receives \$1,000; second-place, \$500; and third-place, \$250.

The judges were as follows:

- Bill Tammeus, former faith columnist for the *Kansas City Star*, author of the current "Faith Matters" blog for the *Star's* website, and a contributor to the *National Catholic Reporter* and the *Presbyterian Outlook*
- Diane Winston, Knight Chair in Media and Religion at the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism at the University of Southern California, and a former religion reporter for the *Raleigh News and Observer*, the *Dallas Times Herald*, and the *Baltimore Sun*
- Barbara McGraw, Director of the Center for Engaged Religious Pluralism and Professor of Social Ethics, Law, and Public Life at Saint Mary's College of California, and a member of the AAR's Committee on the Public Understanding of Religion