



bulletin

British Association for the Study of Religions



139: November 2021

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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

Welcome to this edition of the Bulletin, from a newly constituted Executive Committee. We welcome Suzanne Owen into her new role as Secretary, Joe Webster and Mel Prideaux as new members, and also Theo Wildcroft who has now taken over the running of the Bulletin. We are enormously grateful to Bettina Schmidt and David Robertson for their work over the past many years, and are very happy to still have Chris Cotter, Steffi Sinclair and Angela Puca onboard.

I write after our very successful online 2021 conference, hosted by Edinburgh, and for which we heartily thank our colleagues there. The theme, panels and papers were timely, reflecting the need not just for reflection, but also action in our efforts to protect the academic study of religion within a quickly changing landscape for RS/SoR in the UK. Branding of our subject/discipline, fragmentation of departments and degree awards, and ongoing discussions regarding strategic partnerships between, and branding within, 'TRS' remind us of the importance of action now. This urgency is reflected in our membership, which now contains significant numbers of academics from very small departments, fused departments or wider 'schools', and 'unattached' or 'unsecured' scholars.

With this in mind, I wish my time in the chair to be proactive in growing and supporting our members. To this end, there are several themes or initiatives which the Exec will be pushing forwards.

Firstly, we propose holding a second annual event in addition to our conference. We are committed to in-person September conferences, but would like an online event in the Spring. The community and collegiality of the BASR is so important to many of us, that we wish to have a greater presence in the academic lives of our members. We hope these half-day events will include sessions on pedagogy, outreach/im-

pact and research. Funding will be available, and we encourage members to work with us to put on these events to the benefit of all.

Secondly, we want to explore ways of better supporting early career or unestablished scholars, or those working in institutions without the benefit of RS/SoR colleagues. This may well include increasing funding for bursaries, or using the BASR as a hub for joint student/public seminars, collaborative grant applications or publications. No doubt these ideas will evolve, and we welcome input from members.

Thirdly, we will work to improve the archive and dissemination of information on the BASR. With the planned completion of the History Project upon us, it is timely to improve our website and strengthen our online presence.

Lastly – but, for many of us, most importantly – we are determined to improve our contribution to, and reflection of, diversity in all its forms. Good intentions are honourable, but action is vital. The Exec will therefore be disseminating a Statement of Intent to explain our approach to this issue. Wider consultation with members will follow, but we need to take steps straight away, which will be reflected in the Statement. Initially, we will be ensuring that a commitment to diversity underpins our increase in bursary awards, our extension of invitations to keynotes, and our resurgent focus upon involving postgraduate students. We will, of course, be sure to take guidance from the 2010 Equality Act at all times. Much more work must be done, and we will ask members in the coming months to contribute to a more formal policy and to help with actions going forwards.

We will also fund each of these initiatives fully. Careful management of our finances has doubled our capital over the last decade, and it is

our obligation under the rules of the Charity Commission to spend any surplus reserves we have on our charitable aims.

We are also delighted to confirm that the 2022 BASR Conference will be held at King's College London, hosted by our colleagues at INFORM. The theme will be 'Religion and Public Engagement' and a full Call for Papers will be issued soon. We are delighted to be going to King's, and particularly thank Suzanne Newcombe for her work with the Exec.

I must, however, end on a sombre note. This edition of the Bulletin contains reflections and tributes on the passing of much loved and missed colleagues who have contributed so much to the study of religion(s). These tributes include one to Maya Warrior, about whom I should like to add my own words here. Maya supervised my slowly-assembled part-time PhD with enormous patience and good humour during her time at Lampeter. Her guidance and kindness have long stayed with me, and our lunches at Sospan Fach and our epic hours-long conversations on Vivekananda are

such happy memories for me. Early in my career, after I spent a couple of years teaching at Trinity College Carmarthen, Maya and I became colleagues when Trinity and Lampeter merged. I remember, soon after my PhD completion, that we shared teaching on a module about Hindu Ritual. Throughout the course, Maya always treated me as her equal despite my clear junior-status, and the moment that she introduced me to the students as 'Dr' Gregg for the first time remains a very proud moment in my career, which I am so glad to have shared with her. That kindness and support speaks to the woman she was. I was so saddened when Maya passed, and am very aware of the awful and unwanted irony of my first editorial as President containing a tribute to her. Thank you, Maya, for everything.

Stephen Gregg,
BASR President



news, etc

2022 BASR TEACHING AND LEARNING FELLOWSHIP

Each year, the BASR Exec awards a single Teaching and Learning Fellowship to a colleague in recognition of their contribution to the student learning experience in the study of religions. This Fellowship includes an award of £300 plus a funded place at the BASR Annual Conference. The expectation of the person receiving this Fellowship is to write a short piece reflecting on current issues/ experiences of teaching Religious Studies in HE for the BASR Bulletin and help the Teaching and Learning Rep on the BASR Exec, Steffi Sinclair, organise the teaching and learning panel for the 2023 BASR conference. However, there is a lot of flexibility in how this could be approached.

If you would like to be considered for the 2022 BASR Teaching and Learning Fellowship or would like to nominate a colleague (or have any questions about this Fellowship), please get in touch with Steffi at stefanie.sinclair@open.ac.uk. Your application will need to be supported by a statement that outlines the contribution the applicant/ nominee has made to the student learning experience in the study of religions in HE with reference to any of the following four themes:

- Influencing and inspiring students' learning;
- Influencing and inspiring colleagues' teaching;
- Innovation and development of practice;
- Personal reflection on practice.

This statement can be provided either by the applicant themselves or by a colleague supporting the application. The deadline for nominations/ applications is the 1st of June 2022. We welcome applications from/ nominations for colleagues at all stages of their careers.

PLANNING ONLINE CONFERENCES

The Covid-19 pandemic has led to an exponential growth in online conferences. While there are challenges, there are strong arguments for holding conferences online in the more long-term future in light of their environmental credentials, lower cost and potentially greater accessibility. Based on findings of a project led by colleagues at Religious Studies Department at The Open University (including Maria Nita, David Robertson and Stefanie Sinclair), a short Guide on 'Planning Online Conferences in the Arts and Social Sciences: Widening participation and improving engagement' has been put together with tips and tricks of how to make online academic research conferences more engaging. The project involved a literature review and semi-structured interviews with 20 colleagues at The Open University, who spoke about their experiences as organizers, attendees or support staff of online academic conferences. The Guide is freely available and can be accessed on the BASR website.

<http://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/FASS-Scholarship/how-to-run-engaging-academic-conferences-online/>

BASR ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – 13.30-15.00 - 07/09/21
UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH (VIA ZOOM)

Welcome (Bettina Schmidt). 48 present. BS welcomed all members, and particularly new members, and stressed she was proud of how inclusive the BASR was.

Apologies (Stephen Gregg). Molly Kady, Ursula King and Hugh Goddard.

3. Minutes of the previous AGM (Stephen Gregg). BS noted they were published in the November Bulletin. Accepted by members as accurate record of the meeting.

4. Matters arising (Stephen Gregg). None that are not covered by this meeting.

5. Presidential Address (Bettina Schmidt). BS noted again how difficult the year has been for members, and her Presidency, from Covid which has magnified pressures on teaching and made researching challenging. There have also been huge pressures on our departments and schools, which have often been merged, and this has impacted on degrees across the UK. During her term of office, BASR has written to VCs to support in-danger colleagues. This has helped in some cases, but not in others. Teaching and Learning has been an important focus in the Pandemic, and last year's conference was very well received and made an important contribution to this. Teaching has been affected, of course, including fieldwork for students. Support for PhD and ECR colleagues also so important, but has reduced during lockdown – BS noted she sees the BASR as a tool to help re-start proper support for such colleagues for jobs in the UK and abroad. BASR needs to keep raising our profile, including on REF panels etc. One challenge, however, was the BA Report on Theology and Religious studies, which produced negative publicity for our discipline from an unexpected report. The BA did not engage with the BASR at any point. BS noted she was invited to a meeting after the report was published, but not in her role in the BASR, but as a representative of a Welsh University – BS noted this was another example of RS being side-lined by national bodies. Exec agreed to invest money (approved at AGM) in a detailed statistical response to properly analyse data, which showed a clear difference between Theology and Religious Studies, which was not differentiated in the BA report, with numbers in Theology being in much steeper decline. Another issue was conflating UCAS codes. Afterwards, a meeting was held with TRS-UK, where some common ground was found, but where challenges also arose from different responses to both the reports from some colleagues from Theology, and those from Religious Studies. BS noted that the continuing relationship would be a matter for the new President and Exec. The BA also asked for a meeting, which was organised through DR, which was a positive meeting with open dialogue, with the chair of the BA TRS Fellows group, and two RS Fellows (Chakravarty Ramprasad and Douglas Davies). BS also noted that the BASR pointed out only 7 out of 64 Fellows were RS, but it was clear that the set regulations for appointing Fellows is unlikely to change this, or any other issues of diversity – for example, they will not take nominations from subject associations, and the nomination process from existing Fellows means a self-perpetuating profile of the current demographic of membership. BS asked members to think of BASR members when filling positions on national bodies. One last point was the challenging behaviour of a minority of contributors to the English-language mailing list of the EASR (Dolmen), which is the second largest language list of the EASR, after the German-language list. An ECR from the UK was attacked (ad hominem) by a series of posts by senior (and older) male members, which was clearly abusive in tone, and abusive of position/power. BS (and other BASR members) took the issue straight to the EASR Exec. At the EASR Exec meeting, there was an acknowledgement that action needed to be taken – they also adopted the code of conduct for conferences that the BASR provided two years ago to them. The EASR Internet Officer also suggested a code of conduct for mailing lists, and also suggested the merging of mailing lists, to be discussed at the next EASR in Cork. So, the BASR is vital in pushing forward these changes. BS was happy to remind members that the next EASR is hosted by our friends in the IAASR in Cork. 2023 will be in Ukraine, and 2024 will be in Sweden. 2025 will be an IAHR, with no

location decided yet. BS ended by saying it had been an honour to represent the members of her academic home in the UK, and thanked the extended Exec Committee wholeheartedly.

6. Secretary's Report (Stephen Gregg). SG noted that he had worked closely with BS and other Exec members in response to the challenges, including support of departments, responses to BA and TRS-UK, and support for individual scholars, all of which were covered by BS, allowing him to be brief. SG had continued to work with CC on membership, and kept members up to date on mailing list. SG noted he had been appointed to QAA TRS Benchmarking working group, but RS was poorly represented, with less than a third of the panel. Proposed new document has gone through two reviews, will be out for consultation in the future. SG asked BASR members to respond where appropriate.

7. Treasurer's Report (Chris Cotter). Balance stands at £22,964 as committee costs are zero, and travel bursaries are also zero due to online conference. Membership increased considerably due to linking conference registration to membership (72 new members) – largest increase in a long time. Around 2/3rds are directly conference related, and we hope to retain very many of them. CC noted RSP project did not ask for sponsorship this year (by error) and noted that SG has covenanted to seek support from incoming Exec to rectify this. Teaching Fellowship was also lower, as free conference place could not be given for online conference, so next year's will be three years' worth. Finances now back up to two years ago after the expense of purchasing data from HEA in 2020.

8. Teaching and Learning Update / Fellow Announcement (Stefanie Sinclair). SS introduced the T&L Fellowship to members – noting it was £300 for the winner, and a bursary-covered place at the next conference. The winner each year is asked to write a Bulletin article and organise a T&L panel in the next conference. This year's winner is Joseph Webster of Cambridge University. SS read a report on Joe's contribution to T&L (to be included in the next Bulletin), and SS noted that JW had been nominated by colleagues, and had numerous supporting statements provided by students. SS and the wider membership congratulated JW. SS asked members to think about nominations for next year, as we want to continue to support this initiative. SS also thanked last year's winner, Mel Prideaux, for organising T&L panels at this year's conference. SS also noted that there is an upcoming special issue of JBASR on T&L.

9. JBASR Co-ordinating Editor's Report (Suzanne Owen). T&L special issue based mostly on last year's special panel at the 2020 conference is upcoming. Will include reflection pieces. The next edition will be based on the 2021 conference, and SO welcomed attendees to nominate papers, and noted many members had their first article published in JBASR (Diskus). SO reminded members that JBASR is open access, and thanked JO'D for his assistance.

10. Bulletin Editor's Report (David Robertson). DR noted TW was taking over in Nov, and handed over to her. TW reminded people that book reviews were due, and members' publications were welcome. TW asked SG to write the editorial for the upcoming edition, which should be a full one. BS welcomed TW into the fold.

11. Website and Social Media (Angela Puca). AP noted she had completed her first year as Web Officer. She had responded to requests to update website, including bulletin and archive of bulletin. Social Media (Facebook group and twitter). She is monitoring Facebook membership to ensure people are academics or PhD researchers.

12. Religious Studies Project (David Robertson / Chris Cotter). DR passed over to Andie Alexander, RSP Managing Editor, who confirmed the RSP now has over 1,000,000 episode downloads. New season starts on Monday 13th September. AA noted RSP now has an Instagram account in addition to other social media presence. DR asked for new contributions from new people.

13. Nomination/Election of Candidates for Executive Committee: Secretary, Treasurer, Ordinary Member 1, Ordinary Member 2 (Stephen Gregg). One nomination was received for each position. Secretary (Suzanne Owen – Nominated by James Cox and Stephen Gregg), Treasurer (Chris Cotter – Nominated by Bettina Schmidt and Steve Sutcliffe), Ordinary Member #1 (Mel Prideaux – Nominated by Suzanne Owen and Dawn Llewellyn) and Ordinary Member #2 (Joe Webster – Nominated by David Robertson and Chris Cotter). Via electronic poll, members gave their agreement to all nominations and all four nominees were duly elected to their posts.

14. Hand-over to incoming President (Bettina Schmidt/Stephen Gregg). SG thanked BS for their work together, and noted several themes he wished to address during his tenure: greater support for ECR and 'unattached' scholars; public-facing events once a year, in addition to the conference, to raise the profile of RS; exploring ways of using BASR as a collaborative project/grant hub for members who may not be in large departments; and continued lobbying for RS to have a stronger voice in interdisciplinary and national bodies.

15. BASR Conference 2022 (Stephen Gregg). SG noted that the Exec are working with an institution to host 2022, but as they had not yet 'signed off' on the hosting, it would not be appropriate to publicise the venue at this time. An update will be sent on the mailing list as soon as possible. Discussions are already underway regarding 2023. SG noted that, although we have had excellent hosts in recent years, it is increasingly difficult to find hosts, due to the increased pressures on all academics and the continuing challenging landscape – which makes planning ahead where possible even more helpful.

16. Any Other Business (Stephen Gregg). CC informed membership that there would be opportunities for paid Honoraria for members coming up in the next year, as work needed carrying out on archiving old issues of Diskus on the website, and also the editing of AHA materials originally from Philosophy that outline strategies to protect vulnerable staff and departments, and which will be very helpful to BASR members if applied to our subject area.

17. Date, time and location of next AGM (Stephen Gregg). Precise details TBC through mailing list and Bulletin, however will be held during the business of the 2022 BASR Conference.

BASR TREASURER'S REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDING 15TH AUGUST 2021

Dr C.R. Cotter, BASR Honorary Treasurer, University of Edinburgh [online], 7th September 2021

1. General income for the year was £6,404. This is in line with most recent years (barring the blip of last year) and is entirely made up of subscriptions, 2021 conference receipts, and bank interest.

2. Subscriptions: Huge increase, of nearly £1800. This is to be explained by a) a drive following the 2020 AGM to re-enrol defaulted members, b) our "2021 conference is free to members" offer. Quite a few of those defaulting are active members so this should be easily rectified. We currently have 251 paying members and 13 life members. 72 new members joined in the past year, with 40–50 of these being directly conference related.

3. General expenditure for the year: £2,466, a decrease of approximately £6,500 on last year. Last year's expenditure was notably high, but this year's was notably low due to the impact of the

pandemic. Also, the RSP have not billed us recently, only one insurance payment was included this year, and there were no committee expenses.

4. Committee expenses are an unprecedented zero, saving us about £2000 on a typical year. Although these will rise again in the coming year with the return of face-to-face meetings, we are committed to keeping these costs low.

5. Insurance remains in place, with 2021/22 paid during this accounting period.

6. The BASR will continue to sponsor the Religious Studies Project at £500 per year, but this will come as a £1000 payment in the next accounting period to cover this year's missed payment.

7. Our subscription payments to the EASR and IAHR are down slightly due to our slight decrease in membership numbers at the time of payment. These will be significantly higher next year.

8. There is no entry in the accounts for our 2020 conference because no financial activity related to this conference passed through the books.

9. £480 was paid to a designer to produce a visually appealing version of our response to the BA report.

10. BASR members are reminded that they are encouraged to contact the committee if they would like small amounts of financial support for events. At present these will be handled on a case-by-case basis and judged against the BASR's constitutional aims. If the volume of applications increases significantly, we will need to develop a policy on such support.

11. Please see the AGM minutes for details of a couple of other opportunities for paid honoraria to assist the BASR with some tech-related work.

12. Bank Accounts: As of August 15th, Bank Accounts totalled £22,964, an increase of £3,938. This decrease is largely explained by points 2, 3, and 4.

13. Summary of Financial Position: Overall, the finances of the BASR are very good with adequate reserves, but we may need to be more conservative in the coming years. Although our balance recovered to almost the level it was in the 2018/19 financial year – which is good news – this is mostly explained by a massive reduction in outgoings due to the pandemic. This year, our healthy bank balance allowed the BASR to invest in the production of a response to the BA report, to maintain the teaching fellowship, journal, website and branding, and provide a well-received online conference hosted by the University of Edinburgh. We always welcome comment on spending decisions, as well as suggestions/applications from members for the future allocation of funds in keeping with the BASR's constitutional aims.



www.facebook.com/groups/490163257661189/



twitter.com/TheBASR

**BRITISH ASSOCIATION FOR
THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS
ACCOUNTS as at 15 AUGUST 2021**

	<i>Notes</i>	2020-21	2019-20		<i>Notes</i>	2020-21	2019-20
Balance at 16 August 2020		19026	23309				
RECEIPTS				PAYMENTS			
Subscriptions	<i>i</i>	5938	4152	Printing & Postage Bulletin		0	-121
Bank Interest		1	23	RSP	<i>ii</i>	0	-500
				Committee Expenses	<i>iii</i>	0	-1614
				Society Subs		-766	-789
				BA Report	<i>iv</i>	-480	-3547
				Insurance	<i>v</i>	-418	-811
				Journal		-398	0
				Bank Charges		0	-22
				Teaching Fellowship	<i>vi</i>	-300	-584
				Website		-103	-109
2021 Conference Receipts	<i>vii</i>	465	0	2021 Conference Expenses		0	0
2019 Conference Receipts		0	277	2019 Conference Expenses		0	-100
2018 Conference Receipts		0	334	2018 Conference Expenses		0	-872
Total		6404	4786	Total		-2466	-9069
Balance at 15 August 2021		22964	19026				

BALANCE SHEET as at 15 August 2021

Cash Funds: Bank Accounts

Lloyds Current	8714	7199
CAF Gold	10971	10970
PayPal	3253	832
Petty Cash	25	25
Total	22964	19026

FINANCIAL SUMMARY UP TO 15 AUGUST 2021

Balance as at 16th August 2020			Conference 2021		
Total Receipts		6404	Total Receipts		465
Total Payments		-2466	Total Payments		0
Net Receipts/Payments	<i>viii</i>	3938			
Balance as at 15th August 2021		22964	Deficit/Surplus		465

NOTES TO ACCOUNTS

- i* 72 new members this year (40-50 conf. related). Current membership 251 paying, plus 7 non-paying life members.
- ii* RSP forgot to ask for sponsorship this year, and Treasurer forgot to pay.
- iii* No travel to any committee or BASR-related meetings/conferences.
- iv* Design fees for slick presentation of our response.
- v* 2021/22 paid in this accounting period. 2019/20 and 2020/21 paid in previous accounting period
- vi* £300 prize paid to M. Prideaux. Conference fee pending in-person conference.
- vii* Various conference attendees not wishing to take the "free 1 year membership" offer
- viii* This was a fairly typical year, with high income explained by negligible expenses due to Covid-19 and large increase in membership subscriptions. Hopefully some of this can be retained.

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

features

Lessons from Teaching in a Time of COVID

Mel Prideaux and Stephanie Sinclair

A small but perfectly formed group of us joined together at the BASR conference to discuss what we had gained and lost during the pandemic and what we might gain in the future as a result. We abandoned the enthusiastic plan to use different platforms to prompt discussion. This decision proved to be a useful start for reflecting on the experience of the last two years – that sometimes the best laid plans just need to be abandoned in favour doing what's right at the time with the group in front of you!

We all shared a concern around student and staff wellbeing, and their mental and physical health, during and beyond the pandemic. Our ideas about how we might support each other and our students focussed on patience, kindness and understanding but recognised there were systemic issues on which we would need to exert pressure. Most of us also shared a sense of concern that many students' sense of belonging had been eroded by their experience, and that over coming years we would need to keep revisiting 'induction' in a way which would be quite different to our usual experience. Remembering that students might not have actually been into the library building, or have got used to the geography of the university or locality, would need to become second nature. Of course, we missed the corridor conversations with colleagues and students, and strangely we also missed our institution's terrible catering! We all took a lot of comfort that The Open University – which we look to as the experts in the online and blended delivery of programmes – had their own difficulties.

There were plenty of positives which we identified in our discussion. We're sharing them here as something of an aide memoire and also maybe a prompt as we all head into what will doubtless continue to be tricky times:

1. The way in which going online had increased access for a diverse cohort – for instance for carers who could access events from home or at a time that suited them – gave us all reason to think about how we can improve the accessibility of our courses for a diverse range of students.

2. The opportunity to run online visits and activities had increased the range of opportunities we could bring to students to engage with religion in the locality and beyond.
3. The rise of online worship means a huge range of material is available online for students to observe and analyse.
4. There seemed to be more opportunity for managing work/life balance for students and staff – and increasing opportunity for staff to be available to teach in geographically distant contexts.
5. Being online increased opportunities to have speakers from outside the institution.

What we all got from the discussion was the sense of being heard, and having our concerns recognised and shared. If nothing else, it is to be hoped that opportunities to get together to talk informally about the challenges, opportunities and excitements we all experience in teaching might be something we increasingly look for.

Colleagues also shared a range of resources, including

- International virtual visits through 'You Visit' e.g. Machu Picchu: <https://www.youvisit.com/tour/machupicchu?pl=f> - especially interesting for students to reflect on the "heritagisation" of worldviews/traditions of practice.
- British Museum resources (including <https://islamicworld.britishmuseum.org/>) and this timeline for students to use as the basis of their own timeline (and to discuss the problematic use of AD/BC!): <https://britishmuseum.withgoogle.com/>.
- A set of videos with guided 360° tours of 7 religious buildings in London that have been made available by the Open University: <https://openlearn.medium.com/exploring-religion-in-london-7d66e9fa1778>
- Ideas for an activity where students take and share digital photos of 'religion' as a way of introducing them to fieldwork at a distance (see: Stefanie Sinclair's and John Maiden's article on "Take a picture of religion: Engaging students in the multisensory study of lived religion" that was published in Vol 22 (2020) of the JBASR).

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 tw36@soas.ac.uk
DEADLINE FOR THE MAY 2022 ISSUE IS 30 APRIL 2022

conferences

BASR ANNUAL CONFERENCE, 6-7 SEPTEMBER 2021, SCHOOL OF DIVINITY, UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

The 2021 BASR conference was entitled “From Religious Studies to the Study of Religion/s: Disciplinary Futures for the 21st century”, and marked the 175th anniversary year of the foundation of New College, and the 50th anniversary of Religious Studies at Edinburgh. There was plenty of reflection on the past, on the contributions of the BASR and the University of Edinburgh to the Study of Religion in the UK – and beyond, as the conference was also an IAHR Special Conference, with many international colleagues participating. The organisers stated that, “After a period of sharp critique of many of the field’s basic categories and axioms, it feels timely now to reflect upon what the field has positively achieved, the challenges it has faced (and overcome), and the direction(s) it should now pursue.” And overall, the presentations and conversation looked to the future, where three themes dominated—decolonisation, knowledge and education.

The conference (the second consecutively to be held entirely online) opened with introductions from BASR President Bettina Schmidt, Head of the School of Divinity Helen Bond, Claire Wanless on behalf of the organising committee, and a particularly warm and enthusiastic note from IAHR President Tim Jensen. Parallel sessions began immediately, and throughout, they were organised into four streams—“Disciplinary and Interdisciplinary Futures”, “Methodological and Theoretical Futures”, “Pedagogical and Conceptual Futures”, and “Social and Political Futures”.

The first “Pedagogical and Conceptual Futures” session focused on contested concepts in the study of religion, chaired by George Chrystides. This focused in on the issues of terminology, in-

cluding terms such as ‘superstition’, ‘prophecy’, ‘belief’, ‘folk religion’, and ‘guru’. This session highlighted the need for care when using terminology, a theme which continued through later panels, and particularly the session on ‘indigenous religion’, chaired by Arkotong Longkumer & Bjørn Ola Tafjord.

This was followed by the first of two plenary roundtables. This first one focused on the contribution of the UK to Religious Studies, and featured a diverse range of scholars from different parts of the world and different career stages (though not, as one attendee pointed out, so diverse ethnically) to reflect on how the BASR and other UK scholars have impacted the international field today. The theme of decolonisation was highlighted at length within this session, especially in the sense of ‘de-centering religion’, and the need to move past colonial terminology.

There was a less optimistic view of the future in the second session, “Climate Activism and the Future of the Discipline”, chaired by Claire Wanless with panelists Todd Levasseur, Matthew Stemp, Maria Nita and Russell Powell. A strong focus on the body and ritualisation emerged, where embodied and network-based methodologies perhaps reflect new forms of technological and societal organization society must increasingly adopt. In the session “Exploring New and Alternative Spiritualities”, chaired by Angela Puca, the panelists discussed the history of occult culture in Britain, the relationship between the rhetoric of “cult” and the issues with the world-Religions paradigm, and what it means when the term ‘New Religious Movement’ is used when a group is not so ‘new’. The first half of the Pedagogical Futures panel reflected on the RE Commission’s “Religion and Worldviews” report three years on, and the second half looked at some practical ways in which this approach is being developed. What is especially ex-

citing about these panels—and the broader way in which the Teaching and Learning Officer role has developed under Stefanie Sinclair’s stewardship—is the involvement of teachers, scholars of education and people involved in education in a managerial or policy capacity. The dialogue this produces is inspiring, helping educators to incorporate the critical developments of the field, while goading us to think about education and how to communicate our work more widely.

Monday’s keynote—“The Collective Ownership of Knowledge: Implications for the Study of Knowledge for the Study of Religion/s in Local Contexts”—was given by James Cox, Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies at Edinburgh; After briefly sketching the development of Religious Studies at New College, Cox laid out his vision for the disciplinary future of the discipline. The discussion again turned to issues of knowledge, drawing on J. A. Barnes’ argument for a shift from knowledge-as-property to knowledge-as-power in *Who Should Know What* (1979). Invoking Cantwell-Smith and other scholars, he argued for a return to a view of knowledge-as-property, recognising the ownership of knowledge with those among whom we do our research, and involving them dialogically throughout. But, he asked, if intellectual property is jointly owned, then what are the implications for academic researchers? It only works, he argues, if the aim of research is seen as being towards enlightenment. But several questions were raised about how this model actually perpetuates Western concepts such as property and “enlightenment”, as well as constructing indigenous people as homogenous and ahistorical groups.

The final session of the day included a panel on “Interdisciplinary Encounters”, chaired by Bettina Schmidt. Barbera Berrocal presented a comparison of postmodern and Rabbinic critiques, focused on hermeneutics and the role of texts. Stephen Gregg’s talk on the politics of the Study of Religion highlighted how Religious Studies is dismissed by most institutions as a discipline in favor of Theology. The solution, Gregg argued, is a visible inter-disciplinary identity and a focus on lived religion to help ground the utility of Religious Studies. There was also a lively session on “Teaching in the Time of COV-

ID” led by Steffi Sinclair and the 2020 Teaching and Learning Fellow, Mel Prideaux. While we didn’t get the interactive polls and whiteboards we were promised, it nevertheless became a really useful workshop to share teaching ideas.

The most innovative part of the conference was the online RUINS video art installation, which “excavates the varied means through which contemporary artists re-mix, re-construct and uproot myths and religion from the past and catapult them forth into alternate futures”. It was ~~curated~~ DJ’ed by Michael Dudeck, who formerly received a studentship to the 2019 conference in Leeds, and he and several contributors took part in a plenary session chaired by Steve Sutcliffe. Oreet Ashery explained how her background led to the video “Dancing With Men”, in which she dressed as an Orthodox Jew at a gathering in Israel to celebrate the death of second-century Kabbalist Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. He ordered the celebrants to be joyful in his memory; but only the men may dance. The piece juxtaposed ideas of pious Orthodoxy with a rave atmosphere, and homoerotic overtones. Digital artist Skawennati presented her piece, “She Falls for Ages”, a sort of First Nation-futurism, combining myths and sci-fi, presented narratively as a machinima (an animation produced using computer game graphics engines). Silivia Battista presented “An Archaeological Excavation”, thirteen fragments drawing on mythology to juxtapose images with short, reflective texts on identity. The exhibition and panel was a pioneering contribution, presenting a possible future for new ways for scholars to carry out research, and new kinds of scholarly engagement with audiences.

Tuesday kicked off in the Methodological Futures panel with a discussion of “belief” in philosophy and religious studies by Jack Williams, arguing that we should view belief as universal, affective and embodied. Joe Webster presented on his attempts to read the Bible eschatologically with Jehovah’s Witnesses, and David Kim presented via video on the controversies over the political engagement with Confucianism in China. In the Disciplinary Futures stream, Marion Bowman hosted a discussion of 25 Years of Vernacular Religion, which took on a bittersweet note with the recent premature passing of Leonard Primiano, whose work (and

personality) was foundational to this approach. The session honored Primiano's work into popular religious practices and iconography.

This was followed by a lively roundtable on "Alternative Academia and the Future of Scholarship", hosted by Vivian Asimos of alt.ac. The discussion circled around new ways of communicating to the public(s), the realities of academic employment, as well as much broader issues of how and why the Humanities and Social Sciences are under attack. Aled Thomas and Dawn Llewellyn described how, despite the current academic climate, their students are driven and inspired, which informs how they tackle conversations regarding religious studies within public spaces, which can only be a positive for the future of the discipline.

The second plenary roundtable discussed international perspectives on the past and future of the discipline. These included discussions into the roots of the discipline in colonial ideology, with Afe Adogame questioning whether attempts to move past this have been enough. Carole Cusack described the situation in Australia, where the discipline is seen as connected to philosophy, sociology, history, etc, but an explicit disciplinary focus on religion is missing. James Kapalo mentioned how the political landscape in Ireland means that religion is seen as divisive, and tends to be taught in theological silos. Despite this, Kapalo stressed that decolonising Religious Studies is pivotal to future success. The talk ended on a positive note, where Terhi Utriainen described how in Finland, Religious Studies has been successfully incorporated into other disciplines, by shaping the discipline pragmatically.

The last session of the conference included a necessary discussion on decolonising Religious Studies. Hilde Capparella on how Rastafari spread globally, and how speech, language, and text have been decolonised, including adopting new Rastafari names to replace 'white' names from slavery. Jonathon O'Donnell focused on demonologies with Queer and Black Studies, drawing binaries between representation of demonologists and Queer and Black experiences in America, where they are presented as the 'other'. Jennifer Eggert's talk focused on approaches beyond the West.

Wanda Albert's closing keynote was an inspiring account of how she set up a new Religious Studies department at Leipzig University in Hannover, making the break away from Theology. She was polite but steadfast in her commitment to the independence of Religious Studies from confessional approaches, and the importance of the presence of robustly critical scholarship on religion in the public sphere. It was very gratifying that she drew repeatedly and positively on the BASR's response to the BA Report on Theology and Religious Studies, showing that the BASR is still at the forefront of debates about the future of the field, and deeply embedded with our European colleagues, regardless of Brexit. Because whatever the future of the discipline looks like, it will be international, and maybe even global, in one way or another.

Vishal Sangu (Wolverhampton) and David G. Robertson (Open University)

Image credits:

Cover - Chinese painting of birth of Christ, circa 2000, Unknown author

Page 4 - Buddhas for sale in garden centre, 2021, Marion Bowman

EASR, UNIVERSITY OF PISA, 30 AUGUST- 3 SEPTEMBER 2021

After about two years of online events due to the restrictions brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, it was exciting to learn that the 18th EASR conference would offer the option of attending the event in person. Indeed, the conference was held in a hybrid format with some papers being delivered online and some on-site.

The conference opened with the welcome speech by Paolo Maria Mancarella, vice-chancellor ('magnifico rettore') of the University of Pisa, who introduced the theme of the conference by tackling the resilience of religions in history along with Chiara Tommasi, EASR deputy general secretary and organiser of the conference. The talk was then followed by the welcome remarks by Kim Knott, president of the EASR, who highlighted the challenges encountered by scholars in Religious Studies as a result of the pandemic, rendering resilience an apt theme of discussion. Eileen Barker, after being introduced by Massimo Introvigne as a pioneer in the study of new religious movements, proceeded on delivering an inaugural lecture on the difficulties faced by first-generation religions and their more or less successful solutions.

Throughout the five days of the conference, there were about ten concurrent panels on each session, covering religious traditions and manifestations from numerous perspectives and disciplinary angles. Interesting to notice that some of the panels were articulated into multiple sessions, which may suggest a particular interest at this moment in time towards those subjects. As a scholar of magic practices and Paganism, I could not help but notice that quite a few panels were dedicated to Paganism, magic as practised across different traditions as well as re-enchantment, gnosis and other esoteric-related subjects. Indeed, the panels 'Resilient Esotericism' and 'Gods don't die' both were delivered over four sessions, but so were the panels 'Yes, we Jain!' and 'Resilience or Resistance'. Other popular themes, in my perception, were political perspectives on religion and the matter of change; namely, how religious traditions change and get reshaped to adapt or survive.

There were twelve keynote lectures during the EASR conference this year. On the second day of the conference, Vincent Goossaert discussed modern Chinese elite religiosity as a toolkit for withstanding disasters, Anders Klostergaard Petersen covered formative Christ-religion as an example of a resilient type of religion within Israel religion while Gerard Wiegers talked about prophecies of empire in the Medieval and Early Modern Islamicate and European worlds.

The third day saw as keynote speakers Annelies Lannoy on the spirit of progress and its changing faces in relation to Judaism and the dynamics of religious resilience in late 19th and early 20th-century Europe, Éva Pócs tackling the religious life of a community on the boundary between Orthodox and Latin Christianity which had preserved its traditions until the end of the 19th century and where religion is the most important normative regulating system of everyday life almost to this very day. In this session I attended the keynote lecture by Yuri Stoyanov on resilient diabolologies and dualist "heretical" religiosities in early to contemporary Christian contexts, that I found extremely interesting and well presented, arguing that diabolological notions and models have proved capable of assimilating new and changing religious and cultural currents, while also manifesting a capacity to endure transformations and resurface at times of major religious-political and/or socio-economic crises, including the recent pandemic.

On the fourth day, Miguel Herrero de Jáuregui gave a lecture on concepts and narratives of salvation in antiquity, Ruth Illman spoke on the varieties of vernacular Jewishness based on ethnographic research in Nordic contexts while Ina Wunn who tackled Richard Dawkins' theory of the selfish gene – that would prevent forms of togetherness beyond the closest family members – and how that theory plays out in religious contexts and ritualistic functions. The last day of the conference hosted a lecture by Johannes Bronkhorst on the resilience of religion across different ages and political regimes, Einar Thomassen addressed the changes in the very structure of religion in Late Antiquity while Mihaela Timu tackled the challenges faced by Zoroastrianism after the Arab conquest of Iran

in 7th-10th c. CE.

Given the numerous panels presented at this EASR conference, it would be tedious and endlessly long to cover every one of them. So, I decided to cover the session I was presenting in, part of the panel 'Resilient Esotericism' - organised by Marco Pasi and Henrik Bogdan - and articulated in four sessions on the second day of the conference. The third session was chaired by Manon Hedenborg-White and began with a paper on the resilience of Daskalos' esoteric teachings from the suburbs of Nicosia to the heart of Tokyo delivered online by Ioannis Gaitanidis. The following three papers were all delivered on-site, starting with Marco Pasi's account of the esoteric resilience in the religious history of Italy, spanning from the 15th to the 19th century.

Then, I delivered my paper on the Italian spiritist and medium Fulvio Rendhell, who developed a system of magic that goes beyond the practice of Spiritism and revealed it to be influential to other esoteric traditions in Italy, including contemporary Satanism. The session ended with a fascinating talk by Chloe Sugden on the Italian artist Chiara Fumai, whose radical feminist mediumship, showed how artistic representations play a significant role in the resilience of esotericism. I was pleasantly surprised by how well attended and received all the sessions in this panel were, which - perhaps, selfishly - makes me hopeful about the possible growth of this field in the future.

Academic conferences are worthwhile experiences not only due to the invaluable knowledge conveyed by scholars from all over the world, but also thanks to meaningful time spent with colleagues that often - when we are lucky - become friends. This conference was certainly not lacking in social time as well as occasions to en-

gage in conversations and get to know each other. With the conference being held in Tuscany, rich in breath-taking sceneries, the meals were a magnificent experience on many levels. The Italian cuisine, the delicious wines and the dining space being immersed in nature accompanied lively discussions with scholars of religions from various countries and different backgrounds.



Besides the daily meals immersed in nature and the coffee breaks, the conference dinner revealed to be an equally pleasant occasion to connect with other researchers and it took place on the second-to-last day of the conference in a restaurant near the conference venue. As an early-career scholar, I find it helpful and formative to converse with more experienced academics - who might share valuable knowledge acquired along their journeys - as well as connect with peers based on a shared, albeit unique, experience carving our path in the field of Religious Studies.

Overall, I have had a fantastic time at the EASR in Pisa and I would like to thank Chiara Ombretta Tommasi for all the hard work put into the organisation of a hybrid conference that, surely, presented numerous challenges making the conference as resilient as religion.

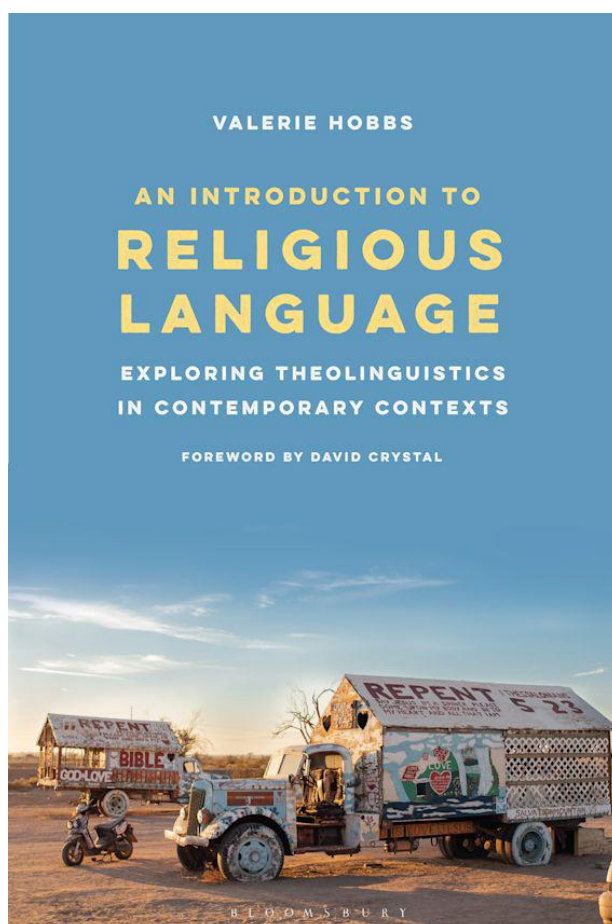
Angela Puca (Leeds Trinity)

reviews

HOBBS, VALERIE. 2021. AN INTRODUCTION TO RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE: EXPLORING THEOLINGUISTICS IN CONTEMPORARY CONTEXTS, XIX + 215PP. (PBK) ISBN: 978-1-3500-9574-8.

Valerie Hobbs' *An Introduction to Religious Language* is an accessible primer that draws from Emile Durkheim's conception of the sacred and Edward Bailey's insistence that Religion (with a capital R) goes beyond institutions and ritual practices officiated by virtuosi, but is also (and significantly) implicit in everyday speech, activity and interaction. According to Hobbs, "religious language is all around us", in "unexpected places like advertising, politics, news media, popular culture and even healthcare" (2). Religious language, for Hobbs, denotes not only a rarefied corpus or lexicon of special words and terms but also a general medium through which people, regardless of "religious affiliation or lack thereof", engage in "sacred-making through language" (5). Sacred-making, according to Hobbs, is a universal human disposition which, at moments such as conflict or bereavement, people articulate their "most fundamental beliefs and ... loyalties" (175). Hobbs' objective is to "propose a theory of religious language which extends beyond the language of devotion for a sacred supernatural to the depth and breadth of language that encodes what we value and what we hate and fear the most, both as individuals and communities" (176-7; see also xiv). In the process she offers a series of fascinating case

studies which demonstrate the explanatory depth and power of her approach which combines elements of corpus linguistics, discourse analysis and sociological functionalism to analyse the explicit and implicit religious language of billboards and advertisements, wedding invitations, prayers and obituaries. Each chapter is accompanied by pedagogical features including chapter summaries, suggestions for further reading and additional questions for discussion and exploration, while four appendices round off a series of features which will ensure the book's value to students and teachers alike.



Hobbs introduces her reader to some of the linguistic elements of sacred-making language including among others, vocabulary, archaism and intertextuality. Previous scholarship has included the drawing up of inventories of explicit and implicit religious words, from a narrow, highly technical vocabulary known to specialists, to a larger pool of words and phrases (or collocations) used most commonly in religious contexts and finally a wider, general vocabulary which are known to most speakers of a given language (83). In English, archaic religious words and phrases such as "ye" or "thine" function to generate authority by

invoking a connection to past tradition. Intertextuality by contrast, is where texts refer to other texts, both overtly through quotation or structure, but also through parody such as in the *Atheist's Prayer*, which adopts the form of the *Lord's Prayer* but in the service of critique. When combined, these different

lenses of linguistic analysis – when applied to texts from sermons to advertisements – can be used to address questions regarding a text’s intended audience and how it establishes authoritativeness and authenticity.

Hobbs is a persuasive advocate, able to explain the nuts and bolts of her “theolinguistics” (it’s in the title, but throughout “religious language” is her preferred delineation of the field) yet there are only the thinnest references to the theorists of language that one might have anticipated in a book such as this. For example, in a brief gloss of locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts (113), Hobbs does not mention J. L. Austin. Indeed, it is David Crystal’s ‘Foreword’ that does most of the work of situating Hobbs’ book in the wider field of linguistics, where he suggests that she has integrated the perspective of “structure” and the perspective of “use” by “placing the notion of context centre-stage” (xiv). To be sure, the academy is not exactly in desperate need of more vignettes of dead, white guys, but there are interesting ones that students arguably should be introduced to, among them Valentin Voloshinov who may or may not have authored Marxism and the Philosophy of Language and Ferdinand de Saussure whose most famous work the Course in General Linguistics was written by two of his students after his death. Both could easily have been summarised to illustrate the structure-use continuum.

Hobbs does an excellent job of showing how her approach to religious language is implicated in wider debates in Religious Studies regarding the delineation of the field and the definition of Religion. For Hobbs, religion goes beyond any belief in a supernatural entity or transcendental reality, such that the “study of religious language” reveals “the porous boundaries between the sacred and the secular” (6 and 18) and the wider “complexity and fluidity of religion” (17). Hobbs’ approach also contributes to debates in Religious Studies about religions and religious literacy, with the potential to encourage “self-reflection and dialogue among different sacred communities” (177) and “greater empathy” (178). This very readable book deserves a wide audience; there is much to be learned from Hobbs’ approach to religious language.

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WIEBE, DONALD. AN ARGUMENT IN DEFENCE OF A STRICTLY SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF RELIGION: THE CONTROVERSY AT DELPHI. TORONTO: INSTITUTE FOR THE ADVANCED STUDY OF RELIGION, 2021.

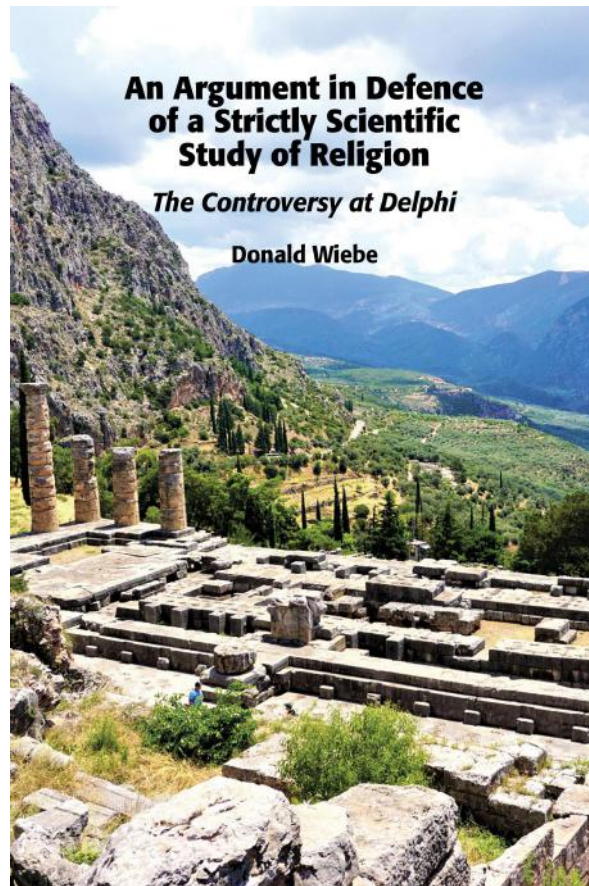
Don Wiebe’s reputation as a fierce defender of Religious Studies as scientific discipline is well known, and well earned. His extraordinary resignation from Honorary Life Membership of the IAHR in 2019 therefore sent shockwaves through the field. He claimed that the IAHR Executive Committee had, during a special summit involving an “Extended Executive Committee” of former luminaries, revealed their intention to abandon its commitment to the non-confessional study of religion. To many, including myself, this seemed to jar with the recent addition of the line “The IAHR is not a venue for confessional scholarship” to the constitution (since replicated by the BASR), and current President Tim Jensen’s energetic and firm rebuttal of the founding of the EuARe. A cache of documents from the meeting, released by the IAHR EC, did not do much to clarify what exactly had been discussed or why Wiebe was so outraged. Yet it cannot have been a decision which Wiebe took lightly, so while I was surprised that his explanation required a full book (more accurately, a long essay and supporting material), I welcomed the opportunity to fully engage with his reasons.

From the account given in An Argument in Defence of a Strictly Scientific Study of Religion (the details of which the IAHR does not seem to challenge, given that their documents are reproduced here), it appears that the EEC summit was called to address two challenges—the globalisation of the IAHR, and its declining “market share” in Europe and North America—and the future direction it should take. The first challenge has been a debated issue in the IAHR since Michael Pye’s tenure as President, and was a central debate at the Tokyo Congress in 2005 (as recounted in current Secretary General Satoko Fujiwara’s chapter in the Jensen and Geertz-edited NUMEN, the Academic Study of Religion, and the IAHR (2016, 391–414). The issue of market share was more surprising, however. As well as the EuARe, the EASR was listed as a competing group, with the comment that its conferences attract a larger attendance than IAHR congresses, as well as attracting international scholars, of the kind, presumably, that the IAHR intends to attract. One key suggestion to address these issues was the proposal of a name change to IASR (International Association for the Study of Religion).

The account that Wiebe present begins with Wiebe being invited to the two-day special meeting in Delphi in September 2019 (though not Luther Martin, who with Wiebe co-organised the Toronto Congress in 2010, and follow-up consultation two years later to discuss what was perceived as a lack of academic rigour in the papers presented). Wiebe was immediately concerned how little time was allocated to discussing the key questions, so asked to circulate a document defending the importance of a firm commitment to the scientific study of religion—which he frequently relates back to Werblowsky’s statement, contra Bleeker, at the 1960 Marburg Congress—as well as a precis of Leonardo Ambasciano’s *An Unnatural History of Religions* (2020). Following this, a paper written by current Deputy Secretary General Ann Taves was added to the agenda, which was presented as a response to Wiebe’s papers, but actually sets out Taves’ “world-views” approach. Wiebe then added a third paper, in which he rejects “the study of religion” as opening a door to non-scientific and confessional scholarship, and suggests the IAHRSSR (International Association for the Historical and Scientific Study of Religion) instead. Ultimately, to facilitate discussion, a further paper outlining the three potential “scenarios” was circulated: change the name to IAHRSSR and reassert the Marburg position (a la Wiebe); continue on as at present, as the IAHR; or change the name to the IASR and drop the Marburg position (a la Taves). Following the meeting, however, Wiebe felt that it had been designed to present the third option as a *fait accompli*, and it is this, with the dropping of the commitment to non-confessional studies, that ultimately provoked his resignation.

My take on the situation is that while I think that Wiebe has overstated some of the details, and per-

haps missed a larger context that makes the necessity of the debate more understandable, he is ultimately correct to be concerned. My main reason for that is that the position advocated for by Taves does indeed suggest making the IAHR open to confessional and theological academics, switching from a commitment to non-confessional work to “stressing the difference between confessional and non-confessional approaches”. This is indeed an abandonment of the Marburg Statement, and would be disastrous, even in terms of attracting members and making the IAHR more attractive to collaborations with academic and non-academic bodies. If you take away the one thing that makes the IAHR unique, what is left to attract anyone? The way to challenge groups like the EuARE or AAR is not to turn yourself into them, but to make yourself more useful than them. As Wiebe correctly notes, there are already-existing groups who support confessional scholarship.



Regarding Wiebe’s claim that the meeting was to rubber-stamp a decision that was already made, I am uncertain. There is not enough evidence here to challenge my impression of all the parties involved as fundamentally decent and committed to academic rigour, and most of what occurred suggests disorganisation and confused communication more than deception. That said, it is undeniable that the statement outlining the three possible “scenarios” uses biased language in favour of Taves’ position and against Wiebe’s, and it is highly problematic that she was allowed to be the main author of the supposedly impartial “scenarios” document at all.

In terms of the name, however, I think Wiebe overstates the degree to which “Study of Religion” suggests a desire to incorporate confessional

approaches—in fact, in much of Europe, it is preferred over the alternative English rendering “Religious Studies” for precisely that reason. Indeed, NAASR, which Wiebe was central to the establishment of, uses the same formulation, as does the publisher of this very volume. Similarly, I think he underestimates the degree to which History of Religions is seen as a toxic brand because of its associations with Eliadian Phenomenology of Religion, and its (at best) essentialist and ahistorical tendencies, and (at worst) pseudoscientific and religionist tendencies (a point which is, ironically, made in Ambasciano’s *An Unnatural History of Religions*). So I don’t have a problem with a name change, which would align the IAHR more closely with the BASR, EASR and NAASR, arguably the three groups most committed to the Werblowskian ideal.

Yet globalisation and decolonisation are real problems for the discipline. Wiebe does not view the definitional problems of religion and science as real issues, but they are at the core of the decolonisation. Religion is not a universal phenomenon, but a way of organising the world according to Protestant-colonial-patriarchal-capitalism. Science may be too, although we can at least establish testable criteria (note here that Wiebe’s is a natural scientific position, and he directly dismisses religionswissenschaft as describing his approach). Yet a “strictly scientific” approach (such as CSR) ultimately tells us little about “religion” itself, but instead only certain specific building-blocks which may or may not be considered religious depending on context—and that context is colonial. Thus, decolonisation in the study of religion either requires us to accept that scholars and/or can join the IAHR only if they use this colonial framework, or alternatively, the discipline moves past the colonial framework and therefore past the category “religion”. “Non-confessional” is all well and good in an episteme where “religion” is a private matter of personal confession, but doesn’t necessarily make sense in other epistemes. What, epistemologically, makes sub-altern knowledges different from confessional approaches? This is not to say that I think that Taves’ approach is correct, but I understand why she is concerned with this question, which is indeed an existential question for the discipline, and I think Wiebe misses this broader issue.

So, more than being simply Wiebe’s side of the story, *An Argument in Defence of a Strictly Scientific*

Study of Religion is an important part of the historical record of the development of the IAHR. Whether Delphi will carry the same import as Marburg did depends on what happens next. But this book is also a worthwhile read for anyone with an interest in the history and future of the discipline.

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RICHARD K. PAYNE, *LANGUAGE IN THE BUDDHIST TANTRA OF JAPAN: INDIC ROOTS OF MANTRA* LONDON: BLOOMSBURY, 2018. 256 PAGES.

Richard K. Payne attempts to re-embed the practice and theory of some forms of esoteric Japanese Buddhism in the wider horizon of the spiritual, religious, linguistic and ritualistic worldview that can broadly be described as Indic, covering a multitude of traditions and texts synchronically and diachronically from Vedic times onwards.

He attempts to argue prevailing tendencies in Euro-American scholarship that would see Buddhism as a religion that is inclined towards ‘mystical silence’ and quiet meditative practice (p.65). Citing the Jesuit scholar Michel de Certeau (p.40), Payne discusses the conflict in Western mysticism in which language is at times seen as the barrier to absolute truth, as it can never be expressed in linguistic terms. However, language and revelation are also often paradoxically means to access that truth. In his study, Payne attempts to show how practices of Tantric Buddhism in Japan have Indic roots emphasising language that have hitherto been neglected in areas of Buddhist Studies.

The book is neatly divided into thematically consistent chapters, starting with a more general discussion of what Payne understands by ‘extraordinary language use’, moving on to a more general discussion of the philosophy of language and how ‘extraordinary’ language, such as that used in Indic and Japanese Buddhist rituals, can fit into those categories. He focuses more particularly on the concepts and practices surrounding mantra and dharaṇī in Sanskrit, and daimoku, and nenbutsu in Japanese. Daimoku refers to the recitation of the title of the

Lotus Sūtra among the Nichiren sects in the form of *namu myōhōrenge kyō*, *Nenbutsu* refers to the citation of the name of Amitayus Buddha in the form *namu Amida butsu*, a practice found in the Pure Land traditions. These are described by Payne as examples of 'extraordinary language' as they are not propositional and do not convey information.

He then presents a cursory discussion of the Indic understandings, starting with the Vedas and moving on to Tantric traditions. The efficaciousness of mantras, he says, lies in their relation to the Vedas and how the Vedas are related to brahman—the absolute reality, which is at the same time the "word-principle" or "sound-principle" (*abdatattva*).

An important tradition to understand Indic conceptions of language and the power thereof is also *Mīmāṃsā*, which is an Indic reflection on the meaning of ritual in texts and arrived at the conclusion that speech, and in particular Vedic speech, is constitutive of reality and a correct knowledge thereof allows for rituals to be performed efficiently. Payne draws from the pioneering works of Frits Staal (p.30-31) who discussed the 'meaninglessness of mantras', which Payne distances himself from, saying that language that is not communicative can still be meaningful as part of a wider ritual action.

The proper use of mantra "removes all impurities, purifies all knowledge and leads to release.", influential Sanskrit grammarian Bhartṛhari also noted in his *Vyākhyāpadya*, as mentioned by Payne. Mediaeval *śaiva Siddhānta* also knows of the identity between a mantra and a deity, and in the properly non-dualist *śaiva* traditions, such as the cult around the goddess *Kubjika*, and broadly the *Spanda*, *Krama* and *Kaula* traditions, reality is seen as woven out of the Sanskrit

syllabary and mantras are used for ritual transformation.

Payne also usefully discusses Buddhist conceptions of language as encountered in Abhidharma literature, *paritta* protective recitations, and later works, such as the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* and the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, that are commonly associated with 'Mahāyāna' Buddhism, which show that Buddhism is not merely a mystical doctrine of silence.

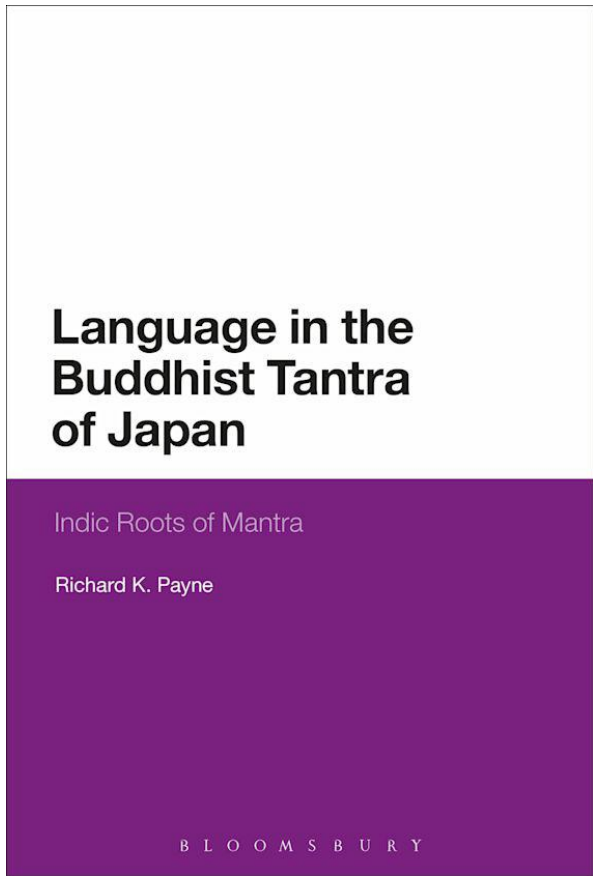
His analysis of 'extraordinary language' is intriguing, and it is difficult not to notice that he only mentions Ludwig Wittgenstein's conventionalist understanding of language once, in which "meaning is use". The use of these mantras is perhaps not as 'extraordinary' as one might think if used against a coherent

conventionalist understanding of language. However, he manages to differentiate it against 'ritual language', as not every use of language in ritual is extraordinary, or the notion of 'spells', which he finds to narrow and "semiotically paired in opposition with religion" (p.9) in Western scholarship.

To complete the picture of potential influences on Japanese Buddhism, and to more neatly distinguish between Indic and East Asian conceptions of language, Payne then discusses Daoism and Confucianism and their approach to language, such as the Daoist tendency to treat language with a degree of skepticism,

and the Confucian emphasis on the usage of the correct terms as a means of social order and cohesion, which would somewhat differentiate them from

Building on those previous discussions, Payne discusses the relationship between the emptiness



(*nyat* in Sanskrit, p.77-90) of all phenomena – a hallmark in many strands of Buddhism – and cosmogenesis as it can be found in Japanese tantric Buddhist traditions. He also discusses Buddhist epistemology, especially with regards to verbal testimony, in the works of such seminal Indic Buddhist thinkers as Dignāga, Dharmakīrti and Nāgārjuna.

Moving on from this, the book discusses more specifically the Clear Light Mantra and its role in Medieval Japanese Buddhist ritual where the practitioner undergoes transformation through the correct use of mantric verbalisations that is in line with prior Indic traditions.

Then the oral-aural authority of the speech of the Buddha is discussed which is reminiscent of some scholarly discussions by Peter Masefield or Paul Harrison around whether Buddhism could be seen as a religion of revelation due to the role of speech in relation to dharma or dhamma (Pali).

This is then followed by a discussion of *dhāraṇī* in the Lotus Sūtra, highlighting the Indic background of the power of words, which are here primarily of a protective or apotropaic use, rather than a soteriological one. Lastly a discussion of practice called *Ajikan* takes place, in which the syllable *A* is visualised as a means of attaining knowledge and liberation. Looking more specifically at two practices of *Ajikan*, Payne, inspired by Staal, puts forward two corresponding syntactic models of the ritual structure, which helps put them into relation to other rituals, Buddhist or not (p.143-148).

Payne largely succeeds in showing the continuity between Indic and Japanese forms of practice, with a particular focus on how important language and ritual are to these traditions. The study therefore helps the reader understand the importance of cross-cultural modes of analysis that help enlighten various traditions through their interaction. Whilst the discussion of Indic sources is cursory, it highlights those tendencies that could indeed be found in Japanese Buddhist traditions, such as the efficaciousness of ritual invocations, the general conceptions of language, and the relation between language and reality.

He is also successful in focusing on ritual and language, removing these Japanese traditions from the neo-Romantic and Protestantising tendencies in

some Western or Euro-American scholarship that would neglect the role of ritualism, 'magic' and language in religious practice in Shingon, Pure Land, and Nichiren, as well as other Buddhist tradition. This suggests a positive view of the role of language in the process of obtaining awakening or liberation.

There would also be fruitful avenues of comparative studies with regards to the role of the so-called 'barbarous words', that are, like many mantras, linguistically meaningless, but still play a powerful role in ritual magic in texts such as the Greek Magical Papyri (PGM). Here, one could perhaps move beyond the semiotic dichotomy between magic and religion. One might recall Matthew Melvin-Koushki's works on Islamic occultism, which highlights the 'letterist' traditions in Islam in science, religion and magic.

The book has extensive footnotes and a complete and helpful index that makes it easy to navigate the very compressed discussion of terms from several languages that one might not always be familiar with.

Overall, the book is a thought-provoking study that could be of great interest to those interested in ritual, philosophy of language, Indian and Indic studies, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Japanese traditions. The cross-cultural approach, which reveals a strong knowledge of both Indic and Japanese Buddhism, and relates them coherently to each other, could well be the inspiration for further research projects in that area.

Yannick Lambert,
Journalist,

Members' Recent Publications

Celine Benoit

- 2021 "I'm just British, normal British": Exploring Teachers' and Pupils' Conceptualisations of Religion(s) and Religious Belonging, *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 36 (2), 311-328.
- 2020 with Hutchings, T. and R. Shillitoe. (2020). *Worldview: A Multidisciplinary Report*. [Online]. Religious Education Council for England and Wales.

Marion Bowman

- 2021 'Trees, Benches and Contemporary Commemoration: When the Ordinary becomes Extraordinary'. *Journal for the Study of Religious Experience*, Vol 7, No 3 (2021): Festschrift: Essays in Honour of Peggy Morgan, 33-49.
- 2020 with Dirk Johannsen and Ane Ohrvik. 'Reframing Pilgrimage in Northern Europe. Introduction to the Special Issue', *NUMEN* 67 (5-6): 439-452.
2020. 'Rehabilitating' Pilgrimage in Scotland: Heritage, Protestant Pilgrimage and Caledonian Caminos. *NUMEN* 67 (5-6): 453-482.
- 2020 with John Jenkins. 2020. 'Leaving and Taking Away: Cathedrals and Material Culture'. In Dee Dyas D and John Jenkins, eds. *Pilgrimage and England's Cathedrals: Past, Present, and Future*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp 215-233.
- 2019 with Simon Coleman. 'Religion in cathedrals: pilgrimage, heritage, adjacency, and the politics of replication in Northern Europe', Introduction to co-edited, themed issue of *Religion* 49 (1): 1-23.
- 2019 with Tina Sepp. 'Caminoisation and Cathedrals: replication, the heritagisation of religion, and the spiritualisation of heritage' *Religion* 49 (1): 74-98.
- 2019 with Simon Coleman, John Jenkins and Tiina Sepp. 'Visibly different: Continuity and change at Westminster Cathedral'. In David Goodhew and Anthony-Paul Cooper, eds. *The Desecularisation of the City: London's Churches, 1980 to the Present* London: Routledge, pp 300-327.
- 2019 with Simon Coleman, John Jenkins and Tiina Sepp. 'A Cathedral Is Not Just for Christmas: Civic Christianity in the Multicultural City' In Pamela E. Klassen and Monique Scheer, eds. *The Public Work of Christmas: Difference and Belonging in Multicultural Societies*. McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, pp. 240-261.

George D. Chryssides

- 2021 "Charisma—Elusive or Explanatory? A Critical Examination of Leadership in New Religious Movements." *Fieldwork in Religion* 16(1): 35-54.
- 2021 "Handling Things Unseen: Tactile Aspects of the Christian Faith"; in Welch, Christina and Amy R Whitehead, *Religion and Touch*. Sheffield UK: Equinox: 253-275.
- 2021 *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter. Entries on: Migration III.D.; Milk and Honey, Land Flowing with III.D; Minister, Ministry IV.E; Miracles V.D.; Misogyny IV.D.; Molech, Moloch III.D; Monasteries II.F.; Monasticism I.E; Moneylending V.D; Monotheism V.D; Moon, Sun Myung; Morning Star IV.D; Mother, Mothers, Motherhood V.F.; Mourning V.D. Vol.19: 83-84; 134-136; 225-226; 283-285; 409-410; 670-671; 704-705; 725-727; 783-784; 881-883; 978-979; 1045-1046; 1226-1228; 1328-1329.

James L. Cox

- 2021 'Indigenous Religions of Oceania: Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific Islands'. In G. N. Devy and Geoffrey V. Davis (eds). *Environment and Belief Systems (Key Concepts in Indigenous Studies, Vol. 1)*, pp. 91-114. London and New York: Routledge.
- 2021 'What Makes an Experience "Religious"? The Necessity of Defining Religion', *Journal for the Study of Religious Experience* 7 (3): 73-90.
- 2019 'Religion as the Transmission of an Authoritative Tradition: The Significance of Timothy Fitzgerald's Critique of Religious Studies for a Socially Embedded Definition of Religion', *Implicit Religion: Journal for the Critical Study of Religion* 22 (3-4); 331-348.

Carole M. Cusack

- 2021 "Between Sea and Land: Geographical and Literary Marginality in the Conversion of Medieval Frisia," *Religions*, Vol. 12, No. 8, 580, 2021. Special Issue: The Many Faces of Faith: Celtic and Germanic Christianity in the Middle Ages edited by Samuel J. Youngs, Bryan College, Dayton TN.
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- 2021 "The New Spiritual Marketplace: Comparing New Age and New Religious Movements in an Age of Spiritual and Religious Tourism", in Daniel H. Olsen and Dallen J. Timothy (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Religious and Spiritual Tourism*, London and New York, Routledge, pp. 79-89.
- 2021 with M. Afzal Upal (eds), *Handbook of Islamic Sects and Movements*, Leiden and Boston, Brill.

- 2021 "Gurdjieff and Sufism: A Contested Relationship," in Afzal Upal and Carole M. Cusack (eds), *Handbook of Islamic Sects and Movements*, Leiden and Boston, Brill, pp. 612-631.
- 2021 "Norman Paulsen and the Brotherhood of the Sun/ Sunburst," in Benjamin E. Zeller (ed.), *Handbook of UFO Religions*, Leiden and Boston, Brill, pp. 354-368.
- Denise Cush
- 2021 'Is Buddhism a Religion?' and 'Should Buddhism be taught in schools?' In. E.Harris (ed.) *Buddhism in 5 minutes*. Sheffield: Equinox
- 2021 with Robinson, C. 'Buddhism isn't a religion but Paganism is' The applicability of the concept of 'religion' to Dharmic and Nature-based traditions, and the implications for religious education'. In P. Hannam and G. Biesta, (eds.) *Religion and Education: The Forgotten Dimensions of Religious Education?* Leiden: Brill|Shine.
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- 2021 with Francis, D. 'Solarity: The Story So Far' *Sofia*, 141: 16-18.
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- 2020 'Buddhist Worldview Traditions' *RE:ONLINE*, a 20,000 word article mainly for teachers.
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Graham Harvey

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Michael T. Miller

- 2021 "Ben Ammi's Adaptation of Veganism in the Theology of the African Hebrew Israelites" *Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society* 7.2
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Georgios E. Trantas

- 2021 'East Meets West: Glocality and the Lieu de Mémoire within the Greek-Orthodox Migrant Religioscapes of Germany'. In: Matevski, Z. (ed.) *The Role of Religion in Peace and Conflict*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing. pp.27-37.

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- 2020 'The Vision of the 'Byzantine Commonwealth' as Model for Religiocultural Diplomacy and the Case of the Greek Orthodox Church under Archbishop Christodoulos (1998–2008)'. *Politics, Religion and Ideology*, 21 (1). pp.24-45.
- 2020 'Greek-Cypriot Religiocultural Heritage as an Indicator of Fundamental Rights and a Means to Cultural Diplomacy'. In: Giordan G. & Zrinš ak S. (eds.). *Global Eastern Orthodoxy: Politics, Religion, and Human Rights*. Cham: Springer. pp.149-171.
- 2020 'The Orthodox Church of Greece: Church-State Relations, Migratory Patterns and Sociopolitical Challenges'. In: Leustean L.N. (ed.). *Forced Migration and Human Security in the Eastern Orthodox World*. [Routledge Religion, Society and Government in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet States]. London: Routledge. pp.164-206.
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Theo Wildcroft

- 2020 *Post-lineage Yoga: From Guru to #MeToo* (Equinox Publishing).
- 2020 'Re-telling the self in personal practice.' In Alice Lagaay (ed.) *Routledge Handbook of Performance Philosophy* (Routledge).
- 2020 'Post-lineage yoga: adventures in social media', *Journal of the British Association for the Study of Religion*.

obituaries

Leonard Norman Primiano

11 January 1957 - 25 July 2021



Leonard Primiano, Cabrini College, 1995. Photograph courtesy of Dawnielle Marie Phil. This was the photograph Leonard himself chose to be displayed at his Funeral Mass at Daylesford Abbey on September 11, 2021.

I first met Leonard in the summer of 1995, when we were both conducting research in Newfoundland, and it was whatever the academic equivalent of 'love at first sight' might be. Those few overlapping weeks in Newfoundland were both intellectually stimulating and utterly hilarious, and we were close friends from then on.

Of Italian and Polish heritage, Leonard Norman Primiano was born on 11 January 1957 in Philadelphia, a city he loved throughout his life. Leonard was awarded a BA in Religious Studies from the University of Pennsylvania (1978) and a Master of Theological Studies from Harvard Divinity School (1980), and then returned to the University of Pennsylvania for both the MA in Folklore and Folklife (1982) and a dual doctorate in Religious Studies and Folklore and Folklife Studies (1993). His great mentor at University of Pennsylvania was the influential scholar of religious folklife, Don Yoder. In 1993 Leonard started lecturing at the Roman Catholic Cabrini University (originally Cabrini College) in Radnor, Pennsylvania, eventually serving as Department Chair and Professor of Religious Studies there until 2021. He also taught at Memorial University of Newfoundland and the University of Pennsylvania.

Instrumental in establishing the Folk Belief and Religious Folklife section of the American Folklore Society (of which he was an elected Fellow), and the Folklore and Religion Seminar of the American Academy of Religion, Leonard perceived the enormous potential in folklore studies and religious studies sharing methodological and disciplinary insights to better understand 'religion as it is lived: as human beings encounter, understand, interpret, and practice it' (1995: 44). Leonard was also exceptionally engaged in European scholarship; his involvement in the 2nd second symposium of the SIEF (International Society for Ethnology and Folklore) Commission of Folk Religion in Portugal (1996) led to significant European connections and friendships.

Leonard Primiano is probably best known in British religious studies circles for his 1995 article "Vernacular Religion and the Search For Method in Religious Folklife," (*Western Folklore*, 54: 37-56) which brought about significant refocussing in both religious studies and folklore studies/ ethnology in relation to how we might describe, study, conceptualise and engage with the messy, complex and creative reality of the ways in which people do religion in their everyday lives. However, there was so much more to this remarkable man and his scholarly achievements than this one article, and he continued to write about vernacular religion almost until the end of his life. (A chapter by him will appear posthumously in *Vernacular Knowledge: Contesting Authority, Expressing Beliefs*, a volume I am co-editing with Ülo Valk that will now be dedicated to Leonard.)

Leonard was a prolific author and authority in many fields. For his PhD dissertation Leonard wrote about the Philadelphia chapter of the gay and lesbian Roman Catholic organisation Dignity during the AIDS crisis, an experience which had a profound impact on how he conceptualised vernacular religion. He studied extensively the material culture of vernacular Catholicism, but also researched 'Sister' Ann Ameen, an independent evangelical Newfoundland religious folk artist and her vibrant, idiosyncratic rugs.

Leonard invariably prefaced any communication with 'Peace!', having worked closely and sensitively for decades with the racially mixed, Philadelphia-based community of Father Divine's International Peace Mission Movement for whom this was a standard greeting. He not only wrote about the movement, its foodways and its material culture academically but co-produced with Will Luers *The Father Divine Project*, a documentary series of podcasts about Father Divine, Mother Divine, and the Peace Mission Movement, which constitutes an invaluable oral history resource.

These examples merely scratch the surface of a rich and varied body of work, some of which will be brought together in a collection entitled *Vernacular Religion: Collected Essays of Leonard Norman Primiano*, to be published by New York University Press in 2022, edited by a group of American Religion friends and scholars as a tribute to his significant contributions to religious and folklore studies.

Leonard's passion for material culture was gargantuan, both personally and professionally. His home and office overflowed with artefacts and artwork. He developed and curated Cabrini's Religious Folk, Popular, Liturgical Arts Collection from its inception in 2002 and, to his great satisfaction, coordinated in 2006 the acquisition of The Don Yoder Collection of Religious Folk Art. He curated a number of innovative exhibitions, including the travelling exhibition based on his personal collection of Italian ex-voto paintings, "Graces Received: Painted and Metal Ex-Votos from Italy" which was first exhibited in New York City and subsequently seen at various US venues before being displayed at Cabrini in 2014.

Leonard was a consummate communicator, both as a companion vivaciously discussing mutual interests, and as a deeply committed, demanding and effective lecturer; The Kennedy Center/Stephen Sondheim Inspirational Teacher Award (2014) was among his many accolades and awards. Following his death, numerous former students have written movingly of what a great influence and inspiration he was for them. For such a talented communicator, the diagnosis of, and surgery for, oesophageal cancer in 2006 seemed a particularly cruel blow, but with extraordinary resilience and determination he mastered the necessary technology, regained his confidence, and continued to research enthusiastically and lecture engagingly and authoritatively. Despite the initially odd effect of the electronic voice, his humour, personality and passion shone through.

In relation to conferences, seminars and invited lectures, Leonard was a tireless international traveller, invariably accompanied by astonishingly large quantities of luggage. Leonard's lively, often amusing but always meticulously researched conference papers were 'must sees' for many, for example at the conferences of the American Folklore Society (AFS) and the American Academy of Religion (AAR), and SIEF Folk Religion (later renamed Ethnology of Religion) events. It is partly through such appear-

ances that many first encountered the concept of vernacular religion which has gained such traction internationally.

Folklore and Religious Studies have benefitted immensely from Leonard Primiano's innate curiosity, his articulation of vernacular religion (which is NOT a synonym for folk religion!), his detailed study of material religion, and his determination to celebrate individual religious creativity as an exemplar of agency that complements the dynamics involved in collective acts and manifestations of religiosity. Future studies in vernacular Catholicism and vernacular religion will be promoted by awards to be administered by the AFS Folk Belief and Religious Folklife Section established in his memory, and the completion by friends and colleagues of a number of publications Leonard was working on at the time of his death.

One of the best dressed men in academia, and passionately fond of orchestral music and opera, Leonard was witty and mischievous with a great sense of humour. He was unfailingly supportive and generous both with his time and his enormous, eclectic knowledge. Leonard had an immense gift for friendship and inspired huge affection across a considerable range of people, all of whom have benefitted significantly from knowing this delightful, brilliant and resilient man.

Marion Bowman



Leonard Primiano at the Woodmont premises of Father Divine's International Peace Mission Movement, 2017. Photograph courtesy of Katie Reing.

Maya Warriier

28 September 1970 – 24 September 2021



The British Association for the Study of Religions was deeply saddened to receive news of the death of Dr Maya Warriier, on September 24th 2021, after a long illness. Maya will be remembered as an accomplished anthropologist and Indologist, a caring and empowering teacher, and as a friend and mentor to many of us in the BASR community.

Maya had retired in 2020, on health grounds, from her post as Reader in Religious Studies at the University of Winchester, where she had also been Head of Department until 2019. Prior to moving to Winchester, she had been at the University of Wales Lampeter, her first position after receiving her PhD from the University of Cambridge.

Back in the year 2000, Maya and I both went for the same job; a vacancy at the University of Wales, Lampeter opened by the departure of Gavin Flood. I was bowled over by Maya's warmth and generosity from the moment I met her on the day of the interviews. She (rightly) got the job, but I was lucky enough, the following year, to get another post in the same department and we became colleagues and firm friends, having offices next door to each other for much of the next decade.

Maya's first book, based on her PhD, *Hindu Selves in a Modern World: Guru Faith in the Mata Amritanandamayi Mission*, published by Routledge in 2004, was about the lives of urban, middle-class devotees in a transnational bhakti tradition. Following that publication, Maya went on to have a wonderfully productive collaboration with John Zavos at Manchester, resulting in their work with colleagues on "Public Hinduisms" and the development of a methodology that she went on to use in her work in other settings, for example in her work on the West Wales temple of Skanda Vale, and its deployment of 'Hindu' identity around the threat to life of the temple's beloved bull, Shambo.

In the mid-noughties, with then-Lampeter theologian Simon Oliver, Maya co-founded a ground-breaking seminar series at Lampeter around the disciplinary disputes between Theology and Religious Studies. She argued for a better understanding of what was at stake in our disciplinary disagreements and was willing to do the hard work to achieve that. An edited volume *Theology and Religious Studies: An Exploration of Disciplinary Boundaries* followed from that collaboration, and was published in 2008 by T&T Clark.

Later in her career, with a prestigious grant from the Wellcome Trust, Maya worked on transnational Anglophone Ayurveda. Her last publication is *A Cultural History of Hinduism in the Age of Independence (1947-2017)* - Volume VI of *A Cultural History of Hinduism* - which she co-edited with Amanda Lucia (Bloomsbury, in press).

From Winchester, Professor Anna King writes. "As a scholar Maya was a meticulous researcher whose publications show extraordinary clarity, insight and intelligence. As a teacher she was loved for her gentleness, warmth and sense of humour. As a colleague and mentor, she was calm, generous, and professional. All who knew her in the university were left stunned and deeply saddened by her death. The university flag flew at half-mast in her honour. Those of us who knew Maya will miss her as a gracious, wise, and courageous friend."

On behalf of the department at Winchester, Prof Neil Messer writes: "Maya made a tremendous contribution to the Department of Theology, Religion and Philosophy at the University of Winchester. As Head of Department from 2015–19, her quiet, collaborative and clear-sighted leadership style was valued by colleagues within and beyond the department. Her teaching was very well received by her students, and her personal research activity as well as her academic leadership made an important contribution to the department's research activity and culture. Over and above these specific contributions, however, those who knew and worked with Maya in Winchester valued her as a friend, whose gentleness, kindness, graciousness and integrity are fondly remembered by all her colleagues."

On receiving news of her death, many of Maya's students left warm comments on social media or wrote to their departments indicating the various ways she inspired and empowered them. A former undergraduate said, "Maya was the person that made me a lot more open minded. I remember turning up to a lecture with her and she managed to make me really reflect on a lot of my ideals and principles. Maya is the reason I'm now teaching religious studies as a secondary school teacher and have been for some years. I hope to impassion my students in the same way she did me ten years ago."

One of her graduate students said, "She possessed a unique combination of the qualities of an exceptional teacher: genuine compassion, psychological perceptiveness and absolute academic rigour. I miss her warmth and understanding, and her acute, and rare, shining intelligence that she put so freely and generously at my disposal. Her impact on my life has been enormous."

Colleagues and students across the sector have been in touch with memories of Maya as a teacher, scholar, mentor, supervisor, external examiner, and as a friend; all speaking of her integrity, fairness, humour, warmth, gentleness, openness, modesty, and her incredible courage. All these messages have been shared with Maya's family.

Like many others, my life has been enriched from knowing Maya, with her warm smile, mischievous sense of humour, her tales of Kerala, and beautiful turns of phrase. Maya's modesty was deep and genuine. She never took herself too seriously. Yet she always challenged me to be better, just by being herself. My thoughts, and those of BASR colleagues, are with her much-loved family, and with the many students, colleagues and friends whose lives she touched, and who will feel her loss keenly.

Wendy Dossett

Andrew Walls

21 April 1928 – 12 August 2021



Professor Andrew Walls, church historian, missiologist, Africanist, scholar of Indigenous Religions and former President of the British Association for the History of Religions (BAHR), now the British Association for the Study of Religions (BASR), died on 12 August 2021 in Aberdeen at the age of 93. In recent years, he was best known internationally for his respected work on the study of Christian missions, but his important impact on Religious Studies often is underestimated, or even overlooked. In this short article, I want to add to the many tributes Andrew Walls received following his death by drawing the attention of students of religion to the significant contribution he made in the formation of Religious Studies in the UK and to the study of Indigenous Religions globally.

In 1957, Walls was appointed to a lectureship in Church History in the Department of Theology at the University of Sierra Leone. In 1962, he moved to the University of Nigeria in Nsukka, where he headed the Department of Religious Studies, which had been recently founded. He returned to the UK from Nigeria in 1966 to take up a post in Ecclesiastical History in the University of Aberdeen. Four years later, he established the first department of Religious Studies in Scotland at Aberdeen in the Faculty of Arts and Social Studies rather than the Faculty of Divinity, where it might have been expected to have been located. Walls described the purpose of the new department as 'the study of religion, in its own terms and in its social, phenomenological and historical aspects' (Walls 1990a: 42). Walls soon became known in Religious Studies circles as a scholar of religion with a specialisation in the study of Christianity in Africa. After he became President of the BAHR in 1977, he made an immediate impact by organising the BAHR Annual Conference of 1978 on the theme: 'The Understanding of Christian Mission in the Study of Religion'.

A special edition of the journal *Religion*, published in 1980, was dedicated to Walls's friend and colleague, Geoffrey Parrinder, a fellow Africanist, who was Walls's immediate predecessor as President of the BAHR. As one of the contributors to the journal in honour of Parrinder, Walls chose to explain his own theoretical understanding of the study of religion. He argued that 'the study of religion is a field in its own right', irreducible to the many disciplines that contribute to its understanding. He acknowledged that the disciplines 'can be, and must be applied' to the study of religion, but he insisted that religion is 'a well-nigh universal dimension of human life' and that 'its manifestations in one place may illuminate its manifestations elsewhere' (Walls 1980: 148). His non-reductionist position was confirmed when he wrote: 'Religion can best understand religion' (Walls 1980: 143). He explained further that 'religious commitment' provides the best 'entrance gate' for understanding religion because 'it at least presupposes the reality of the subject matter' (Walls 1980: 143).

If religion is a universal dimension of human life, Walls reasoned that there must be a basic, primary form that underlies its concrete manifestations in diverse cultures everywhere throughout history. He called this the 'primal' component, which is found at the base of every religion and provides for all religions their elemental and common understandings. This explains why many societies around the world share foundational ideas and why the universal religions cannot be understood apart from the way they incorporate primal concepts within their world views. As the universal religions interact with primal religions, new religious movements emerge. This can be seen particularly in the development of Christianity in Africa where, Walls (2004: 215) writes, 'the old religions' form the 'sub-structure of African Christianity'. The scholar cannot ignore this vital relationship: 'Neither in life nor in study can the two now be separated' (Walls 2004: 2015).

In line with his conviction that primal religions provide the key to understanding the historical development of religions generally, in 1976, six years after he founded the Department of Religious Studies in the University of Aberdeen, Walls inaugurated a one-year taught master's programme, 'The M.Litt in Religion in Primal Societies'. He described the aim of the course as 'the study of the "primal" (or "ethnic" or "traditional") religions characteristic of many societies in Africa, the Americas, Asia and Oceania, the effects on belief systems, practices and religious institutions of the meeting of these religions with "universal" religions (notably Christianity and Islam) and the new religious movements arising after contact with Western influences'. He justified the creation of the new postgraduate degree by arguing that 'no part of the formal study of religion is in general so unsatisfactorily treated' as primal religions, adding that 'many a substantial book about the religions of the world ignores the primal religions altogether' (Walls 1988: v).

In 1982, Walls expanded his emphasis on the 'primal' element in the study of religions by establishing at Aberdeen a new academic research programme he called the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World (CSCNWW). In an announcement appearing in the *Bulletin of the British Association for the History of Religions* in 1983, Walls (1983: 10-11) described the CSCNWW as having been founded on the conviction 'that the churches of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Pacific are now central to the Christian faith, and lie at the heart of most questions about the present and future of Christianity'. In 1987, Walls moved the CSCNWW to the Faculty of Divinity in the University of Edinburgh and shortly afterwards secured a major grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts aimed at researching in depth Christianity in Africa by forging links with seven universities or research institutes located in Western and Southern Africa. The CSCNWW to this day maintains an active research and teaching programme in the School of Divinity in the University of Edinburgh under its new name, the Centre for the Study of World Christianity (CSWC).

In his Foreword to Phillipa Baylis's *An Introduction to Primal Religions*, Walls (1988: v) reaffirmed his longstanding conviction that 'primal religions ... underlie all other religions'. He explained that 'though we think of ourselves as Christians, Buddhists, Muslims or unbelievers, we are all primalists underneath'. Although he admitted that it is extremely difficult to offer a comprehensive definition of primal religions due to their complexity and local variations, he maintained that the relationship between primal religions and universal religions must be understood if we are to appreciate religion in the contemporary world 'long after adhesion takes place to Christianity, or Islam, to Hinduism or Buddhism' (1987: 250).

By contending that the world religions are built on a primal sub-stratum, Walls maintained that the world religions not only have adopted elements of primal world views into their own belief systems, but global religions have been prefigured in the primal religions. To demonstrate this, Walls introduced the concept 'cultural translation', whereby, just like a language, the ideas, thoughts and beliefs of the universal religion are translated into the primal world view, which turns them into appropriate conveyors of meaning within their own cultural contexts. Walls argued that if the universal religions had not been built on the primal perspective, the process of translation could not have occurred. He called this the 'translation principle' (Walls 1990b: 25) or, in an earlier publication,

he referred to the same procedure as the 'indigenising principle' (1982: 97-8). African Initiated Churches (AICs), he contended, provide an excellent example of how this principle operates because AICs have incorporated many Christian ideas introduced by missionaries into their traditional practices, while at the same time, transforming the Christian practices into African customary ways of honouring ancestors and maintaining traditional social regulations. Throughout this analysis, Walls's primary aim was to explain how universalising forces stimulate cultural change from the outside and how, once the changes take effect, they are incorporated into localised cultural contexts.

The broad approach to the study of religions advocated by Andrew Walls and the analytical tools he employed are consistent with methods employed widely in Religious Studies, particularly the phenomenological tradition that was so dominant among scholars of religion throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Walls clearly adopted an empathetic attitude towards religious communities by privileging the perspectives of believers. At the same time, he sought to establish the study of religions within an academic context that was distinguishable from theology and that employed a combination of historical and typological methods for understanding religions. He underscored the relevance of the social sciences and theology for Religious Studies, but safeguarded a place for the study of religions that was neither purely social scientific nor theological. Through the idea of the translation or indigenising principle, Walls set out a method for analysing the dynamic processes of religious change by describing a balanced interaction between universal and local forces.

Walls's use of phenomenological principles was not particularly innovative, but his emphasis on the central place of the study of primal societies in the formation of global religions foreshadowed research into what we now generally refer to as Indigenous Religions. In this sense, Andrew Walls was truly a visionary figure within Religious Studies. Testimony to his continued influence is confirmed by the increasing number of academic programmes around the world devoted to the study of Indigenous Religions in their multifaceted and complex manifestations. In my view, it is the manner by which Andrew Walls analysed the impact of cultural change on Indigenous societies while, at the same time, underscoring the power of local agency that marks his primary and lasting contribution to the academic study of religions.

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"the ultimate,
hidden truth of
the world is that
it is something
that we make,
and could just as
easily make
differently"

(David Graeber, 2015.
The Utopia of Rules: On
Technology, Stupidity,
and the Secret Joys of
Bureaucracy p89)