

BA
ASR

bulletin

British Association for the Study of Religions



136—May 2020

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WWW.BASR.AC.UK

ABOUT THE BASR

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

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editorial

This won't be a typical editorial, and this isn't a typical issue of the Bulletin. I'm putting this issue together while everything is in flux due to the COVID-19 lockdown—this year's IAHR has already been cancelled, and I have just announced that our own conference will be an online affair. What will happen with the REF is still up in the air. Everyone is scrambling to adapt to a changing situation, not least in our teaching and examination.

The contents of the Bulletin reflect this uncertainty, and are a reminder of how fast this epoch-making situation has come upon us. Indeed, it may well be the case that we never quite go back to business-as-usual, something which Liam Sutherland's timely piece addresses. This is not necessarily a bad thing, as crisis often drives systemic change, and embracing new technologies in teaching, research and other academic activities, as well as reconsidering how we spend our time and balance our lives, could have significant positive impact. On the other hand, this is already having a devastating

impact on institutions which rely on foreign students, and may well have a disproportionate effect on those on short-term or zero-hours contracts. These are not issues specific to Religious Studies departments, of course, but as these departments are already vulnerable due to size and perceived obsolescence, it is going to be a tough time.

Yet it is also clear that, while understanding the virus and its epidemiology are vital to our long-term well-being, on a global scale, understanding how people react to the virus may be just as important—how different cultures construct their knowledge of the world, how this drives their behaviour and how they negotiate this with other groups. And while this involves more than just "religion", religious studies scholars are especially trained in how these negotiations unfold. It is more vital than ever that our unique perspective be heard on the public stage.

David G. Robertson
16/5/2020



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news, etc

My second year as president of the BASR is (so far) the most challenging one. While we planned our usual one day conference, as 2020 was supposed to be the IAHR Congress, the world came to a still stand. Attention focused on how to help students getting through their degrees, from moving to online teaching (for most universities quite a rushed crash course), organizing PhD viva online, persuading external examiners to examine online material only, and so on. What got missed were the ECRs whose job possibilities flew out of the window and who lost opportunities to network at conferences. The lockdown will come at a cost, not just financially. It even seems that with the closure of religious communities the traditional role of religion to support their members and the wider public in a time of need became insignificant. A sign of the lack of understanding was evident in the comments made in a BBR Radio 4 Today show when a Corvid 19 survivor was told his experience which he had described as religious was “because of the drugs” he was given when on a ventilator machine. While just a small incident, it shows the importance of the study of religion and the BASR. Though our conference on campus is cancelled, I hope you will join us online for the AGM and the keynote we will be organising. We need your support to continue our work.

Bettina Schmidt

PUBLISHERS OFFER DISCOUNTS

Bloomsbury is offering a 35% discount on all books until the end of the year—including the Advances series. Use the code GLR CB4 at <https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/non-fiction/religion/>

Equinox have made all journal issues published in the last 12 months and all new issues freely accessible until the crisis abates. Anyone compiling remote learning material and wishing to incorporate Equinox journal or book material can arrange free access to specific materials for the duration of the course module.

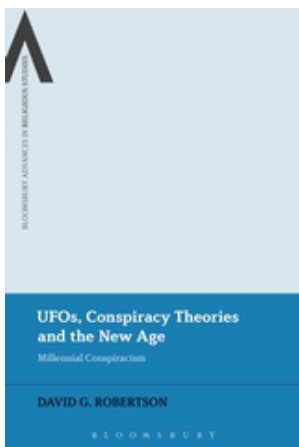
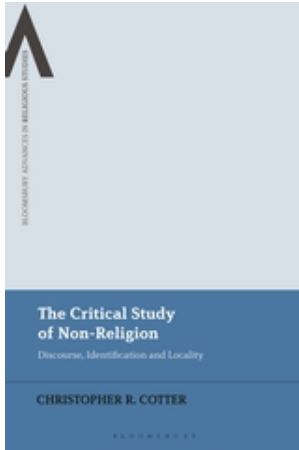
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available again. They have reduced the price of all new ebooks by 10% and are also offering a further 25% discount for ebooks using the code EQX. Please visit <https://www.equinoxpub.com/home/religion/>

JOBS

Rosalind I. J. Hackett was named a Chancellor’s Professor at the University of Tennessee in August 2019. She also received an honorary chieftaincy title (“Yeye Meye” – Mother who knows our ways) from the Elerinmo of Erinmoland in Nigeria in August 2019. Her term of office (2014-20) as Vice President of the International Council of Philosophy and the Human Sciences (CIPSH) ends in December. She has been appointed as a delegate of the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) to the Union Academique Internationale (UAI) from July 2020-24.

Series Update: Bloomsbury Advances in Religious Studies



Advances (for short) is a series of original monographs and edited collections in the Study of Religion/s which was co-founded by James Cox at the University of Edinburgh and Peggy Morgan at Mansfield College, Oxford, publishing its first book in early 2008. Over the next twelve years the list has grown to nearly thirty publications, including several items by BASR members. From the beginning the series has been targeted at research publications in Religious Studies that combine empirical data from international sites—case studies, ethnographies, interviews, surveys, archival sources—with various theoretical frameworks. The remit of the series has been kept broad, in line with the international and comparative ambitions of Religious Studies, with the overall aim to publish fresh, creative studies which integrate nuanced description with robust theory.



Greg Alles briefly served with James Cox and Peggy Morgan as a third editor. In January 2012 co-founder Peggy Morgan stepped down. James Cox continued on the editorial board and was joined by Steven Sutcliffe. Craig Martin then joined the board for a spell before Will Sweetman came on board. After twelve years at the helm, co-founder James Cox stepped down in December 2019. Steve and Will were delighted when Bettina Schmidt accepted the invitation to join them to steer the series into a new decade.

We welcome new proposals which fit the series' remit:
<https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/series/bloomsbury-advances-in-religious-studies/>

Please contact Lalle Pursglove in the first instance:
Lalle.Pursglove@Bloomsbury.com

Series Editors: Bettina Schmidt (University of Wales Trinity Saint David), Steven Sutcliffe (University of Edinburgh), Will Sweetman (University of Otago).

The committee of the BASR invites nominations for the next President. The successful applicant will be sworn in as President Elect at the (online) AGM at the 2020 conference, and will take up the office of President from the 2021 AGM at the conference in Edinburgh.

Nominations (including self-nominations) to the Secretary Stephen Gregg—s.gregg@wlv.ac.uk—by August 1st, 2020.

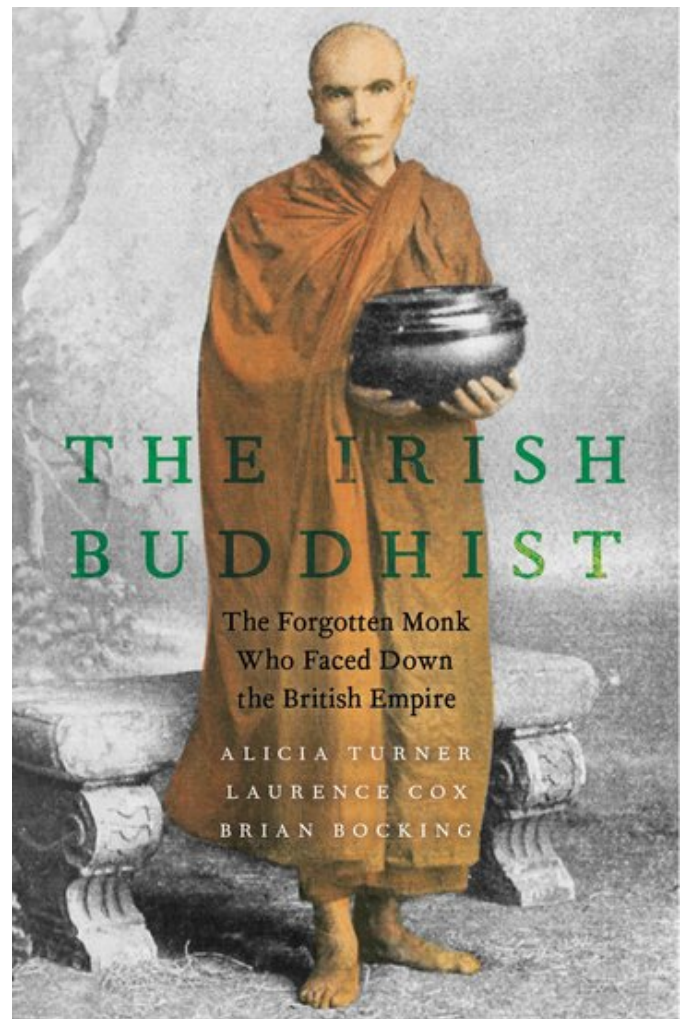
features

Tracking Down the Lost “Irish Buddhist”

**Brian Bocking,
University College, Cork**

A friend of mine, himself a published author, called me part-way through his reading of *The Irish Buddhist*¹ to ask how it was that three people could write a book. This made me think. The best answer I could supply at the time was ‘luck’, but shared academic values, complementary strengths and mutual respect were also key. *The Irish Buddhist* is written in one (collective) voice by Alicia Turner,² Laurence Cox³ and me, living in different parts of the world and meeting in person on only five occasions over ten years – all the rest of our collaboration was online. Research assessment and promotion prospects, as we know, discourage all forms of selfless behaviour, and many of us might reasonably ask ‘how much did author x actually contribute to this publication?’. In the case of *The Irish Buddhist* I happen to know that each of us thinks the other two did more work, which is a happy state of affairs, but I wouldn’t know how to engineer it.

The *Irish Buddhist* is a detective story that draws on much traditional archival and interview research ‘on the ground’ undertaken by its three authors and their sometime research assistants in Ireland, UK, USA, Canada, India, Sri Lanka, Burma, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Australia and Japan. Collaboration among scholars with



very different skills and languages was a necessity as we unearthed accounts (always crying out to be critically analysed) of Dhammaloka’s remarkable travels and extraordinary activities. The book however could only be researched and written because of the massive rise of digitized resources over the last decade. In late 2009, when I found online a possible index reference to Dhammaloka in a newspaper archive in Singapore’s National Library, I had to find a contact in

Singapore to go to the library, print from the microfilm and airmail to me in Ireland the papers with the full text. Within a year or two, everything in that archive was fully available online, and today full-text online searching worldwide is the norm, paywalls permitting. Yet, the information made searchable so far must be merely the tip of the iceberg.⁴

Digitisation was decisive because most of the many hundreds of fragments of information we have relied on to bring to life the forgotten figure of the Burmese-ordained (in 1900) radical monk U Dhammaloka (?1856-?1914, a.k.a. Colvin, O'Rourke, Carroll, Collins, Calvin or Kelly) have been found in places where, in the recent past, we couldn't possibly have known where to look: tiny small-print references in Colonial-era Asian and Western local newspapers, passing comments about 'Buddhist revival' in news sent home by Christian missionaries, letters from, or reports of, Dhammaloka published in obscure freethinking (atheist) papers in different European languages, images from short-lived colonial illustrated magazines. In many cases an entire newspaper, published daily over decades, might have just one passing mention of Dhammaloka, but that obscure fragment might open up for us a whole new lost chapter of Dhammaloka's extraordinary life.

In tracking down the Irish Buddhist we found that religious history is capable of being radically rewritten, as fragments of evidence of a quantity and variety inaccessible to 20th century scholars become discoverable. This may be particularly true for the religious history of the late nineteenth century, a period of high colonialism

when steamships, the telegraph, railways and mass printing were making the world smaller and enabling not just rulers, but also those who resisted them, to organise on a global scale.

As we know, many of the categories we find intellectually disquieting today, such as "religion", took their modern shape in the nineteenth century. Dhammaloka, an atheist as well as a Buddhist monk, was no fan of religions, especially those involving God. However, as a working class migrant labourer and sailor he had travelled the world and seen injustice, prejudice and exploitation at first hand, and as an Irishman he understood how wary the British were of "religion". Hence for Dhammaloka "religion" was very definitely a good thing. It enabled Dhammaloka, on behalf of his Asian and Buddhist friends and supporters, to find a way to resist colonial rule.

- (1) Alicia Turner, Laurence Cox and Brian Bocking. *The Irish Buddhist: The Forgotten Monk who Faced Down the British Empire*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2020.
- (2) Alicia Turner; <https://yfile.news.yorku.ca/2020/04/17/new-biography-reconsiders-how-buddhism-became-a-modern-global-religion/>
- (3) Laurence Cox; <https://roarmag.org/essays/the-forgotten-futures-of-anti-colonial-internationalism/>
- (4) I say more about this in "Mrs Pounds and Mrs Pfoundes" in the *JBASR* Festschrift for Ursula King, <https://doi.org/10.18792/jbasr.v19i0.19>

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
DEADLINE FOR THE NOVEMBER 2020 ISSUE IS **31 OCTOBER 2020**

Bigger Might not be Better: Some Reflections on the Scale of Conferences in a Post-Lockdown Academic World

**Liam Sutherland,
University of Edinburgh**

Academia may well have had an easier time adapting to the urgent need for social distancing dictated by the Covid19 pandemic than some industries,¹ but the clearest impact on the profession has been on the conferences which usually dominate the summer months. This is the time of year usually set aside for the largest conferences, drawing in scholars from across the globe and at various stages of their careers. The very things that make international conferences so stimulating, valuable (to the point of being career forming for many young scholars) and indeed fun; is what has made them especially dangerous in these circumstances. This should give us some pause to reconsider what this and other aspects of our profession will look like, and how they should be organised when the world emerges from lockdown. There are many dimensions that will need to be reflected on when considering the future of academic conferencing in a post-lockdown world, but I will focus on the issue of scale.

I am sure that I share with other BASR members a sense of disappointment that I will not be able to attend and present at the scheduled 22nd World Congress of the IAHR due to be held in Dunedin this August. The conference organisers must also be commended for making the right decision in cancelling the conference as early as they did. This cannot have been an easy decision but reflects what appears from the UK at least to be characteristic and enviable Kiwi common sense. I can only imagine the amount of time and labour sunk into planning it and must also be mindful of what the event meant to scholars in New Zealand and the southern hemisphere.

One of the issues which large scale international conferences bring with them is their environmental impact. This is obviously something which should be given serious reflection, but unfortunately this is not something I can presume to tackle here. I would reiterate how valuable such events can be and hope that means of offsetting or mitigating such an impact can be utilised rather than dispensing with them altogether. There are of course increasingly alternatives to face-to-face conferences which we have all had to rely on recently. Videoconferencing technology has been incorporated into academic conferences for a long time and I am sure that such technologies will be increasingly integrated into events going forward. The Open University unsurprisingly have been particularly adept at this, integrating twitter feeds into live events to blur the lines between offline and online discussion. I would also like to commend the newly founded Alt-Ac UK for putting together the online 'Conference at the End of the World' due to be held on July the 14th. Though, it is always important to be cautious about the impact of new technology and avoid fetishizing it. If the experiences of face to face conferencing could ever be replicated by online technologies, it will be a long time in the future. For now, we will need to continue to work through our 'Zoom fatigue' as best we can.

I would also add that this is a much broader problem than the most truly global conferences such as the IAHR considering that they are held much less regularly. As someone with next of kin in Australia, I think it would be hypocritical of those of us in the northern hemisphere to single

out the rare event based in the southern hemisphere as truly indicative of the problem. The fact that colleagues based in the southern hemisphere are compelled to travel northwards so frequently if they want to participate fully in the field arguably adds much more to the problem (events like the 22nd World Congress would be a rare exception and perhaps even part of the solution). Instead, I think that the problem might be considerably closer to home. The amount of flying between Euro-American campuses which goes on as a matter of course would dwarf occasional long-haul flights to Dunedin.

If the environmental impact were not bad enough, there are several other issues with international conferences seeking ever greater numbers of attendees. The problem was exemplified recently for me by the 2019 EASR Conference in Tartu, Estonia which included in one slot 23 parallel panel sessions² and was the largest conference ever held by the EASR with around 660 participants³ I certainly do not intend to cause any offence to the organisers of this specific conference—it was a thoroughly engaging and well-run event. The fact that there were so many attendees at the conference and that it was such a roaring success is testament to the hard work and competence of its organisers. However, there are several reasons why this event particularly hammered home a need to reflect on whether bigger numbers at events like this are always better and our current circumstances provide an ideal opportunity to engage in this reflection.

Regardless of how daunting or crowded such a large event might be, the biggest issues with conferences aiming for greater numbers is a lowering of standards and the inclusion of speakers who do not fit into an academic religious studies conference (which will likely not be to their benefit either). This can have the unintended effect of undermining the work of the titular association and the field in general. The desire to adhere to strictly academic or scientific (in the broad sense) study of religion was certainly expressed forcefully at the conference but undermined by some of the papers I and some of my peers attended.

The conference was held not long after the at-

tempt to establish a confessional, interfaith and 'religion-friendly' European Academy of Religion condemned in a joint statement by the Presidents of the IAHR and EASR. In his opening speech at the conference, President of the IAHR Tim Jensen referred repeatedly to this statement and the need for the various professional associations to cooperate in defending the academic, scientific and non-confessional study of religion. He quoted from the constitution of the IAHR to state in no uncertain terms what was and was not welcome at such conferences "the IAHR is not a forum for confessional, apologetic or other similar concerns". Responding to a recent publication by Leonardo Ambasciano, he stressed that discussion of the societal value of the study of religion should not sleepwalk into the "night of pseudo-science." He forcefully stated "I have to take the opportunity to say very loudly, that there is a difference, a big difference" between the work promoted by these organisations and forces like the EAR.

By and large this is representative of the vast majority of papers presented at the conference but unfortunately, I did encounter papers I would regard as charging headlong into "the night of pseudo-science" and some of its most extreme and prejudiced forms. In one panel that I attended on religion and psychiatry, Jensen's speech clearly had provoked a particularly visceral reaction in one of the speakers. She balked at the attempt by "the society" to define the parameters of the conference in terms of the scientific and academic study of religion because, to paraphrase, "no one can define science." The paper went on to detail her use of autoethnography to study her own spiritual experiences related to the hearing of voices. I do not for a moment intend to disparage the inclusion of persons who hear voices or their derivation of meaning from these experiences. I may have some reservations about autoethnography, but its proponents have clearly worked to ensure that it is a rigorous methodology.⁴ What I do object to and assume that they do not have in mind by autoethnography is what was in my recollection at least, the narrating of her personal experiences and the presentation of her interpretation of them uncritically and as finally authoritative. The most galling aspect of this was the lack of any discernible inquiry even, a

theological one, which the autoethnographic evidence was supposed to inform.

Unfortunately, this was not the only or the most alarming example of inappropriate content. Though I did not attend another panel, it was recounted in detail by several attendees as riddled with Islamophobic content. Obviously, I cannot personally verify how fair this critique is in terms of the events of the panel itself but what I could do and what I did, was read through the abstracts. The questionable character of these abstracts seemed fairly self-evident. One paper was presented by two speakers from the US, one from a medical school and the other from the Latter-day Saints affiliated Cumorah Foundation. This may not be much in and of itself but the abstract appeared to endorse a version of the alarmist far right 'great replacement' myth, positing that Christians would soon be outnumbered in the west by Muslims because of the growth of the non-religious population. Another one of the abstracts opined about the essential incompatibility of Muslim minorities in Europe with secular values unlike Christianity, due to their unwavering adherence to an unchanging and homogenous Sharia. None of this is remotely deserving of the credibility afforded by having been presented at the annual conference of a prestigious international association in our field.

Obviously, annual and general conferences for a field as broad and varied as religious studies cannot be especially exclusive. This is because they serve as fora for the presentation of very different forms of research, for debate on the nature and future of our field and must allow challenges to its established norms. It was fairly jarring to encounter content such as this in the midst of stimulating and vital discussions in the field such as the panel reflecting on the 20th anniversary of Tim Fitzgerald's 'Ideology of Religious Studies', which prompted important dialogue between more traditional critical-analytical approaches and the Critical Religion approach pioneered by Fitzgerald. On a less grandiose but equally important note, such conferences must also be welcoming and nurturing spaces for postgraduate students, early career scholars and established scholars alike. In short, I acknowledge that they need to be fairly inclus-

ive and provide of plenty of tolerance or leeway for airing out and refining research in the works, but this cannot be at the expense of academic credibility.

Conference papers should not only meet basic academic standards but must also be relevant to our subject area in some plausible fashion, as broad and contested as it might be. Religious studies conferences should certainly not be the places to encounter pseudo-scientific or even prejudiced content. I appreciate that this can never be completely avoided but when the desire to expand the scale of a conference takes precedence over academic propriety, seemingly obvious red flags can be missed.

Notes:

1. I do not intend to suggest that this is necessarily anything to celebrate. As someone with a part-time job in a supermarket I appreciate that this is a luxury afforded by the nature of our work. The comparative ease with which our labour can be shifted online comes at the expense of the valuable interactions of conferences, discussions with colleagues on campus and for me, most importantly, face to face teaching. This may not bode well for the future.
2. I have double checked these numbers, see the EASR 2019 Conference Book pp. 44-46 <https://easr2019.org/wp>
3. As mentioned repeatedly at the opening ceremony available on youtube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNgRpRC5dKE&t=2898s>
4. Exemplified recently by the Religious Studies Project podcast with Bradley Onishi on 'Straight, White American Jesus' <https://www.religiousstudiesproject.com/podcast/straight-white-american-jesus-the-podcast/> and Christine E. Crouse-Dick's featured response 'A Tacit Case for Autoethnography as a Crucial Research Method for Befuddling Times' <https://www.religiousstudiesproject.com/2019/12/21/a-tacit-case-for-autoethnography-as-a-crucial-research-method-for-befuddling-times/>

conferences



BASR 2019: A PERSONAL REFLECTION.

Remember when we could travel to Conferences? It seems like a lifetime ago and considering how late this report is it may as well be. One positive for me in this current lockdown is that I have finally managed to organize stacks upon stacks of long-overlooked paperwork. In amongst which I found my notes from the BASR 2019 Conference—Visualising Cultures, Media, Religion and Technology, held at Leeds Trinity University on 2nd to 4th September.

I was a very grateful recipient of a bursary from BASR, and so I set off from Brighton in the wee small hours of the first day armed only with a notebook, some clothes and an A1 sized spreadsheet for my own presentation. Despite my best efforts at getting lost in Horsforth, I walked in three wrong directions from the station to begin with, I arrived at the Conference in good time to collect my room key, Conference pack and get acquainted with the campus.

Leeds Trinity is a relatively small campus set in the West Yorkshire countryside, I would say that its relatively tranquil spot save for the fact that Horsforth sits on the edge of Leeds International Airport, so you do get some spectacular views of aircraft coming in to land.

This was my first time at a BASR Conference, I had previously attended the British Sociological Asso-

ciation Sociology of Religion Study Group Annual Conference (SOCREL) 2017, also held in Leeds, at the University in the city. I was relieved to find that the BASR Conference was much more compact and much less disorientating than SOCREL. Spread over three days, the Conference comprised of fifteen panels held over five sessions. This meant that there was a choice of three panels to choose from for each session. Given that the Conference attendance was around sixty delegates this meant that the panel were not packed, but the audiences were very attentive and engaging, nonetheless.

As well, as the panels, there were events after the evening meals. On Monday this was a Religious Studies Project Special called Only 60 Seconds, unfortunately I had fallen ill just after the keynote lecture that afternoon. All I can say is never eat a toasted sandwich at 6am in Kings Cross Station that's probably been sat there all night. That completely wiped me out not only for the RS Project evening but most of the following day until the BASR AGM.

This was the first AGM of a society other than a Quaker one that I had attended in a very long time, I was impressed with how well run and organised the AGM was. The Presidential address by Bettina Schmidt included a rebuke to the British Academy report that had painted a very negative picture of Religious Studies and its place within Humanities in general. Considering the pressures that have been placed on Humanities, higher fees, recon-

struction of departments and courses, plus an indifferent Government, to have the Academy sound the last post for Religious Studies was pretty disheartening. However, Bettina rallied everyone with “we are not dead, we are alive and kicking”.

A fascinating keynote was given on the first day by James Kapaló entitled ‘Performing Clandestinity: The Religious Underground, the Secret Police and the Media in Eastern Europe’. Focussing on Hungary, Romania, Moldova and Ukraine the lecture investigated the relationships between the majority and the minority in a politically turbulent space, both in place and time. Over the past thirty years since the collapse of the Soviet-bloc, many secret police archives have been made accessible regarding the religious practices of individuals. Not only was the content of individual files, some running up to 8,000 pages, quite astonishing to see, but also the ethical concerns for the researcher these brought up. Much of the information used for the files was the work of informants, and therefore may well contain plenty of misinformation, used at the time for personal gains, vendettas or protection from the State, and the researcher has to be aware of this. However, the files, especially the visual images found do provide a valuable source about community lives. Film and media representations of religion in Communist Eastern Europe was also the title of one of the panels on Wednesday. Papers by Ágnes Hesz (Cork/Pécs); Dumitru Lisnic (Cork) and Kinga Povedák (Cork/Szeged) complimented and added to the themes of the keynote.

Panel sessions were diverse in their make-up and subject matter, which doubled my disappointment at being unwell and unable to attend as many as I would have liked. That said, I found the Conference very enjoyable, and the BASR extremely welcoming—I’ve renewed my membership, and look forward to the next Conference, as and when.

In considering how to put reports together, those of us with bursaries were encouraged to use any style of media. Originally, I had the notion to put together a playlist of songs that would reflect my visit. I have a weekly online radio show on Radio Lewes called Vapour Trails, incidentally the Conference gave me a new friend, fan and regular contributor in the shape of Graham Roberts (Leeds Trinity). So with that in mind here is a link to a song that will ever remind me of Leeds, and a paper by S.

Jonathan O’Donnell (Dublin) on “The Return of the Nephilim”:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rJWs-DpA909c>

Stephen Brooks,
University of Birmingham

STUDYING G.I. GURDJIEFF: SCHOLARS AND PRACTITIONERS IN CONVERSATION. SYMPOSIUM AND WORKSHOP, 3-4 DECEMBER 2019, UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

A significant two-day gathering of international scholars and practitioners of the teachings and practices of G.I. Gurdjieff (1866?-1949) was held on Tuesday 3 and Wednesday 4 December in the John Woolley Building at the University of Sydney. Organised by Professor Carole Cusack in the Studies in Religion Department and funded by the School of Literature, Art and Media, the event brought together scholars from the UK, the US and Australia, plus a number of local Gurdjieffian practitioners, to discuss and debate aspects of Gurdjieff’s life and teachings. The symposium featured seven papers followed by a demonstration of Gurdjieff’s movements accompanied by live music, while the closed workshop focused on the identification and examination of new sources and approaches to an updated social history and ethnography of the Gurdjieff movement.

Analysis of Gurdjieff within the Study of Religion/s remains an emergent field, although a number of studies have recently appeared which have brought new light to bear on what remains in many ways a mythologised and somewhat protected movement. The efforts of the organiser of this event, Carole Cusack—well-known to BASR members—have been pivotal in this resurgence of scholarly interest, and build on an earlier wave of work by scholars such as James Webb, James Moore and Andrew Rawlinson. Beginning with the curating of four new research papers in the *Brill Handbook of New Religions and Cultural Production* (C. Cusack and A. Norman, editors, 2012), Cusack edited a series of special issues on various aspects of the Gurdjieff work: for example, the *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion* (2014), *Fieldwork in Religion* (2016) and the *International Journal for the Study of New Religions* (2015), the

latter co-edited with Steven Sutcliffe at the University of Edinburgh. In roughly the same period Cusack and Sutcliffe co-organised panels at European conferences including IAHR Erfurt in 2015, EASR Helsinki in 2016, and BASR Belfast in 2018. Both Cusack and Sutcliffe have also supervised PhD students, most notably Johanna Petsche whose monograph *Gurdjieff and Music* (Brill 2015) is a revised version of her PhD thesis supervised by Cusack.

The Sydney symposium was therefore the latest event in a new wave of Gurdjieff studies in the Study of Religion/s. Topics under consideration included Gurdjieff's sources and techniques, key texts and contexts for communicating the 'work', and orthodox and heterodox continuations of the Gurdjieff teaching. The *Movements*, and the music Gurdjieff composed with Thomas de Hartmann (1885-1956), were also featured, demonstrating the importance of exchange and discussion between scholars and practitioners.

Around forty people were gathered for the opening morning of talks on Tuesday 3 December. The audience (and speakers) included Gurdjieffian practitioners, students and academics from the Sydney Studies in Religion department, as well as from Scotland and the US. Steven Sutcliffe (Edinburgh) began with a talk entitled 'Remembering Gurdjieff: The Role of the Memoir in Extending Charismatic Authority', which looked at examples of the many published recollections of Gurdjieff by people who knew and/or worked with him in person, and the function of this affective genre in summoning through print media the charismatic presence of the guru. This was followed by a paper by Joseph Azize (Sydney) under the title 'Gurdjieff Theologus' which examined theological influences in Gurdjieff's teaching, focused on his notion of intentional suffering in relation to the ray of creation. Azize is the author of a new study of the practical roots of 'the work', *Gurdjieff: Mysticism, Contemplation and Exercises* (Oxford University Press 2020), and was previously a student of the English Gurdjieffian teacher, George Adie (1901-1989), who knew Gurdjieff before emigrating to Australia in 1966. Michael Pittman (Albany, US) then gave a presentation called 'Gurdjieffian Laughter as Demolition and Restoration' in which he examined the role of laughter and humour in Gurdjieff's magnum opus *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*. Pittman

argued that laughter was an important practical tool in Gurdjieff's work which sought to break down received knowledge and open the way for new insight, including deeper appreciation for the everyday efficacy of Gurdjieff's erstwhile 'esoteric' teaching.

After a restorative coffee break, Vrasidas Karalis, Professor of Modern Greek Studies (Sydney) spoke on the topic 'Gurdjieff and Jung: Individuation and *Life is Real only Then when "I Am"*'. Karalis argued that in the episodic collection of texts constituting *Life is Real*, Gurdjieff sought to model the desired transition from self-consciousness to objective knowledge, understood as awareness of self and world free from psychological projection and emotional transference. Karalis argued that Jung's principle of individuation offered an analogous approach, although Gurdjieff's method was more practical and this-worldly. Next, in his talk 'Spaceship Karnak in the Daintree', Jeremy Johnson (Sydney) gave a rich account of 'Fourth Way' courses run in the 1980s by Australian actress Diane Cilento (1933-2011) at her 200 acre property 'Karnak' in Far North Queensland. At this remote site, named after the spacecraft in Beelzebub's Tales, Cilento (who starred in 1973 cult film *The Wicker Man* and was previously married to the archetypal 'James Bond', Sean Connery) developed a new expression of the 'work' via the teachings of Gurdjieff's eclectic English follower, J.G. Bennett (1897-1974). Johnson discussed a number of enthusiasts and detractors who took from this local tropical Australian site new interpretations of the Gurdjieffian corpus which were then fed into the global mythos of the work.

The final two talks of the morning continued to trace Gurdjieffian themes and influences within popular culture. In 'Fictional Portraits: Gurdjieff in the Popular Imagination', Carole Cusack (Sydney) discussed several literary representations of Gurdjieff, including in Leonora Carrington's novel *The Hearing Trumpet*, Alma de Groen's play *The Rivers of China*, and John Maxwell Taylor's *Crazy Wisdom The Musical: The Life and Legend of Gurdjieff*. With the exception of Leonora Carrington's portrayal of 'Dr Gambit', Cusack argued that these were well-researched and serious representations which also played a role in attracting new practitioners to the movement. To end the morning session, David Robertson (The Open University, UK)



gave a talk entitled 'Fripp, Bennett, Gurdjieff: Three of a Perfect Pair' (the oxymoronic subtitle referencing King Crimson's 1984 album). Robertson argued that the participation by King Crimson guitarist Robert Fripp (b. 1946) in a nine month residential course in Dorset led by J.G. Bennett in the early 1970s was a turning point in the musician's career. Fripp subsequently created a new line up of King Crimson, with the influence of Bennett—and through him, Gurdjieff—increasingly becoming apparent in Fripp's approach to music. Through a case study of the pedagogy of 'Guitar Craft', Fripp's signature teaching programme, Robertson argued that Fripp himself became a teacher in the Gurdjieff lineage.

After lunch we walked over to the imposing MacLaurin Hall where a public demonstration of Gurdjieff's Movements was held by a small group of practitioners, led and introduced by teacher Dorine Tolley and accompanied by her on the University's Steinway grand piano. This was a fine event before a substantial audience, boosted by friends, family and other interested parties. The Movements performed were 'The 4th Obligatory or Note Values', 'Multiplication 18', 'The Seven Positions or Prayer of 21st October' and 'The Men's Ceremony'. This was followed by a short recital of music composed by Gurdjieff with the Russian-Ukrainian composer Thomas de Hartmann (1885-1956). Johanna Petsche (Sydney) introduced this programme and played clarinet to accompany Dorine Tolley. Five pieces were performed: 'Kurd Shepherd Melody', 'Duduk', 'No. 40', 'Chant from a Holy Book' and 'Trinity'. The combination of movements and recital formed an impressive demonstration of the embodied dimension of Gurdjieff's teaching and a tangible example of the work as in part a form of 'cultural production' with aesthetic impact. We returned to the lecture hall for a final summary and discussion of what had been a very full and rich day.

The closed workshop on the morning of Wednesday December 4 was attended by Carole Cusack, Joseph Azize, Jeremy Johnson, David Pecotic, Steven Sutcliffe and David Robertson. This gave a more leisurely opportunity to exchange news on current research and future plans. Access to relevant archives, often in private hands, was a significant topic for discussion, as was the possibility of collecting oral histories of senior Gurdjieffian prac-

tioners. One possibility under discussion was to establish an international network of scholars working on the Gurdjieff movement, plus approaching one or more Gurdjieffian groups for research collaboration. An initial step is to publish a reader to gather together under one cover some of the best articles stemming from the new wave of Gurdjieff studies which are currently scattered across numerous journals and collected volumes. As this symposium and workshop amply demonstrated, there is plenty of life in the old dog yet and the bone, though still firmly in the ground, remains tasty. Thanks once more are due to Carole Cusack and the School of Literature, Art and Media at the University of Sydney for their hard work and financial support for this invaluable gathering.

Steven Sutcliffe,
University of Edinburgh

***CENTER FOR STUDIES ON NEW RELIGIONS, 5-7
SEPTEMBER, 2019, UNIVERSITY OF TORINO***

Scholars with an interest in new religious movements (NRMs) should consider attending the annual conferences organised by CESNUR (Center for Studies in New Religions). Sadly, this year's event (Religious Pluralism in an Era of Globalization), due to take place in Québec in June, is one of the victims of the current Covid-19 virus, and has been cancelled. However, it has now been rescheduled for 17-19 June 2021, at the same venue, and details can be found on its website, www.cesnur.org.

Last year's event took place at the University of Torino, Italy, and presentations covered a range of themes and traditions, with presenters from the US, Europe, and the Far East. A short report cannot do justice to over 40 sessions with around 200 presentations, but two relatively new topics are worth mentioning. One is Flat Earth belief, which has been growing in recent times, mainly in the US, being seen by some Christian fundamentalists as an aspect of biblical inerrancy. Another relative newcomer to the NRM scene is the Daesoon Jinrihoe, established in South Korea in 1967, and which is now the country's largest new religion, far exceeding the better-known Unification Church of Sun Myung Moon, and which was the subject of several presentations. As usual, presenters in-



cluded adherents to NRMs as well as academics, and some presenters fell into both categories.

CESNUR conferences normally end with an optional field visit, and we visited the Church Universal Soul—a little-known schismatic Catholic group which has combined traditional Roman Catholicism with elements of Eastern religion. From there we went on to Damahur, which is a New Age community situated in the alps, north of Piedmont, and which has a complex of large highly ornate underground temples, with paintings, sculptures, and stained-glass, depicting themes and symbols of a large variety of spiritual traditions. Their construction began in 1975, and took 16 years of carving into the rocks by hand. Unfortunately photography is not permitted, but pictures can be found on the Internet.



Some of the proceedings can be viewed online at <https://www.cesnur.org/2019/turin-cyberpro.htm>.

George D. Chryssides
York St. John / Birmingham

AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGION, UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE, NSW, 5-6 DECEMBER 2019



Newcastle has something of a frontier town feel, after taking a train up the coast from Sydney, a feeling only exacerbated by the occasional smoke and red skies from the fires still raging less than a hundred kilometers away inland. The conference itself took place in the very new, built-for-purpose NewSpace campus building of Newcastle University that sat on the main street, looking out on the Pacific ocean in one direction and at the colonial gardens of Newcastle City Park on the other. The theme was “Religion and Violence”, and it officially opened with visiting UON Fellow Professor Naomi Goldenberg of the University of Ottawa, entitled “Reflections on Deuteronomy 20: 16-18: Understanding “Religion” as both Solution and License for Violence”. This was introduced and chaired by the organiser, Kathleen McPhillips, whose firm but unobtrusive influence was felt throughout the conference. Goldenberg’s presentation was provocative and well-written, as always, develop-

ing her arguments about religions as “vestigial states”, reading the passages of Deuteronomy not as “religious” texts, but as political texts aimed at establishing patriarchal authority (see also her recent paper in *Implicit Religion*, “There is no Religion in the Bible” (<https://journals.equinox-pub.com/IR/article/view/39758>).

I say officially because in the days prior there had been two workshops aimed at phd students and early career scholars—the first a workshop led by Professor Goldenberg on “‘Critical Religion’ – How Theory that Deconstructs the Category of ‘Religion’ Can Lead to Better Research”, and the second a workshop entitled “Navigating Academia”, led by University of Sydney staff including Christopher Hartney, Zoe Alderton and Dan Towers. These were followed by a public discussion panel on ‘World-views of Australia's Generation Z: Negotiating Religion, Sexuality and Diversity’, featuring Andrew Singleton, Anna Halafoff, Gary Bouma and Dan Woodman. Simultaneously, Marion Maddox and the Charles Strong Memorial Trust had organised a symposium on “The Australian Church and the Aus-

tralian Settlement”, aimed at developing a new publication.

Each session following Goldenberg's keynote had four parallel panels. Many had a close focus on the theme of religion and violence—understandably, perhaps, given the Christchurch shooting in March 2019 and the ongoing investigations into abuse in the Catholic Church in Australia. Violence was considered in relation to New Religions, online religion, literature, Islam, intimate relationships, historical perspectives, media, morality, gender and utopianism. To judge by the titles, there was some normativity on display, but this was perhaps inevitable given the theme. There were also panels devoted to Christchurch and to the work of René Girard. I was not able to attend all of these; happily, there will be two journal issues of proceedings produced. What I did attend was the New Religions and Violence panel, in which I presented, together with Steve Sutcliffe and Carole Cusack. I then attended the Publishing panel, again including Sutcliffe and Cusack, along with Venetia Robertson (University of Sydney). After lunch, I was pleased to be the





support act for Naomi Goldenberg and Timothy Fitzgerald (a recent emigr e to Australia) on a panel on the critical study of religion. Naomi and I were both happy to let Tim take the majority of the time, in an off-the-cuff summary of his work to date. The discussion that followed was engaged, if not entirely convinced, but it was a rare treat for me nevertheless.

Because of the fires, I decided to return to Sydney that evening in case the trains were delayed the following morning, so I missed Morny Joy's keynote on "Vulnerability, Violence, Precarity and their Contemporary Modifications", and the conference dinner. If the rest of the food I had during the trip was anything to go by, this was a shame indeed. The morning of the 6th began with the Charles Strong Memorial Lecture, given by Norm Habel, and after two further panels, concluded with the AGM. I was disappointed not to be able to attend the second day, as I was simply too busy when I was there to even spend time with friends, let alone make new ones. For all I was as far from Scotland as I could

be, attending the AASR felt very much like being at home at the BASR.

David G. Robertson,
The Open University

THE EUROPEAN SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF WESTERN ESOTERICISM (ESSWE) CONFERENCE, 2-4 JULY 2019, UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM, THE NETHERLANDS

The seventh international conference of ESSWE, on the theme "Visions, Voices, Altered States," was organized by a team based at University of Amsterdam and coincided with the twentieth anniversary of the establishment of the Center for History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents (HHP) at that institution. Delegates were fortunate that several excellent events accompanied the main conference; on Monday 1 July at 6 PM there was a guided visit to the Kabbalah Exhibition at the Jewish Historical Mu-

seum, and the Welcome Reception on Tuesday 1 July was held at the “House With the Heads” in Keizersgracht, which houses the Bibliotheca Philosophia Hermetica (Ritman Library) and the Embassy of the Free Mind. The Head of the Ritman Research Institute is Peter Forshaw, former editor of *Aries* and well-known scholar at University of Amsterdam. In addition, every delegate received an elegant and informative hardback, *Hermes Explains: Thirty Questions About Western Esotericism*, edited by Wouter Hanegraaff, Peter Forshaw and Marco Pasi (Amsterdam University Press 2019).

The opening had speeches from Wouter Hanegraaff (on behalf of the organisers), the President of ESSWE Andreas Kilcher, and Fred P. Weerman, the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities. The audience was large and enthusiastic, and the three keynotes addressed diverse and fascinating subjects. The historian of psychiatry and specialist on C. G. Jung, Sonu Shamdasani, opened with “A Faint Rumour Left Behind’: Fragments from a History of Concepts of Consciousness.” Yulia Ustinova (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev) spoke on “Ecstatic Wisdom in Ancient Greece,” linking the certain Greek philosophers to contemporary trends in Greek religion. The final keynote, Karl Baier (University of Vienna) gave a lecture titled “Early Psychonauts: Albert Hofmann’s Occultic Network,” which situated Albert Hoffman and his early experiments with LSD in a milieu that included political conservatives and scholars, rather than the usual suspects from the counterculture.

Due to the large number of papers (there were six parallel sessions) this report will be selective. There were sessions on “Consciousness in Islamic Esotericism: From Physiognomy to Psychology,” “Mesmerism and Somnambulism,” “Theatre and Music,” “Postwar Psychedelic Culture,” “The Visionary Renaissance” and “Judaism, Sufism & Zoroastrianism” and that was only on the first day. “Postwar Psychedelic Culture” was an especial highlight, with great papers by Erik Davis (“The Wizard of High Weirdness: Robert Anton Wilson’s Psychedelic Theurgy”), Christopher Partridge (“UFOs and the Psychedelic Experience”), Christian Greer (“‘Don’t Forget New Age Rhymes With Sewage’: The Lunatic Fringe of 1980s Esotericism”) and Graham St John (“The

Spirit Gland & Psychedelic Occulture”).

In the afternoon of Tuesday 2 July I chaired “Film and Media,” with papers by Lila Moore and Marianna Ruah-Midbar Shapiro (“The Emergent Contemporary Movement of Spiritual Cinema and Media: Explorations in Mind/Body Alternations”), Guido Nerger (“Structures of Social Alterations: Magic, Media and [Mass] Manipulation”) and Brian Ogren (“Kabbalah and Film: Cinematic Visions,

Narrative Voices, and Altered States”. On Wednesday 3 July, the parallel sessions included “Christian Theosophy”, “Psychical Research,” and the panel I attended on “Accessing Contemporary Esoteric Techniques for Altering Consciousness” (with Susanna Crookford, Markus Altena Davidsen, and Jenny Butler). That afternoon I presented on “Everyday Enlightenment? Physical Labour, Food and Drink as Teaching Methods” in the “Gurdjieff Plus” session in which Christian Giudice spoke about “The Struggle of the Magicians: Gurdjieff’s Sacred Dances and Higher States of Consciousness” and we were in company with Leo Bernard (“Jacques Demarquette [1888-1969]: Mysticism Within the Academy”) and Damien Karbovnik (“How to Rationalise the Esoteric: Jacques Bergier and the ‘Telepathy with the Infinite’”).

As with the previous conference at the University of Erfurt in 2017, ESSWE in Amsterdam was connected to popular media; Baglis TV, a media organization based in Paris with an online channel devoted to esotericism, filmed several sessions. The later sessions on the second day covered topics as diverse as “More Than Fantasy) (with an amazing paper by Cavan McLaughlin on “Tulpamancy: Psychospiritual Technology, ‘Self-Willed Therapeutic Schizophrenia’, or a ‘Community of Imaginary-Friends Hobbyists?’”), “Magic and Kabbalah in Early Modern Italy,” “Anthroposophy,” “Faeries and Pagans,” and “Alchemy.” ESSWE 2019 was an intellectually stimulating and entertaining conference, that despite its large size felt friendly and communal. In a 2020 dominated by the absence of conferences due to the coronavirus pandemic it is good to have such happy memories to look back on.

Carole M. Cusack
University of Sydney

reviews

RUSSELL T. MCCUTCHEON. "RELIGION" IN THEORY AND PRACTICE: DEMYSTIFYING THE FIELD FOR BURGEONING ACADEMICS. EQUINOX, 2019.

"Religion" in Theory and Practice provides an overview of the current state of the academic study of religion by exploring both its theoretical and practical dimensions. The book, primarily aimed at early career researchers, contains three sections. Here, Russell McCutcheon carries on the discussion started in his previous work *Entanglements: Making Place in the Field of Religion* (2014).

The first part, "In Theory", presents some of McCutcheon's thoughts on the current state of the field. It consists of a series of essays reflecting on the place and role of theory in the contemporary study of religion. McCutcheon laments a scarcity of theory within the field, where the tendency to "naturalize" particular interests and implications emerges as an enduring problem. Many scholars, McCutcheon argues, fail to acknowledge the pre-assumptions based on which they operate; they treat theory as a secondary step following the observation of something seen as obviously significant or noticeable (9). The challenge, instead, would be to historicize what is portrayed as self-evident, i.e. religion as a category. The problem within the field, however, is that theory rather serves to "[dehistoricize] the very thing that we might instead be scrutinizing as an historical and thus human act" (13).

This links to a discussion of the utility of the "world religions" category as a paradigm for the study of religion. Besides questioning the heuristic value of the

category, this reflection aims to outline a fundamental duality underlying scientific investigation. The debate over a category, McCutcheon notes, can take two forms: one might discuss whether particular objects belong to the category, or investigate the category itself, examining the historical and cultural circumstances that brought it to existence. The relevance of these considerations is not merely theoretical, but linked to a reflection on the desired pedagogical goals of religious studies modules. For McCutcheon, these courses should not merely aim at providing students with descriptive knowledge on a range of religious traditions, but rather seek to equip them with skills that are relevant across disciplines. In this respect, the study of religion as a category becomes a means to reflect on the processes of signification through which social actors make sense of the world (28-29).

In general, one of the merits of the book lies in the intertwining of theoretical disputations with personal anecdotes and glimpses into McCutcheon's own professional experience and pedagogical practice. Such intersections not only facilitate the digestion of conceptually rich passages, but also serve the more practical aims of the book. Most notably, they encourage a revitalisation of the field by proposing innovative strategies to the study of religion tailored to the needs of a postmodern world. While instrumental to the investigation of more recent trends, these considerations can also provide a fresh perspective on capital works in the field. McCutcheon uses the divide between the concern for classifying religions as opposed to that for the criteria for classification themselves as a lens to re-think the cornerstones of the sociology of religion. His com-

parison between the works of Emile Durkheim and Max Weber provides an insightful reflection on the history of social sciences and the emergence of sociology and anthropology as two intellectual traditions marked by different focus and approach to theory (Chapter 3). Through a critical reflection on Jean Calvin's theological system, then, McCutcheon convincingly undermines the current understanding of spirituality as a new, unprecedented phenomena that is gradually supplanting religion, and unveils its nature as yet another social management technique or rhetoric whereby people signify themselves in contrast with a dominant mode of organisation (Chapter 4).

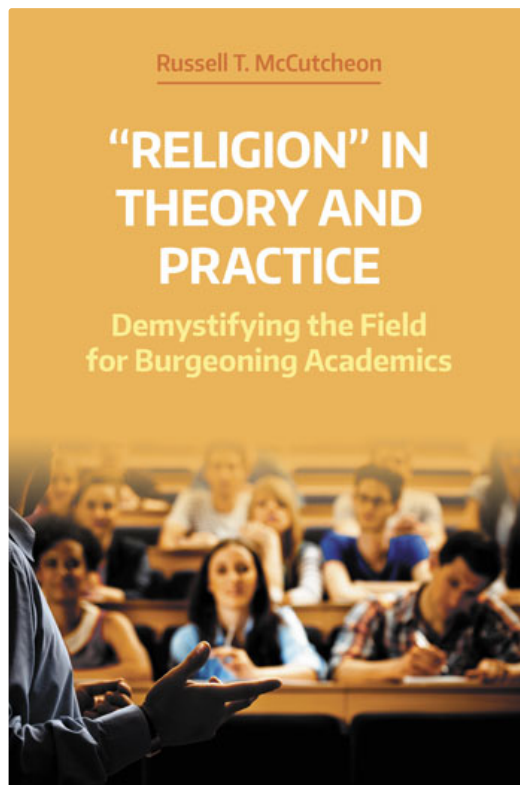
The second section, "In Practice", shifts the focus from theory to practical issues, examining a range of specific professional location—such as employment conditions, departmental relationships and cooperation, professional associations, introductory courses—to highlight some of the areas demanding reconsideration and restructuring. This section draws extensively from McCutcheon's professional experience to highlight pedagogical concerns and structural problems that require attention, and to suggest possible ways to address them. The issues examined range from approaches to introductory courses in religious studies, to curriculum design, integration of non-tenure-track staff in departmental life, and knowledge dissemination through online platforms.

The third and last section of the book, "In Praxis", contains twenty-one responses to McCutcheon's "Theses on Professionalisation" (2007). The responses—originally commissioned by Matt Sheedy for the blog *Bulletin for the Study of Religion* to a range of doctoral students and early career re-

searchers—reflect on the developments occurred in the years following the publication of the "Theses". This section offers precious insights into the shifting conditions and roles within the field, and the main issues faced by new generations of scholars. Among these, pre-professionalisation, i.e. expectations that job candidates who are not yet in the profession would meet its criteria (in terms of publications, teaching experience and so forth) is given particular emphasis. This section has the merit to broaden the conversation about religious studies as a professional field, opening up a space where emerging scholars can make their voice heard. McCutcheon does not discount the complexity of the problems presently affecting academia, which have developed

in the course of decades. While stressing that the institutional context in which early career scholars presently find themselves is hardly unique (157-58), he also highlights how this is also different from the one of their predecessors. The aim, thus, seems to be to create a fertile ground for discussion and cooperation between early career researchers and senior scholars, allowing them to join forces in the face of current challenges. As McCutcheon also noted in the previous section, while it might be beyond the reach of individual scholars or departments to annihilate the structural issues presently affecting academia, they can

still act to alleviate problems, and more importantly contribute to foster the critical reflection essential to the long-term reinvention of the field.



Aura Di Febo

University of Manchester / University of Leeds

J. LORAND MATORY, *THE FETISH REVISITED: MARX, FREUD, AND THE GODS BLACK PEOPLE MAKE*. DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2018

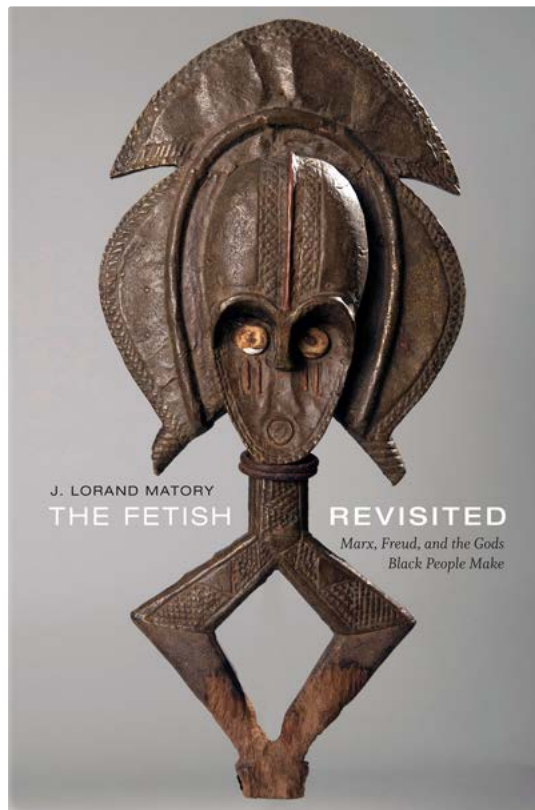
The influence of Karl Marx (1818–1883) and Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) on the academic study of religion has primarily left its mark on the way that scholars have theorized the field by broadening the scope of existing frameworks beyond intuitive accounts for the global variation in understandings of religion. Much of this process of developing and analyzing the category of religion, and the numerous theories related to it, has been based on assumptions that are rooted in the dominant normative discourse of Euro-American Christianity. In *The Fetish Revisited*, J. Lorand Matory demonstrates how the concept of the fetish was used independently in the social theories developed by Marx and Freud to reinforce Enlightenment ideals of Africa and Africanness as being a foil to Europe and whiteness. This is first done by appropriately contextualizing the theories of Marx and Freud in the Eurocentric thought that shaped them, and then by identifying false assumptions about race and religion that their theories authorized, particularly in formulations of the concept of the fetish.

The book is organized into three fairly separate parts with three chapters each. The first part is dedicated to Marx, the second to Freud, and the third to Matory's argument for how objects of fetish ought to be understood in light of the rituals and practice of various Afro-Atlantic religions. The awkward pairing of Marx and Freud is part of Matory's attempt at elaborating what he calls his hypothesis of ethnological Schadenfreude (p.16). This is the term that Matory has developed to describe a process by which "stigmatized populations

endeavor to escape their stigma and its related social encumbrances" by attempting to reconstruct their identities in the image of the majority populations who torment them (17). Though deeply interesting as a theory, the connection of ethnological Schadenfreude to the broader themes of the book seems to come across as rather speculative at times, and perhaps even irrelevant to Matory's entirely persuasive arguments about the fetish.

In part one of the book, Matory notes that Marx's critique of capitalism makes use of references to the "negro slave" as a pedestal intended to display the greater problem of capitalism, which is characterized as "the undeserved suffering and disenfranchisement of European workers," effectively as wage slaves (61). Matory shows how Marx continues his critique of capitalist exploitation by identifying a central flaw in the labor theory of value, which Marx ties to the capitalist's belief in an inherent substance of value that can be traded when commodities are exchanged (73). For capitalists, this seemingly mythological value is ultimately what determines how much of one thing can be traded for another, resulting in what Marx terms the fetishism of commodities, in relation to the process by which Africans assign value to fetishes (73-74). This is to say that for Marx, capitalists arbitrarily assign value to com-

modities in the same way that Africans arbitrarily assign value to fetishes, as part of the presumed spurious (religious and cultural) practices of Africa. Matory continues to elucidate the significance of Marx's deployment of the term fetish as a pejorative metaphor alongside other remarks that make it exceedingly difficult to ignore Marx's lack of alarm at the implications of his theories for Africans ensnared by Europeans and Americans in the transatlantic slave trade. From Matory's perspective, it is



not simply a matter of Marx disparaging Africans and African religion, but Marx also gets it wrong by mischaracterizing the role of god making for his analogy. Matory details how deliberate and purposeful aspects of this process may be later in the book (p.265).

Next, Matory turns his attention to Freud and psychoanalysis, largely through his reading of *Totem and Taboo*. He explains that key issues in Freudian thought revolve around a social, and presumptively evolutionary, distinction (195) between civilized people and savages, which subsequently allows additional hierarchies to be constructed (135). Freud thus proceeds to develop a new terminology around this hierarchy, beginning with his concept for base desires, which he calls the id. The id is then distinguished from other psychological modes of agency, namely the ego and superego. Matory contends that “Freud’s psychoanalysis is best understood not as an ethereal idea or disembodied philosophy but as a historically and culturally specific network of people, things, idea-images, conventions, and relationships, that enhanced some people’s forms of agency and value production at the expense of others” (105). This allows Matory to return once again to the notion of Freudian objects of fetish, which he elaborates in relation to Freud’s personal collection of Eastern and African artifacts. At the end of the book, Matory mentions, but leaves unexplored, Freudian fetishes in relation to the phenomenon of BDSM (bondage, discipline, and sadomasochism), which is the subject of Matory’s subsequent work in progress. In this work, however, Matory’s interest seems to lie in what he considers to be the duality of the master-slave relationship comprising the fetish that has come to characterize certain sexual rituals in (primarily white) American subculture, where participants don “black skins” in the form of leather apparel (p.321). Matory’s discussion here is enough to establish a need to reconsider the relationship between Freud, fetishism, and slavery.

The third and final part of Matory’s book is devoted to an analysis of real-life objects of fetish from Afro-Atlantic religious traditions. Here, on occasion, Matory’s commentary on the thought of Marx and Freud in conjunction with Hegel draws attention to the mutuality of the processes at play when a specific god creates a specific person, or perhaps a specific person creates a specific god, as the case may be. This enables Matory to resume his deliberation on the no-

tion of fetishes as he considers the relationship of worshippers and the worshiped, not necessarily as individuals but from within a social context. This includes ample coverage of various religious objects, originally intended for use in ritual, from the Sacred Arts of the Black Atlantic (SABA) collection at Duke University. In each case, Matory punctuates the intentionality of creating a fetish by fetishists, priests, and priestesses across the Afro-Atlantic, which lies in sharp contrast to the assumptions and subsequent characterizations of Marx and Freud about the gods that black people make.

One common theme recurring consistently throughout the book is that of ambivalence. Matory sees ambivalence in the theories of Marx and Freud, as he sees ambivalence in the production of Afro-Atlantic gods. According to Matory, the reality of the ethnological Schadenfreude that influenced the development of these particular theories of Marx and Freud was indicative of the ambivalence they felt as assimilated Jewish men of the time trying to get beyond their marginality. Similarly, in Afro-Atlantic traditions, the ambivalence of the religious community is present in the creation of gods and objects of fetish that embody both the ability to punish and to protect (300).

Matory’s book forces readers to rethink the social theories of Marx and Freud in unexpected ways and shows how some of the assumptions made by both influential scholars were self-serving and baseless. Although specialists might find Matory’s research uniquely illuminating and his attention to detail impressive, his overall analysis should still be thought provoking for any scholar of religion whose area of focus lies beyond the particulars of Africa or Afro-Atlantic religions. It was not necessarily the specific content being discussed, as reflected in the summary of the text above, that made the book so remarkable, but the treatment and analysis of the content that left the most lasting impression. Any reader interested in a highly intellectual critique of theory and theorizing should find this book rewarding, including (but not limited to) those comprising a specialist readership who are more expressly interested in the way that racial ideologies have affected how Europeans have thought of themselves in relation to Africans. The *Fetish Revisited* is not just a book about the gods that black people make, as the subtitle suggests, but is equally about the theories that white people make, in the sense that Matory

shines light on the inescapable role of race in shaping the Euro-American imaginary, especially in relation to Africans, during the 19th and early 20th century.

Adil Hussain Khan
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PETER HEEHS. SPIRITUALITY WITHOUT GOD. A GLOBAL HISTORY OF THOUGHT AND PRACTICE. BLOOMSBURY, 2018.

Peter Heehs's historical examination, *Spirituality without God*, comes at a timely moment in the discourse on spiritual practice. The idea that one can be 'spiritual but not religious' is not quite a brand-new thought but has become in vogue with the rise of New Age religious practices over recent decades. At the outset, Heehs reminds us that, in fact, those living without God—atheists and agnostics—are a growing group, according to data on religious affiliation. When New Age spirituality emerged, some of these new, or newly synthesised, practices were dropped on fertile ground; in many post-industrial societies, members of the middle-class bemoan their mundane and disenchanting lifestyles and are losing touch with established religions. Claiming to reject religion, outdated concepts of God, or God as such, these new spiritual movements have become popular approaches to soul-searching in which affiliation and external dogma give way to esoteric universalism and the authority of subjective inner experience.

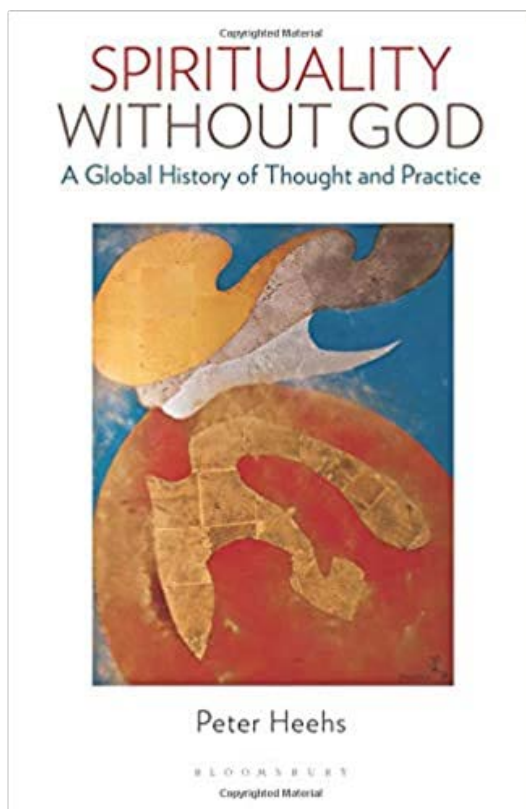
"When disbelief in God met subjective spirituality the outcome was spirituality without God"

(31), Heehs asserts, before taking the reader on a journey through 3,000 years of time and places on the Asian continent. Drawing on the Upanishads and Vedic literature, Buddhist doctrines, Jain scriptures, Chinese thinkers, and Roman and Greek mythologies, Heehs explores the non-theistic philosophies and portrays the rising significance of theism and its attached concepts of God, death, and the afterlife. His main argument is that the rejection of or indifference about God, while embedded in a spiritual practice, is not a new phenomenon, but has been

around since long before the New Age movement, way before Nietzsche, and without the terms atheism or agnosticism even being coined. Although some of today's largest religions (by number of adherents) emerged on the Asian continent, Heehs's historical exploration also shows us that Asia has been the place where nontheistic spiritualities were theorised and practiced as early as 3,000 years ago. Following up the history of thought and practice on spirituality without God, the book also explores the growing semantic gap between the religious

and the spiritual that has made both terms a rather conflicting, if not opposite, pair. 'Spiritual but not religious', as mentioned before, remains an important self-definition of many practitioners. Heehs goes on to explain how some spiritualities came to be, in essence, not caring, not needing, or rejecting (belief in) the supernatural.

Spirituality without God is an interesting, timely, and equally relevant read for the religious scholar, practitioner or layperson alike. Not least, it benefits from the author's in-depth understanding of—especially South Asian—religions and

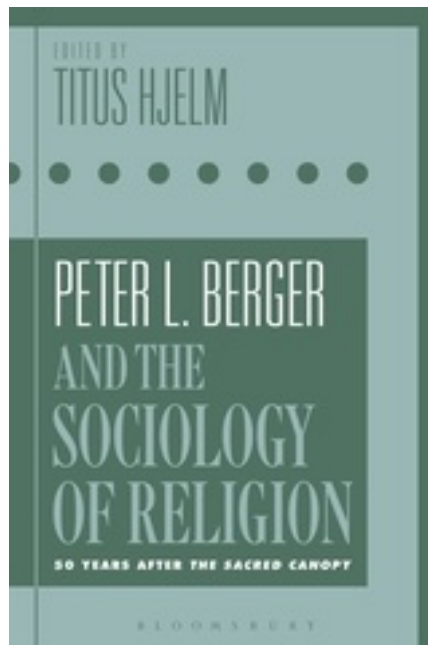


scriptures, which shows while reading and following his processing of a complex comparison of thought and history of thought. The many tales recounted from various traditions allow an emic glimpse at the traditions at hand through the stories and symbols of oral traditions and scriptures, and yet, Heehs writes in a refreshingly unengaged way, meticulously sticking to his historical method.

The book's focus remains on traditions that emerged from Asia, excluding others, for instance, from Africa, the Americas, Oceania, as well as Pagan traditions and nature religions. Yet, it provides a good overview and starting point to understand spiritual practice beyond the supernatural. It would be interesting to see a follow-up analysis in the (para-)psychological understanding of the supernatural, and the deification or de-deification of ideas, stories, and prophets over time, and especially since the Enlightenment. More recent spiritual and secular groups use their own understanding of sanctity, out-of-this-world, and holiness that have even been adopted by secular market logics. Has the idea of the supernatural or of God disappeared and become obsolete, or is it changing according to rapidly developing social needs and conditions? How does the supernatural connect with the natural? And will the supernatural eventually need to remain a distant, mystical, beyond-grasp entity to remain adore-able? In a documentary on India that I watched recently, the filmmakers portrayed Ganga worship and interviewed an environmental scientist who was working on a study on the Ganges river: "As a scientist", the man said, "I believe nobody should ever come in contact with the water of Ganga, it is dirty and infectious. But as a Hindu, I believe in its holy quality,

so I bathe in it every day". Ultimately, Heehs' exploration has made me wonder: if considering spirituality without God is not new, quite possible, and does not pose a defect, where does it leave us in terms of belief in the supernatural or God in theistic traditions and spiritualities that internalise the abstract supernatural? Is it a given, a need, or a choice?

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HJELM, TITUS (ED.) PETER L. BERGER AND THE SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION: 50 YEARS AFTER THE SACRED CANOPY. BLOOMSBURY, 2018.

Such is the influence of Peter Berger—both in the sociology of religion, wider sociology and in religious studies and theology—that this is by no means the first volume of essays to engage with his contribution to scholarship. It is the first to appear following his death in 2017, however, and the first the focus specifically on the intellectual legacy of *The Sacred Canopy*, the groundbreaking monograph Berger published over 50 years ago. The cross-disciplinary breadth of Berger's influence will ensure this volume attracts considerable interest, although it has a special significance for the sociology of religion. The essays all fall within this subfield, written by a range of authors based in the UK, continental Europe and North America, with each probing aspects of the conceptual apparatus that Berger outlined in *The Sacred Canopy* back in 1967.

Titus Hjelm has drawn together a collection that is coherent and compelling, covering a range of issues while maintaining a focus on Berger's landmark volume. Essays revisit the theoretical

context of Berger's intellectual development (e.g. Bryan Turner on the links with Arnold Gehlen's work on institutions) and the capacity of Berger's thought in advancing live debates in the sociology of religion (e.g. David Feltmate and Titus Hjelm on social constructionism and what it can learn from *The Sacred Canopy*). Feltmate's essay is especially instructive both for its exegesis of Berger's theoretical paradigm and for its identification of various possibilities for conceptual development, lucidly drawn out from a discussion of recent Durkheimian studies of the sacred. Other contributions retrieve aspects of Berger's thought for application to contemporary phenomena, underlining its enduring relevance. Especially thought-provoking is Riyaz Timol's chapter on Islamic Revivalism in the European context, which considers how a dominant secularism within continental Europe might be theorised as a form of 'sacred canopy', a 'secular discourse religious believers are obliged to navigate' (121).

For this reviewer, the stand-out essay is by Nancy Ammerman, who revisits Berger's idea of 'plausibility structures' within the context of recent developments in the sociology of religion. Ammerman's work on 'lived religion' has underlined the significance of conversation as a means of binding together members of religious communities. Summarising her argument, she suggests 'Congregations gain their potency as producers of sacred consciousness not through their exclusivity or high boundaries, but as they create spaces for and encourage opportunities to imagine and speak about everyday realities among spiritual compatriots' (33). Ammerman calls attention to the need for the concept of 'plausibility structures' to be both more clearly defined, but also more expansively understood. Alluding to the capacity of practices and experiences to embody meaning, she argues that the 'conversational plausibility structures we inhabit are made up of more than just words' (38). Such an orientation builds critically on Berger's legacy while also developing his insights in conversation with thinkers such as Talal Asad, effectively enlarging the scope of sociology of religion in capturing the nuanced ways in which religious identities (and our conversations about them) are constructed and maintained.

Several essays address Berger's legacy in terms of social constructionism, including the curious fact that, while *The Social Construction of Reality* (co-authored with Thomas Luckmann in 1966) offered a programmatic account of this approach which was applied and developed in *The Sacred Canopy*, the development of a distinct sociology of religion built on constructivist foundations was not followed up by Berger after this point. Hjelm explores this in detail in his second contribution to the book, arguing that the influence of *The Sacred Canopy* can predominantly be found within debates about secularisation and plausibility structures, to the detriment of social constructionism as an approach in the sociology of religion, which has received far less attention. Hjelm presents a number of possible explanations, including Berger's emergent preoccupation with order as a central sociological concern and his scepticism about the revolutionary politics of the late 1960s, both of which might suggest a disinclination to retain a focus on construction and contingency as a conceptual interest. But if Berger changed his emphases to reflect his politics, he did not avert the tendency of sociologists of religion to take the social construction of religion for granted in the decades since *The Sacred Canopy* was published. As Hjelm states, 'constructionism did emerge as an implicit framework for the sociology of religion, but its theoretical refinement has been waiting in the wings for a surprisingly long time' (174). Those wishing to take this project further will find a valuable guide in this edited volume.

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Members' Recent Publications

Brian Bocking

- 2020 (with Alicia Turner and Laurence Cox). *The Irish Buddhist: the Forgotten Monk who Faced Down the British Empire*. New York: Oxford University Press. <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/the-irish-buddhist-9780190073084>
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“Is Western anthropology, religious anthropology in particular, in its quest for the Other and for our very humanity, capable of discovering anything but itself—that is, anything other than than its own categories and its own ways of conceiving the world?”

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