

BA  
ASR

# bulletin

British Association for the Study of Religions



130: May 2017

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## WWW.BASR.AC.UK

### ABOUT THE BASR

The British Association for the Study of Religions (BASR) was founded in 1954. It is a member association of the International Association for the History of Religions (founded 1950) and of the European Association for the Study of Religions (founded 2001). The object of BASR is to promote the academic study of religion/s, understood as the historical, social, theoretical, critical and comparative study of religion/s through the interdisciplinary collaboration of all scholars whose research is defined in this way. BASR is not a forum for confessional, apologetic, or similar concerns. BASR pursues its aims principally through an annual conference and general meeting, a regular Bulletin, and a Journal of the British Association for the Study of Religions. Membership of BASR is open to all scholars normally resident in the United Kingdom.

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# editorial

This issue carries news of another department closure. Departments are being squeezed all over. Dominic Corrywright's feature on the imminent instigation of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) suggests further ways in which the job of teaching and researching is being made to adapt to a free-market, neoliberal economic model. Bodies like the EuARe and AAR are increasingly attempting to move the field away from critique, toward theological engagement, interfaith dialogue and by implication, citizenship and statecraft.

Religion is a bigger part of discourse in the public sphere than for many, many years; yet our departments are less supported than ever before. I don't know exactly why. But I do know that this community has a lot of bright people who can achieve a lot when they pull together.

The BASR Bulletin is an example. Here we have contributions from three continents, pooling our efforts to create something valuable for all of us. Our *From Our Correspondent* series is building into a unique snapshot of the international field today, as well as encouraging conversation between depart-

ments, between countries and between continents.

The Religious Studies Project is another example, which the BASR have been supporting since it began. Here, an international team of volunteers - from postgraduates to senior scholars - have given some time to create something more than any of us could do through traditional means - a library of hundreds of interviews on the cutting edge of our field, free to use for anyone, forever.

There remains a lot of untapped potential. We need to embrace not only new technologies, but new ways of doing things. From conferences, journals, departments - so much of what we do is done the way it is done just because that is how it has always been done. And we need to find new ways of communicating our ideas - reaching out to media and policy makers, making our ideas accessible to the public and policy-makers.

The crisis of our institutions may yet be an opportunity, to think anew about what we do, and change how we do it.

David G. Robertson, 14/05/2017



[www.facebook.com/groups/490163257661189/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/490163257661189/)



[twitter.com/TheBASR](https://twitter.com/TheBASR)

# news, etc

## USW CLOSURE

The Religious Studies course at the University of South Wales is being shut down with immediate effect. Existing students will be taught out over the next two years. This news was not unexpected, due to declining numbers, and no redundancies are expected. Enquiries to [lynn.foulston@south-wales.ac.uk](mailto:lynn.foulston@south-wales.ac.uk).

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## EuARe

On December 5, 2016, the 'European Academy of Religion' (EuARe) was launched in Bologna at a large and prestigious event. EuARe is primarily the brainchild of Alberto Melloni from the University of Bologna, along with several other historians of Christianity, particularly Catholicism, and seems to be modelled on the "big tent" of the American Academy of Religion (AAR). An open letter was sent to EuARe by Einar Thomassen, President of the EASR, and later circulated by Marco Pasi (Secretary) to the member organisations, including the BASR, setting out EASR position, after some EuARe material seemed to suggest EASR support for the initiative. This letter is reproduced overleaf.

The committee of the BASR wrote in support of the EASR position, and furthermore forwarded details of BASR members' successful funding bids to be included in a statement designed to establish the significance and achievements of the EASR. BASR President Steven Sutcliffe further clarified the BASR's position at the TRS UK AGM on 23 Sept, 2016.

The EASR executive is currently preparing a further statement on the issue.

## BASR HISTORY PROJECT GETS UNDERWAY

Dr Chris Cotter has been tasked by the BASR Committee to undertake the interviewing and archival research required to develop our pilot history of the BASR in the context of Religious Studies in the UK. Chris completed his PhD in Religious Studies at the University of Lancaster in 2016 under the supervision of Professor Kim Knott and is the co-founder of the Religious Studies Project with Dr David Robertson. There will be two main outputs from this project: a history of the BASR for members, and a peer-reviewed journal article to be written with members of the BASR committee. Chris has drawn up an initial list of interviewees but welcomes further suggestions from BASR members. He will also be consulting the BASR archives, including past Bulletins and occasional papers, and exploring related material including the Ninian Smart archive at Lancaster. He will begin work on May 25 and will give a paper on his early findings at the BASR annual conference in Chester in September. You can contact Chris with suggestions for interviewees or archival material at [chris.r.cotter@gmail.com](mailto:chris.r.cotter@gmail.com)

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## KIM KNOTT ON UK RS

Kim Knott recently published an article on RS in the UK in its institutional context (in the Dutch journal, NTT - <http://www.ntt-online.nl/edities/>), following a roundtable on changes in RS in different European settings. It will likely be of some interest to many members, so she has made a pre-publication version available here:

[http://www.research.lancs.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/-\(bd69b4c9-780a-4fa5-b5dc-9528c3cab823\).html](http://www.research.lancs.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/-(bd69b4c9-780a-4fa5-b5dc-9528c3cab823).html)

## *Statement on the European Academy of Religion (EuARe)*

On December 5, the 'European Academy of Religion' was launched in Bologna in the presence of the European Commissioner for Research and Innovation and a range of other significant personalities.

The aim of the event was to create a network for the study of religion in Europe. As most of you will be aware, the EASR has been critical of this initiative since our association already offers a broad network for scholars of religion at the European level. I decided however to attend the event as an observer together with General Secretary Marco Pasi, several representatives of our national member associations, and the President of the IAHR, Tim Jensen.

In the original invitation to the meeting, a plenary session of general discussion was mentioned, and I accordingly announced my wish to speak during this part of the programme in order to present the EASR and to offer some perspectives on urgent tasks for the study of religion in Europe. In the end, this session of general discussion was removed from the agenda. Instead, we listened to addresses made by a series of specially invited and politically prominent guests, including the EU Commissioner himself. None of these speeches displayed professional insights into religion as a field of research. Rather, they underlined in general terms the importance of the subject matter of the proposed Academy and congratulated the organiser on his initiative. The importance of 'dialogue' was repeatedly mentioned by all the speakers, but no discussion was allowed.

*"The importance of 'dialogue' was repeatedly mentioned by all the speakers, but no discussion was allowed."*

After lunch, the meeting split into three sessions mainly devoted to practical matters: the statutes of the new Academy, including membership issues, the theme, location and date for its first conference, and very brief presentations of some research projects and how to organise a webpage. A decision was made to hold the Academy's first conference in October 2017, in Bologna, on the general theme of 'The Studies of Religion(s) in Europe'.

It was clear from the beginning that the need for establishing this 'European Academy of Religion' was never an issue. The apparent aim of the event was to celebrate its foundation and show support for its founder. The conference was void of scholarly content and discussion. For this reason, it is also difficult to form a precise idea about what the Academy wants to do and to understand why its aims cannot be accomplished through the existing organisations and networks in the field. The proposed theme for the first conference hardly sheds more light on this question. On the other hand, the impression we formed during the meeting was that the Academy most of all will cater to the needs of theologians and that 'dialogue' between representatives of different religions and confessions is a primary concern. The pursuit of normative theology and engagement in interreligious conversation are activities that fall outside the objectives of the EASR and the study of religions as we understand it (though the empirical study of such activities is certainly valid and interesting from our perspective as well). In conclusion, it seems that the 'European Academy of Religion' will appeal to a different audience than the EASR. We should, on our part, continue our work to make the EASR ever more attractive and inclusive in the future.

Einar Thomassen  
President of the EASR

## Promoting Degree Level RS to A Level Students

The National Association of Teachers of Religious Education and TRS-UK are developing a strategy to strengthen the relationships between 'A' level Religious Studies teachers and students, and university Theology and/or Religion / Religious Studies departments and academics. The plan is that University departments (or groups) provide students to visit A level classes in schools and sixth-form colleges. The student delivers a session that includes (and perhaps goes a little beyond) A level subject content. They also include information about their university and T/RS course. The university provides some basic training for students to enable them to deliver a high quality subject content session, and ensures they have resources to market the department they represent (e.g. PowerPoint/audio-visual sequence). The university will reimburse students for their travelling expenses if necessary. NATRE will host a webpage on their website that links to webpages that list the ways in which university departments offer schools liaison and publicise this webpage through newsletters, Twitter, Facebook, NATRE affiliated local groups etc. to alert more teachers to the opportunities to link with university departments. This scheme is currently being developed through a number of pilot studies around the UK, with the hope to extend this around the UK in the coming years.

Colleagues interested in the scheme are invited to contact Wendy Dossett, [w.dossett@chester.ac.uk](mailto:w.dossett@chester.ac.uk) (TRS-UK) and Ben Wood, [bwood@haslingdenhigh.com](mailto:bwood@haslingdenhigh.com) (NATRE).



### **GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTORS**

News Items	Up to 150 words
Conference Reports	500-1500 words
Conference Announcements	Not more than a single page
Book Reviews	700-1000 words
Features	Around 1000 words
Members' Recent Publications	Maximum 5 items

PLEASE SEND MATERIAL FOR INCLUSION TO [david.robertson@open.ac.uk](mailto:david.robertson@open.ac.uk)  
DEADLINE FOR THE MAY 2017 ISSUE IS **31 OCTOBER 2017**

# BASR ANNUAL CONFERENCE

## NARRATIVES OF RELIGION

UNIVERSITY OF CHESTER  
4-6 SEPTEMBER, 2017

Keynote (Tuesday 5th September)  
'Narratives of Pagan Religion' | Professor Ronald Hutton

'Narrative' has emerged as valuable category of analysis in the study of religions. This conference takes narrative as its theme with a view to testing its efficacy and resilience for elucidating constructions of religion.

The BASR invites colleagues to the University of Chester to contribute papers or panels on the above theme. Papers will be 20 minutes with 10 minutes for questions/discussion. Panels will be 90 minutes to normally include 3 papers. Abstracts for roundtables, poster presentations, and alternative formats are also encouraged – please contact the below email for details. Ideas for papers and panels may include, but are not limited to:

Competing narratives | Orality and textualisation  
Ritual and archetypal narratives | Representation and reproduction  
Story, story-telling and communities of story-telling  
Life-writing, spiritual biography, self-narratives, auto-ethnography  
Narratives of race, class, age, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, culture, subculture  
Narratives of religion in fiction, film, media | Official versus popular or subversive narratives  
Narratives at the intersection of religion and science (CAM, ayurveda, alchemy etc.)  
Apocalyptic narratives | Narrative identity | Curating narratives  
Narrative methods and methodologies in the study of religions  
Narratives of religion in education | Grand-, hidden- and meta- narratives

Abstracts (200 words plus paper title, author name and institutional affiliation in Microsoft Word format) should be submitted to [basrconference2017@gmail.com](mailto:basrconference2017@gmail.com) before 30th May 2017. Panels should be submitted in the same way, with details for each paper along with the panel title and the name of the convener/chair.

If you are an PGT/Taught Masters or early PGR student and wish to present your project for 5-10 minutes there will be a 'Lightning Talks' seminar. Please send a proposal of 50 words including a label: 'Lightning talk' along with your institutional affiliation, programme, mode of study and year.

Deadline for paper/panel submissions: 30th May 2017  
Notification of acceptance of papers/panels: No later than 15th June 2017  
Online registration for conference open from: 1st June 2017  
Deadline for registration: 31st July 2017

A limited number of student bursaries will be made available to support PG students and EC academics to attend the conference. Please see the separate Call for Bursary Applications on [basr.ac.uk](http://basr.ac.uk).

# features

## FROM OUR CORRESPONDENTS ...IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

The story of the study of religions as a discipline in the Republic of Ireland is a very recent one, yet it is marked by some considerable successes. Before we begin this short exposition, we should clarify that discussing the study of religions in Ireland or on the island of Ireland are two different things and although scholarship on religions in Ireland, or Irish religions, invariably bridges the jurisdictional boundary between Northern Ireland, which is part of the UK (and therefore claimed as BASR territory!) and the Republic of Ireland, academic life in the two parts of the island have distinctly different traditions in terms of the non-confessional, non-theological study of religions. This short communication is written from the perspective of the Republic of Ireland.

Unlike most western and northern European countries where the study of religions as a distinct discipline can be traced well back into the twentieth century, Ireland has had no tradition of the scientific study of religions. The educational landscape has been dominated by institutions with a Christian (primarily Catholic) ethos. University education, in terms of teaching about religions, has generally catered for the needs of schools to teach a confessional Christian Religious Education curricula and for prospective priests and ministers to gain a theological education. Ireland's preeminent university, Trinity College Dublin, has a Protestant past and a strong theological tradition which has strengthened in recent years with the addition of a new Catholic Theology department, the Loyola Institute. Because of these institutional constraints and a colonial legacy of religious

division that polarised society into two competing religious camps, Catholic and Protestant, the possibility for the development of the study of religions or religious studies free from confessional influence has been very restricted.

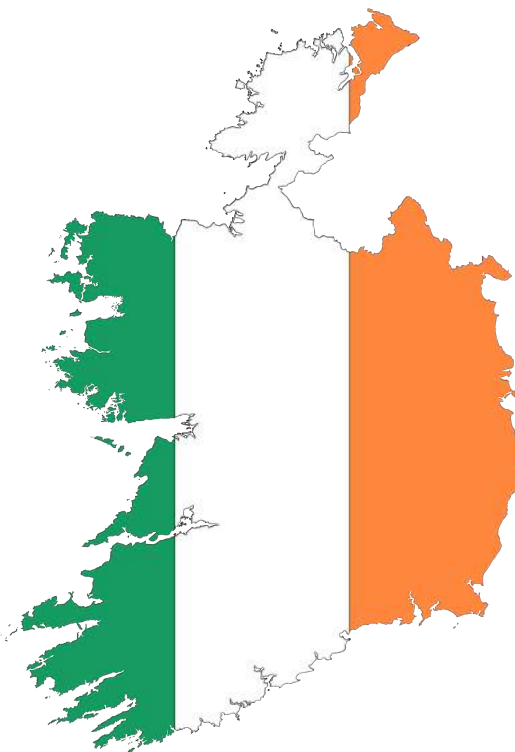
In the nineteenth century, the British established three non-confessional universities offering equal opportunities to Protestant and Catholic students alike and the 1908 Universities Act prohibited the "provision or maintenance of any theological or religious teaching or study" in these institutions. Whilst the University Act kept these institutions free of Theology departments, it also discouraged the non-theological, non-confessional study of religions. The Universities Act of 1997 removed the clause forbidding the teaching of religion, and it was in one of these non-confessional institutions, University College Cork, that the first Study of Religions department was formed in 2007.

As Brian Bocking, the first Professor of Study of Religions at University College Cork, and indeed in the Republic of Ireland, summarised, "For most people in Ireland, studying religion has meant studying Christian theology and Christian history, largely in Christian-ethos (usually Catholic) educational institutions ranging from primary schools to third-level colleges. So-called 'other religions' (which for a long time meant only Protestantism or Catholicism depending on standpoint, but now extends to Islam) may be included through 'Ecumenics' or 'Inter-Faith Dialogue', but only in relation to a Christian theological perspective." The Study of Religions Department at



University College Cork was the first to break with this model in a decisive way. Established by Gwilym Beckerlegge with the first lectures taught by Gregory Shushan in 2007, the programme is entitled Religions and Global Diversity. The department has, since its foundation, built up to core faculty of between four and five academic staff, researching and teaching on broad range of religions and regions including Islam, Hinduism, indigenous religions, new religious movements, and contemporary religions in Ireland. The department has a contemporary focus with all research activity centring on the modern period (19th-21st centuries) with a strong emphasis on ethnographic, anthropological, cultural studies and gender approaches. Important research landmarks in the department's history include hosting the Irish Research Council funded project Muslims in Ireland led by Oliver Scharbrodt (now at Chester University) which ran from 2008-2011 and the European Research Council (project no. 677355) – Creative Agency and Religious Minorities: 'Hidden Galleries' in the Secret Police Archives in 20th Century Central and Eastern Europe – led by James Kapaló, which is running from 2016-2020. The department is also home to the Marginalised and Endangered Worldviews Study Centre (MEWSC), a research centre focused on the concerns of indigenous and marginalised communities and the threat to their worldviews posed by a globalised and industrialised world. The department has so far produced two PhDs with several excellent PhD students undertaking research on a wide range of topics from minority religions in Eastern Europe, contemporary goddess worship, Western Esotericism, Japanese Christianity and religion and sound.

In the last couple of years, religious studies has also been strengthened significantly in three other institutions. Within the context of its Religions and Theology Department, Trinity College



Dublin has expanded teaching and research in religious studies with four academics now engaged in the non-theological study of religions, teaching and researching on Islam, African religions, theory and method in religious studies, early Christianity and South Asian religions. Dublin City University (DCU) has recently expanded by incorporating a number of smaller colleges, including St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, and Mater Dei Institute of Education. This has also led to an enhanced Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, including a new School of Theology, Philosophy, and Music. Here Religious Studies is offered (along with theology) as a subject on the undergraduate BA Joint Honours programme with teaching and research on sacred texts, Judaism and Islam. Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) has also introduced religious studies to its Theology, Psychology and Social Care programmes in the School of Humanities teaching modules on Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism to undergraduate students.

The other major factor in the development of the academic field was the founding of the Irish Society for the Academic Study of Religions (ISASR) in 2011. The tireless work of Professor Brian Bocking, who came with considerable experience in both BASR and IAHR, ensured that ISASR was able to establish itself as both a member organisation of the EASR and the IAHR with lightning speed and efficiency. And as the first President of the Society, Patrick Claffey, set out at the inaugural conference held at University College Cork in 2012, this was coming at a momentous time for Irish society more broadly:

*We are at an interesting time for the study of religion in Ireland as the heretofore dominant religion has gone through a period of severe crisis and indeed it can be argued [...] that what we are seeing for the Catholic Church and indeed perhaps for wider Irish society is what Michel de Certeau has described as a scène de crise - a*

*moment when the socio-political and religious landscape in Ireland is undergoing a fundamental change [...] We are witnessing the end of what Dermot Keogh has described as 'the informal consensus' that existed in a 'clerico-political nexus'. At the same time we are witnessing the emergence of other religious movements and spiritualities as Ireland moves into this new paradigm. All of this makes the study of religions of great interest and offers great possibilities for an emerging area in the Irish academic landscape.*

– ISASR President Patrick Claffey, at the 2012 inaugural conference address

Because of this shifting landscape in which the study of religions exists in Ireland, the Society sets out very strongly its mission as a “forum for the critical, analytical and cross-cultural study of religions, past and present. It is not a forum for confessional, apologetical, interfaith or other similar concerns.” None of this was self-evident at the outset and the society has had to work quite hard to engage and inform the broader academic community in Ireland. From a committee that at first was largely comprised of staff and postgraduate students at the new Study of Religions department at UCC, the society now has a committee in which academics from four institutions where religious studies/study of religions is taught and researched. Membership of the Society has reached a stable 35-40. From our humble beginnings and for a relatively small scholarly society, it is often remarked at IAHR and EASR gatherings that we seem to be “omni-present”.

The two main vehicles for the promotion of the academic study of religions in Ireland were identified by the first committee as the running of an annual conference and the establishment of an in-house journal, both of which we have achieved. Since our first conference at UCC in 2012, we have organised conferences in Dublin (2013 and 2015), in Belfast (2014) (where we will return in 2018 for a joint conference with BASR), and following a return to Cork in 2016, the 2017 conference will be held at Waterford. The society launched its journal, entitled the Journal of the Irish Society for the Academic Study of Religions (JISASR), as a forum for the publication of research by Ireland-based schol-

ars and for research on religions in Ireland globally. The journal will shortly publish its fifth edition.

Other noteworthy developments include the founding of INSEP, the Irish Network of the Study of Esotericism and Paganism which held its first workshop in March of this year, and also the introduction to the teaching programme of Western Esotericism, one of very few modules of its kind in the world.

For those of us that have been involved in the exciting mission of establishing the study of religions as a distinct and recognised discipline at University College Cork and in Ireland more broadly through ISASR, there have been many significant achievements but also many hurdles to overcome. The discipline still struggles to be recognised as a scholarly endeavour that deals with religions and yet is not ‘religious’ in its aims. The broader institutional framework of the state, which still grapples with its relationship to the Catholic Church, of universities and teacher training, which are all significantly different in Ireland to the UK with regards to religion, continue to pose challenges, some explicit and some more subtle. Going forward, we wish to see more institutions offering taught postgraduate programmes so that students in Ireland or coming to Ireland to study will have more choice, we wish to see more inclusive and pluralistic RE taught in Irish schools in place of what is effectively religious instruction, in order that social awareness of religious diversity help young people in Ireland navigate with sensitivity our globalised world, and we would wish to see research on religions in Ireland invigorated through increased funding opportunities for talented researchers.

**James Kapaló is President of the Irish Society for the Academic Study of Religions and Jenny Butler is the Secretary. Both lecture in the Study of Religions Department at UCC.**

# RE:THINKING PRIMITIVE CULTURE

*Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art and Custom* first published in 1871, is the foundational text of social anthropology, providing its first account of religion. It is the magnum opus of the discipline's founding father, the first Reader and Professor of social anthropology - Sir Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917), but was also a significant text for the interdisciplinary study of religion, serving as a foil for other seminal theorists, notably Émile Durkheim.

Yet it is not clear that it enjoys the same status as other classics of the field or is as widely read

as it once was. For the occasion of the centenary of Tylor's death this year, we will launch our edited volume *Edward Tylor, Religion and Culture* reflecting on Tylor's life and work and his place in academic memory and offering fresh perspectives from scholars who have engaged with Tylor's work, but here we reflect on his most famous book.

In *Primitive Culture*, Tylor collated historical and contemporary ethnology together to systematically theorise human cognition and culture as a whole. Religion was a vital part of that albeit not deemed to be a *sui generis* or transcendent part.

Liam Templeton  
Sutherland (University  
of Edinburgh), Paul-  
Francois Tremlett and  
Graham Harvey (The  
Open University).

The use of the singular term 'culture' was deliberate, while he recognised distinctions between peoples and between elements of human culture, including 'religion', these were not reified. He treated them as part of the same (albeit not indivisible) phenomenon.

He may not have been the first to centre the study of religion on what we would now term indigenous religions but this book acted as a strong counterweight to the textual, philological and world religions focus of the nascent science of religion pioneered by F. Max Müller. *Primitive Culture* was a systematic attempt to reflect on pressing questions about humanity through an examination of the mounting, yet still fresh historical and ethnological data which Victorian scholarship had acquired. While there is much about Tylor's approach which contemporary scholars rightly critique, the dismissive characterisation of the first generation of anthropologists as 'armchair' anthropologists, glosses over this context.

While pejorative characterisations of indigenous peoples and a form of cultural evolutionism ('development theory') are embedded in the text, even in the title, there are features of this book which some contemporary scholars might find surprisingly refreshing. Ironically given that his approach casually described as 'intellectualist', its engagement with systems of thought and religion is through ethnographic details, practices, lifestyles and self-reportage not through the study of sacred texts and formalised doctrines (though used the term 'doctrine' to refer to pat-

terns of thought). Further the book is 'intellectualist' because it is concerned with outlining broad and recurring patterns of thought, which is why many practitioners of the cognitive sciences of religion continue to acknowledge the influence of Tylor on their work.

The text avoids the world religions paradigm because Tylor's interest in religion was not in rigidly demarcated systems but in the development of human thought generally, viewing 'religion' defined as 'belief in spiritual beings', as bound up with the stages of that development. Clearly, this underlying assumption is out of step with the aims of modern scholarship but given the breadth of the text and the fact that it was written before most of the social scientific approaches to religion had calcified, parts of this text can be surprisingly relevant. Its minimal, cross-cultural approach to religion provides a clear subject matter while avoiding the foci of the world religions approach.

The book also introduced the term 'animism', referring to the general belief in a 'soul' as pervasive in nature. The 'soul' for Tylor was used by early humans to account for the distinction between living and dead human beings and animals and the encounter, of dead persons in dreams. Animism was the base of all religion for Tylor, to be superseded by materialist explanations of the world. In Tylor's account the doctrine of the soul was then projected on the properties and processes of nature, so that trees, rocks, rivers and celestial bodies could be understood as human-like persons. This view of religion as early mistaken science may itself have been superseded, but the emphasis on religion as rooted in, often pedestrian, relations with personal beings may not be.

According to this understanding, 'religion' or 'gods' and 'spirits', are not treated as necessarily fundamentally transcendent or part of a separate sphere of life, but can be treated pragmatically as part of everyday socio-political relations. This anticipates the work of later anthropologists to a surprising extent. It also means that this approach to 'religion' avoids some of the pit-

falls of comparison by refusing to specify a specific social role or social significance for religion, in short religion is not necessarily 'sacred'. As such, Tylor may even have some relevance for the nascent study of 'non-religion'.

This book occupies an odd place in academic memory, because it is the core text in which Tylor expounded his approach to religion, it is the source of the selections and interpretations offered in most introductory texts and courses. Yet the historical background is usually where Tylor is left, unlike many other founding figures. Though this exposure of generations of students to Tylor's work is rarely misleading, the 'canonical' or 'received' Tylor is very evident in *Primitive Culture*, this still leaves much room for nuance and for alternative Tylors to emerge from the text. Perhaps the view of Tylor as theoretically redundant, as unsalvageable owes much to the sharp hostility of the 20th century, post-Malinowskian anthropologists to the first generation of anthropologists which reflected their own uncomfortable proximity to them. Hopefully we are better placed to reassess the legacy of *Primitive Culture* from our historical standpoint.

The breakneck speed at which some students are first introduced to classical theorists in the study of religion means that even the predominant face of Tylor can be surprising. He rejected racist accounts of cultural difference, expounding the 'psychic unity of mankind' or the common intellectual capacities of all human beings which was important in its day. Further, even the place of development theory in the text is complex, he was concerned with accounting for differing technology and material culture. He did so in response to theories which accounted for technological variation as uniformly the result of diffusion and degeneration from 'higher' civilizations. Tylor not only acknowledged indigenous innovation, his theories actually depended on doing so. The logic of Tylor's approach to religion also meant that hunter-gatherer animism was not only conceived by him as resulting from rational inferences about nature but was more rational than western religion because it has not been superseded by ma-

terialist understandings of the world.

The real tension between the differing faces of Tylor relates to the difference between Tylor the careful and systematic ethnologist and Tylor the grand theorist with his unshakeable faith in linear human development, which we have dubbed 'micro' and 'macro' Tylor. This is reflected in Tylor's presentation of a uniform explanation of religion compared to his more nuanced discussions of the development of language, myth and numeracy which tended to strike a balance between prevailing approaches and strived to avoid myopic explanations of these phenomena.

This reading of the text also helps to explain one of the most puzzling features of Tylor's work, his notion of 'survivals'. Practices or beliefs which he considered to be out of place in 'higher' cultures were explained as survivals from an earlier stage of development. Included in this category was everything from the animistic folk beliefs in Scotland and Germany, attributing agency to the contemporary growth of Spiritualism in England with its strong resemblance to the religions of indigenous peoples with which he concerned himself and arguably the survival of religion itself.

The need for this arose because Tylor was both true to his sources and yet felt compelled to fit them into the framework of his development theory which they undermined, when in fact they could be explained with greater ease as evidence of the variability of human cultures which resist such rigid classifications. Engaging fully and critically with the text certainly helps us to provide a more nuanced account of Tylor himself but can help us to reflect on the field itself through its development, just as Tylor attempted with culture. The text may linger at the fringes of academic memory but we hope that this year can act as an impetus to engage once again with this flawed but foundational text which when read with care may still have more to offer than is first apparent.

# THE VALUE OF CONFERENCES AS A RESEARCH STUDENT

Conferences are valuable experiences, at any stage of your academic journey. The BASR Conference 2016 was influential in different ways for three research students at different stages of their academic careers. Here, they give their perspectives on how the conference influenced their research and their relationship with the academic community.

## Attending a Conference in the Transition between Masters and PhD | Áine Warren

I attended the BASR conference of 2016 as a research student transitioning from Masters to PhD. It was both the first academic conference I had attended or presented at. While I had given shorter presentations of my work in the context of the Masters and within my school, this would be the first full paper, and my first experience sharing my research with a wider audience. The BASR was an ideal environment for a first conference experience: it was comfortable and non-intimidating, while being large enough to provide a wide range of engaging panels, and a diverse audience for panel discussion.

For my paper, I chose to present early research from my Masters rather than my PhD proposal, so that I would have a comprehensive piece of work to share. It was, however, closely linked to my PhD proposal, and so provided me with an opportunity to receive feedback on some elements of my upcoming doctoral research. The large audience for my panel ensured the experience was somewhat daunting, but also made for a lively panel discussion. I received some feedback on my paper that was formative on the direction of my explorative research in the first year of my PhD.

Attending other panels was as much of a novelty as presenting on my own, as my prior experience of academic papers on Religious Studies was limited to research seminars and other events within my school. It was a very valuable experience to be exposed to so much varying research at this early stage in my academic career, as it showcased a wide range of ideas and approaches. Outside of receiving direct feedback on my paper, this provided indirect feedback through enabling me to situate my re-

search in the context of the work of other peers and scholars in Religious Studies in Britain.

As a whole, the conference was an incredibly positive experience. It provided a vital opportunity to meet Religious Studies scholars outside my university, and to experience an academic community which was still very new to me, having come to Religious Studies from other disciplines of study. The BASR was simultaneously friendly and non-intimidating, and professionally run and large enough to exemplify the conference environment. It was invigorating to have the opportunity to network with senior scholars and seek guidance as I made the transition into PhD study, and to gain insight into the academic world of Religious Studies. I would greatly encourage any Masters student to seek to present their dissertation or other material at such a conference, whether or not they were directly entering a PhD programme.

## Refining Themes and Identifying Research Questions | Sammy Bishop

I attended the 2016 BASR conference as a PhD student entering my second year of study, straight after going through the first year review board process. I had been fortunate enough to attend the larger EASR conference in Helsinki earlier in the year, which gave me a good introduction to the conference environment without the pressure of presenting. However, the BASR conference was my first experience of presenting my own work to colleagues and others in the field, making it an important time in my PhD development. Being somewhat in the middle of the PhD process, I didn't feel any urgent pressure to connect with potential examiners or employers. Even so, the conference was an excellent environment for meeting others in the field. As a relatively small conference (compared to the

EASR at least), it was immediately a more intimate and friendly environment, which was only encouraged by the fact that well-renowned scholars in the field mingled happily with early career researchers such as myself. Such an environment can provide a measure of reassurance to less confident early-career scholars.

I presented work from my first-year review board – ideas that I was keen to pursue, but which perhaps needed some more thought regarding specific methods and approaches. I found the audience supportive and encouraging, and my panel provided a great chance to receive formative feedback from other enthusiastic and committed scholars in the field of Religious Studies. Since the conference, it has been helpful to reflect on the questions and comments I received whilst discussing my work with other attendees – both in my panel, and in other conversations – and this has helped to refine my research focus. I have found it particularly helpful to bear certain conversations in mind whilst conducting and reflecting on my fieldwork, which began shortly after this conference.

The conference theme of ‘Religion Beyond the Textbook’ and the panels resulting from this prompt encouraged me to think differently about how my own research might develop during the remainder of my PhD studies. Attending other panels allowed me to situate my own research within the wider field, and identify how I can contribute fresh research of greater value to the areas concerned. I found the roundtable on ‘Religion and the Senses’ particularly thought-provoking, and it was a joy to see researchers from many sub-fields of Religious Studies pitching such a wide range of ideas to approach this theme. This has become increasingly relevant to my own work, and points raised during this discussion have later re-emerged when reflecting on my own fieldwork.

As a second-year, post-review board student, this BASR conference helped me to reflect on how my research can make original contributions to the wider field, as well as refining my focus for the fieldwork stage of my research. I hope to present later research at future conferences, and look forward to seeing how this could help me in different ways.

### Conferences as a Formative Feedback Opportunity for Final Year PhD Candidates | Louise K. Gramstrup

Attending the BASR annual conference as a final year doctoral candidate provided an exciting opportunity to get additional formative feedback on ideas that were to inform my thesis. Rather than “play it safe” by talking about an

aspect of my research that I felt confident about, I decided to present on a subject matter that I had yet to clarify in terms of my argument and place in my thesis, namely the role of food in a women’s interfaith book group. I knew that BASR would attract subject experts in material religion due to the 2016 conference theme: ‘Religion Beyond the Textbook.’ Consequently, I hoped to take advantage of their expertise so as to get a clearer sense of my own data, for instance by gaining ideas about where to look for further literature to inform my analysis or simply to get a feel for whether or not my argument proved relevant and engaging. On the other hand, for the same reason – the presence of esteemed scholars – it felt somewhat intimidating to present on work in progress. This anxiety could also be explained by the fact that networking is an important dimension of attending conferences as a final year PhD candidate. It provides you with the chance to spend several days interacting with potential viva examiners or future colleagues.

My fears about presenting my paper proved to be wholly unfounded, however. Following my presentation, I gained incredibly supportive feedback. I received insightful questions that brought out valuable perspectives that I had not considered. The atmosphere at panel discussions felt friendly and encouraging, and based on the number of questions asked throughout the conference, people seemed genuinely interested in the papers presented. The value of having graduate students, early career researchers and scholars established in the field of religion come together to discuss various aspects of religion in depth cannot be underestimated. Their insights informed several of my thesis chapters that were significantly enhanced as a result. Furthermore, the conference provided a space to reflect on potential directions in which future research and publications might go precisely because of the gathering of scholars, new and experienced, with a keen interest and understanding of issues of religion. It gives you an awareness of the areas trending in Religious Studies and allows you to engage with scholars with whom you might end up doing collaborative work.

Overall, attending the BASR Annual Conference was incredibly valuable as a final year doctoral candidate for the purposes of gaining formative feedback on work in progress and so improving one’s PhD thesis, for networking, and for gaining knowledge about the direction in which Religious Studies is going as a discipline. I wholeheartedly encourage any final year PhD student doing research on issues of religion to submit an abstract for future BASR conferences and, thereby, take advantage of being members of the Religious Studies academic community.

# TEACHING MATTERS: Mixed Metaphors and Muddled Senses: Measuring Pedagogy in a Time of TEF

The Higher Education website challenge, 'Are You TEF Ready?' (<https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/institutions/consultancy/TEF>) may resonate with a certain advertising style, or journalise, but TEF-readiness is an ideology that requires our scrutiny, and satire. Certainly, scholars contributing to WonkHE are 'raising their eyebrows' as TEF has 'fun with flags' and introduces a medal system for teaching quality (<http://wonkhe.com/blogs/policy-watch-fun-with-flags-the-role-of-metrics-in-tef-outcomes/>) as should we, in all scholarly associations interested in the teaching of our subjects.

In my classes I often refer my students to the metaphor of lenses as means of examining the data of their study. 'The tools of social research are akin to lenses', I advise, 'that we select in order to bring the correct object into focus'. The lenses used to examine the big data of religions – their grand narratives, long historical influences and current global impacts – need to be distinguished from the smaller, perhaps more refined, lenses that investigate the relative minutiae of an individual belief, presumption or motivation. When my undergraduates suggest using the techniques of mass observation, broad social surveys and questionnaires to measure small indicative phenomena (as they too often do) I advise against using 'a hammer to crush a nut'. And when they suggest using quantitative methods for qualitative ends I suggest they may be using 'round pegs for square holes'. It may be that the measurements for TEF require similar recalibration.

*Should we use metrics to measure success in teaching? Dominic Corrywright is not sure.*

The Higher Education Academy is making soundwaves across pedagogy in HEIs this year with a conference entitled: 'Generation TEF: Teaching in the Spotlight'. (<https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/training-events/hea-annual-conference-2017-generation-tef-teaching-spotlight>). It will be an opportunity for myriad student experience specialists and "qualiologists" to gather and share, or compare, measuring sticks. For metrics is the tone resonating around such gatherings and the focal length of the selected lenses is teaching quality set within the 'Teaching Excellence Framework' – which has become, since TEF is of course a refrain of REF (the 'Research Excellence Framework') - an adopted mode of measurement for those lenses which seek to produce a clear picture of both research and teaching. We teachers and lecturers, pedagogues new and old, are in sound and sight the centre of a reconfigured sense of excellence – data-based excellence. The intrinsic, nuanced elements of observed quality (those which so often require small lenses) are being ground anew to focus on the extrinsic objectives of mass quantity. It



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should perhaps be emphasised that the much challenged tool of NSS is the primary source of data for 3 of the six 'core' metrics in TEF round one.

This is not to disavow the value of metrics in analysis of teaching effectiveness, nor the impacts the consequent data can have on enhancing teaching practice, from 'nudge' to radical change. But excellence in teaching is a tricky mode to measure – as has been understood in the UK by various versions of the Office for Standards in Education for many years, and is well attested worldwide in multifarious literatures in research scholarship on teaching and learning. Yet, the grey drivers of 'value for money' and 'league tables' lead the effort to quantify excellence in HEIs. And the corollary emphasis in both evidence-based and significant metric data in quantitative measurement of 'effectiveness' (or success) in HEIs is being extended to all teaching practice, irrespective of the local contexts and conditions – one might argue, in a mistaken move to establish a generic habitus from localised habitats.

But, as TEF round two looms, (which will focus on subject areas) some of my colleagues will be muttering about 'emperors and new clothes!' Or, and since the wisdom of aphorisms seems good enough for HEA, it must be good enough for us, they point out 'elephants in rooms' or, rather, entirely empty rooms, devoid of either elephants, or students. Indeed, one of my colleagues recently tweeted an image of a student-less teaching room to his entire (absent) undergraduate class, that they might see its 'magnificent emptiness!' While the measurement of teaching is in the spotlight the increasingly consumer-based model for undergraduate engagement means classes – especially at semesters' end – are evidently emptier than they were at the start of teaching. It is this shadow outside the spotlight that is equally a part of 'Generation TEF'.

This new focus on teaching excellence, to inform flag and medal systems, ostensibly for the benefit of student choice, while employing national benchmark data may actually negatively affect real improvement. The metrics of big data look impressive but have little to do with the contextual conditions of quality teaching.

# conferences

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF RELIGION ANNUAL MEETING, SAN ANTONIO, NOVEMBER 2016.

The American Academy of Religions' (AAR) Annual Meeting was held this year in San Antonio. This year's gathering attracted around 7000 attendees, which was somewhat down on previous years – over 10,000 scholars attended the 2015 gathering in Atlanta. A number of scholars were apparently reluctant to attend, owing to the fact that the meetings were in Texas and fell shortly after the presidential elections.

Nevertheless, the scale of the events can be daunting and exhausting – indeed, just reading the program to decide what sessions to attend can take days. At any one time there can be around three dozen panels to choose from, probably making a total of around 500 at the entire event. The largeness of the gathering is due to the meetings being held jointly by the AAR and the Society for Biblical Literature (SBL), and there are few themes that are not covered. On the other hand, the scale can also be inspiring, especially for those who imagine themselves (rightly or wrongly) to be in beleaguered disciplines or careers. The US presidential election seemed to generate fewer conversations than the AAR president's instigation of a conference theme of 'revolutionary love'. Happily, there were plenty of sessions that did not feel the need to actively contest, let alone celebrate, any link between love, revolutionary or otherwise, and religion. Most participants got on with the business of debating critical issues.

It is a good idea to make arrangements to meet people before arriving, because the spread (geographically across hotels and gaping conference centre, as well as the dozens of concurrent sessions) can make it difficult to find anyone and the conference can be a lonely experience. Many scholars, though, tend to go to selective sessions and most BASR members will find their closest academic allies in the parallel NAASR (North American Association for the Study of Religion) conference, which begins a day earlier and has an Equinox-sponsored reception the Friday evening.

There are also other business meetings and events prior to the conference. Suzanne Owen attended the annual meeting of the (more informal than it sounds) Society for the Study of Native American Religious Traditions (or Sacred Traditions as it is called now, though it is still referred to as SSNART). George Chryssides attended the editorial meeting of De Gruyter's Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception, a massive project just reaching its half-way point—14 out of the projected 30 volumes have now appeared, with advance work having been carried out up to the letter L.

The programme proper began Saturday with an early start to attend selected sessions, and in between taking in the warm sunshine where possible by taking a walk along the San Antonio waterways. An app has usefully replaced the heavy programme book, and can help you find sessions and presenters if you find yourself at a loose end for a couple of hours. The NAASR sessions were excellent, themed around concepts such as 'Comparison' with an opening paper by Aaron Hughes.



Several sessions pursued ‘body’ and ‘materiality’ as key topics of debate. While these are not exactly new topics, they are being approached more interestingly than ever before. That is, we do seem to have largely escaped from the idea that religion is represented or manifested in physical / material forms — i.e. that religion is interior or transcendent and only secondarily expressed by art or activity, etc. Terms like embodiment and materiality have sometimes suggested that religion exists prior to people doing things. In AAR sessions about the “new materialism” and “personhood” some exciting debates energised not only panels but rooms full of people with diverse interests and perspectives. Graham Harvey and Suzanne Owen both presented

short papers for the roundtable session on ‘Personhood, Revisited’.

One of the impressive things about AAR 2016 was the increased participation of scholars engaged by the study of Indigenous religious traditions. While such colleagues always gather within AAR annual meetings, it seemed that Indigenous religions research was presented in a wider array of sessions than previously. As always, the Contemporary Pagan Studies panels featured more than a few interesting papers, such as those in the ‘Dilemmas of Identity and Formation in Contemporary Paganism’ session, as well as Native Traditions of North American, which had a highly engaging ‘Native American Traditions:

Approaches to Research and Teaching' panel. The fact that some of these (and many other sessions) were organised and led by younger scholars bodes well for the future of this aspect of the study of religions.

On the periphery of the event was a session for prison chaplains, who were addressed by various scholars of minority religions in order to inform their professional work. This year George Chryssides was asked to give an afternoon presentation on the Jehovah's Witnesses, and their interest in acquiring accurate information and in treating them fairly was encouraging. On the other hand, the Adventist session was a most disappointing event, with little academic content: the chair began with extempore prayer, and the bulk of the meeting consisted mainly of younger members giving personal reminiscences. Being on a Saturday – the sabbath – the talks culminated in a service of worship. The flavour of the meeting can be encapsulated by one speaker's comment: "Prophets need to be scholars, and scholars need to be prophets." Nonetheless, despite the lack of academic material, this meeting could be regarded as interesting primary source material.

Evenings can be quite busy with competing receptions, dinners and programmed events, tours (some religious, some local), and opportunities for early career scholars to receive counselling regarding their future strategy. It was difficult, even while being selective, to find time for the publishers in the exhibition hall, where you can still spot one or two relevant titles among all the Bible presses. Most of the main publishing houses have stands there, but if you intend to discuss ideas for one's own projected publications, you are advised to make contact in advance, and book a one-to-one session with one of the commissioning editors.

AAR annual meetings are always interesting and impressive events, and thoroughly recommended if you have never been. It is well worth the journey. The 2017 meeting will be in Boston, and details can be found at the AAR's website at [www.aarweb.org](http://www.aarweb.org).

George D. Chryssides, Graham Harvey  
and Suzanne Owen

TRANS-STATES: THE ART OF CROSSING OVER, 9-10TH SEPTEMBER, UNIVERSITY OF NORTHAMPTON

This year's (hopefully inaugural) Trans-States conference was billed as a "transdisciplinary conference exploring representations in contemporary visual culture of boundary crossing, liminality and queeification with specific reference to occultism, mysticism, shamanism and other esoteric and spiritual practices", and it more than delivered on the potent promises of that description. Indeed, even the conference's programme booklet managed to be a thing of mysterious beauty and fascination (available online here).

While historically the relationship between religion and the occult has been problematic, to say the least, this conference served to demonstrate that at least in academic terms there is a robust and healthy interest in the esoteric side of the religious coin. In fact, exoteric religion was something of an absent presence at the conference. Pax Fexneld's paper, *Bleed for the Devil: Self-injury as Transgressive Practice in Contemporary Satanism, and the Re-enchantment of Late Modernity*, briefly touched upon the distinction between theistic and atheistic Satanism, but this was about as close as it got. The lines between "religion" and magical practices can be difficult to draw. Non-Western traditions such as Voodoo made an appearance in Georgia van Raalte's talk on The Ghetto Tarot (a photographic deck whose imagery utilises real Haitians using makeshift props to recreate the deck's arcana), while elsewhere Vanessa Sinclair's Third Mind work and Pandrogeny, which explored Genesis P-Orridge's late work (P-Orridge being the founder of Thee Temple ov Psychick Youth during the 1980s, though he has since abandoned that project to its own momentum). Aleister Crowley, and his religion of Thelema, was a notable presence, with Crowley biographer Richard Kaczynski delivering the first keynote speech which detailed the creation of Crowley's Thoth Tarot deck, the result of an intensely creative collaboration with the painter Lady Freida Harris (not coincidentally, that deck's depiction of The Hanged Man served as the poster for the conference).

Art, and its relationship to esotericism was a recurring theme. As well as small exhibitions showing the art of Carlos Ruiz Brussain, Sara Hannant and Sasha Chaitow there were performance art rituals from Orryelle Defenestrade, Appril Schaile and

Stefanie Elrick, as well as filmed pieces such as a screening of Roy Wallace's documentary *Modern Angels*, which explored body modification and the psychotropic music video for *Kyrie Eleison* by Denigrata (directed by the conference's own organiser Cavan McLaughlin). Painting and illustration was also present in the talks about the art of J.F.C. Fuller and Austin Osman Spare (whose influence merited a panel dedicated to his life, work and ideas). The literature of Victorian writer and occultist Edward Bulwer-Lytton was discussed by Jonah Locksley (curator of the highly recommended [thethinkersgarden.com](http://thethinkersgarden.com)), while H.P. Lovecraft appeared by way of Kenneth Grant in Alistair Coombs presentation of Grant's ideas, concerning Lovecraft as unwittingly channelling a great and terrible truth in his Cthulhu mythos. Cinema made its presence felt in Rebekah Sheldon's *Queer Sex Magic, Transindividual Affect, and Nonrepresentational Criticism* by way of the films of Kenneth Anger, as well as Kristoffer Noheden's *Cinematic Possession* which focused on the use of trance in the films of Maya Deren, Jean Rouch, and Andrzej Żuławski. Surprisingly absent were comic books, though this was countered by the presence of the final keynote speaker, Alan Moore, arguably the world's best known comics writer, and very active and open about his magical practices. Moore's speech echoed the recurring themes of the conference, in particular the relationship between art and magic (if indeed they can be said to exist separately at all), and the capacity of art, in all its forms, to alter our perception of reality.

Intriguingly, Kaczynki's fascinating discussion of the Thoth Tarot deck also included the revelation that Harris had originally based The Fool card on Harpo Marx, a design Crowley rejected on the grounds of it being vulgar popular culture. Incidentally, Harpo makes an appearance in Alan Moore's superhero comic-come-magical grimoire, *Promethea*, representing The Aeon/Judgement. Such hidden connections could be encountered throughout the conference, its transdisciplinary focus resulting in an underground root system of invisible threads linking across panels. For my part, these themes dovetailed nicely in the *Black Mirror: Journal & Research Network* discussion panel. As well as a healthy debate as to how best define 'esoteric art' (art using occult symbols? Art created while in a magical state? Art designed to create a magical state in the viewer? All three?), the discussion also pondered the

question of "re-enchantment". One argument for the recurring interest in the occult has been, to take a phrase from the sociologist Max Weber, to counter the "disenchantment" of rational modernity by re-enchanting the world through occult practices. However, this narrative is hardly clear-cut. The occult is deeply intertwined with modernity. The Western occult tradition especially draws upon the mystical as well as the scientific. This was a theme developed in my own paper on *Tantric Transhumanism: An Esoteric History of Human Enhancement*, and touched upon in Geoff Greentree's talk on the sweat lodge as an 'ancient technology'. Unfortunately I was unable to catch Ana Belén González-Pérez's *Epistemology of Magic. A Transdisciplinary Approach to the Quest for Results in Ars Magica* which appeared to investigate related themes of reconfiguring magical practices through the lens of scientific thinking, and vice versa.

Whether it be the evolutionary mysticism of Blavatsky's Theosophical society, or Frieda Harris's use of then-modern scientific concepts and findings such as the Mobius strip, lunar tides and Martian canals into the Thoth deck designs, magical thought has assimilated, rather than been defeated, by scientific ideas. Indeed, as Marco Pasi from the History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents, University of Amsterdam said during that panel, "One wonders when the world was disenchanting". It might be suggested that anyone lucky to have attended this two-day conference would leave asking exactly the same question.

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#### MILLENARIANISM AND VIOLENCE, CENSAMM, THE PANACEA TRUST, BEDFORD, 6-7TH APRIL

The inaugural CenSAMM conference took place on in a tent in the garden of the Panacea Museum in sleepy Bedford. The setting was both beautiful and comfortable, if occasionally noisy, although the background of birdsong was quite charming. The conference proper was preceded by two film nights curated by David G Robertson. Fittingly for a place considered to be the original Garden of Eden, it began with *Noah*, followed by *Left Behind*, *The Last*



Top: delegates discuss the presentations in the sun. Below: Susan Palmer's opening keynote. Bottom: inside the big top.

Wave and 2012.

Due to illness, Stuart Wright (Lamar) was unable to present the opening keynote, so Susan Palmer (Concordia/McGill, his co-author of the recent *Storming Zion: Exploring State Raids on Religious Communities*) stepped up to talk about children in millenarian movements. She presented five different examples of the relationship between children and violence in millenarian groups, including the Order of the Solar Temple (OTS, who committed mass suicide in 1995/6 - although of course it wasn't suicide for the children), MOVE (a radical anarchist and largely black religious commune who were bombed - yes, BOMBED - by the Philadelphia police in May 1985) and the Twelve Tribes (whose violence is entirely mythical and rhetorical). In each of these cases, children represent the self-image of the group, and are taken to be pure and perfect, uncorrupted by the down-fallen modern world.

Gary Trompf (Sydney) presented via satellite from Australia, giving an overview of his work on Polynesian "cargo cults", and their "retributive logic". He focused on the tension between the reward of the "new goods", and the motif that contact with the outside world can precipitate the collapse of the traditional world. In certain cases, the locals felt "cheated" by modernity, by the apparent "failure of reciprocity", which could lead to violence. Anthropologist Joseph Webster (Queen's Belfast) then discussed the apocalyptic imaginings - how violence, and images of violence, play into our visions of the Eschaton. The material violence of the imagery embodies the violence of the temporal break between the corrupt present and the perfected future, while tying the future, past and present together.

Stuart Wright's paper was then read in absentia by Eileen Barker (INFORM, LSE, living legend). It started by considering what factors such groups might have in common which lead to violence, both endogenous (a movement's leadership, rituals, expectations, etc..) and exogenous (social opposition, unrest, etc.). Drawing on Social Movement Theory, he notes that apocalyptic violence grows out of opposition between millenarian groups and representatives of the social order who see them as deviant. In other words, violence is not a necessary outcome of some intrinsic quality of the millenarian group, but one possible (and unpredictable) outcome of the

negotiation between them and other groups, including the government. When state agents are seen by the group as acting with their opponents, "the upward spiral gives sacred meaning to possible violence."

The next two papers concerned the Fifth Monarchists, who emerged in Cromwell's Republic, alongside the Baptists and Quakers. Ariel Hessayon (Goldsmiths) discussed how the Book of Daniel inspired their unsuccessful 1661 uprising against the restored Stuart monarchy. Suffice to say, King Jesus never arrived. Thomas Venner and his surviving followers were hung, drawn and quartered. Aiden Cottrell-Boyce's (Cambridge) paper further developed the idea that the restoration of Charles II represented a failure of prophecy, using frameworks developed by Festinger, Zygmunt, Melton, and others. Here, violence becomes a way of reducing cognitive dissonance. In another SKYPE presentation, Britta Gullin (Umeå) presented a comparison of the process by which the OTS and the Branch Davidians moved toward violent endings. The day was closed by Moojan Momen, who described the uprising of the Iranian Babi movement in 1848-51. This paper was a welcome broadening of the conversation into the Islamic world.

Rob Geaves (Exeter) picked this theme up again on Friday morning. After acknowledging that Islamic scholarship has not been successful in speaking to broader method and theory in the study of religion, his overview of Islamic millenarianism did just that. The paper was presented with good humour, but the material presented without sensationalism or apologetics, and without shying away from controversy.

Matthew Rowley (Leicester) discussed the changing attitudes of early Puritan settlers to Native Americans, from ambivalence, to expectation, and finally to disillusionment. Changing circumstances drove hopes from millennial to apocalyptic, and scriptural support was eventually sought for violence. Seb Rumsby (Warwick) took discussion to South-East Asia for his paper on the Hmong people. He argued that millenarian activity is often clustered around borderlines and is closely related to the changing socio-political and importantly territorial position of the ethnic group within a nation state increasingly consolidated using "distance demolishing" technologies such as mass media,

roads, etc.

The next session focused on the American Christian Right and conspiracy theories. David G. Robertson (Open University) outlined the recent Pizzagate narrative, and its connection to long-running apocalyptic narratives about Satanic elites, including the Illuminati. He argued that we should see violent and sudden narratives like these as mushrooms fruiting from the mycelium of the cultic milieu when the environmental factors are right. Andrew Fergus Wilson (Derby) went further into explicitly racist narratives, to argue that we should see a non-localised white nationalism as an apocalyptic movement. Wilson showed us material from sites such as Stormfront which mixed symbols like the swastika, Greek mythology, Germanic paganism, nature and animals, the Confederate flag and popular fantasy fictional sources such as *Star Wars*. Stripped of ideas connecting these narratives to a particular land, we find an emerging nativist *nomos* that underpins a transnational populist nativism. Tristan Sturm (also Queen's Belfast) then presented on the millennial discourses of Christian Zionists in the Christian Right. As a geographer, his paper made great use of ideas of space and landscape. In short, by attempting to establish Gaza as "God's Land", the eschaton of the Palestinian demise takes on a sacred inevitability.

The conference closed by summing up the themes emerging from the conference by Joseph Webster. First was an admonition that although there are real cases of violence by millenarian groups we need to not generalise - not necessarily religious, nor only Christian or NRMs - global and local - the importance of time - there are disagreements particularly along disciplinary lines, but this conference gives us an opportunity to use these differences constructively, in dialogue. Two more are planned this year (info at [www.censamm.org](http://www.censamm.org)), and I would encourage anyone working in this field to consider these small but collegial and well organised conferences.

All papers were professionally filmed, and are available to view at [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCLeX\\_GYWBjdMF\\_lydw\\_OLBg/videos](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCLeX_GYWBjdMF_lydw_OLBg/videos).

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INFORM SEMINAR: MINORITY RELIGIONS AND  
EXTREMISM IN SCHOOLS AND ON CAMPUS,  
LSE, 5 NOVEMBER 2016

This year's Autumn Seminar held by INFORM (The Information Network on Religious Movements) focused on the highly topical issue of minority religions, extremism, and the issues these present in schools and University campuses.

Held in the New Academic Building of the London School of Economics (LSE), the home of INFORM, the seminar attracted a variety of attendees, ranging from academics, university staff, and members of minority movements. A well-structured day of papers provided an enlightening day for all attendees, whilst the frequent coffee breaks were a perfect facilitator for additional discussions on papers that sparked much interest amongst an eager audience.

We were welcomed by the founder of INFORM, Professor Eileen Barker, with a talk on the difficulty of defining 'extremism', and the problematic nature of the British Government's 'Prevent Strategy' - which aims to tackle and prevent extremism in British society. The influence of the Prevent Strategy in contemporary education became a running theme throughout the day. Barker noted that Islam was to be a dominant topic of the day's seminars, most particularly due to the prevailing issue of Islamophobia.

With this theme in mind, the seminar's papers presented an excellent and wide range of topics related to the issue of extremism. Professor Alison Scott-Baumann's (SOAS) *Who Cares about Islam on Campus?*, outlined her position as an 'activist philosopher' - combining her stances on social justice and status as an academic. Scott-Baumann's paper highlights the challenges presented to both students and scholars at University who wish to debate extremism. The increasing concern that Universities host extremism through debate not only results in Muslim students self-censoring, but also resembles a form of racial profiling. Whilst outlining the need for robust guidance for acceptance of free speech in Universities and the need for a more satisfactory definition of 'terrorism', Scott-Baumann argues that this agenda has controlled much of intellectual thinking in the academic community (noting other rich areas of Islam suitable for scholarly exploration).



Subsequent papers throughout the day expanded on this issue with a coherent flow, addressing issues such as the relation between extremism and home education in Britain, and the impact of the Deobandi movement on young British Muslims. Professor Lynn Davies (University of Birmingham) spoke of her social enterprise, ConnectFutures, which uses her previous research on what draws young people towards violent extremism to create a project that not only connects young people with different people with different ideas, but encourages them to articulate their own values that are not restrained by the narrow binaries of extremist mindsets. Other notable papers include Dr Rachel Sara Lewis' enlightening talk on her experience of home schooling her Muslim children due to what she perceives as poor pastoral care prompted by the Prevent Strategy in schools. Mehri Niknam of the Joseph Interfaith Foundation spoke of her hands-on experience of working with young Muslims, which raises concerns regarding causes of extremism missed by government policies, whilst Paul Thornbury (Head of Security at the LSE and PhD Candidate at the LSE Department of Sociology) provided security perspectives of the Prevent Strategy in Higher Education, with particular emphasis on the 'Hard and Soft' approaches to counter-terrorism.

This succinct but varied string of papers highlighted concerns for scholars in the study of religions, not only due to the limiting nature of the Prevent Strategy in conducting research of extremist groups, but also issue of extremism being promoted through public platforms at University debates. The seminar's papers demonstrated the need for the Academy to promote the value of freedom of speech in allowing scholars to not only fully explore extremist views and their causes, but also discuss these issues in a scholarly space designated for a calm and rational exchange of views.

The uncertain future of INFORM was briefly mentioned as the seminar drew to a close, with Professor Barker stating that, should this be the final INFORM seminar, it is a "good way to go out". Indeed, this highly topical seminar was bittersweet in demonstrating the value of INFORM and the contribution it has not only made to the academic community, but also the wider society.

Aled Thomas, Open University

THE SPALDING SYMPOSIUM ON INDIAN RELIGIONS,  
7TH-9TH APRIL, 2017, LADY MARGARET HALL,  
OXFORD UNIVERSITY

The theme of this year's Spalding Symposium on Indian Religions was 'Appearance and Reality', and this theme was framed perfectly on the first evening by Dr Rafal Stepień's reference to Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna's use of the tetralemma (or *catuṣkoṭi*), which set a suitably destabilizing tone for the weekend:

All is real  
All is unreal  
All is both real and unreal  
All is neither unreal nor real.  
This is the teaching of the Buddha  
(Mūlamadhyamakakārikā 18.8).

The subjects of the opening and closing keynotes – respectively exegesis of Madhyamaka philosophy and political dimensions of contemporary Nepalese religion – give a sense of the range of aspects of Indian religions discussed. Other topics included Vedic ritual, Svāminārāya a Hinduism, and the lives of the Buddha as told in the Jātakas. The research methods employed included textual exegesis, archival research, and anthropology, but two other interdisciplinary approaches were notable: one from literary studies, considering how literary devices are designed to cultivate religious experience, and one from the philosophy of religion, analysing soteriology as the correct perception of the nature of reality.

The conference was opened on Friday afternoon with a keynote address from Professor Anne McDonald (Austrian Academy of Sciences) on appearances and reality in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Engaging deeply with current interpretations of Madhyamaka, McDonald put forward the argument that Madhyamaka ideas were, in fact, intended to be just as radical as they seem to be. The next speaker, Rafal Stepień (Oxford), followed this by arguing that current attempts to render the Madhyamaka founder Nāgārjuna logical in order to rescue his work from its apparent illogicality fail to recognize that what Nāgārjuna presented was a position of non-positionality. These first two speakers engaged at length with Oxford's resident Madhyamaka expert, Professor Jan Westerhoff, both within their papers and in the discussion periods.

The conference theme was picked up the next morning with two contrasting papers. The first was from Marco Ferrante (Austrian Academy of Sciences) on the representation of language as consciousness in the grammarian Bhartṛhari's magnum opus, the 5th century Vākyapadīya. The next paper was from Monika Nowakowska (Warsaw) on the role of desire in the Mīmāṃsā interpretation of ritual in the Mīmāṃsā Sūtras and in the 5th-6th century commentary the Śabara-bhāṣya.

On Saturday afternoon the papers took a more literary turn. Firstly, Julie Regan (La Salle) presented on how the 2nd-century Buddhist author Aśvaghōṣa used literary forms, including the erotic and sensual pleasures of *rasa*, in the *Saundarananda* and the *Buddhacarita* to enable ordinary people to grasp the nature of reality. Eviatar Shulman (Hebrew University of Jerusalem) took us through an array of colourful (and gory) stories from the *Jātakas*, a Theravāda Buddhist corpus in which stories of the past are told to shed light on the present. Shulman argued that the Buddha's omniscience combines appearance and reality, and this paper produced a lively debate among the 'Jātakologists' in the audience, including the conference organizer, Dr Naomi Appleton (Edinburgh).

Saturday's program also included five shorter papers from graduate students. Although not required to address the conference theme, these papers each related to those of the established scholars in useful ways. Avni Chag (SOAS) presented her research on the *Śikṣāpatrī* manuscript of the Svāminārāyaṇa Sampradāya, which is currently housed in the Bodleian Library at Oxford. Reading, at times, like a detective story, her tireless research of archives led to her discovery that the provenance of the manuscript is not in accord with the standard historical records. Charles Li (Cambridge) revealed how the 10th-century Vedāntin philosopher Helārāja falsified a quotation from the Pātañjalayogaśāstra in order to turn a Sāṃkhyan position into a Vedāntin one. Davey K Tomlinson (Chicago) explored the dialogue between two 10th-11th century Buddhist philosophers, Ratnākaraśānti and Jñānaśrimitra, as to whether all mental content is erroneous and how this relates to conscious experience. Picking up on the literary theme, Aleksandra Gordeeva (Yale) examined divergent emotions in Rāmacandra's dramatic works. And I presented an assessment of the category of 'classical yoga' within the history of

Indian religions and a suggestion for a greater focus on figurative language in the Pātañjalayogaśāstra.

On the final morning we returned to perplexing philosophical themes, this time in Advaita Vedānta. First, Michael S. Allen (Virginia) led us through an idealist turn in 16th-century Advaita Vedānta, focusing on Prakāśānanda's treatment of *dr̥ṣṭisr̥ṣṭi-vāda*, according to which the world (*sr̥ṣṭi*) does not exist independent of perception (*dr̥ṣṭi*). He contextualized this doctrine from Śaṅkara up to recent 20th-century commentaries and argued that the rhetorical framing of the Vedānta-siddhānta-muktāvalī communicates a secret teaching. Michael's presentation was particularly fun and even included an ontological pop quiz that left us wondering who was the ultimate *jīva* in the room. An equally superb lecture followed from Victor van Bijlert (VU, Amsterdam), who examined how the c. 5th-century Gauḍapāda (credited as the founder of Advaita Vedānta) reworked older Nyāya epistemology, logic, and similes to make new arguments about causality, pure consciousness, and illusionism to a soteriological end. The ensuing discussion period focused on current theories as to the authorship of the Gauḍapādīya-kārikā.

The closing keynote presentation of the Symposium offered a detailed account of contemporary Nepalese religions, helping us to transition back to the present day from the deep recesses of history. Professor David Gellner (Oxford) analysed the intersections of religion and ethnicity in Nepal and the 'performance' of religious identity in relation to government census recording. His talk included many insightful reflections on how these issues play out in diaspora Nepalese communities in Britain.

Finally, this report could not end without noting the elegant setting of Lady Margaret Hall at Oxford University. All weekend we were treated to an unusually warm burst of spring sunshine, and attendees made use of the breaks to take walks among the pink blossoms of the college gardens and university park. Whatever about the dense discussions on appearance and reality in the Monson Room, the awakening colours and smells of nature and trilling birdsong reminded us that the external world could, at times, seem hyper-real indeed.

Karen O'Brien-Kop  
SOAS, University of London

THE AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGION (AASR) CONFERENCE, 26 NOVEMBER 2016: AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY (SPRING STREET MELBOURNE CAMPUS).

The 2016 AASR annual conference was a one-day event hosted by the Australian Catholic University's Melbourne-based Institute for Religion, Politics and Society. The opening keynote was the Penny Magee Memorial Lecture, delivered by Dr Angela Coco (Southern Cross University), "Touching Taboos: Sex, Gender and Universal Medicine." This research examined a little-known alternative spiritual movement headquartered in Australia but with centres in the United Kingdom, Spain, Germany, Belgium, Norway, the Netherlands, Canada and the United States. Founder and charismatic leader Serge Benhayon teaches esoteric philosophy, ancient wisdom, and esoteric medicine, and espouses strongly gender-essentialist models of male and female relationships:

<https://www.universalmedicine.co.uk>.

The other keynote lecture was given by Professor Bryan Turner (Western Sydney University and City University of New York), "Populism and Public Religion," a timely reflection on the place of religion in political and media discourses, and the role of scholars, religious officials and the public in determining what religion was and how it functioned. The AGM of the AASR was held prior to the conference dinner, and Professor Doug Ezzy (University of Tasmania) was re-elected President and continues as Editor of the Journal for the Academic Study of Religion (Equinox). Angela Coco retired as Women's Officer after serving for many years and Lisa Worthington (Western Sydney University) was nominated by the Women's Caucus to be the new Women's Officer. An "unofficial" conference dinner was held at nearby Mama's Buoi, a decidedly groovy Vietnamese restaurant in Postal Lane, off Little Bourke Street, and was well-attended. Paper sessions throughout the day were lively and varied with strong representation by postgraduate students, though it was sadly the case that bad weather in Sydney prevented several speakers from attending as flights were cancelled.

Particularly distinguished or topical contributions included: "Resisting the Man of Sin: The Exclusive Brethren, Technology, and the Hermeneutic of i-

Dolatry" (Dr Bernard Doherty, Charles Sturt University and Laura Dyason, University of Sydney); "The Sacred in the Australian Public Sphere: Of Dominance and Diversities" (Enqi Weng, RMIT University); " 'We Can Be Heroes': Examining the Real-Life Superhero Movement as an Implicit Hyper-real Religion" (Vlad Iouchkov, Western Sydney University); "Neither Critics Nor Caretakers: Religious Concepts in the Academic Study of Religion" (Doug Ezzy, University of Tasmania); and "Religious Identity Negotiation Amongst Young Australian Buddhist Practitioners" (Kim Lam, Monash University).

The AASR annual conference for 2017 will be held at Notre Dame University (Sydney) on 7-8 December (with Dr Rosemary Hancock from NDU's Institute for Ethics and Society as Convenor) and in partnership with the New Zealand Association for the Study of Religion (NZASR). This is important, as University of Otago (Dunedin, New Zealand) will be hosting the International Association for the History of Religion (IAHR) Quinquennial Congress in 2020, and the AASR will be deeply involved in this prestigious event. This will be only the third time that the IAHR has met in the southern hemisphere (the earlier two being Sydney in 1985 and Durban in 2000).

Carole M. Cusack  
University of Sydney

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# reviews

RELIGION AND LEGAL PLURALISM. RUSSELL SANDBERG (ED.). FARNHAM: ASHGATE, 2016

The existence and greater visibility of religious legal systems within modern societies have become increasingly controversial. Though far from new, perceptions of them have been shaped by alarmist media depictions of Shari'a law, increased transnational migration, multiculturalism and fears about the fragmentation or erosion of the normative hegemony of liberal states.

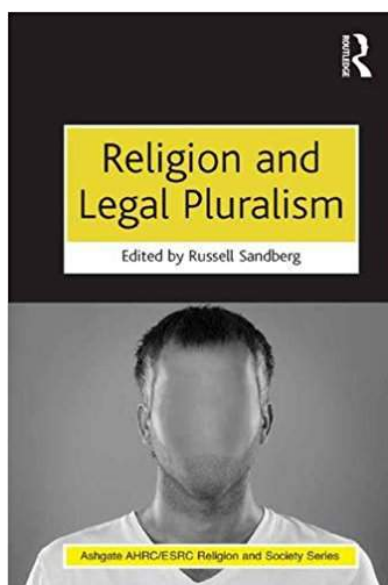
In the United Kingdom, these concerns came to the fore when then Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams gave a speech on the 7th of February 2008 at the Royal Courts of Justice in London, arguing that the relationship between Islamic and British legal systems should be rethought, predictably enough interpreted as a call for state Shari'a. The ironic fact that this came from the head of the established church in England, whose canon law is still part of the law of the land in England (though under the state's jurisdiction) seemed to be lost on many. This blindness to the long-standing facts of religious legal pluralism was also evident when one peer in a House of Lords debate remarked that England had 'got rid of' ecclesiastical tribunals which Russell Sandberg wryly notes would be news to the Church of England, as examined in Christopher Smith's chapter on internal Church of England disciplinary measures. These perceptions are also clearly underpinned by

the post-Protestant bifurcation between private 'faith' and public life, as Sandberg points out the courts often reify traditions to divide elements of religion which 'can' and 'cannot' be left at the threshold between private and public. Internal differences and the individual construction of religious identities around visible symbols from turbans and

hijabs to purity rings are generally ignored, a critique echoed by Sylvia Bacquet and Celia G. Kenny in their respective chapters on religious symbols and Islamic 'veiling'. For some the desire to use such religious tribunals is also part of the ways in which they construct their religious identity.

To describe these non-state legal systems, Sandberg introduces the acronym HALO (Heterogeneous and Autonomous Legal Orders) which includes but is not limited to religious legal systems. These systems are able to generate

and induce compliance to rules and are 'autonomous' from the state even if they can be ultimately overruled by it but also because they are voluntary. Issues of agent's autonomy, how much cultural and linguistic barriers and ignorance of the law could be used to coerce parties to disputes are addressed head on. Sandberg and Frank Crumner have drawn up a draft bill for non-statutory courts and tribunals in England and Wales based on the definitions of consent given in the Sexual Offences Act 2003, presented in the book's appendix. Margaret Davies also provides a normative account of



how she argues that a pluralistic legal system should work.

The fact that many minority legal systems are generally more 'conservative' than the 'mainstream' is discussed by Amina Hussain in relation to two rarely addressed cases: Buddhists and Romani. However, HALOs are not always conservative as Frank Cranmer demonstrates in his chapter on the Religious Society of Friends or Quakers in the UK, who opted to support same-sex marriages and even conducted their own ceremonies, recognising such couples as married before the state. The inevitable, multiple entanglements of religious and civic legal systems also become evident throughout the volume. Increasing recognition of legal pluralism parallels the increasing reliance on the discourse of religious pluralism which Dorota A. Gozdecka examines at the European level while David Pocklington notes that much government relations with religion consist of extra-statutory 'quasi-law' and 'soft law' such as official guidelines and regulations, containing few or no legal obligations.

This volume provides a comprehensive collection of empirical studies and theoretical reflections on the phenomenon of modern legal pluralism. These demonstrate that legal pluralism is a fact of life in modern societies, that various identifiable legal systems operate in various ways at every level. Mark Hill QC in his general introduction to religious legal systems and English law stresses that these play a purely consultative role, echoed by the empirical research of other contributors. Gillian Douglas presents ethnographic research conducted with a Shari'a court, Jewish Beth Din and Roman Catholic tribunal in relation to marriage disputes while Eithne D'Auria examines Catholic marriage tribunals specifically in relation to their use of experts in cases of psychological capacity.

These discussions come from scholars who are clearly working at the coal face of this area of research, and there must be few relevant issues and debates left unaddressed. For scholars working in or interested in this field this would make an ideal volume to consult but because there is so much rich material, it may not be suited for many general undergraduate courses, at least as a core text. While readers interested in these issues without much legal knowledge such as myself, may find some of the legal discussions a little dense at times these seem

quite indispensable and well explicated.

It is impressive how much the volume has engaged with theoretical debates and research from the study of religion meaning that 'religion' is not treated as some taken for granted phenomena around which the legal discussions can be built. Research on NRM's have even been incorporated: Beth Singler discusses the ways in which Scientologists and Jedis have constructed their own folk discourses around copyright law online, though as she notes these are interpretations of the state's laws rather than 'HALOs'.

The difficulties in defining the boundaries of 'law', especially in relation to legal pluralism are recognised but I would argue have not been overcome. Amy R. Codling argues for Subjective Legal Pluralism (SLP): that 'law' should be defined as whatever agents operating within a given social context consider to be 'law', being located in their narrative account shaped by their social context and therefore is not infinitely diverse. This presents a conundrum familiar to scholars of religion of how 'wide' or 'narrow' the application of the term 'law' should be in the scholarly literature.

Sandberg in the concluding chapter strives to avoid what he regards as the two pitfalls of scholarship on legal pluralism, reinforcing and replicating the central legal system of the state in an often unintentionally normative manner, and rendering the law so subjective that it cannot be distinguished from any system of norms as the SLP would arguably threaten to do. For Sandberg, the only solution is to make a deal with 'the devil', as German Sociologist Niklas Luhmann once described himself due to his 'anti-human' (non-agential) systems theory focused on communication between social systems.

HALOs then would be legal social systems defined as such because of the 'binary coding' which underwrites them, 'legal'/'illegal' or 'lawful'/'unlawful'. This Faustian pact is an erudite and imaginative solution but not one that I am convinced solves the problem, while religion and legal pluralism remains an immensely fruitful area of research to which the volume has made an enormous contribution, it is difficult to see how significant degrees of both statism and subjectivism are avoidable in mapping out this murky, disputed terrain.

Liam Templeton Sutherland  
University of Edinburgh

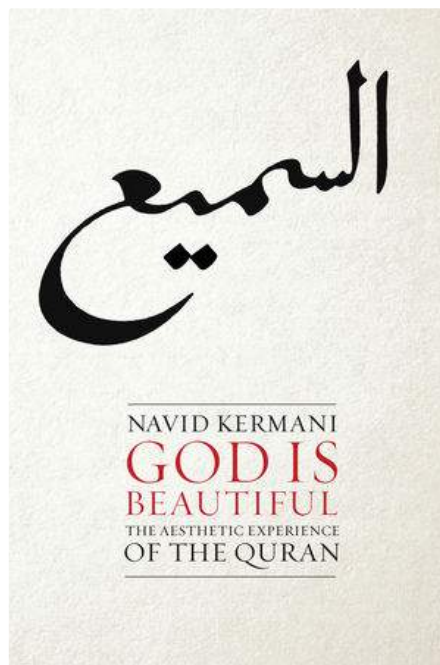
GOD IS BEAUTIFUL. THE AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE OF THE QURAN. NAVID KERMANI, TRANS. TONY CRAWFORD. CAMBRIDGE, UK AND MALDEN, MA: POLITY PRESS, 2015..

This is an extraordinary book written by an Iranian born in 1967 in Germany where he still lives. A prominent writer and Islamic scholar of much acclaim and winner of several prestigious prizes, (including the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade of Oct. 2015), he is little known in the English-speaking world where only three of his books have recently become available in translation. Of these, *God is Beautiful* is probably the most substantial. This puzzling title, said to be one of the most frequently found hadiths in Sufi literature, raises many questions about the nature of beauty and its understanding from Plato to Arabic poets, skilfully discussed in this book.

A perceptive thinker of much depth and subtlety, Kermani has an amazing knowledge of western and Islamic literature and scholarship. He makes challenging reading, opening up wide horizons with new insights and questions. But reading this magnificent book also demands large spans of time and single-minded attention in order to grasp its amazing richness and singular significance. A standard book review can hardly do it justice but can only point to some of its essentials. A whole semester's seminar could be devoted to unravelling the riches of this substantial study.

Academic colleagues may be interested to learn that this work is based on Kermani's research for his 1997 doctorate in Islamic Studies at the University of Bonn. It was first published as a book in 1999, with a third edition in 2007, followed by its English translation in 2015. This shows just how long the road can be for academic research to have a public impact on the wider world.

From the Preface onwards Kermani emphasizes that his book is primarily concerned with the reception history of the Quran, not with the content of the text itself. Its primary focus is the aesthetic experience and response of the audience when hearing the Quran. In his view, this aesthetic reception of the Quran has never been treated at length by western scholars, whereas for practising Muslims the Quran is not so much a text than a performance to be recited, heard, memorised and experienced. He deals at length with the development of the major themes of the Quran's reception aesthetics within Islamic history, linked to poetics, musicality, its miraculousness, the role of the Prophet and of mystical experience.



The opening chapter deals with the miraculous nature of the Quran and the transformative effect of Muhammad's recitation of its verses on his audience who were reportedly spell-bound by the magical-spiritual power of these words. Kermani writes that Muhammad's recitation was unlike any other kind of oratory known at that time, producing a simultaneously delightful and disconcerting effect on his listeners.

The reception aesthetics of the Quran are examined at a textual level in terms of the special nature of the Arabic language, and at an acoustic level in terms of its association with music and dance, but also in relation to the importance of listening. Kermani compares the Quran with other sacred texts and points out the belief in the untranslatability of this message of God, meaning that translations of this scripture into other languages remained rare until modern times. One had to learn Arabic in order to get to know the Quran, but this has now changed. The many now-existing translations of the Quran into the languages of different Muslim countries can be seen as a proof that a modern "Protestant" notion of scripture is spreading through the Muslim world. There now exists a considerable tension between the aesthetic

reception of the Quran, its association with musical performance and its religious message.

The Quran's ambiguity becomes further apparent through it being "an open text", due to the open nature of its revelation. The enigmatic quality of its message is due to the fact that its sender is God; the openness and unfathomability of the Quran is seen as a characteristic of the divine; its words imply a limitless degree of interpretability where every verse is said to offer 60,000 explanations. Muslim exegesis works with the important notion of the "faces of the Quran", not found in the Quran itself, but helpful for justifying so many different understandings of it. Moreover, the aesthetic cannot be expressed in discursive form. Kermani criticizes what he sees as distortions of the Quran found in Orientalist translations which reduce the poetic verses to their bare informational content " coldly using reason alone; one must experience it, one must give into it completely and... progress through one's own emotions" (220). Much attention is given to the discussion of the relationship between poetry and prophecy, art and religion, the power of listening, the Platonic legacy in the understanding of beauty and the reception of the Quran in Islamic mysticism, judged to be only marginally mentioned in Western studies on Islam.

Kermani's work embraces a wide range of perspectives of special interest to scholars in different branches of the humanities, whether in linguistics, philosophy, hermeneutics, religious studies or whether they are specialists in Islamic studies or comparativists in the study of several religious traditions. I much like Kermani's emphasis on the act of listening and understanding which, I think, can never be achieved by intellectual reflection alone but requires the powers of heart, mind and soul in order to reach a truly experiential understanding of beauty and all other realities. This ground breaking, dazzling book deserves a most loving reception, closest attention and widespread critical discussion.

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Institute for Advanced Studies,  
University of Bristol

CONTEMPORARY VIEWS ON COMPARATIVE RELIGION. PETER ANTES, ARMIN W. GEERTZ AND MICHAEL ROTHSTEIN (EDS.) SHEFFIELD: EQUINOX, 2016.

This collection of essays was collected in honour of Tim Jensen on the occasion of his sixty-fifth birthday. It is a weighty tome in both the literal and metaphorical senses. The thirty-three chapters are divided into six sections: The Comparative Study of Religion; Conceptions of Religion and "The Religious"; Comparative Religion and the University; Comparative Religion, Education and Schooling; Religion, Society, State Law and Rights; and Empirical Studies and Research Perspectives – all of which, taken together, could and do cover an impressive diversity of perspectives, subjects, countries, religions, disciplines and scholars.

It is impossible to cover the wealth of disparate ideas that can be found in this book. Some of the chapters overlap with others – many are concerned with methodological issues, particularly those of conceptualisation; others are concerned, as Tim Jensen has been, with religious education at various levels. The geographical spread is considerable, although European and North American scholarship predominates. Let me introduce just some of the ideas that I found interesting.

The volume opens with Ivan Strenski's critique of a remark by Jonathan Z. Smith (one of the most frequently quoted scholars in the volume) that "in comparison a magic dwells" – the magic being not an illusion, but wonderful breakthroughs in our knowledge. And, undoubtedly, breakthroughs in our understanding of religions through comparison are considered in several of the ensuing chapters.

One of the basic challenges in any comparison is the use of concepts and categories – the words we use to suggest similarity and difference, with their often unrecognised assumptions about what to include or exclude within and without the boundaries. Sometimes the inclusions and exclusions can be religious or political decisions. Those of us who find ourselves constantly being asked whether a new religious movement is a 'cult' or a 'genuine religion' know only too well how easily moral judgements can, by themselves, account for manipulable linguistic boundaries. Satoko Fujiwara in her chapter on "Why the

Concept of 'World Religion' has Survived in Japan", quotes Jonathan Z. Smith writing about a 'pluralistic etiquette' which led to an expansion of the category of 'world religions' (as opposed to 'ethnic religions') when it was decided that "if Christianity and Islam count as world religions, then it would be rude to exclude Judaism ... Likewise, if Buddhism is included, then Hinduism cannot be ignored" (page 194). I suppose this might today be termed 'political correctness'.

Rarely is the challenge of having an operational definition of religion more acute than in the relatively new and somewhat trendy sub-discipline of the 'cognitive science of religion'. The consequences of this problem are lucidly explored by Armin Geertz in his chapter. He puts into words some of the thoughts that I have been struggling with in my rather incoherent suspicion of the claims of CSR practitioners. Geertz footnotes an article by Stéphane Doyen et al: 'It's All in the Mind, But Whose Mind?', conjuring up the image of a little man or 'homunculus' sitting inside the brain, with another little man or homunculus sitting in his brain – and so on (136).

Christoph Bochinger tackles problems related to the concept of religious pluralism, pointing to the evaluative overtones that it has frequently embraced, even to the point of being confused with a pluralistic theology. Sensibly, he argues that, unless an author is merely describing religious plurality or diversity (in which case these terms are preferable), then it should be made quite clear what emic and etic connotations of religious pluralism are being adopted if one wants to avoid evaluative confusions.

Einar Thomassen, in a provocatively titled chapter "What is a 'God' Actually?", suggests that, although there has been a massive focus of religion based on cognitive psychology, these theories have not been operationalised in the description of historical reli-

gions, which could explain why the insights offered by research into cognitive processes have yet to penetrate mainstream religious studies (page 366). Whilst agreeing that gods are supernatural beings, it is clear not only that all supernatural beings are not gods, but also that whether or not we consider them to be gods is liable to depend on where we happen to be standing. While, for example, Santa Claus would not be considered a god in a monotheistic context, might we consider him to be one in a polytheistic one, such as the Greco-Roman world?

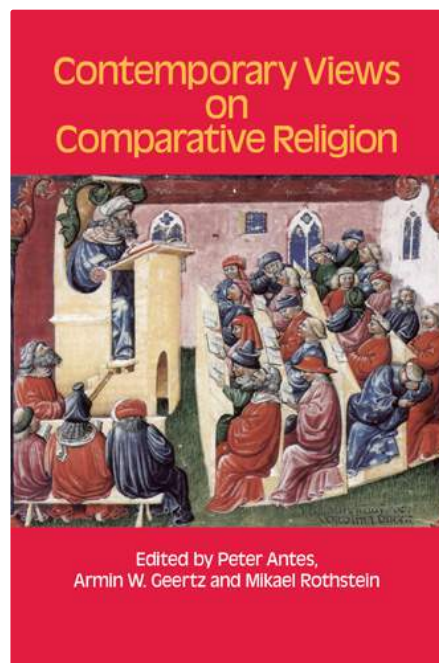
Olav Hammer tackles the question of whether, in employing the term 'religious experience', it is the interpretation rather than the experience that is religious.

Perhaps, he suggests, the most helpful term would be 'experiences deemed religious'. Furthermore, he suggests, to make it really religious, it would need to have special consequences in the experienter's life.

Mikael Rothstein, drawing on his fieldwork with the Penan of Sarawak, argues that scholars of comparative religion are actually 'studying normal things that are claimed to be strange or somehow extraordinary by their producers and users – religious people' (page 389). Rosalind Hackett adds a further dimension by offering ideas and resources for scholars to think about (and with) sound in both empirical and

conceptual studies of religion

The section on Religion, Society, State Law and Rights ranges from a discussion about admissibility of evidence provided by an undercover policeman posing as an obeah or spiritual advisor to extract a confession of murder, to the debate in Denmark over ritual infant male circumcision – a debate that involves considering not just the rights of the child as opposed to the parents, but also those of a group (the Jewish community) as opposed to the individual. And from an examination of the concept and practice of religious freedom and toleration in ancient Rome, to utopia and heterotopia in post-apartheid South





African Muslim discourse in relation to homosexuality.

To repeat, this is a weighty volume. It offers a rich assortment of ideas rather than a cohesive collection of thought leading to any particular conclusion. It can be picked up and put down at will without interrupting any clear story line. But this is not a criticism – it is an invitation to encounter a number of interesting and provocative thoughts sometimes directly and sometimes a bit more tenuously, relating to contemporary views on comparative religion.

Eileen Barker  
London School of Economics /  
INFORM

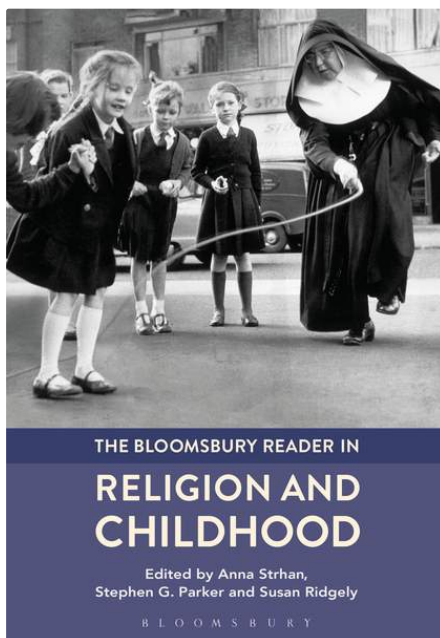
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THE BLOOMSBURY READER IN RELIGION AND CHILDHOOD. ANNA STRAHAN, STEPHEN G. PARKER AND SUSAN B. RIDGELY (EDS.). LONDON & NEW YORK, BLOOMSBURY, 2017.

The editors have put together a useful anthology of 45 short readings on the topic of religion and childhood, a mixture of extracts from already published material, and pieces commissioned especially for this volume. They draw upon a number of different disciplines including sociology, psychology, history, theology, religious studies, education, as well as the developing field of studies of childhood. Historically, the extracts range from Augustine to recent research by the editors themselves, and geographically include some from Africa and one from Brazil, though mostly from Europe and the USA. An attempt has been made to include a range of religious traditions, but the majority of readings reflect US/European culture, and Abrahamic religions, especially Christianity.

The readings are arranged in five sections - theoretical (adult) perspectives on childhood; changing ideas and locations of childhood piety; religion, edu-

cation and citizenship; media and materialities, and discipline, agency and domination. Each section is introduced by the editors who help to put the readings in context and familiarise the reader with this developing field of study. Topics range from children's rights to child abuse, theories of developmental stages to Sunday schools, child soldiers to Jewish children's toys. It is fascinating to see the various ways in which adults have constructed 'childhood' at different times and in different places, and how actual children continue to subvert these assumptions. It was reassuring to discover that people other than myself have been unconvinced by the various 'stages of development' offered by scholars over the decades.



The intended readership is mainly university students, or those teaching them, most likely within programmes of education studies, or studies of childhood, but perhaps also religious studies, who will find readings relevant to their particular enquiry. It is unlikely that it will be read from cover to cover as this reviewer did, but that was a useful exercise, with material relevant to my own specialisms, but also topics that were new to me.

Chapters I found particularly of interest were those on children's literature, both Christian and Jewish, on young Muslims whether in the West or in various African countries, those on education and nurture within Catholicism and, to pick out just one chapter, Strhan on two contrasting approaches to childhood from contemporary evangelical Christians. The introduction and contextualising sections by the editors were also particularly useful.

The editors point out in their introduction that children are rarely studied 'in their own right' but as part of an adult agenda. Most of the historical readings tended to reflect the adult constructions of children as either 'innately spiritual' or sinners in need of discipline, authority and protection. However, it was en-

couraging to see that the emerging discipline is moving towards taking account of the agency of children themselves, as part of the emphasis on 'real' religion and intersectionality, found in other subsections of the study of religions. Without wanting to fall into the romantic idealisation of children illustrated by some of these readings, in my own interviews with children, whether Buddhist, Christian, Pagan or in the context of religious education, I have been continually impressed by the depth of insight as well as knowledge that children themselves have to offer to the debates adults are having about them. It is a healthy corrective to worries about indoctrination to realise that learning is never the same as teaching, and that religious traditions are not so much passed on to children, but re-created by them.

It is a pity that the volume was not able to offer more from non-Abrahamic traditions and about children from Pagan, new religious or non-religious backgrounds. The single contributions on Hindu childhood and Buddhist childhood were impossible to compare as one was based on contemporary ethnography and the other on ancient texts - nevertheless each was interesting in themselves. I would have found it helpful if each of the readings from the already published pieces had included a full reference rather than having to go back to the permissions details pages to locate them.

Otherwise, the collection is a very useful one, not just for the selected and commissioned readings themselves, but also for references to other sources which could be followed up. There are both reading lists and questions for discussion on each piece to be found on the book's webpage, which could be very helpful for those using this resource within university programmes.

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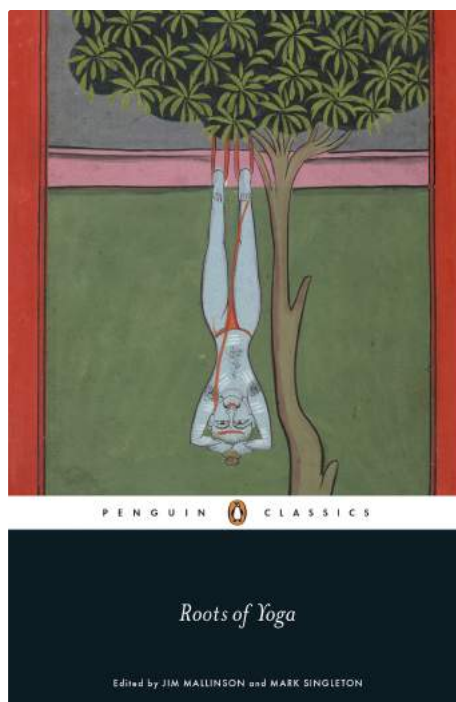
ROOTS OF YOGA. JAMES MALLINSON AND MARK SINGLETON (EDS.). LONDON: PENGUIN CLASSICS, 2017.

*Roots of Yoga* is the first major textual output from one of the most significant research projects into the history of hatha yoga, and as such, has been eagerly awaited by both scholars and practitioners alike. The Hatha Yoga Project is one of two ongoing ERC-funded research projects into yoga, led by James Mallinson (the other being the AyurYoga Project led by Dagmar Wujastyk). The Hatha Yoga Project aims to collate evidence for the evolving history of hatha yoga. Whilst contemporary yoga has become globally popular through the last century or more, the source material for that globalisation is surprisingly narrow. There are in particular only a handful of pre-modern texts that are widely studied outside of specialised Sanskrit scholarship, and most contemporary schools and styles draw upon a relatively small number of lineages, mostly dominated by the nationalist-influenced Mysore revival.

*Roots of Yoga* aims to correct at least part of that imbalance, and bring to light more of the vast diversity of pre-

modern hatha yoga practice. It is, in essence, a collection of curated extracts from dozens of texts that refer to hatha yoga in a significant way, together with some critical commentary and analysis of common themes and differences. Non-Sanskrit scholars, like myself, have to take the quality of the translations on faith, but as a former linguist, there is a familiar meticulousness to the language used. These are translations aimed at accuracy and detail more than fluency. Unexplained gaps are left unfilled, inconsistencies left uncorrected. Critical editions of a number of the individual texts are planned that will no doubt leave other scholars with abundant source material to facilitate productive argument over the details.

Whilst most historians of pre-modern yoga concen-



trate on Sanskrit texts, *Roots of Yoga* also makes innovative use of translations of texts from Pali, Arabic, Chinese, Bengali, Kashmiri, Persian, Tamil, Tibetan and more. To include significant numbers of non-Sanskrit and indeed non-Indian and non-Hindu sources is a deliberate and bold choice, seeking to redraw the boundaries of what is included in the hatha yoga corpus, and acknowledging historical influences that are often diminished in contemporary, particularly Hindu nationalist accounts of hatha yoga. This choice will have political as well as scholarly implications.

A solid Introduction sets out the scholarly and cultural context for the book, giving a short overview of major historical periods in the evolution of hatha yoga, including major texts as well as less-known Buddhist and Tantric sources, before briefly outlining the thousand years that covers the first mentions of hatha yoga to the present day. The introduction also includes a brief history of yoga scholarship, and the choices the authors have made in response. The scope of *Roots of Yoga* is breath-taking: covering over 2000 years of evolving, diverse practice and philosophy. In dividing its extracts into sections, the authors have chosen to collate sections not by source, sect, geography or date, but by themes familiar to any serious contemporary practitioner: the practice classification that has evolved out of modern yoga's most well-known text, the *Patanjalayogasatra*.

Each section gives an overview of common themes and major differences, continuing with direct extracts with their sources. The main body of the text therefore begins with a section covering definitions of 'Yoga', in which we learn of all the many meanings of this polyvalent term, and a number of familiar and unusual typologies of the practice. The next section is 'Preliminaries', covering the pre-conditions for practice, including ethics, purification rites, obstacles and aids. Next is 'Posture', the original meanings of asana for meditation, and the proliferation of asana. Herein we find fascinating and frustrating glimpses of pre-modern movement practices, often obliquely or tersely described, such as "Support the abdominal region with a rope and hold the body rigid like a stick" (p.126). Despite the authorial warnings, scholars and practitioners alike will undoubtedly be tempted to explore some of these descriptions in practice.

The same is true of the section on 'Breath-control', in which this reader was most struck by the internal coherence and rigidity of many practice descriptions, in contrast to a prolific diversity between them. However common or rare an instruction, it is always given as an incontrovertible absolute. The next section bridges the gap to more esoteric concerns, with a comparison of different conceptions of the psychophysical 'Yogic Body'. A further two sections expand on esoteric content with the evolving and elaborate practices of 'Yogic Seals' and 'Mantra', their purpose, use and some practice detail. The following section sensibly combines discussion of the overlapping categories of 'Withdrawal, Fixation and Meditation', but leaves the final destination of these, 'Samadhi', to its own section, reflecting the wealth of discussion on this topic in yogic sources. Final sections on 'Yogic Powers' and 'Liberation' complete the book.

Understandably, the reader is left with innumerable fragments of new information, and some sense of major trends. However the enormous scope of the book, the inescapable use of many short extracts from different texts, and the authors' understandable desire to stay close to the source material, renders for the reader an accurate sense of the complexity of the task at hand in producing a synthesised narrative of the historical evolution of hatha yoga, without producing that narrative. Simply put, this is a work of enormous scholarly importance that will be invaluable as a resource text, but the more casual reader in search of a simple history of pre-modern hatha yoga will be understandably frustrated.

And yet independent scholars and commentators on contemporary transnational yoga are already recommending *Roots of Yoga* as a standard text for yoga teacher trainings. Once again, an important work of robust yoga scholarship will face an unpredictable reception within the wider culture. But for scholars of both historical and contemporary yoga, this is an exciting and vital work, and a sign of much more to come from the Hatha Yoga Project.

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# Members' Recent Publications

## **George D. Chryssides**

2017 (with Stephen E. Gregg) 'The Silent Majority?': understanding apostate testimony beyond 'insider/outsider' binaries in the study of new religions; in Gallagher, Eugene V. (ed.) *Visioning New and Minority Religions: Projecting the Future*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp.20-32. .

2016 (with Cohn-Sherbok, Dan; El-Alami, Dawoud) *Terror and Religion: An Interfaith Dialogue*. Exeter UK: Impress.

2016 'Portraying the Truth in Fiction: Jehovah's Witnesses in Novels'. CESNUR Library Texts and Documents Cyber-proceedings of International Conference organized by CESNUR, Daejin University, South Korea, 5-10 July 2016. URL: [http://www.cesnur.org/2016/daejin\\_chryssides.pdf](http://www.cesnur.org/2016/daejin_chryssides.pdf)

2016/7 *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter. Entries on: International Churches of Christ; International Society for Krishna Consciousness; Interreligious Dialogue IV; Jacob (Patriarch) IV.D (jt. with Clyde Forsberg); Japheth (Person) III, V; Jehovah's Witnesses: Jerusalem V.D; Jerusalem, Council of II.C. Jesus VI; Jesus Army; Jewish-Christian Relations II.D; John the Baptist III.C; Jonadab (Son of Rechab) II. Vol.12: 50-52; 22-53; 597-599; 767-768; 1066-1067; 1105-1106; Vol.13: 41-46; 131-132; 239-240; 461-463; 567-568.

## **Christopher R. Cotter**

2017 (with Philip Quadrio, and Jonathan Tuckett, eds.) *New Atheism: Critical Perspectives and Contemporary Debates*. Dordrecht: Springer.

2017 "New Atheism, Open-Mindedness, and Critical Thinking." In *New Atheism: Critical Perspectives and Contemporary Debates*, edited by Christopher R. Cotter, Philip Quadrio and Jonathan Tuckett. Dordrecht: Springer.

2017. "You're Greek? Well... I'm (Northern) Irish, Kind'a". In *Fabricating Identities*, edited by Russell T. McCutcheon. Sheffield: Equinox.

2017. "A Discursive Approach to 'Religious Indifference': Critical Reflections from Edinburgh's Southside." In *Religious Indifferences: Between and Beyond Religion and Nonreligion*, edited by Johannes Quack and Cora Schuh. Dordrecht: Springer.

## **Mathew Guest**

2017 (ed. with Martha Middlemiss-Le Mon) *Death, Life and Laughter: Essays on Religion in Honour of Douglas Davies*, London: Routledge.

2017 "From Jevons to Collini (via Douglas Davies): Reflections on Higher Education and Religious Identity", in Guest, M. and ed. with Middlemiss-Le Mon, M. (eds) *Death, Life and Laughter: Essays on Religion in Honour of Douglas Davies*, London: Routledge, pp. 201-220.

2017 (with Kristin Aune) "Students' Constructions of a Christian Future: Faith, Class and Aspiration in University Contexts", *Sociological Research Online*, Vol. 22, no. 1: <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/22/1/12.html>

2017 (with Kristin Aune) "The Contested Campus: Christian Students in UK Universities", in K. Aune and J. Stevenson (eds) *Religion and Higher Education in Europe and North America*, London: Routledge, 2017, pp. 71-89.

### **Graham Harvey**

2017 *Animism: Respecting the Living World*. Second edition; London: Hurst.

2017 "Paganism and Animism" in John Grim, Mary Evelyn Tucker and Willis Jenkins (eds) *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Ecology*. New York: Routledge. pp. 209-17.

2017 "Performing indigeneity and performing guesthood" in Christopher Hartney and Daniel J. Tower (eds) *Religious Categories and the Construction of the Indigenous*. Leiden: E.J. Brill. pp. 74-91. ISBN 9789004328983

2016 "Art works: a relational rather than representational understanding of art and buildings" in Tim Hutchings and Jo McKenzie (eds), *Materiality and the Study of Religion: The Stuff of the Sacred*. London: Routledge. pp.103-18.

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### **Stephen Jacobs**

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### **Ursula King**

2017 "Heaven is a place called Earth". Review of Callum G. Brown, *Becoming Atheist. Humanism and the Secular West*. London: Bloomsbury Academic. *Times Higher Education*, 16 March 2017, 46

2016 (ed.) *Turning Points in Religious Studies. Essays in honour of Geoffrey Parrinder*. Foreword by Archbishop Desmond Tutu (originally published in 1990 by T & T Clark).

2016 “Past and Future Feminist Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue” in *Interreligious Insight. A Journal of Dialogue and Engagement* 14/2, 18-30.

2016 *Christ in All Things. Exploring Spirituality with Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books. Revised Edition.

2015 *Spirit of Fire. The Life and Vision of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books. Revised Edition.

### **Suzanne Owen**

2015 ‘The Demise of the Beothuk as a Past Still Present,’ *Journal of the Irish Society for the Academic Study of Religions* 2/1, 119-139. Available at:

<https://jkapalo.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/the-demise-of-the-beothuk-as-a-past-still-present-pdf2.pdf>

2015 (with Taira, Teemu) ‘The Category of “Religion” in Public Classification: Charity Registration of the Druid Network in England and Wales,’ in Trevor Stack, Naomi Goldenberg and Timothy Fitzgerald (eds) *Religion as a Category of Governance and Sovereignty* (Leiden: Brill), pp. 90-114

2016 ‘The Sacred Alternative,’ in Christopher R. Cotter and David G. Robertson (eds) *After World Religions* (New York; London: Routledge), pp. 107-120

### **Paul Weller**

2016 “How Far Can We Go Together? Reflection On and From the Development of the Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby”, *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift/Bern Interreligious Oecumenical Studies*, Volume 2, pp. 96-114.

2016 “Balancing Within Three Dimensions: Christianity. Secularity and Religious Plurality in Social Policy and Theology”, in *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue*, 6, 2, pp. 130-146.

2016 “The Politics of Fear: Religion(s), Conflict and Diplomacy”, Franc Jegede, Malcolm Todd, John Stubbs, an Phil Hodgson (eds), (2016), *Proceedings of the 2016 International Conference Diplomacy and International Relations: Diplomacy and the Politics of Fear: The 21st Century Challenges to the Theory and Practice of Diplomacy and International Relations*. Derby: College of Law, Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Derby, pp. 65-89 online publication only at <http://derby.openrepository.com/derby/handle/10545/620527>

2016 (with Tristram Hooley) “Religion and Belief, Equality and Inequality in UK Higher Education”, in Dawn Llewellyn and Sonya Sharma (eds.), *Religion, Equalities and Inequalities*, Routledge, London, pp. 89-101.

2016 “The Emerging Inter-Faith Context In Society and Religious Education”, in Brian Gates, (ed.), *Religion and Nationhood: Insider and Outsider Perspectives on Religious Education in England*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, pp. 206-228.

"Theory... should not enable us to arrive at the same spot from which we departed. It does not permit us with faddish theorists to justify or legitimate a set of conclusions we have arrived at even before beginning our analysis. Once we begin to theorize, the world that we have constructed in our image should be a different world."

(Aaron Hughes, *Islam and the Tyranny of Authenticity*, 1999: 124.)

