



# bulletin

British Association for the Study of Religions



131: November 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.

All correspondence concerning the BASR should be sent to:

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# editorial



A regular attendee at the BASR conference told me that they saw more energy this year's conference, and that this had been a trend for a few years. This is exciting; but let's not get too far ahead of ourselves. Our field is in a state, and a good deal of this energy was being generated by this situation. Ronald Hutton's keynote was an impassioned and eloquent call for less discrimination and broader representation within the field, and without; but Honorary Secretary Stephen Gregg's no less impassioned presentation the following day perhaps more accurately captured the frustration that many of us feel about the lack of influence that Religious Studies has in the public sphere, and is published here, in full. The emergence of the European Academy of Religion (EuARe) suggests that this function is being usurped by theologians and other parties whose interest is more caretaker than critic, more Religious Scholar than Scholar of Religion. We were reminded of the role of the BASR in representing and fighting for a non-con-

fessional, academic study of religion during Secretary Christopher Cotter's initial report on the BASR's

History Project, and I am sure that we all look forward to reading the full fruits of his archival research in the fullness of time.

On a more personal level, I was quite humbled during the presentation to be reminded of the long line of remarkable scholars who preceded me as Editor of the Bulletin. One of those, Dominic Corrywright, has decided to resign after a long tenure in the committee, most recently as Teaching and Learning Officer. His last action was to conceive of and launch our annual Teaching Award, of which Stefanie Sinclair of the Open University was this year the inaugural recipient. Also resigning from the committee was Web Officer Claire Wanless, to concentrate on completion of her doctoral studies. We thank them both, and wish them every success.

David G. Robertson, 14/11/17



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



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

# news, etc

## **New Developments in Theology & Religious Studies at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David**

Since I joined UWTSD in 2010 the School of Theology, Religious Studies and Islamic Studies at UWTSD has undergone significant changes in terms of staffing and curriculum provision. I am now pleased to be able to report some very positive developments for the subject. Over the last few years the Faculty of Humanities and Performing Arts, to which Theology and Religious Studies belongs, has developed a close relationship to several external bodies, including Chin Kung Multi-Cultural Education Foundation with whom it has launched the joint venture of an Academy of Sinology. A more recent initiative has been the validation of a Professional Doctorate in Interfaith Studies, a programme which has both taught and research components. Through the generous support of the Ching Kung Foundation, the University is able to offer several full scholarships (the second round is currently being advertised on [jobs.ac.uk](http://jobs.ac.uk)) and the first group of students has now started their studies on the Lampeter campus. As a result the Faculty has been able to hire two new lecturers: Dr Jessica Keady and Dr Angus Slater. Jessica's research area is the Hebrew Bible and Jewish Studies, with particular emphasis on gender issues, while Angus works in the area of comparative theology (Christianity and Islam) and inter-religious dialogue. Earlier in the summer Dr Brenda Llewellyn Ihssen joined the Faculty, a historian whose research interests include religion in late antiquity. And in January we will welcome Dr Tim Baylor, a new lecturer in Christian Theology. We are delighted about the arrival of these new colleagues which will enable us to strengthen research and teaching in Religious Studies and Theology and to develop new initiatives related to our subject.

Bettina Schmidt, UWTSD

## **Jobs**

Douglas Davies, a member and former Chairman of the BASR has this year, 2017, been elected a Fellow of the British Academy. Douglas is Professor in the Study of Religion at Durham's Department of Theology and Religion and has spearheaded significant developments in religious studies there over the last 20 years, as he previously did at Nottingham University. He is also Director of Durham's Centre for Death and Life Studies and has led and shared in numerous AHRC, ESRC, and Leverhulme funded projects. He sees it as valuable to be a further voice, one alert to religious studies and religions-focused interests, amongst members of the Academy's section on Theology and Religious Studies. His original training in the anthropology and sociology of religion as well as in theology led to an extensive array of empirical studies of Mormonism, Anglicanism, British beliefs and death rites, and also of the theology of death. Further monographs have addressed issues of the sociology of meaning and salvation, the interplay of anthropology and theology, and the life and work of F. B. Jevons, one of the UK's key Victorian scholars of religion. Some of his death-linked books have been translated into Czech, Greek, Italian, and Japanese, while a Chinese version of one of his Mormon studies is awaited. His work has been acknowledged not only through an honorary doctorate from Sweden's Uppsala University (1998) and an 'earned' D. Litt., Oxford's higher doctorate, (2004) but also in elections to Fellowships in both the UK Academy of Social Sciences (2009) and The Learned Society of Wales (2012). Friends and former colleagues recently published *Death, Life and Laughter: Essays on religion in honour of Douglas Davies* (Routledge, 2017), edited by Mathew Guest and Martha Middlemiss Lé Mon.

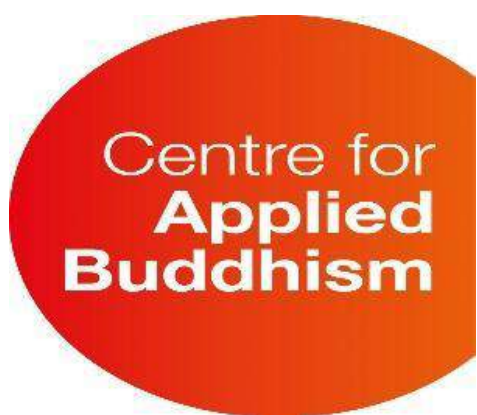
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Dr Chris Cotter has begun a three-year Leverhulme Early Career Fellowship at the School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh, working (with Dr Steve Sutcliffe as mentor) on a project titled "A Comparative Study of Unbelief in Northern Ireland and Scotland."

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Robert Jackson's book, written for the Council of Europe, *Signposts: policy and practice for teaching*

*about religions and non-religious worldviews in Intercultural Education*, has so far been translated into 12 languages. In March 2017 the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, awarded him an honorary doctorate (Doc h.c.) (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/ntnu-trondheim/sets/72157679314939491>) and, in October 2017, the Norwegian School of Theology (MF) also awarded him an honorary doctorate. Both were for his contributions to religious and intercultural education internationally.



Library of the Centre for Applied Buddhism  
Taplow Court, Taplow, Berks SL6 0ER

The Library of the Centre for Applied Buddhism is a fantastic resource for all those involved in Buddhist and related studies. It is available to anyone who wishes to use it. And our on line catalogue can be viewed and searched at [www.appliedbuddhism.org.uk/library](http://www.appliedbuddhism.org.uk/library)

\*We have a stock of over 17,000 volumes (in many languages) and continue to add to the collection regularly. Our collection of materials for Buddhist study is extensive, including many primary sources and literature (full Pali

canon and Chinese canon- the Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo), and the on-going Chinese canon in English project, (pub. Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai). Alongside these, we hold extensive secondary sources on all traditions and schools of Buddhism, Buddhist Art, Buddhist history and culture.

In addition we have been left a number of collections of books from scholars in Religious studies, for example Dr. Bryan Wilson's library of sociology and anthropology. We endeavour to keep up-to-date with current academic research on Buddhism.

\*We take about 30 or so academic journals of Buddhist studies from around the world, as well as more popular, practitioner based magazines. We also hold a good collection of in-house magazines from a variety of Buddhist schools in the UK and Europe. We hold many back copies and difficult to find copies of these journals and magazines.

We run a lending library & charge a small annual sub (£10 / £5 unwaged). We will post items nationally as required, but not overseas.

If you would like to make use of the library or have any questions please contact:

Sarah Norman, Librarian: [sn@appliedbuddhism.org.uk](mailto:sn@appliedbuddhism.org.uk) 01628 591217

Or Jamie Cresswell – Director [jc@appliedbuddhist.org.uk](mailto:jc@appliedbuddhist.org.uk) 01628 591213

We look forward to welcoming you to our centre.



Joint conference with the ISASR - Queen's University Belfast, 3–5 September 2018

## ***Borders and Boundaries: 'Religion' on the Periphery***

Keynote Speakers

***Gladys Ganiel*** (Queen's University, Belfast) | ***Naomi Goldenberg*** (University of Ottawa)

### ***Call for Papers***

Borders and boundaries define limits and margins, centres and peripheries. They demarcate territories, and separate entities and bodies and, as such, they function to guard space, limit action and exclude. They are, however, also contact zones and places of exchange, the 'limen' or threshold, the in-between, and the places of temptation and transgression (Szakolczai 2009). In the current political context when Ireland and the UK are faced with the dilemmas, paradoxes and implications of Brexit, this special joint conference of the Irish Society for the Academic Study of Religions (ISASR) and the British Association for the Study of Religions (BASR) invites paper, research slam, panel and roundtable proposals on the theme of Borders and Boundaries. Scholars based outside the Republic of Ireland or the UK are invited to submit proposals related to this theme regardless of whether their work relates to these islands. Scholars who are based in the UK or the Republic of Ireland and are working on religion and related categories are welcome to submit proposals on any topic whether or not it relates to the conference theme.

Borders and boundaries of states, religions and identities have played a defining role in relations between Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, and Great Britain, perhaps most significantly the boundaries between religious communities. The negotiation between different religious lifeworlds, worldviews, constructs and dogmas takes place across perceived borders, whether real or imagined. Of concern amongst these for scholars of religions are the distinctions drawn between 'religion' and related categories, and between the 'insider' and 'outsider', which require the scholar to engage with the complexity of symbolic divides associated with identity, belief and belonging. In anthropological studies of religions, the crossing of borders or the 'limen' constitutes a transformational experience. Participation in ritual, pilgrimage and ecstatic practices often requires the crossing of thresholds between different states, between human and divine, human and animal, between different realms, of the living and the dead, material and spirit or otherworlds. Things that are normally kept separate, physically, conceptually and symbolically, meet at crossing points in the landscape, in ritual and in spiritual journeys.

These topics and more will provide the substantive content for this first-ever joint conference between these two member associations of the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR).

Please note that papers should contribute to the aims of both societies, ISASR and BASR, specifically to advance research and education through the academic study of religions by providing a forum for the critical, analytical and cross-cultural study of religions, past and present. The conference will not be a forum for confessional, apologetical, interfaith or other similar concerns.

Proposals to be submitted to [isasrbasr2018@gmail.com](mailto:isasrbasr2018@gmail.com) by 27 April 2018 (please include name, title, affiliation, and email address). Paper Proposals: please submit title and abstract of 200 words.

*Research Slam:* A research "slam" is a quick succession of presentations of max. 7 mins per presenter that gives a lively impression of a project, a programme, a network, or a collaboration. Please submit research slam proposals in the form of a title and brief (max. 150 wds) abstract. It is possible to submit a research slam proposal as well as a paper proposal.

*Panel proposals:* please submit abstracts of 200 words for panel proposals. All panel proposals should include the name, title, affiliation, and email address of each presenter plus the chair and discussant (if applicable) plus abstracts for each of the papers on the panel.

Confirmation of acceptance on the conference programme will be sent by 15 June 2018.



# Contemporary Religion in Historical Perspective: Publics and Performances

Kents Hill, Milton Keynes, February 21-23, 2018

#OURS2018  
[tinyurl.com/ours2018](http://tinyurl.com/ours2018)

At a time when the public role of the University is under increasing scrutiny, how can we ensure that research and teaching about religions reaches new publics? What can we do to enhance religious literacy both within and beyond religious and non-religious communities? How is ritual and performance involved in communication between religious communities, the academy, policy makers and the broader public?

Bringing historical perspective to the contemporary role of religion in the public sphere, this conference will include contributions from practitioners and third-sector organisations, who bring their perspectives to the academy to consider the public impact of Religious Studies.

### ***Keynote Speakers***

Bettina Schmidt | The Contentious Field of the Study of Religious Experience: The challenging influence of Rudolf Otto, Andrew Lang and other founding fathers

Stephen Sutcliffe | Playing the Long Game: The Predicament of the Scholar of Religion/s between Academic Researcher and Public Intellectual

Philip Williamson | Remembrance Day: the British churches and national commemoration of the war dead since 1914

***Online registration for conference at [tinyurl.com/ours2018](http://tinyurl.com/ours2018)***

For any enquiries, please contact Paul-François Tremlett and David G. Robertson at [ours@open.ac.uk](mailto:ours@open.ac.uk).



# BASR Annual General Meeting

13.30-15.00 - 05/09/17 - University of Chester

British Association for the Study of Religions  
Registered Charity Number 801567  
(Affiliated to the IAHR and EASR)

1. Welcome. Steven Sutcliffe welcomed everyone and advertised next year and EASR.
2. Apologies – Richard Saville-Smith, Marion Bowman, Douglas Davies, Ursula King.
3. Minutes of the previous AGM. Eileen Barker proposed and Graham Harvey seconded and the minutes were passed as an accurate record of the meeting.
4. Matters arising. None not covered by the agenda of this meeting.
5. Presidential Address (Steven Sutcliffe). Very proud to be face of BASR. Very happy with new website and start of History Project, already well underway. Aiming for at least two publications, one in house (glossy) and at least one, or two, journal articles in peer-reviewed historiographical features of the history of the association. First Teaching & Learning Fellowship – good to see new projects going ahead. Submitted formal response to HEFCE on REF2021 in March 2017, following on from Stern Recommendations. Thanks to Bettina Schmidt & David Robertson for their input on that draft response. Now need to nominate panel members for REF2021. Also responded to EASR publications officer on UK publications of wider interest, helping to collate a resource of materials at a European level. Responded to creation of European Academy of Religion in December 2016 – provided statements of full support to EASR and IAHR oppositions. SS noted that IAHR President and EASR exec attended first conference as observers, but await feedback in Leuven at this year's EASR. SS noted Dolmen exchange on EASR role, and his personal response (on behalf of BASR) to Perry Schmidt-Leukel. This correspondence was all shared on Dolmen mailing list. SS noted this year is 50th anniversary of the founding of the Lancaster RS department – SS handed over to Peggy Morgan, Hon. Life Member of BASR, to speak a few words. PM noted Lancaster had a Quaker VC who wanted to study Religion 'differently'. Advert for first post said candidate could be 'any religion or none' which was ground breaking. PM did Post-Grad work with Smart, converting from theology to RS. PM noted influence of Northern Powerhouse on Religious Studies in Leeds, Manchester, Lancaster and Scotland. SS finished report thanking Chester, inviting people to Belfast in 2018 and invited colleagues to host 2019.
6. Secretary's Report (Stephen Gregg). Since the last AGM, the executive committee met in January at Chester, and again yesterday prior to the start of the conference. As in recent years, we have tried to have only one regular meeting outside the conference to save costs. Meetings have focused upon Conference organisation, website, Bulletin and JBSR development, and exciting new developments in T&L. SG has held meetings this year at the BA Subject Association, including conversation with Nick Stern in his only public discussion post publication of his report, and at the AHA. This, too, focused on REF, but also included wider interdisciplinary issues such as the fight against A-Level cancellations in associated subjects, and on funding cuts to British Academy schools, Brexit, TEF and Open Access Monographs. The dynamic was very much on peer-support discussion, rather than dissemination of new policy, but as ever the Executive will trickle down to members key policy information affecting us, whenever we hear this, through the Bulletin, or via the email list. SG worked with EASR to update list on grants (in political context of new European Academy) and that

EASR responded saying how impressive BASR's list was. Much focus this year has been on the continuing evolution of the role of BASR in the wider scholarly and public community regarding engagement with religion. The new website, and the new digital platforms for the Bulletin and the revamped JBASR will all help with this, we hope. There are continuing discussions regarding more public-facing activities, and media-facing profile enhancement, and we propose producing a publicly available directory of expertise of members – with their permission, of course – and SG will email out in due course with suggested details. There have been over 40 applications for membership, which may be a record, certainly in my time. Not all have paid up their subs yet, however, so the figure remains to be confirmed by the Treasurer in our ongoing discussions regarding the membership list. SG confirmed that he and the Treasurer had met and removed redundant entries – people who had not paid or attended for more than two years. Bursaries for the conference continue to be keenly applied for – very strong set of applications this year, and such is the popularity of them in our times of austerity, that the committee has formulated a new policy: bursary awards will normally be given to individuals once as a student and once as an early career scholar. Papers will be ranked on subject, quality and relevance to the aims of the BASR. The committee may, at their discretion, give an award outside this remit if extenuating circumstances apply in their opinion. SG finished by stating that it continues to be a very busy time for the Exec – everyone in the room is facing more pressure from their home departments and institutions to undertake more duties with less support, and this often makes committee work even more challenging. SG thanked the committee for their continued hard work and commitment to the aims of the BASR.

7. Treasurer's Report (Chris Cotter). Full accounts and notes are provided, following these minutes. When asked for any questions: Bettina Schmidt suggested PhD award (£1,000 every other year) to help young scholars and enhance their CV. PM asked if there could be a follow-up project to the History project, if possible. SG noted it needed to be managed within the existing project, according to the agreed budget. SS suggested the Ninian Smart Archive could be the focus of a new project.

8. Teaching and Learning (Dominic Corrywright). DC noted that the Exec responded to the call from the Commission for Religious Education (part of REC). Wendy Dossett confirmed interim report was due any time, with a final report in the later autumn, which seeks to affect government policy. T&L provides content for Bulletin including pedagogy matters. DC to stand down from BSR exec, after ten years. DC thanked colleagues present and past. SS thanked DC for all his hard work and for pioneering TF Award, and in previous roles on committee.

9. BASR Teaching Fellowship (Dominic Corrywright) DC Announced Dr Steffanie Sinclair as the first recipient of the BASR Teaching and Learning Fellowship. A copy of DC's introductory speech for Dr Sinclair precedes these minutes.

10. JBASR Co-ordinating Editor's Report (Suzanne Owen). The digital journal has now moved onto a new host online platform with a new look and user-friendly interface. Some technical issues have been faced, with links and archival site, which are being addressed. Next issue to be edited by BS & DC. SO outlined a new approach, to include open calls for papers. SO noted that the quick turnaround time (March-Aug) will be attractive to people in the REF cycle. Book reviews are to stay in both bulletin and journal.

11. Bulletin Editor's Report (David Robertson). Happy with bulletin changes and updates, including modernisation, with both quality and quantity up. DR noted that new columns and ideas always welcome – we rely on members, so please contribute. Conference Reports can be co-authored, and photos are always welcome. 'From Our Correspondent' series very popular and raising BASR profile around the world. Also, ReThinking series – scholars to be suggested gratefully received. The News section

getting better, but all news welcome. DR humbled to be doing the bulletin having seen the archive, and reported that publisher noted to him that conference continues to grow year on year in vibrancy.

12. Website and Social Media (Claire Wanless). CW was happy to report that the new logo and branding is complete, and is fresher and more modern. There is a need to get us higher on search engines – CW asked colleagues and members to please link from departmental websites, as that helps raise our ‘web reputation’. CW announced that, with her last year of doctoral studies coming up, she was stepping down from the role to focus on her studies. CW noted that it is an important role for branding and public facing nature of BASR, and wished for the role to continue in some form. SS thanked CW for her work over the last two years.

13. Religious Studies Project (David Robertson & Chris Cotter) – RSP continues apace, and are grateful for the headline sponsorship from the BASR. Currently applying to be a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation. 5,000 followers on FaceBook.

14. BASR Conference 2018 (Steven Sutcliffe & Chris Cotter) James Kapalo and Jenny Butler have been contacted by SS. CC to be BASR conference liaison person, with Crawford Gribben as local QUB organiser. Dates were confirmed as 3-5th September 2018, QUB.

15. President Elect (Stephen Gregg). Prof. Bettina Schmidt was nominated by Dr. Steve Sutcliffe and seconded by Prof. Graham Harvey. BS accepted nomination, which was approved by the membership, and gave thanks for invitation and confirmed acceptance of the role.

16. Exec Committee Constitution (Stephen Gregg) – it was noted that the Exec Committee will need to review the membership of the committee in the next twelve months to reconfigure roles after resignations and to comply with the requirements of the Constitution. It was approved by the membership that DR and SO would continue to serve as members of the committee for the next year.

17. Any Other Business – George Chryssides suggested that a code of Ethics should be put on the BASR website, to include online ethics. SS noted this would be discussed at the January 2018 Exec meeting.

18. Date, time and location of next AGM. Queen’s University Belfast, 4th September 2018.

## **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 APRIL 2018**

## BASR TREASURER'S REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDING 15th AUGUST 2017

Dr C.R. Cotter, BASR Honorary Treasurer  
University of Chester, 5th September 2017

General income for the year was £5,604.

Bank Interest: Even more negligible than previous years due to historically low base rates. Treasurer to investigate options going forward.

Subscriptions: Slight increase on last year to £3,362, explained in part by greater retention of members due to move away from one-off payments. Currently 142 paying members. Treasurer and Secretary to contact non-paying members on list and encourage payment (approximately 150 individuals), then rationalize the membership list.

General expenditure for the year: £8,995, increase of approx. £1,700 on last year. However, this is largely explained by two large planned expenses – the history project and teaching fellowship – and also by the payment of 4 of 5 bursaries for 2017 pre-emptively (due to the University of Chester's system).

Committee expenses are lower than recent years at £1,846. The President and Secretary continue to represent the Association at the EASR, AHA and BA. This year we had one less face-to-face committee meeting, and no additional IAHR travel to support.

Insurance remains in place. Two years' premiums appear in this accounting period.

The BASR continued to sponsor the Religious Studies Project at £500 per year.

The University of Wolverhampton-hosted 2016 BASR Conference was a financial success, bringing in a profit of £375.

Closure of CAF Cash: CAF changed their practice this year and, as such, were going to charge £5 per month for the maintenance of the CAF Cash account. To avoid this expenditure, the Executive Committee opted to close the CAF Cash account, and maintain CAF Gold.

Bank Accounts: As of August 15th Bank Accounts totalled £23,565, a decrease of £3,391. This is explained by point 4 above. Treasurer to look into filing a Gift Aid return this academic year.

Dispersal of 'excess' funds: As noted last year, the Executive Committee agree that, as a charity, it is not appropriate that we accumulate financial assets 'for the sake of it'. As such, we have enacted our plans to spend £5,000 producing a history of the BASR (£3,500 honorarium, and up to £1,500 in expenses), and £300 per year plus a free conference place for a minimum of three years for an annual teaching fellowship. Further suggestions from the membership are always welcome.

Summary of Financial Position: Overall, the finances of the BASR are very good with adequate reserves to ensure our successful continuation. Our healthy bank balance has allowed the Executive Committee, with the support of the membership body, to continue investment in postgraduate bursaries, collaborative research, conference-support and inter-association networking, and to launch a teaching fellowship and history project.

**BRITISH ASSOCIATION FOR  
THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS  
ACCOUNTS as at 15 AUGUST 2017**

	Notes	2016-17	2015-16		Notes	2016-17	2015-16
<b>Balance at 16 August 2016</b>		<b>26956</b>	29149				
<b>RECEIPTS</b>				<b>PAYMENTS</b>			
Inland Revenue		0	0	Printing & Postage Bulletin		-23	-82
Subscriptions		3362	3197	RSP	ii	-500	-1263
Bulletin insert fees		0	50	Committee Expenses	iii	-1846	-3302
RSP		0	0	Society Subs		-477	-508
Bank Interest	i	17	29	Bank Charges		0	-19
				Insurance	iv	-796	0
				Journal	v	-231	-279
				History Project	vi	-1813	N/A
				Teaching Fellowship	vii	-245	N/A
				Website	viii	-84	N/A
2017 Conference Receipts		0	N/A	2017 Conference Expenses	ix	-980	N/A
2016 Conference Receipts		2225	150	2016 Conference Expenses		-2000	0
2015 Conference Receipts		N/A	1646	2015 Conference Expenses		N/A	-1812.8
<b>Total</b>		<b>5604</b>	<b>5072</b>	<b>Total</b>		<b>-8995</b>	<b>-7266</b>
<b>Balance at 15 August 2017</b>		<b>23565</b>	<b>26956</b>				

**BALANCE SHEET as at 15 August 2017**

**Cash Funds: Bank Accounts**

Lloyds Current		1619	1348
CAF Cash	x	0	11052
CAF Gold		21912	13843
PayPal Holding		9	688
Petty Cash		25	25
<b>Total</b>		<b>23565</b>	<b>26956</b>

**FINANCIAL SUMMARY UP TO 15 AUGUST 2015**

		26956			
<b>Balance as at 16th August 2016</b>			<b>Conference 2016</b>		
Total Receipts		5604	Total Receipts		2375
Total Payments		-8995	Total Payments		-2000
Net Receipts/Payments	xi	-3391			
<b>Balance as at 15th August 2017</b>		<b>23565</b>	Deficit/Surplus	xii	<b>375</b>

**NOTES TO ACCOUNTS**

- i* Interest rates even lower this year.
- ii* Last year included BASR support for RSP attendance at IAHR
- iii* Includes attendance at AHA, BA and EASR. One less exec. meeting than last year. No IAHR.
- iv* 2 years payments
- v* Maintaining DOIs etc.
- vi* Total Budget £5000. Includes this 2016/17 conference attendance, first honorarium, and subsistence.
- vii* Funded place at 2016/17 conference. Further £300 prize to follow.
- viii* Initial costs, moving away from OU support.
- ix* Due to Chester's set-up, 4 of 5 bursaries paid in advance this year.
- x* CAF Cash closed and amalgamated with CAF Gold

*Affiliated to the  
International Association for the History of Religions and  
the European Association for the Study of Religions*

# features

## ***Religious Studies as a Muted Voice: Purposefully Rocking the Boat in Interdisciplinary Approaches to Religion***

*Stephen E. Gregg, University of Wolverhampton*

### **Setting the Scene**

The academic discipline of the Study of Religion stands at a juncture in its relationship with public discourse on the phenomena variously labelled religious. Whilst on the one hand, the cutting edge of academic scholarship on religion in the past twenty years has focused upon embodied, relational, everyday religious lives of actors and communities, public discourse on religion continues to be dominated by essentialised and privileged paradigms of religion that stem largely from theological frameworks long since discarded within our subject area. Perhaps more worryingly, interdisciplinary approaches to religion, religious actors and religious communities also demonstrate a wide variance from new approaches and methodologies in the Study of Lived Religion.

Specifically, this variance risks becoming not just a dissonance, but a jarring divergence, both within and without the Academy when we reflect upon interdisciplinary approaches to both the categories of 'religious' and 'religion'. Primiano's seminal work on vernacular religion remains foundational to new approaches, and yet, over 20 years after this publication (Primiano, 1995), the study of lived, vernacular or everyday religion remains at the edge of much scholarly debate, and almost all public discourse, on religion. Whilst Primiano reminds us that all religion is

vernacular religion, it is clear that large tranches of scholarship still infer authority in paradigms of top-down institutional, monoglotic authority. By understanding religion as everyday (Ammerman 2007), relational (Harvey 2013) and, above all, embodied (Gregg & Scholefield 2015) and socially contextualised (Bowman & Valk 2012), we change what we mean by religion. A result of this is an increasing dissonance between academic disciplines and public actors regarding the term 'religion'. Different academic disciplines talk of 'religion' and yet focus upon radically different phenomena. Public discourse on religion continues to privilege essentialised paradigms of religion, often with a focus on belief and 'religion' as a unilateral category of participation separate from culture (Sharma, 2008).

The reasons for this are well known – a thousand-year theological inheritance in our universities which has created a World Religions Paradigm that woefully misrepresents our subjects of study, usefully critiqued by Owen (2011) and others (Gregg & Scholefield (2015)). The colonial inheritance of monolithic religious identity boundaries from the British administration's censuses in the Punjab (Barrier, 1981), through to the invention of 'World Religions' via the Chicago Platforms of 1893 (Masuzawa, 2005) right up to contemporary xenophobic anti-migration parties in Europe. All of these approaches formulate

a category of religion and a view of religious participation that mislocates authority in religion.

Of course, there has been much response to this in recent years. Works by Ammermann (2007), McGuire (2008), Orsi (2003 & 1997), Bowman & Valk (2010) Harvey (2009 & 2013), Barker (1984) and Hall (1997) all question top-down authority and prioritise the everyday, relational, embodied and living nature of religion as a category and of the identity construction of religious actors and religious communities. However, public discourse and interdisciplinary scholarship on religion continues to adopt outdated paradigms and approaches and, whether we like it or not, this has a greater influence on how our subject is viewed in the world beyond the Academy.

I raise this issue, not simply to highlight variance and difference of approach to religion, but to provide a call to those operating at the cutting edge of our discipline to re-position our focus beyond our own discipline and sub-disciplines. Indeed, as far back as 2002, Robert Orsi asked the question 'Is the Study of Lived Religion Irrelevant to the World We Live in?' in his address and article of the same name (Orsi, 2003). In this work, Orsi responds to the challenge in the title by arguing, like Primiano, that "Religion is always religion-in-action, religion in-relationships between people, between the ways the world is and the way people imagine or want it to be" (Orsi, 2003, 172). He goes on to state that: "The interpretive challenge of the study of lived religion is to develop the practice of disciplined attention to people's signs and practices as they describe, understand, and use them, in the circumstances of their experiences, and to the structures and conditions within which these signs and practices emerge" (Orsi, 2003, 172). It is this emergence within extra-disciplinary and extra-academy contexts to which our discipline needs to respond. If we do not, we risk becoming, to use Charlotte Hardman's famous phrase, a "muted voice" in discourse on religion. If, indeed, we are not already so – as Hardman's definition of a 'muted group' as "groups whose medium of articulation is not easily grasped by other sectors of the population; groups who are marginal or submissive to the dominant power group" (Hardman, 2017) seems to me a description of RS' role in public discourse on religion that is too close to home for comfort.

### **Extra-Academy use of terms – The Example of UK Politics and Education**

It should come as no surprise that extra-academy approaches to religions operate within outdated or discredited paradigms. Indeed, how else could it be? The cultural capital that has built up in Western European universities over a thousand years of theological discourse has led to the widespread acceptance of essentialised and reified forms of discourse about, and understandings of, the very category of 'religion'. Invariably, these are hierarchical and monoglotic, and provide daily reminders of the different conversations which occur within public and academic discourse on the category of religion. Perhaps the highest profile contemporary version of this is the current UK Parliament's handling of the language used to describe ISIS.

This short piece is not the place to investigate the complicated social, political and religious dynamics that have given rise to the Islamic State, but what is of interest to the current discussion is the language used within Parliamentary debate, and the assumptions about the category of religion that have been made by political actors of all sides. Prime amongst this is the conversation started by Conservative MP Rehman Chisti, who has consistently called for ISIS to be labelled as Daesh, the Arabic acronym for the group that sounds similar to the word daas, meaning one who is humiliated or lacks dignity (Chisti, 2015). After months of campaigning to Parliament, Chisti won a concession from the then Prime Minister, who unequivocally stated "This evil death cult is neither a true representation of Islam nor a state" (Hansard, 2015). Of course, this crass essentialism of 'what Islam is', and by correlation 'what religion is' can be expected in a politically expedient, perhaps even laudable attempt to ease troubled community relations, but the claim that ISIS is not a State is little short of absurd, when documents leaked through Ay-menn al-Tamimi (Guardian 2015b) clearly show the establishment of taxation, health, education, transport, civil service and law and order systems – however much such systems may jar with western European ideals of civic society. However, the simple fact is that this is a high profile example of the essentialism of a religious tradition – or even what 'religion' itself is – from which the everyday lives of religious actors, have been removed, as if they have somehow fallen short of an expected standard provided by the said religion. Such top-down approaches to religion are not just academically naïve, but are demonstrative of the gap between public discourse on religion and the cutting edge of reli-

gious studies scholarship on religion. In a discourse still dominated by world religions, texts, beliefs and monoglotic top-down categories of religion, there is no room for the dark, complex, contradictory and often unsettling realities of lived religion. In so doing, our public discourse is not just missing the point, but missing the very subject of study when they essentialise religion away from its lived reality.

Crucially, however, this approach to religion is not isolated within the rhetoric of the political classes, but has become enacted and embodied within everyday discourse and action in communities around the country. In 2011 the UK government introduced Prevent, a counter-radicalisation strategy aimed at reducing the risk of exposure of young people and children to radicalised worldviews (HM Gov, 2015). The strategy has been much criticised within the UK, particularly by the United Nations' Special Rapporteur on the Right to Freedom of Assembly (Guardian, 2016a), The National Association of Muslim Police (Guardian 2015a), and The National Union of Teachers (Guardian 2016b). It has also been frequently ridiculed in the press, for example on the occasion of a Lancashire schoolboy who was interviewed by Police for writing that he lived in a terrorist house, when it was thought he meant a terraced house and could not spell it. Such incidents, in their public projection through the media, mask serious misunderstandings of religion as-lived with their discourse of othering and essentialism.

Furthermore, the Prevent Strategy has now become embedded within school curriculae around the country, even down to primary-school level (and indeed, extended to individual childminders and holiday play schemes); every School Governor in England is required to undertake training in the Prevent Strategy, and schools must have an appointed Prevent officer, and embed the strategy into their risk assessments, staff training, Personal, Social & Health Education curriculum, and even into their End user Agreement Licences on all computer equipment. So far, so bureaucratic. However, it is not the tedious administration of this policy that I wish to highlight, but the outdated way in which 'religion' is treated within the Strategy.

Now, let me be clear – the UK Government insists that Prevent is not about religion, but about extremism, both non-violent and violent. Now let me be equally clear – Prevent is about religion, or at least,

religion-as lived, which Primiano reminds us is religion.

The UK Government's separation of extreme worldviews or acts from a notional category of 'religion' is underpinned by an essentialism of 'religion', and in particular of 'Islam' (as if such a community or worldview existed to meaningfully describe and relate Sufis in Seville with Wahabis in Warsaw). Such public essentialisms of religion, highlighted by our earlier discussion of the Isis/Daesh parliamentary debates, locate authority within religion in what I have previously labelled 'reported religion'; textbook accounts which utilise the outdated World Religions Paradigm, and which preference institutional, top-down and often monoglotic, patriarchal, heteronormative views of religion. Crucially, such views also separate 'religion' and 'religions' from darker aspects of human behaviour – a crass essentialism which is politically expedient, but which woefully misunderstands the complicated, contradictory and multi-voiced and acted realities of everyday embodied religious living.

I bring this issue to this discussion, not just to relate to abstracted political discourse, but to highlight the concrete ways in which the Prevent Strategy is solidifying the hold that outdated approaches to 'religion' have over Government Policy and the subsequent 'trickling down' of this to everyday engagement with religion in school communities across the UK. Indeed, as a Governor of my local Community Primary School (the only non-Church school in the area in which I live) I undertook an online Prevent Training Programme, the tone and content of which could only be described as a direct facsimile of the anti-Cult wars of the 1970s and 1980s (indeed into the 1990s in France) that so 'othered' and dehumanised members of minority religions, who were seen as 'brainwashed' individuals. No academic audience needs reminding that the scholarship of Richardson (1994), Robbins (1984) and, above all, Barker (1984), deconstructed these politically and religiously motivated attacks as well and truly discredited understandings of the process of communal belonging and living. However, my recent experience of sitting through training videos and completing online tests of my knowledge of the dangers of extremism (all examples of which were based on Muslim children, without the words Islam or Muslim ever appearing in the text) suggest that public discourse has not caught up; there was clear separation between 'religion' and the lived reality of religious actors.



It is clear from these simple examples that national-level discourse on 'religion', religious actors and religious communities, continues to strongly differentiate between an essentialised textbook account of an ideal of religion, and the lived reality as somehow not 'living up' to this essentialism. Whereas this public discourse concludes that radical extremists are 'not real Muslims' or 'not real Christians', scholars of lived religion are left examining the lived reality, and understanding this phenomena, with all its complexity, as the real fabric of religion. In so doing, we are simply highlighting what Malinowski argued so many decades ago on the Trobriand Islands, when he separated out the 'norms' and the 'activities' of a social group (Parsons, 2002). I want to continue to argue that it is only by looking at Malinowski's category of 'activities' that we can begin to understand bottom-up everyday religion.

### **Interdisciplinary use of terms – The Example of Heritage & History**

Whilst we may expect public discourse to diverge from academic discourse, perhaps the most pressing issue for our discipline is the dissonance between our understandings of religion, and the understanding of related disciplines, when we look at similar or overlapping phenomena. By definition, a discussion on interdisciplinary scholarship could lead us down a myriad of avenues, so I will keep this short and simply give an example or two from the heritage industries.

An issue that has been exercising me for some time is the very simple notion that – if we, as scholars of lived religion, in our rejection of monoglotic and top-down categories of religion, effectively change what we mean when we use the term religion, what then, for colleagues in related disciplines who's work closely relates to notions of religion or religiosity? Are we having overlapping, convergent, or divergent conversations? In short, I worry that it is the latter.

The use of terminology here is interesting, particularly Lived or Living Religion. I have used this in the title of a recent publication (Gregg & Scholefield, 2015), and the term is used by, amongst others, Meredith McGuire. One other scholar who has used this phrase is Jorge Rupke, director of the Lived Ancient Religion Project at Erfurt – our IAHR/EASR hosts in 2015. The project is fascinating – using a Lived Religion approach based largely on McGuire's work

which aims to contest the previously dominant polis religion paradigm which was top-down and anti-individualized in previous studies of the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean. Much important work has transpired – particularly the focus upon everyday action, embodied religious experience and a focus on the roles of actors of all genders. There remains, however, a key difference in approach to some other scholars in the field of everyday religion in that, whilst Primiano reminds us that all religion is vernacular religion (Primiano, 1995, 44), and Harvey observes that "real life and lived religion ... might turn out to be the same thing" (Harvey, 2013, 9), Rupke writes that "'lived ancient religion' focuses on the actual everyday experience, on practices, expressions, and interactions that could be related to "religion".' (Rupke, 2012, 6). This last statement is crucial, as it still ensures a construction of 'religion; within a binary paradigm – everyday acts as related to religion, rather than everyday acts as religion per se.

Similar discussions can be found in the work of other historians and archaeologists. Thomas' classic work *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (Thomas, 1971) creates a binary notion of embodied ritual in opposition to 'religion'. Platt's *King Death*, examining the impact of the Black Death and its aftermath in late medieval England, provides interesting insight into the change of diet in Glastonbury Abbey's Abbot's Kitchen (Platt, 1996, 91) demonstrating the increasing importance placed on diet in a post-Plague world, but at no point links this to negotiated everyday religious practice – for Platt, it is a social custom linked with religion, rather than a religious act itself. On other occasions, interaction with religion and religious life is notable by its absence – Parker Pearson's definitive *Stonehenge: A New Understanding* summarises the results of the Stonehenge Riverside Project, the largest dig to take place at the UNESCO World Heritage Site for a generation, which radically re-dated and reorientated our understanding of both the purpose of the monument, and the relationship of Stonehenge to its landscape. At the heart of all of this is the possibility to read new insights into ritualised healing spaces linked to the role of the Blue Stones, imported from The Preseli Hills in Wales, and the quite remarkable discoveries at Durrington, a few short miles North-East of the Stonehenge site. Parker Pearson's theory is that Durrington Walls was the village-site (the land of the living) and Stonehenge was used as the land of the dead; a portal for

ancestors. This is based upon the discovery of just three human bones at Durrington, amongst 80,000 animal bones, compared with Stonehenge, where human remains far outnumber other finds (Parker Pearson, 2013, 342-3). This understanding creates a separation between the living and the dead, with clear suggestions of a binary notion of otherworldliness – however, this is far removed from the embodied everyday experience of Yoruba conversations with ancestors, Catholic conversations with Saints, Spiritualist experiences of people who have passed over, and what Harvey has described as the “relationality” or negotiated etiquette between religious actors and other-than-human persons (Harvey, 2013, 125) in contemporary religious communities in New Zealand, Nigeria and Hawaii.

Again, we find dissonance between scholars of Lived Religion and our interdisciplinary colleagues – we are observing the same phenomena, and performing remarkably different acts of eisegesis. It should be noted that interesting work is being undertaken in this area – particularly Hukantaival’s ‘Finding Folk religion: An Archaeology of ‘strange’ behaviour’ (Hukantaival, 2013) - however it remains a minority area of scholarship. Closer interdisciplinary work on such projects within the mainstream could yield important results for understanding lived, relational religion in a diversity of historical contexts.

### ***Religious Studies’ and the Politics of Subject Recognition***

This discourse of dissonance in inter-disciplinary and public political contexts, also replicates itself on micro and macro levels of internal academic discourse, and public projections of religion through the media. I find it very noteworthy that, and I am trying very hard not to be ad hominem or disrespectful at this point, the UK’s only Reader in the Public Understanding of Religion (there is no Professor as yet) is a New Testament Theologian, the coordinator of the AAR Committee on the Public Understanding of Religion is an Ethical Theologian, and the director of a recent Religious Literacy project in the UK, at a recent public event reverted to the Theologian David Ford, when defining Religious Studies. I wonder if you can see a pattern emerging?

Such imbalanced discourse is also happening at a subject-level, when we consider the recent instigation of the European Academy of Religion. Recent

updates from Steve Sutcliffe and myself to the BASR mailing list and Bulletin will, I hope, have kept people in the loop, but in a nutshell, this is a new initiative to replicate the mode of the AAR in Europe, organised by theologians, largely Catholic, wishing to inform public policy through the lens of their worldviews. Of course, the methodological issues here are manifold, and the IAHR and EASR have objected strongly, supported by the BASR. We are whistling to the wind. The 2016 pre-conference conference attracted hundreds of delegates, and NGOs, social policy units and governmental representatives were also in attendance. Despite the protestations of the IAHR, EASR and BASR, the event was a resounding success for the organisers. The academic study of religion, as defined in the aims of the BASR, EASR and our sister association in Ireland, were, to paraphrase Charlotte Hardman again, a “group whose medium of articulation is not easily grasped by other sectors of the population; a group who is marginal or submissive to the dominant power group”.

And as the focus of this piece has been on lived interpretations of everyday religion, I thought I would end this section with an anecdotal reflection on my own recent experience with public discourse on religion.

A couple of months ago, I was contacted by a producer from LBC radio. I assumed they wanted to employ me as their new shock-jock, as Katie Hopkins and Nigel Farage were not right wing enough for them, but apparently it was my knowledge of Scientology that they were after. Two schools in London boroughs had recently invited in drug-prevention youth workers to talk to their pupils and, upon realising that the speakers were members of the CoS, had declared their extreme unhappiness to the world. The producer wanted to know what I thought about Scientologists being allowed into schools. Now, besides the obvious question of why the schools did not do their homework – the Narconon website hardly hides the fact it is based on Hubbard’s worldview – I asked the producer if she would ask this question if the speakers had been from a Jewish or Christian organisation. After a deafening silence, the reply came back ... ‘erm ... I suppose not.’ The conversation continued with the producer arranging to call me after the 9.30am news to be wired in live to the airwaves with the beautifully buffoned Andrew Castle. At 9.28am, I was texted by the producer to say that, due to a breaking news story, they had dropped the

item. Having not been born yesterday, I tuned in to the broadcast to hear Jon Attack, a professional apostate from Scientology who has made a financial career out of attacking the Church since the early 1980s describe the Scientologists as both ‘demonic’ and ‘a death cult’. I should point out that none of this is about my bruised ego – there are others within BASR better experienced than I in fieldwork with Scientology organisations – but I ask the simple question; would LBC news drop Brian Cox for an astrologer when talking about astronomy? Religion is, Scientology pun intended, Fair Game. The sensationalist arms of the media do not need to talk to ‘experts’ on religion, as they already know what religion is. Even the more respectable wings of the media fall into this trap of essentialising and approaching religion as they expect to find it, rather than as it is lived and performed in everyday lives. Whether we like it or not, this continues to inform even respectable and well-intentioned public policy and discourse on religion.

### Conclusion

In this short discussion, I have sought to highlight what I believe to be the problem of dissonance between the cutting edge of Religious Studies scholarship and the approach taken to both the category and practice of religion in public discourse and related fields of scholarship. I am not the first to do this, of course, but I press the point now, as we risk becoming a muted voice in wider discourse. For most related scholars, religion still exists within the straight-jacket of the World Religions Paradigm – the domain of texts, doctrines, monolithic identities and binary separation between humans and other-than-human persons, between sacred and profane, between self and society. Even when the same sources and terms are used, there is huge variance about what religion is as new terms are often used within these outdated paradigms. Those scholars engaged with bottom-up, embodied, sensual, relational and contextualised religion must widen the conversation beyond our sub-disciplinary networks to meaningfully engage with wider discourse on religion, to better understand the dynamics of religious participation and engagement in everyday lives.

So... why does this matter, and why raise the point now? Well, despite the evidence of the paucity of jobs within the Academy, our subject has never been more relevant to the political and public debate in our contemporary cultures and societies. Now, it may

well be obvious that public discourse on religion will lag behind scholarly trends, but the pressing need for bridging discourse is due to the unique dynamic of our subject in everyday lives – not every public commentator has an opinion on marine biology or accountancy methodologies, but public and interdisciplinary discourse on religion is all around us. We need to take control of the wider conversation, beyond our sub-disciplines and be leaders in a new discourse on religion, which preferences the everyday, the embodied and the relational. That is the challenge, and we are best placed to respond to it, both inside and outside the Academy.

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# FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT ... IN PERU

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The philosophy of religion is a relatively young discipline. It appears that the first scholar to use the term was the German Jesuit Segismund von Storchenau (1731-1797), a Wolff-inspired philosopher who opposed deism.<sup>1</sup> In this sense, his philosophy of religion is presented as a preamble to the faith (*preambula fidei*).<sup>2</sup> From this first use, the philosophy of religion has evolved to become a domain of its own, but with methods shared with philosophy. Religion is conceived as a fact, and philosophy of religion seeks to answer several questions, including: what is the condition of possibility of this fact? What is its own rationality? How is it articulated with our emotions?

The methodology of philosophy of religion has also varied over time, and this has caused its borders with theology, religious philosophy or philosophical theology to be somewhat tenuous. If we consider the positions of authors like Cicero or Xenophanes, it could be argued that there was always a critique of religion. Criticism—though not yet in Kant's sense—has thus been a kind of philosophy of religion before its emergence in the Eighteenth century. Theology is constituted as a discourse on God and the revelation of God. For its part, religious philosophy tends to take an apologetic tone given that it seeks to account for the internal logic of a specific religious confession. Finally, philosophical theology has gathered some interests of theology and has deepened in them, but has specialized in the proofs of the existence of God, that is, in how to understand the question of God today. However, the method which in the present is most used among philosophers of religion is phenomenology; a method that makes it possible to incorporate the question of the interpreter themselves; it means that he is not a pure observer. In this methodology, religious experience, both in personal space and in the community, will be of particular relevance. More recently, hermeneutics has

increasingly been incorporated, by virtue of which the question of the meaning of religion and of all its practices, worship or morality, are placed at the centre of reflection. These methods have helped to distinguish the philosophy of religion from other disciplines.

In Peru, the philosophy of religion has not developed independently, for a number of reasons. The first is that the philosophy of European religion is still incipient. Since Peruvian and Latin American philosophical discourse has basically been European, more time will be needed to produce a distinct philosophical approach to religion. It should be noted that the need to think with indigenous categories has been seen as important in Latin American since the Twentieth Century. Precisely because of this, the main academic focus has been on subjects like identity or the social and political organization of the country, rather than religion. Nevertheless, since the 1980s, a group of Latin American philosophers under the aegis of Juan Carlos Scannone (Argentina), Vicente Santuc (Peru) and Gerardo Remolina (Colombia) has produced a great deal of philosophy from Latin America. In 2003, this group published two volumes of *Philosophy of Religion from Latin America*, which takes a unique approach to local religions. Although there is a Latin American approach, however, there is no contribution on religion in Peru as yet.

The second reason is due to the complex constitution of the Peruvian nation. Although there has been a decrease in numbers, most of its population still identifies as Christian—specifically, Catholic. This does not mean, however, that religious practices and stories of ancestral character that distinguished the inhabitants of Peru before the colonization from Europe have been altogether abandoned. In some cases, it can be observed that these practices and stories are articulated to constitute a unique under-

ground narrative that survives until today. This context is complex and enormously difficult to systematize. Thus, the academy in Peru has developed the study of religion primarily through the social sciences such as anthropology and sociology. In this respect, we may recall the Jesuit anthropologist Manuel Marzal, whose field work established a tradition of study which has successors until today.

Philosophy has been developed as a reflexive discipline. Even if they deal with day-to-day matters, many contemporary philosophers will claim this reflective character as distinctive of philosophy. But in truth there is more; in addition to being reflective, it has sought to be rigorous—that is to say, it has tried not to defend anything that cannot be argued in a rational way. This should not mean that it has become a dark and abstract exercise understandable only within circles of initiates. It is true that the effort to express the real, to be honest with the description of the world, will always be faced with a Luciferian temptation that would be satisfied with the artifice of words or with the construction of montages that do not speak the real, but represent representations in a world whose background is unfathomable—a pure narcissism which is perhaps one of the dangers par excellence of philosophical work. In this regard, many contemporary philosophical discourses have tried not only to say how things are, but have contributed positively to making things different.

And with respect to what typifies contemporary philosophical discourse, it can be said that today it is unthinkable to make a rigorous philosophical investigation which is not interdisciplinary. Of course, this poses other challenges: what kind of instruments to use and up to what limits without making philosophy lose its own way of working or points of reference? In any case, it is not methodological puritanism that will be able to solve this question. Just as philosophy serves other disciplines for their research projects, nothing should prevent philosophy from using the human, social or hard sciences.

In a religious reality so complex—and so different from the European—as the Peruvian and Latin American, fieldwork is indispensable to get in touch with the way of life of people. Phenomenology and hermeneutics have taught us how relevant their experiences are, and how they constitute meaning, and that is what we have developed in two recent investigations. The first concerns atheism in Peru and its

repercussion on the constitution of the individual subject, and the second on the relationship between the practice of religion and values among young adults in Peru.

We certainly live in a secularized world, but it would be too much to say that Peru is secular; consequently, the category of post-secularity is perhaps inapplicable in our case. Peru is still among the countries with the largest number of believers in the world—some figures place it among the ten most religious countries in the world—but it is clear that the process of secularization has accelerated and seems unlikely to stop. This is visible in the number of practitioners which is far fewer than the number of believers. Many of those who recognize themselves as believers lack personal or communal practice. In fact, we could say that they are believers with a practical atheism.

It is also quite clear that there is a close relationship between the academic world and the growth and acceleration of secularity, by which I mean that the greatest number of agnostics or non-believers is in the academic world. Although a more careful study of the reasons for this must be undertaken, some may assume that the development of academic life has led to question many naive beliefs—the incipient theological formation of the Peruvian believers has prevented many naive convictions from being replaced by more elaborate ones. Indeed, the discovery of the logic inherent in mythical narratives has often led scholars to conclude that there is an incompatibility between being enlightened and being a believer. It could be said that academics have an allergy to religious faith. This is one of the dangers of academia because human beings and cultures appear to be devoid of their dimension of depth. A Peruvian philosophy of religion is yet to be done, and it will undoubtedly have to examine the diversity of religious narratives.

1. Christian Wolff (1679-1754) is a German philosopher, theologian, mathematician and jurist. He taught in Halle and Marburg, published more than 200 works and had great influence in the field of metaphysics.
2. *Preambula fidei* is the expression used by Saint Thomas Aquinas to refer to preliminary truths that can be discovered by reason. The typical example of *preambula fidei* is the existence of God.



# RE:THINKING CHARLES FORT

*Jack Hunter, University of Bristol*

Charles Fort (1874-1932) is not a name that we would automatically associate with the scholarly study of religion, though in recent years writers such as Jeffrey J. Kripal (2010; 2014) have sought to encourage an engagement with Fortean materials and approaches in the academy. Charles Fort was a collector of bizarre stories and strange accounts that he found documented in newspapers and scientific journals at the New York Public Library and the British Library in London. Over the course of four extraordinary books published between 1919-1932 (Fort,

2008), Fort presented thousands of accounts of strange and anomalous events—from fish falling from the sky, to poltergeist outbreaks and UFO flaps (even before the advent of the modern UFO craze)—which he interpreted through the lens of his intermediatist philosophy. It is Fort's intermediatist perspective in particular that might offer fruitful new approaches to the academic study of religion (Hunter, 2016). Jeffrey Kripal writes of intermediatism:

*With this term Fort meant to refer to a philosophical position...that involves the refusal of all easy, polarizing answers to the problems of the paranormal and the related insistence that, whatever such phenomena are (or are not), they cannot be mapped onto the cognitive grids of the pairs mental/material, real/unreal, subjective/objective, and so on (Kripal, 2014, 259)*

In essence, what Fort is calling for with his philosophy of intermediatism is a whole new approach to investigating the paranormal, or religion, or anything—'One measures a circle, beginning anywhere' (Fort, 2008, 554). It is an approach that actively seeks to move away from the traditional assumptions that have dominated Western academic thinking since at least the Enlightenment, specifically by incorporating the 'damned facts' that science has for so long neglected—'Battalions of the accursed, captained by pallid data that I have exhumed, will march' (Fort, 2008, 3). He is calling for a new paradigm of critical thinking—a complete overhaul of our conceptual and analytical frameworks—to open up a space for discourse about new possibilities that extend beyond materialism, or any other widely accepted theory. Fort's biographer, Jim Steinmeyer, writes: 'Charles Fort took on the establishment—science, philosophy and theology' (Fort, 2008, v).

To the intermediatist, all phenomena—from the most mundane to the most extraordinary—provide gateways through which we can approach the structures and processes of what Fort called the 'underlying oneness' (Fort, 2008, 544). The implication is that the extraordinary phenomena and experiences reported across humankind, throughout history, across continents and between religious traditions might prove fertile ground for investigating the nature of religion, culture and human consciousness. In Jeffrey Kripal's terms, Fort's approach encourages us to re-engage with Super Religion, specifically those 'rare but real' aspects of religion that 'defy [and] transcend, our ordinary (Western secular) conceptions of the world and human nature' (Kripal, 2016, xv).

It is encouraging that a new open-mindedness towards Fort's 'damned facts' and Kripal's 'super religion' is beginning to emerge in Religious Studies and related disciplines, that open up new avenues for scholarly inquiry. Take, for example, Michael Grosso's wonderful recent book about the levitating monk, St. Joseph of Copertino (Grosso, 2015), which places

Joseph's at first glance wildly outlandish paranormal phenomena (levitation, bi-location, materialisation) in the wider comparative context of parapsychological phenomena, placebo and nocebo effects, the role of culture and belief, and other remarkable mind-body abilities. Once this context is taken into account, St. Joseph's spontaneous levitations do not seem quite so 'impossible'—indeed they begin to look more like extensions of other less extreme mind-body phenomena.

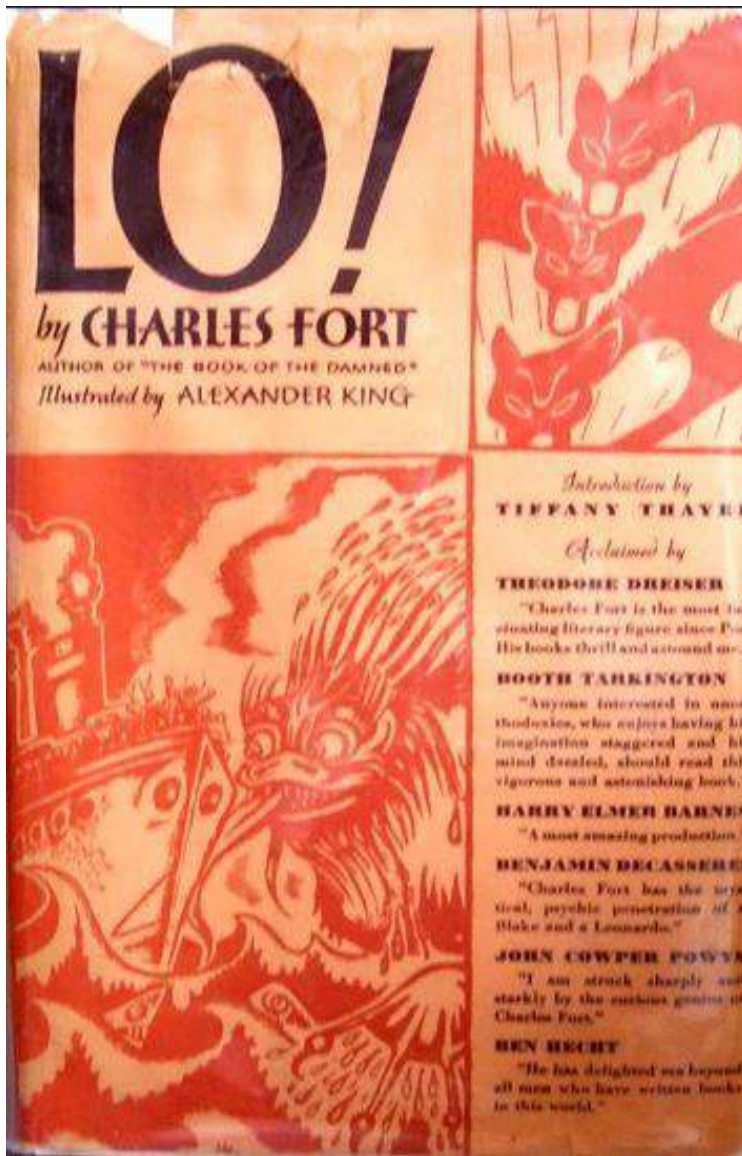
The question becomes, then: If Joseph really was able to levitate, what implications would this knowledge have for theory formation in academic Religious Studies? Certainly, the classical materialist underpinnings (the ontology) of social scientific theory would have to be re-evaluated. Furthermore, a Fortean approach would shift our attention away from religious beliefs towards religious phenomena and experiences, which in itself might lead to new theoretical and methodological innovations. In certain respects this emphasis on phenomena (things) and experiences moves us in a similar direction to anthropology's recent so-called 'ontological turn' (Hobraad & Pedersen, 2017). Martin Holbraad and Morten Pedersen write:

*[the ontological turn] is meant as a call to keep open the question of what phenomena might comprise a given ethnographic field and how anthropological concepts have to be modulated or transformed...to articulate them (Hobraad & Pedersen, 2017, 11).*

A Fortean approach to Religious Studies, then, would not shy away from the damned facts of phenomena such as levitation, spirit possession, psychokinesis, after-death communication, telepathy, apparitions, amongst numerous others, as real ontological possibilities in the field. It would embrace and entertain them as essential components of a 'given ethnographic field,' and might make use of new emic categories, concepts and phenomena in theory construction. After all, if spirits are real then a classic social-functional account of spirit possession practices fundamentally misses the point, or if levitation is possible then standard debunking accounts of individuals like St. Joseph of Copertino must also be reconsidered. Fort encourages us to be sceptical of even our most cherished established theories.

To briefly conclude, I would like to turn to Edith Turner's famous encouragement for anthropologists of





First Edition of *Lo!* (1931)

religion to engage with the experiences, beliefs and practices of ethnographic informants on their own terms in order to gain a richer, more complete perspective, without seeking to 'explain them away' in terms that have no relevance to the informant. She writes:

*Again and again anthropologists witness spirit rituals, and again and again some indigenous exegetes tries to explain that the spirits are present, and furthermore that rituals are the central events of their society. And the anthropologist proceeds to interpret them differently. There seems to be a kind of force field between the anthropologist and her or his subject matter making it impossible for her or him to come close to it, a kind of religious frigidity. We anthropologists need training to see what the Natives see (Turner, 1993, p 11)*

Charles Fort's philosophy of intermediatism seems to offer one possible route towards achieving the kind of perspective Edie Turner called for in her groundbreaking articles. It is a non-dogmatic approach that seeks to move beyond the concepts and categories of Western academic thinking to push forward towards something new and inclusive (a term that Fort explicitly associated with his new paradigm of thinking). As we have seen with Michael Grosso's work, a fresh perspective might also shed new light on historical cases that we no longer have direct access to, encouraging us to reconsider mainstream accounts. These are just a few of the reasons that I would like to encourage all who read this to re-think Charles Fort and his potential contributions to our discipline. Fort's is a call to be creative and brave in exploring new theoretical and ontological territories in our writing and research on religion.

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# conferences



## **BASR, 4-6 SEPT, 2017, UNIVERSITY OF CHESTER**

The theme of the BASR 2017 Annual Conference, Narratives of Religion, was reflected in the richness and diversity of papers and panels that BASR members have come to expect from the three-day event. Narratives of travel, pedagogy, history and well-being were investigated, with the underlying theme of engagement with researcher positionality emerging throughout the discussions.

The opening session, Autoethnography, introduced the concepts of reflexivity, storytelling and identity. Daniel Nield's personal explorations of his autoethnographic work on HIV testing presented self-reflection as a positive form of 'confession', whilst Anna Fisk's research on fibrecraft practice as implicit religion showcased her innovative methodology of presenting her autobiographical narrative alongside feminist theological interpretations of women's fiction. Lynne Scholefield, meanwhile, interpreted her own autoethnography as a 'creative non-fiction', advocating a story-telling approach to researcher positionality. The speakers' commitment to reflexive, innovative interpretations of their fieldwork set a reflective tone for the conference delegates, which continued through the following papers and panels.

Monday afternoon's Religion, Perception and Identity papers session was opened by Paul Fuller with a presentation on ethnocentrism in Buddhism, in which he challenged the preconception that Buddhism is not connected to ethnic identity or preservation. Katarzyna Kowalska then reflected on the perception that members of the Progressive Movements in the United Kingdom have of the Havdalah ritual in Orthodox Judaism; a ritual that is firmly related to Jewish identity. Through participant observation, Katarzyna uncovered a revival of Havdalah and addressed the ways in which its underlying ideology is adapting to interfaith situations. Angela Puca closed the session with a paper on the Theory-Fieldwork dynamic in Anthropological Research. Based on a 12-month case study in Italy, she found that a metamorphosis from original theory to new theory mirrored her fieldwork, suggesting that there is a tension between the theoretical starting point of a research and researcher experiences. These papers fostered discussion as to how religious studies practitioners label themselves and the effect that label has on their identity, as well as critical reflection on the insider/outsider approach and the implementation of 'online fieldwork'.

Tuesday morning saw the theme take a different direction, in the panel Shapeshifting and shadow

selves: Indigenous narratives and western culture, chaired by Susanne Owen. Dr Owen opened the panel with an investigation of two accounts of shapeshifting in Canadian indigenous tradition. Both stories that were examined looked at the role of the narratives in negotiating concepts of kinship within the human tribe and with the 'other than human persons' with which it was in a relationship. In contrast, Louise Child presented an investigation into the relationship between indigenous religions and Native American films by giving a fascinating perspective on the popular 1990's mystery drama, *Twin Peaks*. The series was set in rural Canada, and the paper examined possible links with an indigenous animistic world view as a way of making sense of some of the themes and imagery from the series. While the first two papers provided a fascinating insight into the ways in which indigenous narratives have been reinterpreted, represented and reimagined in a western context, Jack Hunter presented his investigation into a group practising physical mediumship—a topic that has fallen out of fashion with researchers. He suggested that research should move away from a consideration of whether such experiences are veridical, and consider instead the role that such narratives play in identity formation and in the wider context of meaning-making.

Professor Ronald Hutton's keynote speech, *Narratives of Pagan Religion*, drew the second day to a close with a reflection on the history of the scholarship of modern Wicca. Professor Hutton compared and contrasted Wiccan narratives regarding identity

and value construction with changing scholarly narratives regarding Wicca, illustrating that Wicca is engaged in a reciprocal relationship with scholarly opinion and that Wiccan ideas have reacted to changing scholarly notions within academia. Hutton expanded on the point that, whilst there remain a number of outlying individuals and groups within Wicca that posit an unbroken relationship with a pre-Christian Goddess religion and claim that 'witches' executed during the Middle Ages were followers of this religion, this view point is rare, and hostile interactions with Wiccans are unusual. By contrast, the academic narrative of what is a valid and 'respectable' topic for academic research was often at odds with what Professor Hutton was attempting to do, leading to significant institutional hostility.

Two topics of discussion arose from the address. Firstly, the importance of what Professor Hutton referred to as 'reactivity'. That is, the phenomenon by which what academics publish about a tradition affects the way in which that tradition sees itself and develops. This is particularly relevant to the study of contemporary Paganisms, which are still young traditions that are continuing to develop. The other issue was the continuing prejudice that is experienced by Pagans engaged in academic research, or in any other positions of public responsibility. This was met with shock from the audience, and generated a passionate discussion on the potential for scholars of religion to change the ways in which Pagans are perceived.



Ronald Hutton, *Narratives of Pagan Religion*



Intersections of religion and fiction panel. (i-r): Alanna Vincent, Francesca Haig, Zen Cho.

The final day of the conference saw a series of 'lightning talks' presented by six Masters and PhD students from institutions across the UK. For most of these speakers, this was their first experience of presenting at a national conference, and it was promising to see how postgraduates and early career researchers are continuing to deliver strong research in the field of Religious Studies. The session opened and closed with papers on gender; Bex Gerard's critical reflection on the binaries of religion and feminism provided a useful backdrop against which Shona Hayes presented her research on the lived experiences of evangelical Christian women. Other themes covered in this session ranged from the rise of Mormonism in nineteenth century County Durham to the emergence of a 'non-religious Buddhism'. The presenters drew upon various resources to engage their audience, from Lucy Peacock's demonstration of creative methods used to facilitate interfaith dialogue in London's faith schools, to Stephanie Robert's use of music to bring to life her examination of the relationship between Jesus and Judas in Andrew Lloyd Weber's *Jesus Christ Superstar*. The conference was made richer by these contributions and BASR hopes to continue to encourage postgraduates and early career researchers to contribute in this way next year.

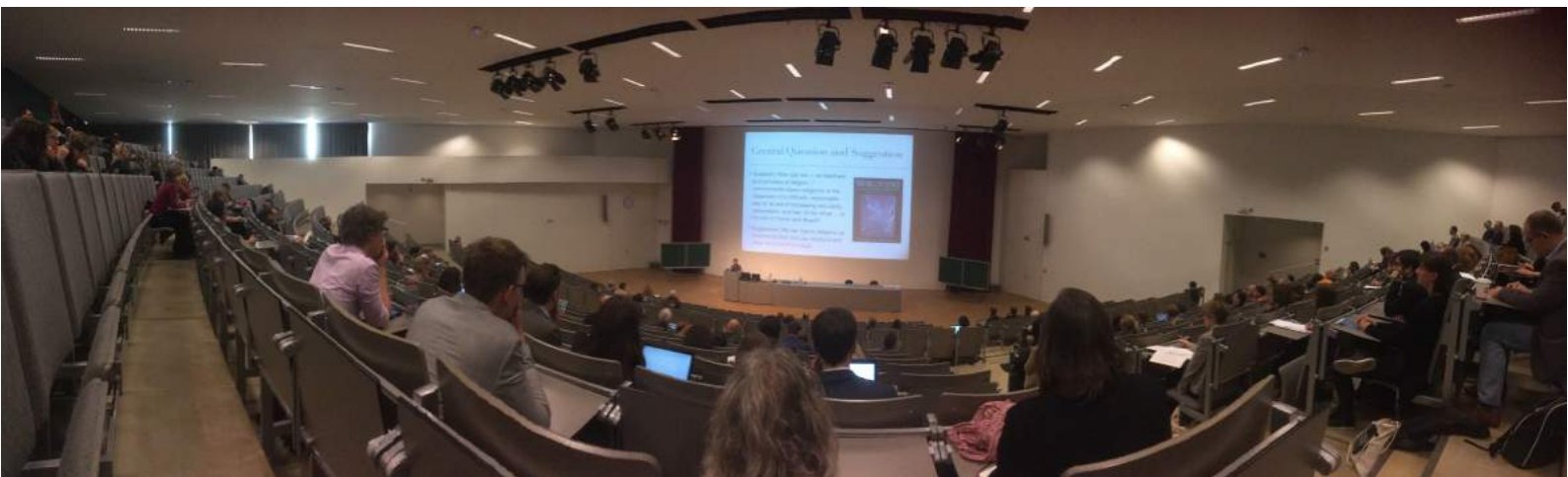
The atmosphere throughout the conference was one of hospitality and community, from the warm welcome by the University of Chester conference team, to the social time, including breaks and meals, which was relaxed and encouraged conversation and net-

working. As the conference drew to a close we were fortunate enough to be welcomed to Chester Cathedral.

Located in the heart of the city centre, the cathedral is a stunning building that combines Romanesque and Gothic architectural styles. A doctoral student from the University of Chester acted as our guide to the building and its history, and we made our entrance through the west door. The first thing we saw was the nave, subtly enlightened by the stained-glass windows, and somewhat 'out of context' with the rest of the building. An exhibition of modern art was in fact being displayed throughout all the areas of the Cathedral; the contrast between medieval art and architecture and the contemporary installations, including stuffed animals, gave visitors a visual shock. An area of particular interest was the Lady Chapel dating back to the thirteenth century that, as with the majority of the building, has artistic elements adjunct through different Centuries and a stone shrine that used to contain the relics of Saint Werburgh. The remarkable lighting and resonance deriving from the Cloisters struck us as we departed, leaving a lasting impression of our time at Chester.

We would like to thank the BASR Executive Committee for the bursary awards which enabled us to attend and present at the conference.

Lucy Peacock, Coventry University  
Angela Puca, Leeds Trinity University  
Jennifer Uzzell, Durham University



## **EASR, 18-21 SEPT, 2017, LEUVEN, BELGIUM**

The European Association for the Study of Religion's 2017 conference took place between the 18th and 21st of September in Leuven, Belgium. The primary theme for the conference was "Communicating Religion", a vague theme which allowed for a multiplicity of differing approaches, themes, and considerations for papers. Three reporters attended for the BASR/RSP, and the three reports reflect this diversity.

### *Hans Van Eyghen's Report*

Visiting your Alma Mater is always accompanied by mixed emotions. On the one hand you see familiar things you missed but on the other hand you're confronted with downsides you hoped were a thing of the past. My visit to the KULeuven for the EASR conference had both, although the positives far outweighed the downsides.

One downside all former KUL students are familiar with is the constant renovation works. The conference venue was only partly finished and the coffee breaks were frequently interrupted by noise. Luckily this was soon forgotten when one of the major strong points of the KUL manifested; its ability to attract a lot of renowned international speakers. The first keynote speaker was Guy Stroumsa who talked about religious evolution in late antiquity. His talk covered developments in pagan Roman religion, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, Judaism and Manichaeism during that era. The keynote was followed by the first parallel session. Each slot offered a choice of no less than 12 sessions. I mostly chose sessions on

minority religions or esoteric traditions. During the first session, titled New Religious Movements, Suzanne Owen discussed a well-known problem in modern paganism—the difficulty in lumping rather diffuse groups together. She discussed it from a legal perspective and noted that some pagan groups had difficulty in gaining official recognition in the United Kingdom. Vladlena Fedianina's talk was on a remarkable Japanese movement called Kofuku-no Kagaka, also known as 'happy science'. Its leader claims to be able to channel messages from all sorts of (living) people. Fedianina focused on the movement's efforts in Russia, for example by means of publishing channeled messages from Russian president Vladimir Putin. The third speaker, Matous Vencalek, talked about his field work among Czech pagan groups.

The first session I attended on the second day unfortunately had only one speaker. Isabel Canzobre Martinez discussed indications of people identifying with various gods in the Greek magical papyri. She compared the practice with Jesus identifying with the God of Israel in the New Testament. The keynote of the day, Jan Bremmer took the theme of the conference to heart and talked about religious education and communication in antiquity. He argued that education into antique pagan religion mainly happened by having children seeing and partaking in rituals. It was a bit unfortunate that Bremmer didn't take recent cognitive research about ritual competence and the role of rituals in community-building into account.

Cognitive science was not missing from the third day, however. Early in the morning three speakers had a panel titled Esotericism and the Cognitive Sci-

ence of Religion. Egil Asprem started off and discussed how recent theories of predictive coding could shed more light on kataphatic practices. Predictive coding models suggest that the human mind is constantly making hypotheses about the outside world and updating them when needed. Asprem discussed how these models could shed light on kataphatic practices where people try to gain contact or knowledge about higher realms or divine beings. Gusmundur Markusson applied cognitive semiotics to how Aleister Crowley's 'Book of the Law' is used in some forms of western esotericism. He argued that the opaqueness of the book allows readers to find divergent meanings in it. This (among other things) makes the book intriguing. To end the panel, Jesper Sorensen made some general comments how cognitive science of religion can aid the study of esotericism and how the study of esotericism can also help to move cognitive science of religion forward.

The afternoon started with a keynote lecture by Ann Taves. She argued for replacing the world religion paradigm with a worldview paradigm. Researching worldviews rather than the five world religions would be more inclusive and could help tackle current problems like partisanship and populism in her view. However, when discussing the course she teaches at the University of California at Santa Barbara, Taves had to admit she still used the world religions paradigm, and was criticized for this during the Q&A. I spend the rest of the afternoon in sessions on Shinto. Michael Pye introduced the first session with a talk on diversity within Shinto. Dunja Jelesijevic discussed interactions between Shinto and Japanese Noh theatre. Tomoko Iwasawa touched on the topic that would be the main point of discussion in the second session on Shinto; namely whether it is possible to use the term 'Shinto' for medieval and ancient Japanese religion or whether these are very different things. During the second session, Yeonjoo Park talked about influences of Tendai Buddhism in medieval Shinto. The last speaker, Mart Teeuwen, voiced his doubt that Shinto can be traced back to medieval times, let alone to ancient times.

The fourth day, I attended a session on modern shamanism. Tiina Mahlmäki drew an interesting parallel between shamanistic practices and ethnography. Shamans attribute an important role to the imagination and try to develop 'inner senses' to tap into other forms of knowledge. Mahlmäki claimed that ethnographers often have to rely on imagination to

capture what their subjects are doing as well. In her view some methods used by researchers are also similar to shamanistic practices. Her example was the 'creative writing' many ethnographers do when taking notes. Jaana Kouri (who is a shamanistic practitioner herself) discussed how shamans are able to shift consciousness. She argued that shamanistic knowledge is best construed as a joint production of both human and non-human actors. She also claimed that many western shamanistic practitioners have an academic background. I did not attend more sessions on the fourth day apart from the keynote lecture. In it, Jenny Berglund compared various forms of (Islamic) religious education in Europe.

The EASR conference showed how diverse and interesting religious studies is. A downside is that it also showed how the diversity does not always lead to interaction. Few presenters showed an active interest in what scholars who study other religions or approaches do. The keynote lectures were also largely confined to a subclass of religious studies. I could not help but thinking that scholars could make a greater effort to learn from each other. For example, the speakers on modern shamanism could arguably learn from the speakers on Siberian shamanism. Large conferences, like the EASR conference, are probably not the best venue to serve as a bridge between scholars.

#### *Hanna Lehtinen's Report*

The theme chosen for this year's conference is a clever one. As Einar Thomassen mentioned in his welcoming words in the conference book, communication is a topical theme in religious studies. Look from a certain perspective and it is present everywhere in human life, so it really is a theme under which a wide range of different research topics can be grouped. The conference organizers themselves seemed to have had something specific in mind, since most of the keynotes addressed religious education from one view or another. However, the conference papers offered many different views on this theme. Communication about religion happens in many contexts; in academia, in media, in classrooms, in political debates, in museums. Similarly, religion is communicated about by many actors and for many reasons. All of these contexts and actors (and much more) were discussed during the four-day conference.



One arena of ‘communicating religion’ that I personally am very interested in was addressed on Tuesday morning, in a session titled Religious Authority and the Internet – Towards a New Framework. Frederik Elwert, Giulia Evolvi, Anna Neumaier, and Samira Tabti from University of Bochum, Germany, had built an excellent panel in which all four papers elegantly contributed to a coherent whole. First, Elwert introduced a paper on the theoretical framework developed together by the group of researchers. After this, Evolvi, Neumaier, and Tabti all presented their own work as a case study, drawing from the theoretical model introduced in the first paper. This panel was easy to follow and gave me plenty to think about.

Different forms of online communication offer new ways to form communities and, consequently, new ways of negotiating power relations—and religious authority. In this dynamic process, more traditional religious authorities, such as texts and religious leaders representing mainstream religious institu-

tions may need to compete with emerging new forms of authority. It is no surprise then that these researchers considered Weber’s traditional conceptualization of religious authority limited when studying religious authority online. The new model of authority they were developing was enriched by including elements from Popitz, Simmel, Bourdieu, and Foucault. As described in the abstract, this new model aims at being a more inclusive, networked model of authority more suited for the online environment. Important theoretical elements included Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic capital and expertise, which help to grasp an important source of authority on online forums. Similarly, Foucault’s theorizing on the connection between power relations and production of knowledge seems like a good perspective for examining the online environments in question. The case studies examined in this session also showed how different forms and sources of authority would be used in combination. Religious texts and traditional religious authorities were referred to

as authorities, but selectively—and this selection process was also done on the forums. In some cases online communities also offered a place for resistance, where participants could seek different kind of authority that they recognized as more legitimate.

The presenters were asked whether their model would be suitable for online environments other than discussion forums. The commenter remarked that such discussion forums are on the decline, and different emerging forms of online communities follow a different logic. I do agree that the variety of different online environment does require sensitive application of theoretical models. Still, I personally think that the model presented by these four scholars may well serve there as well. After all, as Frederik Elwert pointed out, this model is meant to be a useful tool for examining authority in such environment. As such, it can probably be adapted to many different online environments.

One take on communicating religion is, of course, the academic discourse on religion and the way researchers communicate about religion with various publics. This theme often brings with it the discussion about how do (and how should) scholars of religion engage with said publics and be of use in one way or another. I believe the term ‘ivory tower’ was mentioned in this session as well, although just in passing. As someone who has received their higher education and professional training in this field, I am always happy to hear about different ways to apply the expertise of a researcher of religion. The panel, Communicating Knowledge about Religion in the “Extended Classroom”, was chaired by Tim Jensen, and consisted of an introduction and two presentations. Kim Knott described her work as a scholar of religion in “security and intelligence settings”, and Leni Franken discussed the possibility of “worldview education for all the university”. In a sense, both of the papers presented dealt with religious literacy and how scholars of religion can contribute to such a thing.

Knott has plenty of experience in settings which cross the boundaries of academia and engages with various publics and partners. Her discussion on the topic at hand was based on examples from the UK; Partnership on Conflict, Crime and Security Research and the national hub for research and evidence on security threats (CREST). Although the topic of Kim Knott’s paper was intriguing, Knott was quick to dis-

pel any expectations of glamour: cooperating with security and intelligence professionals is hardly the job of a secret agent. Researchers involved in these projects do not, for instance, deal with classified documents. Still, the setting she describes is interesting and controversial. It sure comes as no surprise to anyone that in today’s world matters of religion are of interest to different security institutions, but how should academics relate to them? Knott makes a good case that in order to affect important public policies, simple general ‘religious literacy’ is not enough. Researchers should also be able to contribute with their expertise in cooperation with a wide range of public authorities and officials.

There are special features to working together with security and intelligence professionals. Trust is a key issue, there are limits to what kind of information can be shared, and apparently sometimes the press office of the university needs to be kept on a short leash. On a more general note, Knott emphasizes the ability and willingness to cross disciplinary boundaries and work together with professionals in fields other than one’s own. It is also important to be able to focus on the problem someone else has given you. Religion as the topic of the research may need to be ‘de-centered’ and the focus shifted for something else, such as a security issue. It is also important to provide evidence-based assessment, and not simply remain in the sphere of ‘commenting on security matters’. However, there is no need to ‘suspend one’s critical faculties’ as Knott put it.

From the security setting, the panel then moved to another sphere: university education. This was the topic of Leni Franken, who gave a paper on worldview education, a course offered to all university students at University of Antwerp. According to Franken, the need for such a course arises from the increasingly multicultural society. Furthermore, the education system in Belgium follows the pillarised structure of the society in more general. This means that different religious communities have traditionally had separate institutions, and across-the-board, general teaching about religions and worldviews has not been available. Franken discussed this historical context, outlined the aim and features of this course on worldviews, and offered some questions for further discussion.

From these two examples alone it is clear that researchers of this field can contribute in many set-



tings to different types of religious literacy. As Knott mentioned at the end of her presentation, we as scholars of religion have plenty to offer; the relevant subject matter, and a nuanced understanding of religion (and why not worldviews more generally) situated in different contexts.

One interesting space for communicating (about) religion is, of course, the museum—and the State Museum of History of Religions in Saint-Petersburg is certainly an interesting one. Deputy Director of Research Affairs, Professor Ekaterina Teriukova was giving an interesting example in her paper on her research into the collection on Evenk people shamanism and, simultaneously, the collector A.F. Anisimov, Russian ethnographer who studied the Evenk and their religion. As Teriukova told me in our discussion later, these two aspects are always intertwined: studying a collection always requires studying the context—the people and ideas behind the items.

Veronika Khorina from Saint-Petersburg State University also discussed Russian ethnographers and their work. The focus of her paper was two ethnographers, siblings V.N. Kharusina and N.N. Kharusin. Kharusina is a noted figure for being the first female ethnographer in Russia. She also edited her brother's work and developed her own theoretical views on the history of religions and shamanism. Approaching the topic from a different viewpoint, Renata Schiavo problematized the use of the term "shamanism" in Egyptology, especially in relation to one ceremony titled the "opening of mouth ceremony". Schiavo also argued that it is possible to trace a kind of an evolutionistic undertone in the way this ritual has been defined as shamanistic. However, she stated that the religious figure referred to—the semipriest—was not, in fact, acting in the way shamanic traditions typically have been defined. For instance, no trance state has been described as part of the ritual in question.

An obvious example of communicating religion is, of course, religious education, and this topic was discussed in many panel sessions and several keynotes. Jenny Berglund's keynote lecture on Thursday—"Islamic Education, a Litmus Test on State Relations to Muslim Minorities"—also addressed this topic in an interesting way. The lecture was well structured, and the framework Berglund presented was simple and effective. She introduced examples of various countries in which the state has

organized the teaching (and funding) of religious education differently, and examined the ways in which Islamic education has been included in these structures. This is Berglund's litmus test: examining the position of Islamic education can reveal something about state-minority community relations. On one hand it is a matter of equality and integration; on the other it has to do with state control of religious education.

I personally found examining this link very interesting. Education is an important interface between state authority and various religious e.g. communities. And often the structures that have become almost invisible in their apparent obviousness can be more clearly pointed out when they are illuminated and perhaps questioned by the need to incorporate a new element into the system.

#### *Vivian Asimos's Report*

One of the first aspects of the conference which caught my attention was the amount of recognition of the digital and religion. Media, digital approaches/considerations, and religion are seldom represented largely at mainstream religion conferences, and to see at least one panel a day, and sometimes three panels a day, on the digital is a wonderful sight to see. Two of these panels on the very first day of the conference focused on religion and video games, a much needed representation in mainstream religious studies conferences which is long overdue. Other digital approaches were on digital pilgrimages, featuring Tim Hutchings' (Stockholm University / Durham University) talk about dark pilgrimages and Chernobyl, and two general panels on religion and media, including an intriguing talk by Ashley Campbell (University of Colorado—Boulder) on podcasting non-religion.

There were also a plethora of panels regarding gender, again at least one, but more often more than one, a day. Fredrik Gregorius (University of Linköping) detailed the explicit and implicit ways masculinity is communicated in American Evangelical Christianity, and Terhi Utriainen (University of Helsinki) discussed ways spiritual women deal with issues of secularity in Finland. There were also varying amount of papers and themes presenting other approaches. One panel ran two sessions on Imagination, Knowledge and Religious Traditions, in which new approaches in anthropology, such as the ontolo-

gical turn, was utilized in a way to improve ethnographic fieldwork. There were also panels on Seekership, including Claire Wanless (Open University) who proposed a theoretical framework for seekership.

The open theme allowed for a great deal of difference in papers, though it did have the downside of difficulty of linking papers across panels, and even sometimes within the same panel. Though this did not diminish the interest of the speakers present in Leuven. It is unfortunate that so many great academic papers, approaches, and themes were overshadowed by a negative hospitable experience. The conference venue was far from the main city, but also far from any location for coffee, food, and even a seat outside a panel room. There was an overbearing lack of attention to special diets, even as simple as vegetarian, making me realize that those who would need halal, kosher, vegan, or other special diets were woefully forgotten. In fact, vegetarians and others were made to feel at fault for putting the venue to work to feed them differently. For an international religion conference, it was sad to see little attention to special diets. As is the case with many conferences, there were changes to the schedule, though these were not communicated. We were told to check our emails for these changes, though never received any of these.

The EASR 2017 conference was a successful conference on the side of the papers presented, though a missable one on account for the all the experiences surrounding these papers. Hopefully the next conference venue will be more prepared for caring for their attendees. EASR 2018 will take place 17-21 of June at the University of Bern, on the theme "Multiple Religious Identities: Individuals, Communities, Traditions".

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**SEMINAR IN AMERICAN RELIGION: AMERICAN JESUITS AND THE WORLD. APRIL 1, 2017, CUSHWA CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF AMERICAN CATHOLICISM. UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME, INDIANA**

The biannual Seminar in American Religion, hosted by Notre Dame's Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism, organizes a day of activities around a recent monograph of note. On 1 April 2017, seminar participants from across the United States, as well as the United Kingdom, met in the university's Morris

Inn to discuss John McGreevy's *American Jesuits and the World: How an Embattled Religious Order Made Modern Catholicism Global*. Noted historians Thomas Bender (NYU) and Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp (Washington University in St. Louis) delivered remarks on the book, after which McGreevy, a Notre Dame faculty member, responded. The seminar was intended as part of a larger conference honoring Mark A. Noll, the National Humanities Medalist and recently retired professor of church history, but a family emergency necessitated the cancellation of the Noll panels. Nonetheless, many of the conference participants made the trip to South Bend, Indiana, resulting in a large and lively Q&A session for American Jesuits.

McGreevy's book concerns the activities of American Jesuits who used the United States as a launching pad for international missionary efforts. The initial generations of Jesuits in America were Europeans who sought to maintain a European religious and political sensibility, even as the Catholic Church sparred with the Society of Jesus. As the US produced its own Jesuits, however, these new priests expressed a stronger identification with American exceptionalism and the country's imperial ambitions in the Pacific. American Jesuits sometimes contradicted the Protestant mainstream, as when they opposed the Spanish-American War's attack on a sovereign Catholic country. Nonetheless, American Jesuits missionaries brought their Old World religion as well as New World democratic ideas with them as they worked in the Pacific.

Thomas Bender compared the slim volume to religious microhistories, such as Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's celebrated *Montaillou*, that use case studies to explore larger religious themes. Each chapter of *American Jesuits* profiles a different Jesuit figure, creating a cluster of thematically linked microhistories. Bender also argued for the American Jesuits as a cosmopolitan group, devoted to robust education even as they criticized aspects of Protestant America. Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp wanted the book to give greater context about the Jesuit community; one of the drawbacks of microhistory is the genre's use of narrow subjects. She found connections between the growing nationalism of American Jesuits and Mormons in the late nineteenth century: Both groups sought legitimation in U.S. society, as American Catholics grew distanced from Europe, and Mormons proxy-baptized the Founding Fathers. Drawing from

economic terminology, Maffly-Kipp spoke of the book's attention to 'cultural flows'—the European Catholic Church initially funded North American missions, but over time American Jesuits began their own fundraising for international missionary activities.

McGreevy's response combined a summary of his work with gentle engagement of Maffly-Kipp and Bender's claims. The Jesuits were indeed cosmopolitan, but they were also illiberal in the nineteenth century, distanced from American values of democracy and free speech. Paradoxically, the Jesuits were devoted to education, creating schools across the country. The demographic shift from European-born Jesuits to American-born Jesuits was matched by a cultural shift from European to American mores. As the Q&A progressed, McGreevy argued that American Jesuits grew more liberal by World War II, but a good book on that topic has not been written yet. McGreevy views the Jesuits' anti-fascist stance as evidence that it was not enough to form separate cultural institutions; Catholics had to engage with the modern world. American Jesuits also came to support decolonization, despite their earlier participation in the United States' imperialist initiatives.

The tensions between liberalism and illiberalism (as well as the difficulties of defining those terms) came up often during the discussion. McGreevy discussed how Jesuits tended to support slavery and opposed what they saw as the runaway Biblical interpretations of Protestants and Mormons. Yet Jesuits rejected the idea of black and white Americans as different species, and acknowledged that slavery as practiced was not a benevolent institution. Catholic historiography until the 1950s celebrated how the Church did not divide over slavery, as did so many Protestant denominations, but this consensus view omitted the less savory aspects of American Catholic heritage. It would appear that McGreevy, Bender, Maffly-Kipp, and most, if not all, of the seminar participants want to complicate the narrative of Catholic history.

The conversation turned from politics to Catholic worship. McGreevy and Maffly-Kipp agreed that there were more similarities in nineteenth-century Catholic and Protestant devotional culture, especially the images circulated in Christian media, than people at the time acknowledged. Still, leading Protestants were revolted by what they saw as unmanly Catholic practices, as well as miracle traditions and gory images

such as the Sacred Hearts of Mary and Jesus, or bloody crucifixes. Comments from the audience indicated a desire for more information about Jesuit spiritual exercises and spirituality writ broadly. How did these concepts evolve in the religious environment of the United States? In particular, audience members wished McGreevy had addressed the nature of Jesuit spirituality the way Robert Orsi of Northwestern University studied spirituality in his recent, highly theoretical monograph, *History and Presence* (which the Cushwa Seminar tackled in November 2016). McGreevy countered that he was interested not in the nature of religion (Orsi's concern), but rather where Jesuits fit into the larger narrative of American history.

Late in the conversation, the topic of Jesuit nationalism came up again. The gradual development of an American Jesuit identity caused a complicated relationship with the Old World countries from which Jesuits originally came. How devoted to America were Jesuits when they praised Irish and German Catholics for their religiosity, but mocked the French? McGreevy noted an additional tension—Jesuits wanted to appreciate the American nation, but wanted to uphold and preserve the Catholic Church and Catholic family values. As the twentieth century began, American Jesuits were more openly nationalist and devoted to ideas of American exceptionalism, so it was difficult for them to reconcile their patriotism with their sympathy for Spanish Catholics during the Spanish-American War. Bender added that, in contrast to the Jesuits and their divided loyalties to Washington and Rome, American Protestants of the late 1800s–early 1900s were more openly nationalist and individualist, viewing the Catholic Church as an oddity.

The session came to something of an abrupt end, with these questions of liberalism versus illiberalism, national versus religious loyalty, and evolving devotional life unresolved. But that is the nature of scholarship. The conversation is always ongoing. Participants left the Cushwa Seminar with a greater appreciation for the transnational history of the Jesuit order, and with a deepened interest in Jesuits' relationship to the American state. One suspects that Dr. Noll, had he been able to attend, would have approved of this enlightening discussion of Christian history.

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## **SECOND ISLAMIC EDUCATION SUMMER SCHOOL, UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK, SEPT 2017**

In September, the second Islamic Education Summer School took place at the University of Warwick, focusing on the theme of “Divine Word in a Secular World: Developing Contextual Pedagogies of the Qur’an within the European Muslim Diaspora”. The Summer School was organised and led by Dr Abdullah Sahin of the Warwick Religions and Education Unit (WRERU) at the University of Warwick.

This year’s Summer School attracted twenty-five participants from a range of countries, including Malaysia, Canada, Austria, Turkey, Germany, the Arab Gulf, and the UK, thus making for an international forum for study and debate. A series of presentations (some by guest speakers), sessions, and workshops served as stimulants for Summer School attendees to discuss best practice in teaching the Qur’an to diverse communities of learners. This was supplemented by an impressive performance by the Khayal Theatre Group, whose dramatic telling of the story of

Mosa demonstrated another pedagogic tool for teaching the contents of the Qur’an to different audiences.

The underlying thought of the Summer School was that learners without classical Arabic can find it difficult to engage with traditional teaching methods and that the absence of up-to-date pedagogical resources can leave young people struggling with relating their faith to the contemporary challenges which they face.

This Summer School followed the first inaugural Summer School, which had been held in September 2016, also at the University of Warwick and also attracting an international group of participants. The first Summer School marked the formation of a learning community consisting of practitioners and researchers from diverse disciplinary backgrounds. The aim was, and remains, to establish a collegial academic space within which research-based reflective practice in Islamic Education would be encouraged.



During the first gathering, the main issues and challenges facing the subject were outlined and discussed. The meeting initiated a reflexive process of rethinking Islamic Education within the context of mainly secular and culturally and religiously diverse Western Europe as well as the wider Muslim world. Themes were identified to be explored in subsequent meetings. By facilitating dialogue and the exchange of experiences among practitioners and researchers, this learning community aims to contribute to the emergence of Islamic Education as an interdisciplinary field of research, teaching, and professional development.

Islamic Education seeks to facilitate the achievement of a competent Islamic literacy among the diverse groups of learners so that they can develop contextual understandings of Islam and show confidence in articulating and interpreting Islam within the context of their lived reality. Appreciating diversity and engaging with inter-faith/inter-cultural dialogue and contributing to the public understanding of Islam are other significant aims of the subject. However, the presence of a reflexive culture of teaching and learning remains crucial in realising these educational goals of personal empowerment and social and community development.

The University of Warwick is one of the first UK universities to recognize Islamic Education as an academic field of research and teaching. The Warwick Islamic Education Project is thus a pioneering initiative that seeks to: establish Islamic Education as an academic field of research and teaching; open up professional development pathways for practitioners; encourage research-based, reflexive practice in Islamic educational settings. This project is located within the Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit (WRERU) in the Centre for Education Studies and is led by Abdullah Sahin. The project is generously supported by the DCD Family Trust.

### *The Launch of a New Research Network*

In the course of the Second Islamic Education Summer School, the researchers, practitioners, and scholars present launched a new interdisciplinary and international research network whose aim is to share ideas and to develop best practice in Islamic pedagogy. Colleagues in this field will be invited to join this new network, with members to work on col-

laborative research projects and to encourage research-based practice in Islamic Education. Network members will also focus on equipping young Muslims, whether they are living in Muslim-minority or Muslim-majority societies, with the reflexive pedagogic tools that allow them to engage with and understand the Qur'an in a way which helps them relate it to their own everyday experience and practice of their faith. The network will also contribute to inter-cultural and inter-faith dialogue and understanding.

Dr Sahin whose research has been a catalyst in the development of the new network commented: "It is really exciting to see the formation of a new learning community, coming together as practitioners and researchers to found the new Islamic Education Research Network. There is a huge appetite and need for this kind of scholarly network, supporting the development of rigorous, research-based, reflective teaching practice, enabling the flow of ideas, and perhaps developing teaching resources to meet the needs of the new generation of learners who aren't proficient in classical Arabic and so can't engage with the Qur'an in traditional ways."

Further details of the Second Warwick Islamic Education Summer School can be found at:  
<https://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ces/news/islamiceducationsummerschool2017/>

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### **CESNUR 2017: HOLY LANDS AND SACRED HISTORIES IN NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS, THE VAN LEER JERUSALEM INSTITUTE, ISRAEL, 2-6 JULY 2017.**

The conference theme was of course suggested by the venue, since there can be few places more sacred than Jerusalem. Although Jerusalem and its surroundings were the obvious sacred spaces for discussion, presentations also discussed sacred spaces in Korea, China, Glastonbury, Mormon sacred locations, and L. Ron Hubbard's "Freewinds"—a mobile sacred space, perhaps. Jerusalem has also metaphorical connotations, which a number of presentations discussed. Perhaps surprisingly, out of



CESNUR participants visiting the Baha'i World Center, Haifa

nearly eighty presentations, only two were on Islamic themes, despite the sacredness of Jerusalem to Muslims. The constantly changing venue of CESNUR conferences enables new participants to come on board, and it was good to have a number of scholars based in Israel speak on new forms of spirituality within the country.

These conferences are normally followed by optional field visits, and this year participants were able to visit the ancient Jewish city of Safed, Sufi shrines in Acre, and finally the Baha'i World Center and Gardens at Haifa, Mount Carmel.

The full programme can be located at <http://www.cesnur.org/2017/jerusalem-program.htm>. In the past it has been customary for CESNUR to publish the proceedings online, but this year only cyber-abstracts and some PowerPoints have been uploaded at

<http://www.cesnur.org/2017/jerusalem-cyberabstracts.htm>. This change of practice marks the launch of a new journal—*The Journal of CESANUR*—which is open access, accessible from CESNUR's home page, [www.cesnur.org](http://www.cesnur.org)

Next year's annual conference returns to Taiwan, at Weixin College, Taichung (part of the University of Taiwan). The conference dates are 17-23 June 2018, and the event begins on the 18th with a major religious festival marking the unveiling of a statue of Guiguzi, an ancient Chinese sage whom many have divinised. Conference presentations will end on the 21st, and will be followed by a further two and a half days of visits. More details can be found at the CESNUR website.

George D. Chryssides  
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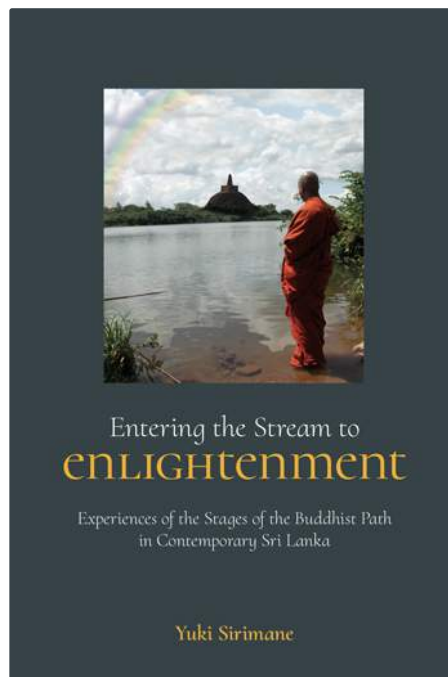
# reviews

**YUKI SIRIMANNE, 2016. ENTERING THE STREAM TO ENLIGHTENMENT: EXPERIENCES OF THE STAGES OF THE BUDDHIST PATH IN CONTEMPORARY SRI LANKA. SHEFFIELD: EQUINOX. ISBN 9781781792049.**

Yuki Sirimanne, in this excellent study, aims to examine the experience of becoming a stream enterer in Theravāda Buddhism, a sotāpanna, the first of four supramundane stages of enlightenment or realization, followed by the once-returner (sakadāgami), the non-returner (anāgāmi) and the arahant. Each, according to the Pāli tradition, is characterized by the destruction of some, or in the case of the arahant, all, of the fetters (samojana). Her method is to move between the Pāli texts and fieldwork, in the form of interviews with seven lay and ordained Buddhists in Sri Lanka who were practising meditation intensively, one of who claimed to be an arahant.

In doing this, she demonstrates that experiences described in the texts are still present in contemporary Buddhism. She quotes extensively from her interviewees and gives a detailed synopsis of each interview in an appendix. Towards the end of her study, she offers a detailed account of her interview with the self-proclaimed arahant, in which she asks whether his description of his state of mind accords

with the texts. She concludes that it does. The monk expresses no craving for anything whatsoever, has no possessions, claims freedom from fear and does not seek human company, a stage very different from that of the sotāpanna, who is 'endowed with the quality of giving (dāna) to an exceptional degree' (147). At this level, the book is a significant contribution to the study of contemporary meditative experience.



The study also has a subtext, in that it addresses two questions that have arisen in Buddhist-Christian, Buddhist-Hindu and Buddhist-Muslim studies: whether the goal of the Buddhist path, nibbāna, is a transcendent reality and whether the four supramundane stages are unique to Buddhism.

With reference to the first, Sirimanne argues, on the evidence of the texts and her fieldwork, that attaining any of the four stages of enlightenment involves a specific

and identifiable fetter-breaking experience, which is beyond the senses—signless, wishless and empty. She then distinguishes between this and the fruit (phala), namely the state of mind, the knowledge of fetters destroyed, which follows the experience. The fetters are destroyed, she suggests, not by the experience but only by correctly understanding it (99), within a Buddhist framework. Those who argue that

nibbāna is a transcendent reality wrongly concentrate on the experience and not on the knowledge that is born from the experience. Nibbāna, she insists, is not independent of the person who experiences it (75) and is not, therefore, a transcendent reality.

In line with this, Sirimanne argues that the experiences and the knowledge connected with the stages of enlightenment/realization are unique to Buddhism, qualitatively different from that which is described in other religious traditions. And she has textual backing. According to the texts, a sotāpanna will only look towards the Buddha for teaching. Two of the author's interview questions, therefore, were: Will you look for another teacher other than the Buddha for salvation from suffering? Could this experience be the experience of the supposed Creator God or the soul? (Appendix 1). She receives a 'No' to both from her interviewees and argues that the non-Buddhist goal of union with God is incompatible with 'right view' and release from samsāra (104-5) and is replaced in Buddhism by paticcasamuppāda (dependent origination) and the experience of a non-defiled mind. Brief mentions of Hindu and Sufi traditions support this. This aspect of her study rightly warns against superficial assumptions of similarity between religious traditions but does not do justice to the complexity within, for instance, Hindu and Sufi traditions.

The strength of this study is the author's ability to move between text and practice. Some might criticize her for failing to identify a methodological problem in her use of texts to evaluate fieldwork interviews. I would not. It emerges out of the author's training at the Postgraduate Institute of Pali and Buddhist Studies in Sri Lanka, where she did her doctorate, and results in the important insight that there is more continuity than dissonance between text and contemporary experience, in spite of contextual differences. And the fieldwork is fascinating and was carried out with difficulty, since monks are all but prohibited from shar-

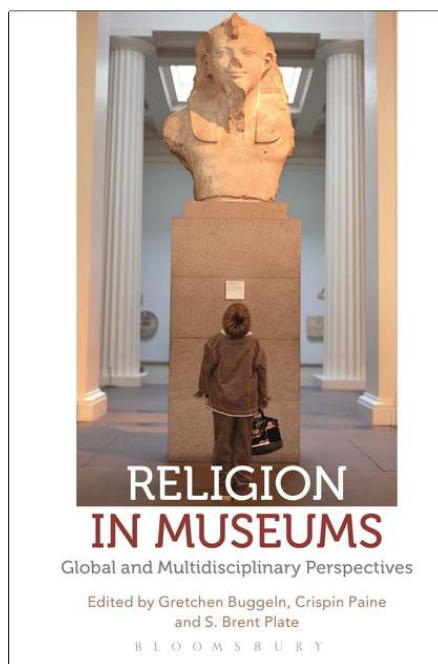
ing their religious practice with others, let alone a lay woman. This alone should give this study an honoured place in courses on Buddhism and religious experience.

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**GRETCHEN BUGGELN, CRISPIN PAINE, AND S. BRENT PLATE (EDS), RELIGION IN MUSEUMS: GLOBAL & MULTIDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES. LONDON: BLOOSMBURY, 2017. ISBN: 9781474255523**

Gretchen Buggeln, Crispin Paine, and S. Brent Plate's edited volume *Religion in Museums: Global and Multidisciplinary Perspectives* (2017) brings together religious studies scholars, curators, architects, sociologists, freelance writers, and art historians in order to consider the intersection of religion and museums from multiple viewpoints. The success of *Religion in Museums* can be attributed to its multidisciplinary approach to this understudied area. This volume presents broad consideration of the intersection between religion and museums, the reader being presented with sundry viewpoints on the multifaceted relationship. In order to provide focus to these multiple perspectives, the work is separated into six sections; (1) Museum Buildings, (2) Objects, Museums, Religions, (3) Responses to Objects, Museums and Religion, (4) Museum Collecting and Research, (5) Museum Interpretation of Religion and Religious Objects, and (6) Presenting Religion in a Variety of Museums. Within these sections several major themes arise, including visitor experience, conservation, curation, ethical display, repatriation, and architecture.





In section one, Museum Buildings, *Religion in Museums* investigates the potentiality for the museum visitor experience to be one that could be considered 'religious.' Of particular interest is Gretchen Buggeln's chapter 'Museum Architecture and the Sacred: Modes of Engagement' (11-20). Buggeln theorises four modes of engagement with museum spaces; associative, magisterial, therapeutic, and redemptive (19) suggesting that there is no 'single, unchanging mode of engagement' (19). This methodological chapter is key; its place at the opening of the volume leaves it sitting in the forefront of the reader's mind. Hence, Buggeln's theory echoes throughout the chapters that follow. Furthermore, this four-pronged theory of engagement could be easily applicable beyond the study of museums to other public and sacred spaces.

Worthy of further note is Mary Nooter Roberts' section 2 chapter 'Altar as Museum, Museum as Altar: Ethnography, Devotion, and Display' (49-56). In this chapter, Roberts highlights the importance of the 'extremely complex contextualisation, negotiation, implementation, and interpretation' required in the curation of religious temples and altars (55). For Roberts, as displays of faith-based material can be 'culturally affirming and paradigm-shifting' (49), attention must be drawn to the importance of both the visitor and the curator in bringing 'displays to life'. While Roberts highlights the visitor/curator focus required when displaying objects of religious significance, this argument sits in some contrast to Steph Berns and her chapter 'Devotional Baggage' (83-91). Berns' chapter highlights the elements that are 'brought-in' to a museum, Bern referring to the 'cultural baggage' that will ultimately influence the museum experience (83). The inability for either the visitor or the curator to leave their baggage outside the museum leads Berns to argue, perhaps controversially, that focus should remain on the function of what is being displayed (90). The opposing view of these chapters, and other chapters in *Religion in Museums* is to commendation of the editor as the contrasting arguments present in this volume create a great opportunity for further discussion and debate.

While Buggeln, Paine, and Plate provide readers with a diverse plethora of material, there are some important points to make in relation to this volume. While *Religion in Museums* it to be applauded in terms of its disciplinary variety, the volume stems

primarily from American, Canadian, Australian, and European authors. It is important to note that the editors have openly acknowledge this and make no attempt to hide this from the reader, however, there remains room for expansion here. This is most notable in relation to the museum representatives included within the volume. The majority of included museum representatives are from museums in the United States of America, Canada, and Europe. While examples from other parts of the world are included in the chapters of academics (most notably Denis Byrne's chapter 'Museums, Religious Objects, and the Flourishing Realm of the Supernatural in Modern Asia') there is room for a greater inclusion of museum representatives from non-western contexts.

The success of *Religion in Museums: Global and Multidisciplinary Perspectives* can be attributed into its multidisciplinary approach to this area of study. This volume presents a diverse and wide-ranging consideration of the intersection between religion and museums, and readers will enjoy the freedom of discussion that is created via the combination of both academic and professional voices. Furthermore, the variety of opinions and disciplines represented opens up the reader to numerous areas of further discussion and debate. Critically, each individual chapter works at a stand-alone piece, yet there are clear through-lines present in the work as a whole. As such, while cohesive in totality, this text is also valuable for teaching academics that will find the individual chapters useful for a variety of courses, particularly religious studies, museum studies, and art history. *Religion in Museums* is a successful volume in that it provides a comprehensive, complex, and exuberant discussion of the numerous forms through which museums and religion come together.

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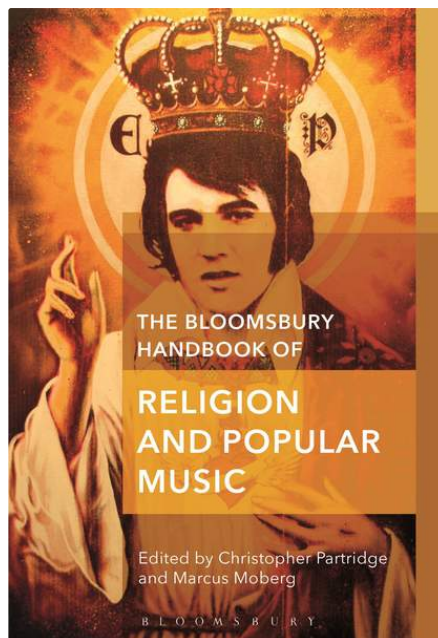
**CHRISTOPHER PARTRIDGE AND MARCUS MOBERG (ED (2017)S) THE BLOOMSBURY HANDBOOK OF RELIGION AND POPULAR CULTURE. LONDON BLOOMSBURY. ISBN 978-1-4742-3733-8.**

The *Handbook* is a very welcome addition to the

growing literature on the complex interactions between religion and popular culture. As the editors indicate in their introduction: 'The relationship between popular music and religion is an emerging, but still neglected area of study' (7). However, this volume gives an extensive overview of the field. The authors of the various chapters come from a wide range of academic disciplines including ethnomusicology, religious studies, music and cultural studies. While there are diverse approaches to the analysis of religion and popular culture, all the chapters in this excellent volume are accessible to readers without being a specialist in any of these particular academic disciplines. The *Handbook* is divided into three useful sections: theoretical perspectives and methodologies, religious perspectives and musical genres.

The section on religious perspectives includes a good range of different traditions such as: Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism as well as paganism and the occult. In some traditions, such as Caribbean religions, the relationship with popular music is clear. For example, David Moskwotitz identifies the links between Vodou and rara bands in Haiti (210-211). However, in other traditions the association between religion and popular music is not so obvious. Jennifer Matsue notes that 'in the case of Japan ... there is a lack of religious connection to contemporary popular music' (162). Christianity is rather over represented in this section, with four chapters in comparison to only one chapter on other traditions, with the possible exception of Buddhism, which is referred to in the chapters on Chinese and Japanese religions as well as having a dedicated chapter. My major criticism of *The Handbook* is that there is not a chapter on Sikhism, nor is it referred to in any of the chapters. This is a major oversight by the editors. Sikhism is an important world tradition, in which music plays a significant role.

A good range of musical genres are covered in *The Handbook* from country to jazz, and from hardcore to ambient. Some musical genres are explicitly associated with a particular religious tradition. For example, Chris Partridge provides an overview of the articulation of reggae music with Rastafari, pointing out that not only are Rasta motifs, such as the fall of Babylon (255), apparent in the lyrics of reggae artists such as Bob Marley and Max Romeo, but they are also identifiable on the cover art of the albums. Other popular musical genres, which are not so explicitly religious, can be said to be functionally equivalent to religion. For example, Graham St John discusses the shamanic like nature of electronic dance music events (EDME), which can be considered as ritual events that have the potential to enable 'transcendent experience' (282).



*The Handbook* addresses a number of major and interrelated questions and debates. Perhaps the most significant of these questions is a consideration of where religiousness is located, if anywhere, in popular music. Is it the music itself or the lyrics that makes music religious? Linked to this question is the debate about whether religiousness should be located in authorial intent, the music itself or in audience reception. As the editors, citing the work of Gordon Lynch, indicate 'the distinction between "authorial-

focused", "text-based" and "ethnographic/audience reception" approaches' will bring 'a different set of questions and methods to the study of popular culture' (3).

A significant theme addressed by some of the authors is the ambivalent attitudes that religious traditions have towards music in general and popular music in particular. Music can have the potential to be both a catalyst for religious experiences and an important aspect of religious rituals, but popular music may also be perceived as antithetical to the religious life. Michael Drewett in his chapter on censorship observes that, particularly within Islam

and Christianity, certain forms of popular music appear as not only ‘the antithesis of religion’, but also can be perceived as ‘blasphemous, sacrilegious, and anti-religious’ (42). However, other chapters consider the use of popular music as a means of expressing religious convictions. Even the most unlikely genres of music like heavy metal and punk can be appropriated to articulate religious convictions. Ibrahim Abraham and Francis Stewart in their chapter on Punk and Hardcore refer to Christian, Hindu, Jewish and Muslim hardcore bands. For example, they observe that Hindu hardcore—known generically as Krishnacore—can be considered as ‘a form of Hindu devotional practice’. However as they point out, ‘listeners unacquainted with bhakti-yoga might not recognize it as departing from the aggressive norms of hardcore punk’ (246). In other words, as many of the authors recognize, audiences can decode specific popular musical texts in a variety of ways.

Globalization is another important theme addressed, albeit not necessarily explicitly, in a number of chapters. Christopher Partridge in his chapter on ‘Emotion, Meaning and Popular Culture’ observes that in late 1960s and early 1970s the music, mantras and instruments of India were frequently utilized to signify mysticism and spirituality (26). Hybridity is one aspect of globalization, and this is noted by David Cheetham in the example of the 1994 album *Officium* which combines the freeform jazz of the Norwegian saxophone player Jan Garbarek weaving in and out of the Gregorian chant of the Hilliard Ensemble. Much of what is now referred to as ‘world music’ has a religious dimension. Perhaps most noticeably with such as the Qawwali singer Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan who achieved success on the world music circuit (see 116 & 332).

Overall, the *Handbook* is an excellent introduction to what is gradually being recognized as an important area of study. Like all handbooks, there are a number of lacunae—particularly the neglect of the Sikhism. Also inevitably at times the authors skate over issues that require a more in-depth analysis. However, this is an accessible overview of the complex and fascinating interactions between religion and popular music, and the chapters contribute to understanding the implications of popular culture for lived religion. The *Handbook* will be of interest to musicologists, who are curious about the religious aspects of popular music; religious studies scholars and students

who wish to know more about the importance of music for religions; and for anyone in cultural studies. I will certainly be using this Handbook for a number of my modules.

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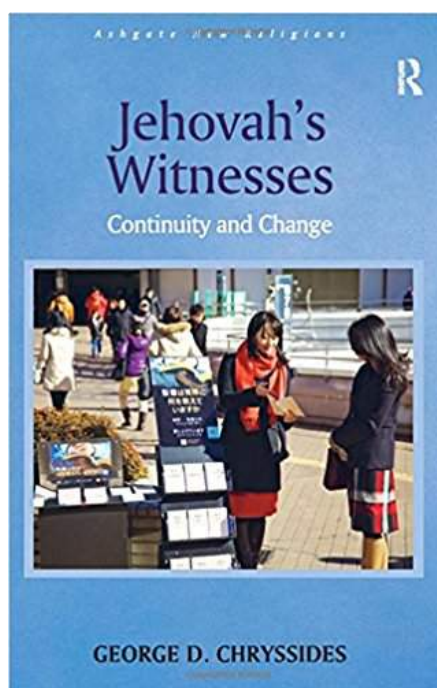
**JEHOVAH’S WITNESSES: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE, GEORGE D. CHRYSIDES. SURREY, ENGLAND AND BURLINGTON, VT: ASHGATE, 2016. ISBN: 9781409456087**

This work has as its focus one of the most prominent of the minor religious movements, the Jehovah’s Witnesses. Specifically, it seeks to explore how the Witnesses have developed and changed since their founding in the late 1870’s. Rather than a pure chronological approach, Chryssides uses a mixture of historical and thematic approaches, both as an overall chapter outline and within the chapters themselves. After the opening chapter, which Chryssides uses to discuss his rationale for the work, this style essentially splits the book into two parts, with the first six chapters discussing the history of the movement. The remainder of the book is broken into specific areas that are commonly misunderstood about the Witnesses, with chapters on the Bible, ethics and lifestyle, worship and rites of passage, and prophecy. While this approach is effective overall, it necessitates a “restarting” of the chronology to show how the topic being discussed has continued and changed, returning to the organization’s founder, Charles Taze Russell, and moving through its different leaders. This at times could be difficult to follow for someone not well versed in Witness history, although it is about as smooth as a work of this type could be.

Chryssides is at his best when he breaks down the Witnesses’ rather complex rationales for their beliefs. Nowhere is this clearer than in Chapter 10 (Prophecy), particularly the section on Russell’s end-time calculations. To understand them a knowledge of the Adventist ideas from which Russell drew his own is helpful, and Chryssides provides these in an

earlier chapter (Chapter 2: Origins). One minor quibble regarding how Chryssides arranges his chapters arises here, as Chapter 2 would be a more relevant lead-in to the prophecy chapter and would help the reader to better understand Russell's exegesis without having to recall concepts from eight chapters previous. This aside, Chryssides handles the array of 'jubilee' calculations, 'weeks' prophecies, and 'time and times' dating in one of the most coherent ways that has yet been published. It is no less convoluted, but far less complicated, and while no work not dedicated solely to the topic of Witness end-time calculations can encompass everything, Chryssides manages to hit the high-points remarkably well and in a comprehensible manner.

Chryssides is nearly as deft with his handling of the history of the Witnesses. His chapters on Russell and the Witnesses' second leader, Joseph F. Rutherford, especially manage to encapsulate each man's personality and leadership styles, focusing on key events in their respective histories leading the movement without getting overly complicated with minute details. Discussions on Russell's acrimonious relationship with his wife and Rutherford's power struggle within the movement, both topics that Witness critics often mention when decrying the organization, are handled swiftly and fairly. Chryssides does however make an odd mistake in his recounting of Rutherford's struggle, claiming that A.H. Macmillan was elected vice-president and A.N. Pierson was chosen as a member of the board in 1918 when, in fact, Pierson didn't make the board and C. H. Anderson was elected vice-president, not Macmillan, as shown in the January 15th, 1918 Watchtower. While a relatively small error, it is an obvious one that is noticeable amongst what is otherwise a succinct and well-written account of the events.



Chryssides states in his introduction that this book is not intended to be a critical study of the organization but rather an "empathetic" one, and he accomplishes this objective. However, there are areas of the book where he takes this arguably a step too far, and consequently his work can be at times apologetic. His handling of the 1975 prediction of Christ's return is the most obvious example of this. This section in Chapter 10 gives the impression that the Witness leadership wrote only one thing about 1975, in the August 15th, 1968 Watchtower, and from that many Witnesses "expected some decisive event" (239) and were disappointed when nothing occurred.

While he is correct that no explicit statement regarding 1975 was made, Chryssides ignores other important evidence, such as former Witness Raymond Franz's book *Crisis of Conscience* (Commentary Press, 4th Ed., 2007), that clearly show that the Witness leadership built up hope about 1975 in its publications over nearly a decade, not just one article. Indeed, the idea of 1975 being the year of Christ's return was first made in the 1966 Witness publication *Life Everlasting in Freedom of the Sons of God*, two years before the only article cited. In attempting to avoid being overly critical, Chryssides at times does his work a disservice by not mentioning

relevant information that would present a more balanced account of events.

Overall, Chryssides has written an interesting and very successful book. He has managed to condense over a century's worth of information on the Witnesses into an easily read and highly informative work. Scholars, students and the interested reader will find much to learn about this well-known, though little understood, religion and its practices. It will be a staple in the field for years to come.

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# Members' Recent Publications

## **Elizabeth Arweck**

- 2017 (ed.) *Attitudes to Religious Diversity: Young People's Perspectives*. London: Routledge.
- 2016 (ed. with Anna Halafoff and Donald Boisvert) *Education about Religions and Worldviews: Promoting Intercultural and Interreligious Understanding in Secular Societies*. London: Routledge.
- 2017 "Religious Diversity in the UK: Young People's Attitudes and Views", in Heidemarie Winkel and Kornelia Sammet (eds.), *Religion soziologisch Denken*. Wiesbaden: Springer, 301–320.
- 2016 "Religious Diversity in the UK: Do 13–16-Year- Old Pupils Perceive it as a Site of Multiple Intersections?", in Leslie J. Francis & Jeff Astley (eds.), *Diversity and Intersectionality: Studies in Religion, Education and Values*. Bern: Peter Lang, 49–66.
- 2016 "Religion Materialized in the Everyday: Young People's Attitudes towards Material Expressions of Religion", in Tim Hutchings & Joanne McKenzie (eds.), *Materiality and the Study of Religion: The Stuff of the Sacred*. London: Routledge, 185–202.

## **George D. Chryssides**

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## **James L. Cox**

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### **Carole M. Cusack**

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### **Moojan Momen**

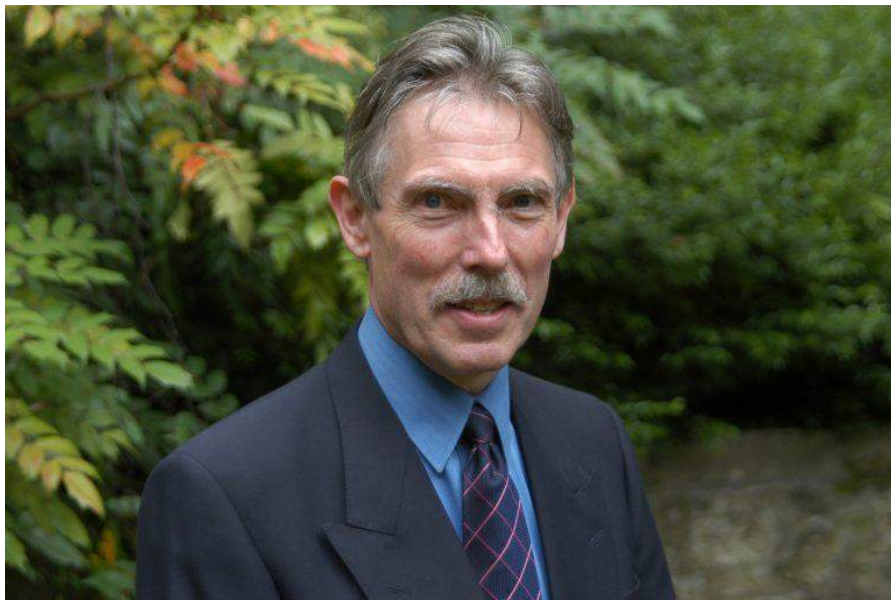
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# obituary

## Dr. T. Jack Thompson

1943 – 2017



### ***The Contribution of Jack Thompson to the Academic Study of Religions***

Dr T. Jack Thompson, who served as Director of the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World in the University of Edinburgh from 2005 until 2008, and was Senior Lecturer in African Christianity until his retirement in December 2008, died on 10 August 2017. From the time we both arrived at the University of Edinburgh in 1993 to take appoint-

ments in the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World, we worked closely together under its then Director, Professor Andrew Walls. Although Jack was noted as a historian of Christian missions in Africa, primarily Malawi, his contributions to the academic study of African religions was notable. It is for this reason that Steve Sutcliffe, current President of the British Association for the Study of Religions, asked me to write an article for the BASR Bulletin outlining those key areas where Jack Thompson's detailed historical studies have made



substantial contributions to Religious Studies, particularly the study of African Christianity.

Jack first went to Malawi in 1970 under the auspices of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. On one of my last visits to him before he died, I commented to him that he had started out his career as a missionary. He protested vigorously, saying that he was not a missionary and did not want to be remembered as such, but, after some reflection, he replied that he wanted to be thought of 'simply as a Christian teacher'. When in Malawi at Livingstonia Mission in the far north of the country, that was indeed what he was. He taught his pupils a wide range of subjects, but was always as much interested in their personal development as their academic performance. As a keen runner, he served also as a field and track coach at the school. Many years later, after his retirement from the University of Edinburgh, and in recognition of his long devotion to education in Malawi, he was appointed Vice-Chancellor of the University of Livingstonia and was made an honorary chief of the Ngoni people among whom he had worked. Jack's personal experience in Malawi formed the foundation for his expertise on the history of African religions.

An early example of how Jack used methods consistent with those employed in Religious Studies can be found in an article he contributed to a book, which was published in 1998 under the title, *Rites of Passage in Contemporary Africa*. This volume was developed out of a conference that Jack and I attended in 1994 in Zimbabwe that examined the ritual relationships between African Indigenous Religions and Christianity. Jack's article focused on the adaptation of Scottish sacramental conventions to the Malawi context. The conventions that originated in the nineteenth century in Scotland were annual gatherings consisting of teaching and preaching, the aim of which was to prepare participants to receive the sacrament of holy communion. Similar gatherings were instituted by Presbyterian missionaries in the late nineteenth century as evangelistic tools, and they proved tremendously popular among the Indigenous Ngoni peoples in Malawi, attracting many thousands annually. They were cited by missionaries as evidence of the huge inroads they were making in converting the Indigenous population to Christian faith. Jack's view was quite different. He carefully constructed the relationship of the Scottish sacramental conventions to Indigenous first fruit ceremonies, noting the parallels with the agricultural cycle and the fact that

they coincided, according to ancient Ngoni traditions, with the appearance of the full moon. Jack concluded his analysis by commenting that the 'export and adaptation of the traditional Scottish highland communion season to Malawi, became for the Ngoni a conscious religious interaction which allowed them to enter the new religion without abandoning their deeply held awareness of ... Ngoni identity' (1998, 12). For me, this insight emphasises Indigenous agency, where the Ngoni were fully aware of what they were doing when they transformed a cultural event from far-off Scotland into a longstanding local customary ritual.

One of Jack's most important academic contributions from the viewpoint of Religious Studies was his intensive research, conducted over many years, on missionary photography, which resulted in his 2012 publication, *Light on Darkness? Missionary Photography of Africa in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*. What makes this work so important is its emphasis on the various perspectives adopted by those taking photographs and those being photographed. Commonly, we think of photographs as objective images revealing a moment in time captured on the camera. Jack indicates that he first became interested in missionary photography in the early 1970s, when he discovered archival photographic records that provided 'a new window on the texts I had been researching' (2012, 3). As he began to study such photographic records in more detail, he soon discovered that many of the photographs had been stage-managed to convey a point of view. He explains:

*My real fascination with missionary photographs began ... when I came across an example of the missionary manipulation of a photograph, to place a Bible in the otherwise empty hand of an African evangelist. It was when I discovered this by accident, and was able to prove it by comparing the original and manipulated versions, that I began seriously to consider that the whole area of missionary photography might be worth further academic study. What did missionaries think they were doing when they took photographs of Africans – both traditionalist and Christian? What were they hoping to achieve when they used these photographs in various formats back "at home"? And, much more difficult to answer, how did the African subjects of such photographs react to being photographed in general, and to being portrayed in a particular way? (2012, 5)*

The remainder of this fascinating study explores just these questions from different angles and in different historical contexts. Jack used his training in historical methods to analyse quite contemporary issues focusing on the role of outsiders who describe and interpret the religious practices of the people they are researching. By drawing our attention to the most blatant attempts to manipulate photographic evidence, Jack unveiled the more hidden ways that academics use their research data to drive home pre-conceived conclusions. This, of course, raises issues surrounding scholarly reflexivity, and, from my own perspective, draws us back to the phenomenological principle that researchers need to bracket out (at least temporarily) their prior, potentially distorting, assumptions so that practitioners' voices can be heard and fairly reflected in academic analyses of their own religious communities.

Jack's commitment to privileging Indigenous perspectives was reflected in his historical analysis of Xhosa missionaries to Malawi during the late nineteenth century in a book which was published in 2000 under the title, *Touching the Heart: Xhosa Missionaries to Malawi, 1876-1888*. This carefully documented volume attempts to counter the prejudice of earlier studies of Christian missions, which, as noted by the Martinus Daneel and Dana Robert in their preface to the book, 'has been biased toward the activity of Western-oriented mission'. They add by way of explanation: 'White missionaries, Western mission policies and the relationship of mission to European imperialism have dominated the discussion of African missions' (2000, xi). By highlighting the fundamental role of African missionaries from South Africa to African peoples situated in northern Malawi, Jack turned the tables on this Western bias and demonstrated the key role played by Africans in making Christianity truly an African religion. This is another example of how Jack's work challenged academics to re-think their starting-positions, or to put it in methodological terms, how he employed the technique I have called empathetic interpolation to enter into the perspectives of those that otherwise would be

regarded merely as the 'objects' of academic research.

Although he was known primarily as a historian who focused on the study of Christian missions in Africa, Jack Thompson made a substantial contribution to the field of Religious Studies, which included highlighting the relationships of the academic study of religions to historical, post-colonial, phenomenological and reflexive methodologies. I discovered his close affinity with our field through the many years we worked together at the University of Edinburgh, co-teaching sections of several courses and conducting post-graduate research methods sessions, but his work has not been recognised sufficiently for its significant contribution to the study of the history of African Christianity as a religion, and hence as a part of Religious Studies, rather than as a branch of theology. Perhaps, this short article may help to correct this important oversight.

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**"Ethnographic objects are made, not found. Posited meaning derives not from original context, but from their juxtaposition in a new context."**

**(Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture; Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*, 1998.)**

