



bulletin

British Association for the Study of Religions



148: May 2026

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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.

All correspondence concerning the BASR should be sent to the secretary.

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editorial

Welcome to the May 2026 edition of the BASR Bulletin!

I write this editorial having just received the news that Religious Studies will continue at Lancaster University, saving three joint honours programmes and a number of jobs. This feels like a victory, given the closures of programmes in Cardiff and elsewhere, affecting not just Religious Studies but departments across the Humanities. This is a moment to celebrate, and proof that when given the opportunity to make robust, evidence-based arguments regarding the value of Religious Studies to the university, highlighting the skills such as critical thinking and empathy that it nurtures – skills I should add which are the life-blood of any deliberative institution and indeed democracy – it is possible to win.

In recent editions of the Bulletin, we have been reflecting not just on the threats we face from what feels like an assault on the Humanities justified through recourse to crude economic metrics, but also on the conditions that colleagues in different parts of the world face in teaching our subject. In countries where the populist right are resurgent, religion has acquired an aura of authenticity, typically articulated through the lenses of race, masculinity, national identity and culture. The UK is not immune to this phenomenon. Recent mobilisations by the far-right have attracted considerable coverage in mainstream and social media for their conjoining of national identity and Christianity, typically garnished with disinformation about Islam and crude attacks on “wokeism”. It is important that, as we seek to construct and sustain supportive, brave spaces for teaching, learning and research, that we look out for one another in these challenging times.

Finally, a few words about our current collaborations with ISASR and CenSAMM in relation to this year’s conference, and with TRS-UK in relation to the national curriculum review. These collaborations reflect long-standing relations between the BASR, CenSAMM, ISASR and TRS-UK. While on the one hand they speak to some of the financial and organisational challenges faced by small subject-associations, they also point to what we can achieve when we work together.

Dr Paul-François Tremlett
President of the BASR

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 theo@thewildcroft.com
DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE IS 30 OCT 2026

BASR COMMITTEE NOMINATIONS

This year, the BASR committee is seeking nominations for both President Elect and Secretary.

The President Elect is a non-voting member of the committee for a year before serving two years as President, while the Secretary serves for three years and is eligible for a second term of three years.

These nominations should be proposed and seconded by members and sent to Suzanne Owen at s.owen@leedstrinity.ac.uk before the AGM, when the elections will be held.

The AGM will be at this year's BASR conference, hosted at Dublin City University, 19 - 21 August 2026.

2026 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 in Higher Education.

Nominations will need to be supported by a short statement that outlines how the candidate has

- supported and inspired students' learning AND/OR
- supported and inspired colleagues' teaching AND/OR
- developed innovative teaching and learning practice in the study of religions in Higher Education.

Nominees can be at any stage of their career.

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 Higher Education 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 BASR conference. However, there is a lot of flexibility in how this can be approached.

If you would like to nominate a colleague for the 2026 BASR Teaching and Learning Fellowship (or have any questions about this Fellowship), please get in touch with Steffi at stefanie.sinclair@open.ac.uk .

The deadline for nominations/ applications is the 30th of June 2026.

A national curriculum for RE in England: Where are we at?

Steffi Sinclair

(BASR Teaching and Learning representative)

In my editorial for BASR Bulletin 147, I highlighted recent developments that may prove highly significant for the future of the study of religion in schools. Among these was the final report of the independent Curriculum and Assessment Review, commissioned by the UK Department for Education (DfE) and published in November 2025. One of its headline recommendations was the inclusion of Religious Education (RE) in the national curriculum in order to improve the consistency and quality of RE across schools in England.

However, the government made clear that any concrete steps toward a national curriculum for RE would depend on the establishment of “a clear shared position from the sector on the future of RE” (UK Government, 2025, p. 35).

On the 9th of December, the BASR hosted a webinar for its members, at which Deborah Weston, Chair of the RE Policy Unit, provided valuable background to these discussions. Many thanks to all who attended, as well as to those who contributed their views via the questionnaire that was circulated to BASR members in February. A summary of your responses was shared with Vanessa Ogden, who led the expert advisory task and finish group that explored whether consensus across the sector could realistically be achieved and what it could look like in practice.

Through its membership of the Religious Education Council (REC) for England and Wales, the BASR Executive has been actively involved in these discussions, meeting with Vanessa Ogden and Deborah Weston, and commenting on proposals for a draft programme of study for a national curriculum for RE. In a letter to Vanessa Ogden, the BASR Executive has expressed its support for the development of a draft national curriculum for England, highlighting this as an important opportunity to:

- enhance the critical thinking skills in young people in relation to religion and non-religion;
- reorient RE to engage with the lived experiences and concerns of young people, and
- invest in and develop the knowledge and skills of teachers of RE.

In March, BASR President Paul-François Tremlett and I travelled to London to view full drafts of the proposed programmes of study for RE shortly before they were submitted to the Secretary of State

for Education. Sarah Lane Cawte, Chair of the REC, recently shared the following response from the DfE:

“The Department is clear that high quality RE can develop children’s knowledge of the religious and non-religious traditions of Britain and other countries, and foster understanding between people with different beliefs. Following the publication of the Curriculum and Assessment Review, colleagues across the Religious Education sector have undertaken thoughtful and detailed work on the potential inclusion of RE in the national curriculum. We are grateful for the excellent collaboration that has made this possible and look forward to continuing to work closely with the sector on next steps.”

While we await clarity on these next steps, the REC has also been leading discussions on reforms of GCSE and A level Religious Studies qualifications. These have been in place since 2014–15 and are in urgent need of reform. As a member of the REC, the BASR also contributed to these discussions. A consensus statement providing a direction for future GCSE RS exam reform has now been agreed by all four Awarding Organisations and is currently under consideration by the REC Board. Once finalised, the REC and the National Association for Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE) will submit this to the Department for Education, accompanied by a rationale for the proposed changes.

While these developments are focused on schools, they are also likely to have far-reaching implications for the study of religion in Higher Education. They raise questions about how RE teachers can be supported through subject-specific professional development, and will inevitably shape how children and young people encounter—and form opinions about—the study of religion during their time at school, influencing the very pipeline of students who could go on to study religion at university.

This is an important opportunity for collaboration across the whole sector—schools, universities, subject associations, and professional bodies- to raise the quality and profile of the study of religion.





The British Academy SHAPE conference

Paul-François Tremlett

The second British Academy SHAPE conference (SHAPE stands for Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts for People and the Economy) was held in London on March 4, 2026. The conference was supported by the Arts and Humanities Alliance, and a number of subject associations, including the BASR, made financial contributions to support the conference.

The conference was introduced by Lord Vallance, Minister of State for Science, Innovation, Research and Nuclear, and it was heartening to hear him centre both the Humanities and the Social Sciences as he introduced the government's visions and priorities for research, and his commitment to curiosity-driven research. A number of panels followed, and I attended the ones on research and international collaboration, on AI, ethics and research, on myth-busting public perceptions of the SHAPE disciplines and on building the universities of the future. All the panels were excellent: engaging speakers, thoughtful audiences and plenty of conversation. Rather than try to cover everything, I will discuss my personal highlights and conclude with a few remarks about the importance of these conversations to the BASR.

The panel on AI was adversarial by which I mean that one person argued that AI could be used ethically in research while another argued to the contrary. Both speakers were at pains to add that their arguments did not necessarily square with their own personal views on the matter! The development of AI is inherently dependent on access to the products of the labour of millions of artists, writers and academics without permission. Thus the idea that something as unethical as AI could nevertheless be an ethical research tool, struck many as perverse. Of course, research is often messy and ethics are rarely black and white, and we can probably all think of some uses that AI could be valuable for, such as preserving endangered languages. However, by the end of the session, most people in the room appeared

to have taken the view that AI was not a tool that could be used responsibly in research. Nevertheless, you can probably expect to see AI pushed as a magic solution to all kinds of problems you didn't know you had.

The session on building the universities of the future saw participants placed in groups and tasked with organising some of the different functions of 'the university' (as diverse as training the next generation of scientists, offering outreach educational initiatives to local communities, and attracting international students) to try to distil the core or essence of the university. The exercise turned out not to be looking too far into the future, as we were still supposed to think in terms of GDP and the state, but it was, nevertheless, an opportunity for some creative thinking and it made for an engaging and enjoyable session.

It's a reasonable question to ask what any of this has to do with the BASR. In my view it's important for the BASR to be represented at these events. Strong relationships with partner subject associations contributes to our ability to articulate the case not just for the humanities and social sciences to government, but also for the public understanding of religion and non-religion. These events also give us insight into the kinds of thinking taking place in government. It is, for example, useful to know that they're thinking about AI in terms of research, ethics and accountability. By the same token it is perhaps concerning to note that they're thinking about the architecture of the university, which suggests to me that some radical questioning is probably taking place behind the scenes.

Future iterations of SHAPE will no doubt continue these conversations. For example, we need to keep talking about AI and not just in relation to research but also in relation to teaching and learning, which for many of us is the centre of what we do in our roles. BASR should continue to participate in these events, programmes and conversations, working with friends and colleagues to make the case for the non-confessional study of religions and its important place in the wider humanities and social sciences.



Religion in Five Minutes

- but wait, there's more!

The recent publication of the second edition of Religion in Five Minutes is an excellent opportunity to reflect on the success of this ongoing series from Equinox Publishing. We start with a few reflections from Russell T. McCutcheon and Aaron W. Hughes, followed by reviews of a few books from the series.

The series editors invite proposals for new volumes to join the 'in Five Minutes' series. Please get in touch with them at: aaron.hughes@rochester.edu and russell.mccutcheon@ua.edu.

We think it fair to say that the two of us have spent most of our careers invested in what some have more recently started calling the critical study of religion—either what it is or what it might look like. To this end, we have co-edited and co-written several articles, books, and collections over the years to try to encourage colleagues (whether in graduate school, fresh out of graduate school, or colleagues within the professoriate) by posing a set of second-order questions about what we are doing when we study something that at least some social actors (and even colleagues) routinely label as a “religion” or as “religious,” not to mention “sacred,” “faith,” “belief,” along with the preferred term for some today, “spirituality.” In doing this, we’ve aimed different works toward different readers: *What is Religion?*, our 2021 edited book with Oxford (not our choice of title, by the way), was intended for colleagues and advanced graduate students (which means that one of the few reviews that we found, which criticized it as inaccessible to introductory readers, pretty much missed the point altogether) while our two 50 word volumes with Routledge (explicitly modeled on Raymond Williams’s still important book, *Keywords*) had a rather broader audience in mind, though still within the academy. Much the same, our edited book with Equinox, *Religion in 5 Minutes*, has a very specific audience in mind: possibly the general reader but, more than likely, those who are enrolled in the first-year introductory class.

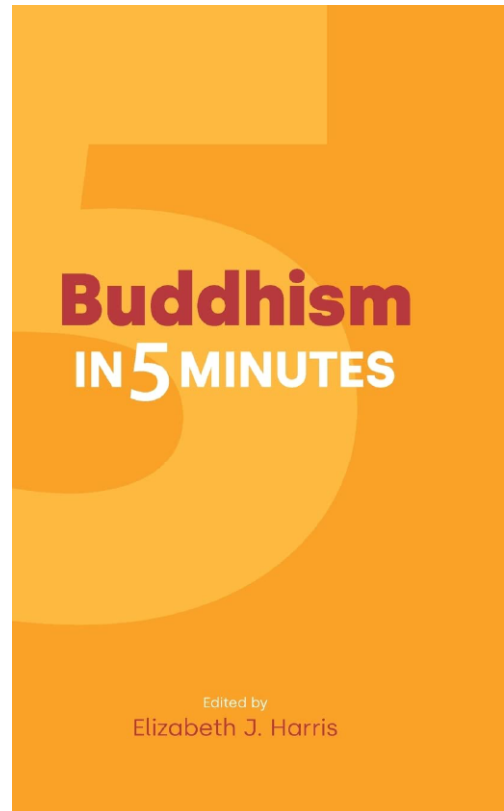
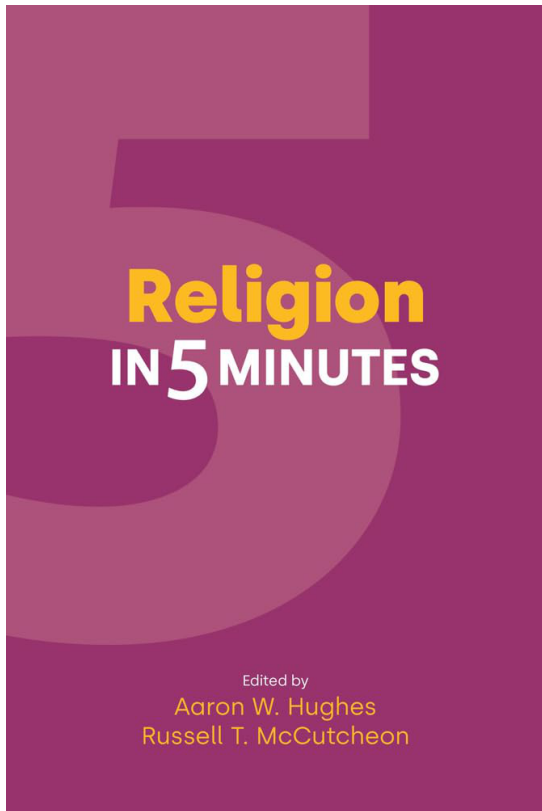
If memory serves correctly, it was Janet Joyce, editor extraordinaire at Equinox (and someone who has been very supportive of our work over the years—first dating back to when she was an editor at what was once Pinter Publishers and Russell first proposed a classroom anthology series to her, having learned of her interest in publishing in our field from Rosalind Hackett)—who suggested a volume like this, based on the success of their 2006 book, *The 5 Minute Linguist* (edited by Barry Hilton and E. M. Rickerson). We agreed, but in typical fashion, thought that the book needed a critical edge: not just addressing basic content questions (e.g., why do some religious people sometimes cover their heads?), but to invite readers to think a little about the conditions and assumptions animating such questions, to see if they might understand those very questions as more interesting than the answers that they might prompt. To put it another way, why isolate the so-called method and theory course (now de rigueur in most programs) to a discrete place in a curriculum when meta-level, critical analysis can (and probably should) happen all across a curriculum? After all, that old chestnut of inquiring as to whether Buddhism is better classed as a philosophy than a religion provides a handy opening onto a discussion about just how you’re defining religion, no?

So, while most of our other co-authored work has been geared for fellow academics, at whatever stage of their career, the innovation of *Religion in 5 Minutes*—in both its first and now its second iteration—is that it is oriented toward an audience of novice readers, trying to show them that there are other ways to answer “big” questions than theologically or purely with an intent to describe the content (the old way of doing history by memorizing the names of assorted rulers and rivers). This takes us to the heart of what we maintain is our collective enterprise in this field: to study, non-confessionally, some of the ways that we understand our various social worlds. While this will indeed mean learning the names of some places and people throughout history, it also means honing the tools and assumptions that we’re using to do that work. *Religion in 5 Minutes* provides an entry to just that.

If you’re familiar with the volume then you already know that it takes questions that many people might have about religion—“What are the main differences between Sunni and Shia Islam?” or “What is ‘speaking in tongues’?”, for example—and provides a series of short, accessible answers to each (which can be read in about five minutes, putting them around 750 words or so). Each chapter provides not just a descriptive account, as already mentioned, but also tries to see that description through a more analytical prism, including asking readers to entertain why such a question might be asked in the first place. Questions, after all, don’t come from nowhere; there’s a good chance that they come from an unanticipated collision of assumptions (that we often fail to realize that we possess) with a world rather more complex or even ambiguous and unpredictable than we had thought, resulting in a moment of anomaly, maybe even frustration, and, at least for a budding scholar, hopefully also a good dose of curiosity—about the people whom we study, sure, but also about ourselves and how we thought things ought to work.

The goal of the book’s second edition, then, is much like the first: to apply a more rigorous theoretical and methodological take on traditional questions that many first-year undergraduates have about religion. (By the way, the bulk of the questions that comprise each chapter came straight from the first-year students that one of us happened to be teaching when we first settled on putting the first edition together.) The new edition reproduces the first; instructors surely have their favorite chapters that work well in their classes and complement their syllabi, since the book is more than likely a companion text for many of them, so we reasoned that removing any of its content would not be welcomed by instructors already using it. But now we’ve included 25% more chapters, taking it up to an even 100, with many of the new additions purposefully aimed at being more relevant to both a British and a European readership (even recruiting more European contributors, to enhance the original team which was largely drawn from an open call among members of the North American Association for the Study of Religion—thus the NAASR imprint on the back cover). So we’ve now included chapters addressing such questions as: “What is Religious Education and is it just a version of the academic study of religion adopted in schools in the UK?” and “Is it true that some nations in Europe fund theological education in their public schools?” The aim is for a table to be set for even more discussions in the sorts of venues that have found the book to be a handy resource. (We admit to hoping that it’ll one day crack the local bookstore’s line-up since we can imagine quite a few people in the reading public finding its succinct chapters, with no citations but only some recommended additional reading, a good place to spend some of their time.)

Since the first edition of *Religion in 5 Minutes*, a book series under the same name has been established, now with a variety of other more-specialized or subject-specific volumes already in print, such as: Atheism (edited by Teemu Taira), Buddhism (Elizabeth J. Harris), Hinduism (Steven W. Ramey), Judaism (Sarah Imhoff), Pagan Religions (Suzanne Owen and Angel Puca), the Old Testament/Hebrew Scriptures (Philippe Guillaume and Diana V. Edelman), Indigenous Religious Traditions (Molly Bassett and Natalie Avalos), and Yoga (Theodora Wildcroft and Barbora Sojková). Forthcoming volumes will be devoted to the New Testament, African Diaspora Traditions, Chinese religions, Islam, Christianity, Jainism,



and Mormonism, New Religious Movements, among others. (There's even an *AI in Five Minutes* in production at Equinox and a *The U.S. Constitution in 5 Minutes* already in print, though not in our book series, of course.) While we're each certainly not fans of the world religions discourse we're also pragmatic enough to know that, although everyone today claims to have read their Masuzawa on the topic and many are also working toward what they call a postcolonial study of religion, the paradigm shows no signs of diminishing any time soon; so why not provide those working within this framework with some critical tools by means of an easy to read supplementary volume that, while being at home in the typical intro course, may also inspire readers to question just a bit.

Russell T. McCutcheon, University of Alabama
Aaron W. Hughes, University of Rochester

***Buddhism in Five Minutes* - ed. Elizabeth J. Harris**

The title of this volume may initially appear to trivialise its subject, suggesting that one of the world's most ancient religious traditions can be comprehended within five minutes. Yet the premise underlying such a series reflects a pragmatic reality: it is common practice to employ quick online searches to access succinct information on subjects without any intention of developing specialist expertise. The widespread habit of using online tools to gain preliminary understanding of unfamiliar topics can illustrate the value of authoritative short-form resources, which avoid exposure to the partiality and errors that such casual investigations might provide.

Recent research has shown that the publication of such works may be even more significant than their creators envisaged. Studies examining the output of AI systems responding to questions about Christianity have revealed a discernible bias towards an American Evangelical perspective, a pattern attributable to the predominance of American sources—particularly Evangelical ones—within the source data. The Tablet recently reported on these concerns. Although the researchers acknowledged the difficulty of generating questions that fully capture the complexity of Christian theological discourse and its divergent interpretations, the findings nonetheless raise legitimate cause for concern. Informal testing suggests that the outcome online is somewhat more favourable in relation to Buddhism, where available content is not dominated by a single school. AI systems such as ChatGPT demonstrate a reasonable awareness of divergent positions on bodhisattvas, non-self, emptiness and the role of deities, although an AI search on 'deities in Buddhism' referred only in passing to Theravāda perspectives.

Against this context, *Buddhism in 5 Minutes* is a timely and welcome contribution, comprising seventy-five sections organised into eleven thematic areas. Elizabeth Harris has ably drawn together leading scholars from across Buddhist traditions to address precisely the kind of questions the curious enquirer might ask online search engines or AI tools. The UK Association for Buddhist Studies, which proposed the volume, has been able to access an impressive network of contributors, imaginatively chosen from distinguished scholars to early-career academics. This random sample of the topics covered conveys the breadth of the collection: the monastic rule, relics, mindfulness, rebirth, mandalas, sexual orientation and vegetarianism. These subjects are distributed across sections on Buddhism as a religion, the Buddha and his teachings, monasticism, major traditions, material culture, ethics and contemporary issues. Contributors are well matched to their topics, and the balance between traditions seems equitable. Some of the more challenging areas are also covered thoughtfully, for instance, the antinomian Vajrayāna acceptance of sexual practices and alcohol and the recently highlighted involvement in ethnic violence. Arguably, more attention could have been paid to

these areas, as being those which might provoke questions among more sceptical enquirers. Harris's editorial leadership has produced a remarkably consistent and highly readable work. While concise in presentation, the chapters do not shy away from the complexity of more nuanced concepts, including several already highlighted in discussions of AI. Although the book contains no footnotes, its recommendations for further reading will be of practical value.

For readers with some interest in Buddhism but little prior knowledge, the volume functions as an ideal introduction. It does not require cover-to-cover reading but rather allows people to follow their own interests and trajectories. Read sequentially, it offers a broad, digestible overview complementary to that provided by more conventional introductory texts. As Harris notes in her introduction, the collection demonstrates that Buddhism encompasses far more than a doctrinal system and a meditative discipline. This is particularly evident in the sections on ethics and contemporary issues. Specialists in Buddhist studies will also find the work stimulating, since it reveals how some leading scholars can distil complex subjects to provide concise and accessible explanations, sometimes providing a '5 minute' article on an area about which they have previously written books and articles. Drawing on my experience of delivering museum gallery talks on Buddhist artefacts, certain areas consistently prove challenging to communicate and to comprehend. These include the role of deities within the tradition, the question of what precisely is reborn, and the Mahāyāna concept of multiple Buddhas. These intricate topics receive assured treatment in the work of Peter Harvey and Cathy Cantwell, whose writings offer both precision and accessibility.

In short, the volume provides an authoritative and balanced introduction to Buddhism, combining scholarly rigour with an approachable style that encourages deeper engagement. And yes, I admit to acquiring a copy as a gift from an interested Anglican priest friend on its initial publication. At a broader societal level, however, such a volume also highlights the ongoing challenge: the need to promote thoughtful, accessible scholarship for non-specialists in an era increasingly dependent on AI systems whose outputs may be shaped by inherent biases and distortions.

Dr Graham Dixon
Independent researcher

***Judaism in Five Minutes* - ed. Sarah Imhoff**

In an age when ill-considered tweets receive more attention on campuses than ground-breaking books, finding new formats to introduce essential information to students, scholars and the general public has become crucial. The *Religion in 5 Minutes* series does just that.

The latest volume *Judaism in 5 Minutes*, stands out as an especially strong and successful addition to the series. It offers approachable and engaging essays by established and emerging scholars in the field of Jewish studies, broadly defined, mostly based in the United States and Israel, that introduce readers to some of the more fundamental questions about textual traditions, laws and rituals, groups and beliefs, the relationship of Judaism to other religions, Jewish difference, the Holocaust, Zionism and Israel, and Jewish approaches to social issues.

As the book is intended to serve both as a useful classroom resource and as an erudite yet reader-friendly introduction for the general public curious about Judaism and Jewishness, the essays range

from very basic questions, such as “What is the Torah?”, “What is the Talmud?”, or “What is a rabbi?”, to more complex issues, including whether Judaism is a religion or an ethnicity and the role of Judaism in the State of Israel. A major strength of the volume is the extent to which most essays emphasise the internal diversity of Judaism, showing how approaches among its various branches can differ significantly on almost every issue. Imhoff’s own work on gender, the body and American Judaism has also had an impact on the selection of topics and the orientation of some of the essays.

That said, books in the *Religion in 5 Minutes* series present challenges for both editors and authors. The selection of topics and the approach taken in the individual essays, whose length ranges between 700 and 1,000 words, can prove limiting, even if the constraints of the format are partly offset by the inclusion of further reading lists referring to essays within the volume itself and other works elsewhere in the form of monographs and academic articles. Hence, the format also provides the reviewer with an opportunity to moan.

Indeed, in reading the volume one occasionally gains the impression that Judaism is presented primarily as a North American phenomenon with roots in the ancient Near East. Some of the topics addressed engage with issues at the centre of current American public debate, such as an excellent contribution on Jewish approaches to abortion and abortion rights, or discussions of Jews, race and skin colour, the latter being problematics that for historical reasons tend to cause unease in continental Europe. In a European context, an essay on “assisted dying” would probably have been more timely, particularly as this highly sensitive issue has been, or is currently being, debated in several European parliaments, whereas abortion rights are generally less contested than in the United States, though there are notable exceptions. Be that as it may, American debates tend to surface a few years later in Anglophone Europe and beyond. No need to say that questions of race and skin colour are becoming increasingly salient in Israel and across continental Europe. As I write these lines, Vienna’s Jewish Museum is hosting the final days of an exhibition titled *Black Jews, White Jews? On Skin Colour and Prejudices*.

The religious landscape of Western societies has changed dramatically over recent decades. One may therefore wonder whether questions pertaining to Jewish–Christian relations and demarcation still need to be so prominently addressed. This is not to suggest that they do not matter. However, one could argue that an essay on Jubus (Jewish Buddhists) would be as pertinent in this volume as the one on Messianic Jews, interesting as the latter is. Similarly, essays on shared religious symbolism, such as the hamsa, common to both Jews and Muslims and known as the hand of Miriam or of Fatima, and on the place of the hexagram (unrelated to the Star of David) in Indian religions, might also have been of interest and offered an opportunity to reflect on Jewish relations with religions beyond the Judaeo-Christian and indeed the Abrahamic traditions. It is true, however, that the essays on the relationship between the Bible and the Qur’an, and on Jewish–Islamic civilisation, do engage with this broader set of issues. A third essay on Muslim–Jewish religious contacts is devoted to the towering figure of Moses Maimonides, the twelfth-century rabbi, physician, and philosopher who remains a central reference point for all branches of Judaism. Yet, one cannot help but regret the absence of one or two essays on Jewish philosophy more broadly. Baruch Spinoza, in particular, would have deserved dedicated treatment, as this would have made it possible to explore the Jewish roots of his work and to reflect on the ongoing debates surrounding his status within or without Jewish thought.

None of these remarks, however, diminish the overall merit of the volume, which stands as a most welcome contribution to contemporary Jewish studies. It is likely to become a widely consulted resource for students, instructors and general readers alike.

Laurent Mignon
University of Oxford

***Yoga Studies in Five Minutes* - ed. Theodora Wildcroft + Barbora Sojkova**

Like the other volumes in this series, *Yoga Studies in 5 Minutes* is organised into several sections. The headings for these sections are posed as questions such as 'What is Yoga?'. Within each section there are brief chapters of between three to five pages long. Each chapter addresses questions that a non-specialist might ask such as: 'Is Yoga a Religion?'. All the chapters usefully cross references to other contributions in the book and gives a short list of recommended publications that provide more detail of the topic.

The editors have wisely called the book *Yoga Studies in 5 Minutes* and not 'Yoga in 5 Minutes', as this is primarily an academic textbook and not a manual on yoga practice. As the editors explicitly state in their introduction: 'As academic scholars, we do not claim any authority over what might be right or wrong ways to practice' (p.xvi). There is an impressive range of contributors from a variety of different academic disciplines, most of whom have published extensively on yoga and have national and international reputations. Almost all of the contributors have a good knowledge of the extensive textual sources of the yoga traditions. Consequently, although short, the entries do not oversimplify some of the complex and contested issues of yoga studies. All the chapters manage to achieve the difficult balance between accessibility and complexity.

Furthermore, as well as having a background in the academic study of yoga, many of the contributors are also practitioners. Theodora Wildcroft suggests that this is 'a new category of researcher – the practitioner researcher' (p.186). That many of the contributors are practitioner researchers gives the book an extra dimension. The category of practitioner researcher also raises the important question of the relationship between the theory and practice of yoga, which is discussed in several of the chapters.

There are three significant themes that emerge in the book as a whole: the incredible diversity of yoga; the relationship between philosophy and practice of yoga; and changes over time. Perhaps, the most significant theme that is reiterated in almost every chapter is that yoga is incredibly diverse. For example, Adrián Muñoz observes 'there are many yoga schools' (p.55) and Lubomir Ondračka indicates the diversity is so great that 'it is difficult to say what all these yoga lineages have in common' (p.77).

Many of the entries explicitly, or at least implicitly, emphasise that yoga is as much a philosophy as a somatic practice. This is an important refutation of the stereotypical perception of yoga simply being a physical practice that involves twisting the body into various postures (*āsana*), exemplified by many of the yoga courses offered in leisure centres and popular magazines such as *Om Yoga*. For example, Laura von Ostrowski stresses that a full understanding of yoga involves both experience and study, and 'theoretical knowledge about yoga is important to be able to enhance one's own experience' (p.157).

Most of the contributors make a distinction between premodern and modern forms of yoga. Whilst this distinction is somewhat simplistic, it is important to note that yoga as a philosophy and a practice has changed over time. For example, many of the contributors note that the goal of most pre-modern forms of yoga was to achieve supernatural powers (*siddhis*) and/or liberation from the wheel of transmigration. However, many of the contributors note that most modern practitioners of yoga state that their goals are more therapeutic in nature. Nonetheless, as Wildcroft notes, modern forms of yoga claim a continuity with the past, and thereby legitimise their practices and thereby 'benefit from an 'aura of ancient authenticity' (p.166).

There are a number of other important themes that can be identified in many of the chapters. Several

of the contributors do not shy away from discussing some of the more challenging aspects of yoga in the contemporary context. For example, a number of the chapters address the issues of power relations and abuse that have come to light in recent years (for example, see the chapters on 'Are Ethics Important in Yoga?'; 'Are Yogis Nonviolent?' and 'Is Yoga Safe?'). Cultural appropriation is another thorny issue raised in a number of the chapters (see for example the chapter 'What is the Relationship between Race and Yoga?'). Another elephant in the yoga studio, that is also mentioned by a number of the contributors, is the way that yoga has been appropriated by Hindu Nationalism (see in particular the chapter 'What Does Yoga Mean to Indians Today?').

Inevitably many of the chapters use Sanskrit terms. Whilst some of the authors do a good job of explaining the technical vocabulary many do not fully define some of these terms. For example, a number of the chapters refer to tantra and this is never really explained, nor does it appear in the index. This might leave some non-specialist reader perplexed at various points in the book. Consequently, I think that a glossary of terms might have been useful to help the non-specialist reader. Nonetheless, *Yoga Studies in 5 Minutes* is an excellent addition to the series. It will be of interest to students of Indian traditions. It will be an invaluable resource for all those who teach about the Indian religions. It will also be of great benefit to yoga practitioners and teachers who wish to enhance their understanding of their practice.

Dr Stephen Jacobs
The University of Wolverhampton



conferences



RECONCILIATION, MUTUAL BENEFICENCE AND RELIGION, FOURTH 2025 WORLD SANGSAENG FORUM INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE, 24-25 OCTOBER 2025: DAESOON ACADEMY OF SCIENCES (SOUTH KOREA).

“Reconciliation, Mutual Beneficence and Religion” was a very stimulating two-day academic meeting hosted by Daesoon Academy of Sciences (DAOS), South Korea. The conference had significant overlap with both CESNUR (Centre for the Study of New Religions, Torino, Italy) and also with the annual online conferences of the Journal of Daesoon Thought and the Religions of East Asia (JDTREA), now in its fifth year of production. After being welcomed by Bae Kyuhan, the Chairman of DAOS, and other dignitaries, the opening keynotes were: “Reconciliation, Mutual Beneficence and Religions: Respecting the Local and Embracing the Universal” by Eileen Barker (LSE, UK); “Building on the Ruins’: A Comparison Between Haewon Sangsaeng and Pope Francis’ ‘Social Reparation’” by Massimo Introvigne (CESNUR); “Mapping Korean American Religion: Observations from the Global Korean Diaspora” by Gordon Melton (Baylor University); “The Social Power of Dao” by Livia Kohn (Boston University); “How the Korean Catholic Church promotes the Concept of Reconciliation and Peace” by Berna-

dette Rigal-Cellard (Université Bordeaux Montaigne); and “Cultural Heritage of Reconciliation and mutual beneficence: Restoration of Jeungsan’s Birthplace and Future Vision” by Bae Kyuhan (DAOS). This wide-ranging and thought-provoking introduction to the conference set the scene for the papers and events of the remainder of the two days.

The afternoon sessions were organised in four parallel sessions and subjects covered include: practices of reconciliation and consent in religious settings (Theo Wildcroft, Open University, UK); Spirituality as social and cultural resistance (Maria Varde, University of Buenos Aires); the I Ching and feng shui as modes for life improvement (Fiona Hsin-Fang Chang, Weixin Shenjiao College, Taiwan); and relationships between Daesoon Thought and Buddhist theology (Kim Taesoo, Seoul National University). The late afternoon session also had four parallel sessions and featured papers on: Caodai ideas of heaven (Christopher Hartney, University of Sydney); inherited trauma in new religions (Márk Nemes, CESNUR/ Hungarian Academy of Arts); Won Buddhism and Haewon-influenced philosophy of reconciliation (Heo Namjin, Wonkwang University, Korea); and the birthplace of Kang Jeungsan as a site of religious cultural heritage

(Ahn Shin, Paichai University, Korea). There was a banquet in the evening.

The second day began with three parallel sessions addressing such contemporary topics as: religion and pseudoscience (Stefano Bigliardi, Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane, Morocco); Adam Chin's (MiraCosta Community College, USA) "Religion-Science Conflict in the Light of Non-Theory-Oriented Science"; Christian nationalism (Holly Folk, Western Washington University, USA); and messianic symbols in Buddhism and Vietnamese and Korean new religions (Dinh Hong Hai, National University, Hanoi, Vietnam). The second block of sessions included presentations by Jason Greenberger (Daejin University) on marketing Daesoon Thought to a popular audience; the Liberal Catholic Church in Poland (Karolina Kotkowska, Jagiellonian University, Poland); and Elijah Siegler (College of Charleston, USA) on Daoist thought in America. The closing ceremony and lunch concluded the formal academic meeting, and in the afternoon delegates

visited the Daesoon Jinrihoe headquarters and Yeosu Temple Complex. There was a very large dinner in the evening with dance and musical performances.

This short review lists fewer than a quarter of the papers presented and the range of nationalities, methodologies, research subjects, and specific religions and traditions was very impressive. Korea is an amazing place for travelers and all Korean colleagues noted that autumn is the most beautiful season to visit. The organisers must be congratulated for putting together such a successful academic gathering, for keeping the conference free of fees, and for providing attractive activities for delegates to enjoy.

Carole M. Cusack
University of Sydney



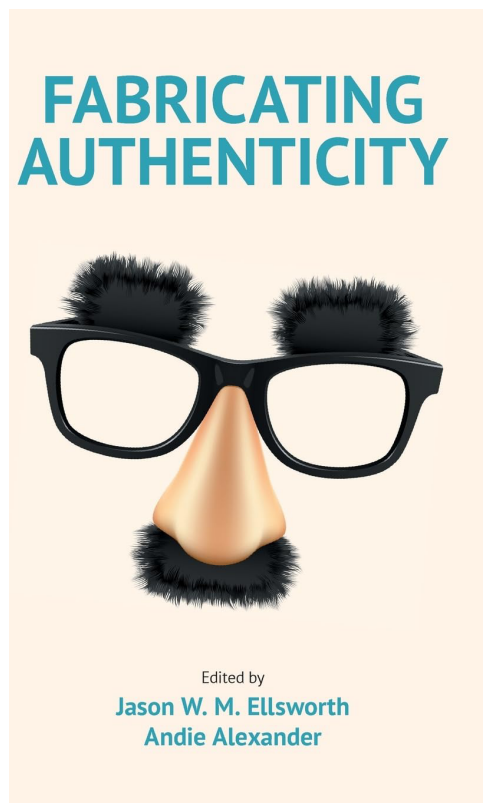
reviews

ELLSWORTH, J, ALEXANDER, A (EDS.) (2024): *FABRICATING AUTHENTICITY*, EQUINOX PUBLISHING, [ONLINE] E-BOOK £24.95; 198P. ISBN: 9781800501461

Fabricating Authenticity is part of a short series of small books that emerged from the online blog of 'Culture on the Edge', which self-described as "a research collaborative engaged in rethinking identity studies". In this case, fourteen original chapters are each followed by fourteen more that were written in response to each one.

As the preface notes, the chapters are short and informal, and are essentially edited and extended versions of blog posts. The idea is that they thus reflect the contingent and evolving conditions that themselves produce the fabrication of 'authenticity'. The results are said to be useful for classroom use, and also aim "to demystify scholarship for broader audiences." I think that, in practice, the former is very true, and the latter much less so. This is a useful collection of short articles to provoke interesting conversations in a seminar context. Arguably, on the other hand, this is the exact op-

posite of demystifying scholarship, that is, each chapter reflects on examples of the everyday and familiar in order to reveal connections to enduring theoretical ideas and concepts that would leave a lay readership lost without additional context.



There is a lot to like about this book, and the shortcomings it has are largely a reflection of its origins. There is an inherent slightness to the blog-post-turned-chapter format that can be frustrating. When discussing the famous Coco-Cola ad from 1971, for example, I wanted at least some reflection on how culture might have changed since. Touna's chapter on understanding ancient cultures on 'their own terms' would have benefited significantly from engaging with similar debates in medieval studies (Cole and Smith 2010). At various points, I was surprised to see no discussion at all of Primi-

ano's vernacular religion (1995), McGuire's lived religion (1990) or similar stalwarts of contemporary religious studies.

And whereas the focus of a series of blog posts can be very loosely held, in book form, that same organising theme feels a little too broad. Some chapters are about authenticity in self-image, some about authenticity as a heritage claim,

and some about authenticity as a marketing strategy. The connections between these are not made often enough to make the collection feel coherent, and both the introduction and conclusion concern themselves less with providing that coherence than with providing yet more interesting things to think about, and still more questions asked and unanswered.

This also isn't really a book about religion, leaving me more than aware that colleagues in other disciplines have established discourses about, for example, art, authenticity and restoration, that are missing here. Besides this, the context of much of the book is rather narrowly drawn for a contemporary, North American audience. That is fine up to the point where very localised, temporally-specific cultural forces are described in globalising terms. I am less than sure that American studies into cultural perceptions of women wearing makeup, for example, are globally-applicable. I would also be curious to see how comprehensible the title, let alone the content, of Drollinger-Smith's chapter 'An Orbiter Is a Simp, a Foid Is a Foid' remains, a decade from now.

This doesn't mean, again, that the book is without many delightful moments, including in the above chapters. McCutcheon delivers a reflection on heritage and geo-political politics through the medium of a Greek salad. Dorough Smith's examination of Donald Trump as a 'baby Christian' is short but forensic in detail. Cotter's chapter on commodity fetishism, Žižek and Baryart and Coca-Cola, is paired with an equally-fantastic response by Ping-hsiu Alice Lin on luxury consumption's associations with timelessness and refinement. Taira's chapter describing authenticity as a marker of religion itself is as concise and illuminating as its title: 'If It's Not Authentic, It's Not a Religion'. These chapters, and many more, should provoke fascinating seminar discussions for anyone teaching liberal arts courses. But the reader will have to pick and choose, according to the fast-moving flows of the cultural zeitgeist, and support these chapters with weightier examinations of the subjects under discussion. As a book, it makes an exceptionally-good blog series.

Theodora Wildcroft
Open University

ELLIOTT, C (2024): POX ROMANA: THE PLAGUE THAT SHOOK THE ROMAN WORLD, PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS: PRINCETON. HBK. £28.00; 304P. ISBN: 9780691219158

In 1963, "Hellenist and philosopher, Freudian, psychically curious, former Calvinist" Eric Robertson Dodds delivered the Wiles Lectures at the University of Belfast, in which he laid out what would prove to be a popular template to reframe the study of religion(s) in Late Antiquity. Dodds called this period "an Age of Anxiety", which he borrowed from the homonymous Pulitzer Prize-winning poem written by his friend W.H. Auden.

The recent experience of an eerily similar situation (which involved the emergence of another pandemic, the outbreak of war at the outskirts of Europe, political uncertainty, social conflict, ecological degradation, rising inflation, and a widespread decline in mental health) has led some historians to reconsider Dodds' original proposal. The latest example of this trend can be found in Colin Elliott's ingeniously titled *Pox Romana*, which focusses on the role of the Antonine Plague as a "catalyst for change" at the very end of the Pax Romana, the period of relative internal stability due to the convergence of benign but temporary ecological conditions and serendipitous geopolitical events that lasted from Augustus to Marcus Aurelius (ca. 31 BCE-180 CE).

Given that any computational modelling of the pandemic is bound to fail due to the dearth of reliable proxies, Elliott tries to solve this puzzle by adopting a multidisciplinary approach that mixes an engrossing and global historiographical account with cutting-edge epidemiology, palaeogenetics, climate science, sociology, economics, and cognitive sciences. The reader is thus presented with a fascinating cornucopia of comparative data that includes Greenland ice samples to gauge declining imperial industrial production, Viking Age remains attesting to the evolutionary history of orthopoxviruses, ancient Egyptian tax and census records that capture village depopulation, coeval Roman epigraphs, Arabian inscriptions, sculptures of Kushan pox deities, and Chinese chronicles all relating the deadly outbreaks that may have been caused by the same pathogen, and even daring urban com-

parisons between cyclical smallpox epidemics in 18th-century Mexico City and imperial Rome. In this way the Antonine Plague regains its key historical role as both the Western end of the very first historically attested Afroeurasian pandemic, and a fundamental, yet neglected, shaper of the Axial Age and its (religious) mindscape.

In line with the Cognitive and Evolutionary Sciences of Religion's renewed emphasis on anxiety as a key neurophysiological emotion that is tied to the detection of environmental threats and the management of uncertainty, Elliott highlights the intergenerational psychosocial effects of the Antonine Plague on the minds and behaviours of the people (emperors included). To avoid any misunderstanding, though, he chooses to replace Dodds' psychoanalytically-based "Age of Anxiety" with a cognitively-based "Age of Angst", a reformulation originally proposed by pioneer cognitive historian Luther H. Martin. In a society where health was intuitively understood through the lenses of religion (and vice versa), the new "everlasting pestilence" radically subverted the contractual and reciprocal logic behind the *pax deorum*, the "peace among gods" that underlined and secured the good relationship between the human community and the divine pantheon.

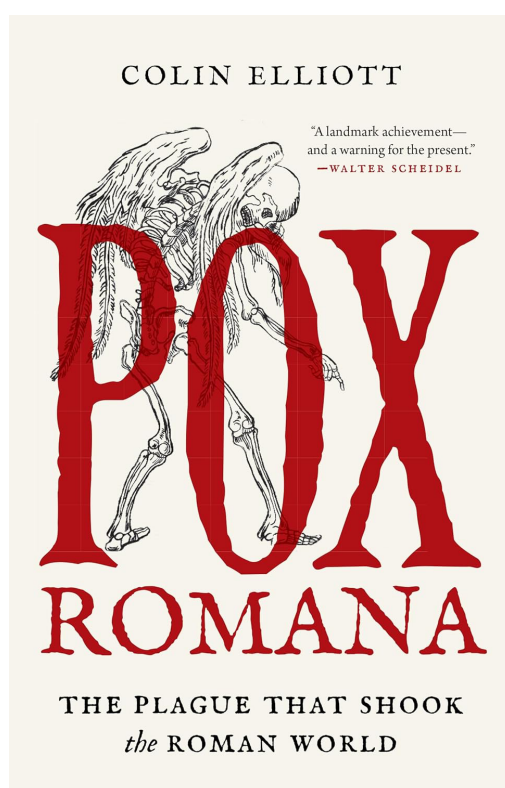
In time the Romans would be infected by the "spirit of pandemic", a mix of indulged cognitive biases, unchallenged logical fallacies, and creeping authoritarianism that led to scapegoating and mass killings to please the god(s) and stave off disease. As Dodds cleverly notes implicitly mirroring Daniel Kahneman's dual cognitive-func-

tion systemisation, totalitarian responses "signify reaction rather than reflection" and, as the empire began to exert absolute control on its citizens' employment, private religion, and even the prices for basic goods, the accumulation of reactive and unreflective institutional responses altered the "imagined community" of the Roman state forever.

And yet, Dodds tells us that the Antonine Plague itself, with an estimated death toll of 5% to 10% of the empire's population, was not the silver bullet that caused the collapse of the empire, but merely "a turning point", or a "catastrophe-flip" that initiated a deadly domino effect on a system that even at its peak was already under stress. Economic cluelessness, widespread folk theories of contagion, and the absence of effective mitigation measures beyond euergetism made Roman society systemically unable to sustain the compounded effect of climate change and a new Euromediterranean pathocoenosis.

The lesson of Elliott's impeccably researched book is clear. Environmental cataclysms are always exacerbated and turned into epoch-defining catastrophes by poor decision making and institutional ignorance. The Antonine Plague fuelled anxiety, anxiety turned into angst, angst bred panic, and panic led to scapegoating, persecutions, and the totalitarian politicisation of religion. Religion never happens in a void, and while history does not repeat itself, it sure does rhyme.

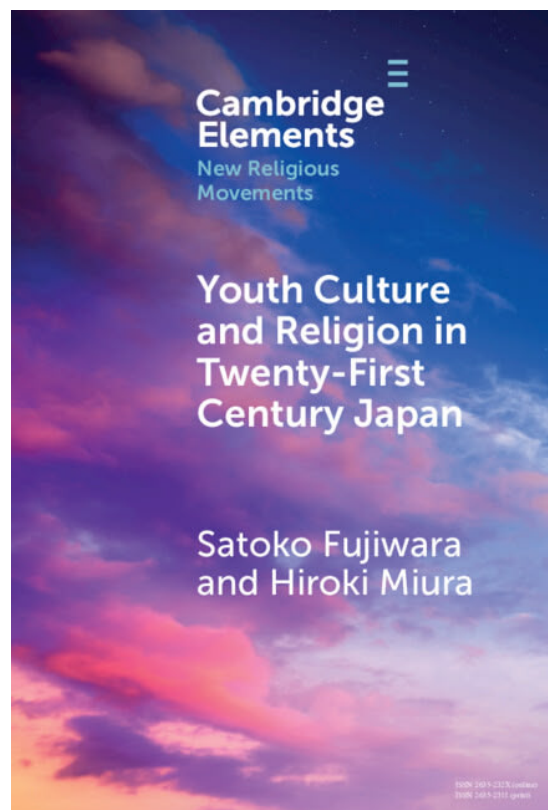
Leonardo Ambasciano
Independent Researcher



FUJIWARA, S AND MIURA, H, (2025): YOUTH CULTURE AND RELIGION IN TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY JAPAN, CAMBRIDGE ELEMENTS: CAMBRIDGE; E-BOOK; €22.50; 63P. ISBN: 9781009550239.

This short but attractive and intriguing book opens with a discussion of oshi-katsu – “activities to express one’s support for one’s favourite people or things, most typically pop idols” (p. 1) – and the way such devotion shades into religion-like attitudes and behaviours. Satoko Fujiwara and Hiroki Miura want to avoid the direct parallel – fandoms are religions for young Japanese – but want to stress the ways in which “contemporary religious forms . . . structurally and affectively resemb[le] oshi-katsu”. Their concern is 2.5 dimensional, in-between 2 dimensional (manga, anime) and 3 dimensional (real humans). Invented or fiction-based religions are part of this mix, as are young people’s encounters with “virtual reality, augmented reality, and physical reality”. Japanese youth are nonreligious in general, but religious and nonreligious alike have common factors that make meaning. The authors identify “practicing belonging . . . vicarious spirituality . . . gendered fetishism . . . parody of religion . . . 2.5-dimensional [and] subjective rituals or ritualization” as core.

Belonging is focused on friend groups, fandoms, and online communities; after the 1995 Aum Shinrikyo sarin gas attack in Tokyo, religion lost popularity and many find it distasteful. This is connected to shifts in consumption practices, which in the 1990s were of ‘high-end’ brands



which have now lost popularity with young people. Ritualization follows logically; participation in events like the annual Shibuya Halloween Party and collecting notebooks from shrine and temple visits are two examples. Vicarious spirituality in Japan includes the popularity of Christian-style weddings and the adoption of tulpas, not to enhance young people’s personal powers, but to support, to “find fulfillment in helping tulpas grow and develop personalities”. The emotion created, moe, is part of gendered fetishism; predominantly males experience moe for female anime characters, while women feel moe for statues of the Buddha.

The parody of religion appears in the creation of humour-based religions like the founding in 2024 “Suyasuya Kyoa (Sleep-Soundly Sect) [which] upholds the doctrine of ‘Get proper sleep’, treating sleep as a sacred ritual”.

Chapter 2, “From Hyper-Real to 2.5-Dimensional,” introduces a description of Japan in modernity; the Era of the Ideal (1946-1960), the Era of Dreams (1960-1975), the Era of Fictionality (1975-2000), and the Era of Virtuality (since 2000). Fiction, it is argued, is a product of the imagination, whereas the virtual has correlations in the real world; “virtuality enables pseudo-ex-

periences . . . performing the Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) in the Metaverse may not be recognized as an authentic Hajj, but it is accepted as a simulated experience”. In the virtual identities are multiple and 2.5-dimensional manifests in phenomena like musicals in which actors cosplay characters from manga and anime recreating stories from the original art forms. Creation of tulpas is important as they exist in 2.5-dimensional only in relation to the tulpamancer.

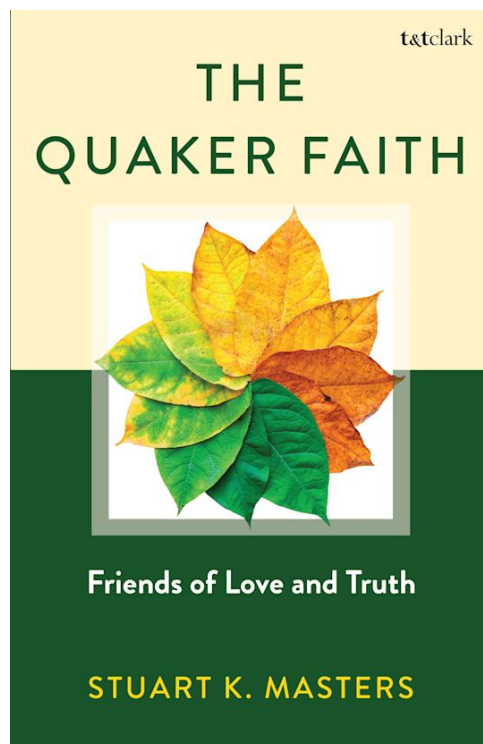
Chapter 3, “From Subjective Myths to Subjective Ritualization,” argues that narratives are less important than characters, and that oshi-katsu rituals have the purpose of supporting the idol, making the adored person stronger and more successful. Oshi-katsu and tulpa-making are ways of making real. Fujiwara and Miura discuss rituals in gaming and the pop-culture tourism called “anime pilgrimage”, in which fans reinforce each other in their attribution of sacredness to certain locations featured in beloved anime or manga. The “Conclusion” reiterates that Generation Z in Japan, young people born between 1997 to 2009, favour subjective rituals over myths, and have exchanged fictionality for virtuality. The authors have used ideas and research from anthropology and sociology broadly, rather than from the narrow field of Religious Studies, such that religio-spiritual phenomena are located within general social shifts and related to patterns of consumption, concepts of the self, and ideas about making meaning in increasingly difficult times.

Another important observation is that moe and otaku culture, which in the 1990s were regarded as extreme, have mainstreamed and jumped from being overwhelmingly male to include growing numbers of women. 2.5-dimensional relationships are seen as rewarding and lacking the risks that relationships with real humans entail. This is a really interesting book and is highly recommended to scholars and students of religious studies, popular culture, Japanese media and society, and of youth culture.

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MASTERS, S (2025): THE QUAKER FAITH: FRIENDS OF LOVE AND TRUTH, T & T CLARK: LONDON, HBK £49.50; 192P. ISBN: 978-1-5381-8534-6

This book provides an overview of the Quaker tradition across the centuries and in different locations. Written, according to its blurb as an “accessible introduction” it serves this in many ways, though readers here may not find it the most conducive introduction text for students.



The book while trying to provide something of an objective overview, clearly has a strong insider focus in how the tradition is presented. Critical questions are framed, it seems, as issues that Quakers themselves need to think about and deal with, while the survey always seems to present a case for why the developments and tensions are true to the original Quaker vision. As such, the whole book does what some have termed the work of “curating” a tradition in a sympathetic way. Hard and critical analysis from an external perspective are not always done. Nevertheless, if a scholar was

looking for a text to present an insider account of how Quakers may present their own tradition then this would be a useful book.

In terms of the structure there are three main parts. Part one is focused on “History and Development” and has two chapters, the first looking at early Quaker history, and the second looking at the diversity of the tradition. These are, respectively, what the author terms its “roots” and “branches”. I have to say that this was illuminating to me as I have, perhaps from a UK context, tended to have a limited vision of what Quakerism consists of, and did not realise the domin-

ance of Evangelical Quaker traditions within the American and wider global movement. Rather it was the quietest and rather post-Christian traditions that are certainly dominant in perhaps many UK contexts that I really only was aware of.

The second part has three chapters focused on “Spirituality and Practice” covering, in order, what the author terms the “Inward”, the “Testing”, and the “Outward”. This gives a good sense of not only what Quakers do, but also some of the internal rationales and contestation as to what this means in the lived life of the community. Hence as a teaching tool this may well be a useful resource to get a sense for students of not only what Quakerism is in terms of it as a tradition but also how this actually works out, at least ideally, in the lives of Quakers. It is very broad in scope, but perhaps also somewhat idealistic in presenting the aims and ideals of Quakers rather than the messiness of how this is actually lived out except in cases where we see things which are perhaps the public facing highlights.

The final part covers “Contributions and Challenges” which has again two chapters. The first one is on “The Quaker Spiritual Journey” and the second “The Critical Friend: Reviewing the Quaker Experience”. These again will give a good sense, from a contemporary perspective but with an eye to history, of how a Quaker would present their tradition, or an account of what the tradition in principle at least, means to someone within that tradition. The final chapter in particular, while not explicitly written as addressed to Quakers but as a general introduction seems to be very much internal self-reflection and questions that would be most meaningful to those within the Quaker tradition themselves.

The internal and theological stance of the text is understandable given its publication by T & T Clark as the theological imprint of Bloomsbury, and so it is not written as a religious studies text. As such, as noted, how far it works as a standalone introduction to the Quaker tradition will depend on what one is looking for. Certainly, it is one of the few contemporary texts introducing this tradition, perhaps the other scholarly one being *An Introduction to Quakerism* written by Pink Dandelion with Cambridge University

Press. Both bear some imprint of an insider account. I found the text in this a bit plodding at times and somewhat dry but certainly provides an accessible introduction for those looking for texts for students or to get a decent overview of this tradition.

Paul Hedges
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

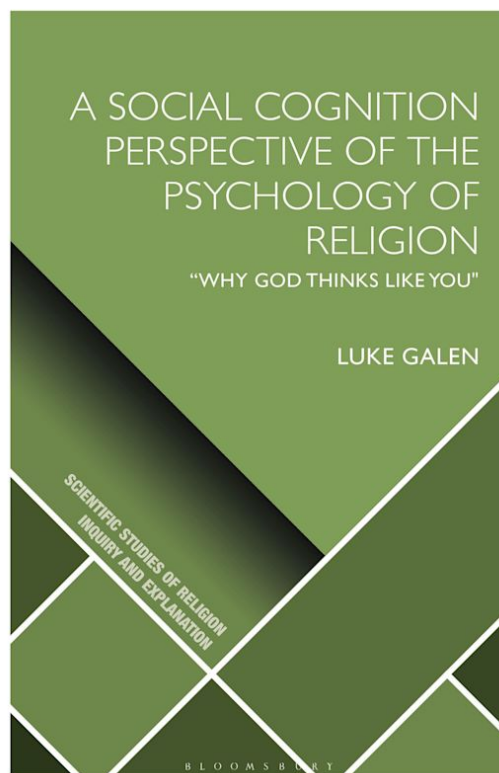
GALEN, L. (2023): A SOCIAL COGNITION PERSPECTIVE OF THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION: WHY GOD THINKS LIKE YOU, BLOOMSBURY: LONDON, E-BOOK £26.09; 272P. ISBN: 9781350293915

In this book, Luke Galen focuses on the topic of psychology of religion and secularity. Addressing a research gap in religious studies, Galen introduces the integrative psychological approach, i.e., Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) and social cognition, to critically analyze religious belief and behaviour. Based on numerous real-world examples, Galen systematically demonstrates how religious cognition uses the same mental processes as ordinary cognition and is shaped by both intuitive and reflective thinking. Therefore, *A Social Cognition Perspective of the Psychology of Religion* can be a good starting point for researchers and graduate students in the fields of cognitive science of religion and psychology of religion who intend to carry out religious phenomena research.

Following an introduction, the book is divided into two sections: the first part (Chapters 1-4) introduces concepts from cognitive and social psychology and explains how they relate to religious belief, while the second part (Chapters 5-6) applies these concepts to religious phenomena such as experiences, well-being, and morality before a conclusion draws together the broader implications.

In Chapter 1, perceiving religious behaviour as a shaped product, Galen summarizes a series of empirical findings from cognitive psychology to shows that religious and spiritual (R/S) beliefs arise from basic, general cognitive processes

and biases, which associated with impaired performance on reasoning, analytic cognition, and perception. At the end of the chapter, he theorizes how these patterns of reasoning and perception are creating the misattribution of supernatural agency. Drawing on the Attribution Theory, Galen demonstrates in Chapter 2 how these misattributions of religious and spiritual agency are produced by cognitive biases. Utilising the two dimensions of R/S attributions (i.e., stable and casual dimensions) by Wimer and Kelly (1982), Galen explains that biases operate largely at implicit levels in attributional dimensions, and they interact with intuitive agency detection tendencies (such as HAAD), leading individuals to apply casual reasoning to extraordinary content and result in the externalization of religious and spiritual agency. In Chapter 3, he further demonstrates that R/S beliefs are unstable and experimentally malleable. He illustrates the many ways in which changes in R/S belief occur in response to fluctuating psychological states in domains functioning to meet various needs, which contain epistemic certainty needs and existential needs. Continuing the analysis of R/S belief, Chapter 4 turns to a distinct type of religious belief, i.e., experiential and perceptual aspects of religion, including perceptions of divine intention, agency, and relational presence. Galen examines how these are internalized from social, contextual, and cultural factors and externalized onto spiritual agents by presenting experiments, research and examples. These social constructs associated with a religious identity are internalized and constitute aspects of the self, while these conditions can induce the externalized projection of specific characteristics onto God(s).



Moving to the second part of this book, Chapter 5 (the subtitle is Misattribution of the Effects of Religion) shifts from psychological concepts to religious phenomena (e.g., Exceptional Experience, Glossolalia and Possession, Illusion of conscious will) that are attributed to the effects of religion and spiritual influence. Galen employs dual-process models (intuitive and analytic) from social cognition to explain how religious and spiritual misattributions emerge. He argues that one's analytic reflection of their spiritual experiences is often biased by their immediate and intuitive feelings, which inevitably leads to pseudo-validation, resulting in the misattribution of internally generated experiences to external spiritual agents. Galen continues his critique of the misattribution of R/S beliefs in Chapter 6 by focusing on spiritual theories/treatments. While he acknowledges the therapeutic benefits of these treatments reported in previous studies, he argues that these positive effects are largely the result of misattribution, driven by interpretive creep that shifts modest associations or correlations into unwarranted causal claims. His argument is further supported by the causal inferences made by third parties such as therapists, practitioners, and researchers besides believers themselves. In Chapter 7 of this book, Galen addresses the link between R/S and morality. Just as R/S effects are often mistakenly presumed to operate uniquely in the domains of exceptional experience and mental well-being, moral attitudes and behaviours are likewise misattributed to religious and spiritual causes. Galen argues that morality constitutes a general stereotype (e.g., impressions of others, judgments of one's own

actions, and attributions of moral motives) which shapes multiple psychological processes and leads R/S believers to externalize the causality of their moral behaviour and attribute it to transcendent influence.

The book has many strong points. Galen has made an obvious effort to simplify psychological conceptions and models by using several graphics and diagrams in chapter 2, 5, 6 to explain theoretical conceptions. However, scaffolding as well as forward and backward references should be given to facilitate readers' understanding of the complicated theories, especially those without a psychology background. The book draws on a wide range of real-world examples to support its arguments. These examples are drawn from diverse sources, including believers' self-reports, as well as observations and interpretations offered by researchers and practitioners across different fields. The diversified empirical evidence makes the author's claims persuasive and the arguments well-supported.

In conclusion, while some sections of this book can be challenging for newcomers, the book offers rigorous arguments and presents cutting-edge theories, such as cognitive biases and social cognition models, with clarity and empirical grounding. It also highlights how contemporary scientific approaches can reconstruct long-standing questions of belief, agency, and morality in ways that reach beyond traditional religious studies.

Zhihan Tao
Hong Kong Baptist University

HUGHES, A. W. (2026): THE FOOTBALL PARADOX: RELIGION, NATIONALISM AND GLOBALIZATION, BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC: LONDON. HBK £85. 213 P. ISBN 978135052739-9

Aaron W Hughes is a Professor of Religion at the University of Rochester, USA, so possibly not at first sight the obvious author of a book on football. He is, however, the son of a Scottish post-war immigrant to Canada who accompanied his

father to Old Firm matches in Glasgow during boyhood trips home, and when in London chooses to watch Millwall at The Den for the "local support and camaraderie"; so his credentials as an authentic fan are undeniable.

He makes two main arguments in this volume, both alluded to in the title. First, he is looking at religion, nationalism and globalization through the lens of football. It is the intersection that is the crux of his thesis: he argues that the social and political scientists who address issues of nationalism and globalization rarely address religion satisfactorily and that religious scholars mostly consider football as a secular religion. The field of "football studies", Hughes says, should be inter-disciplinary and inclusive.

His second argument is that the interaction of football with religion, nationalism and globalization is paradoxical. One of the case studies that are a feature of the book makes this point well. The Rwandan Reds are a Kigalian group of Liverpool FC supporters who gather together on match days to watch the game and celebrate or commiserate with each other. They are also all survivors of the Rwandan Genocide, and their shared solidarity for their team is part of their healing process. As Hughes says, "this is about as far away from big money as you can get". Yet it is only because of big money and globalization bringing the English Premier League to African TV screens that they can follow their team at all. This sense of paradox and eschewing predictable answers is one of the best features of the book.

Most readers of this bulletin will probably turn first to chapter 2, looking at "Football and/or religion", and be disappointed. Although there is an interesting (but ultimately inconclusive) examination of how "You'll Never Walk Alone" was adopted by Liverpool FC and then spread to a number of other teams, uniting the fans in a Durkheimian collective, this chapter contains little that scholars of religion will not already know. It seems to be intended for those social scientists described in chapter 1 as "not used to talking about religion as an independent variable in the world". The aim is to show those who think religion is simple that they are wrong. In particular,

Hughes says that football is not just a secular religion; it is also a place where nationalist or global economic concerns play out with religious implications.

Chapter 3 covers “Football, nationalism and globalization”. Hughes uses Meztur Ozil, a third generation Turkish-German who played for Arsenal and Germany, to show the familiar pattern of having to be seen as “good” to be treated as belonging. He looks at examples of when globalization trumps localism, such as the American takeovers of Premier League clubs; but also at the fan revolt that blocked the nascent European Super League. It would have been interesting to see more analysis of when and how globalization is beaten back. Chapter 4 focuses on FIFA, and retells the sorry tale of its scandals. It also covers the local case of a 2007 girls’ tournament in Quebec where a 12-year-old was prevented from wearing her hijab. Her team walked off in solidarity with her, and the issue continued to cause waves until in 2014 FIFA finally allowed religious head coverings. Hughes shows, once again, the complex implications of both race and gender in the dispute, as well as the inherited French *la-icite* of Quebec.

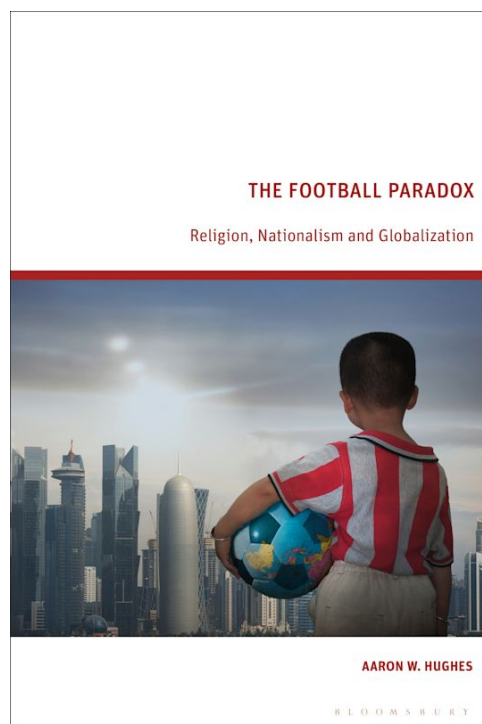
Chapter 5 makes a surprising, and not entirely convincing, argument that the 2022 Qatari World Cup was not a case of “sportswashing”. Hughes’s argument is that Qatar was intended as an act of *dawa*, an invitation to the watching and visiting non-Muslims to follow Islam’s precepts. It was also intended to show that Islam was compatible with modernity. It was, perhaps, religionwashing but not sportswashing. Readers will make their own mind up, but for me there was too little attention paid to the non-citizen status and working conditions of the workers

who built the tournament’s infrastructure.

Chapter 6, as the author admits, has been sadly overtaken by events. Written before the Gaza War, Hughes looks at the relative integration of Jews and Arabs in some Israeli football teams, contrasts this with an antagonistic history between the Israel and Palestine football federations, and hopes that it was the sign of a better future. Not, unfortunately, the path that was taken. He also briefly explores in this chapter the history of women’s football. One criticism of the book might be that it does not contain much analysis of the women’s game: this comes

mainly from the decision to concentrate on the professional side of football, and as this section recounts, widespread formation of elite leagues in the women’s game is relatively recent. The final full chapter acts as a summary of the argument being made throughout the book – that football needs to be studied as a discipline in itself, drawing together researchers from different disciplines to work together in analysing specific case studies in order to root their theory in concrete instances.

In chapter 1, Hughes says he had pitched the book as one that would be of interest to football supporters who might look at a side of the game they did not normally consider, and also to get academics to see football as a way to analyse issues of religion, nationalism and globalization. While the positioning and price of the book probably rules out the former, it has resulted in an eminently readable work, where jargon is minimised and explained, and case studies are used to make the issues concrete. Political scientists should be able to understand the religion in it, and scholars of religion can get hold of some political and economic complexities they may sometimes dismiss too easily.



The book is relatively theory-lite, with the examples doing the work. This gives it an immediacy, but the sources used become repetitive. While acknowledged in the text, the same quote from Hobsbawm about a nation taking concrete form in the eleven players of a national team is used seven times; it would have been good to have different takes on the same issue. The whole book could also have done with a proof-read; the most amusing error being the claim that during the 2022 Club World Cup in the USA, fearing the reaction of President Trump, FIFA removed “anti-racism and anti-discrimination messages”! Nevertheless, I found this a book with a compelling argument, written by someone who clearly both knows and cares about the subject. While I doubt Hughes will be stopped by many fans at The Den wanting to discuss the finer points of Bruce Lincoln’s definition of religion, though it would be great if he was, he deserves to be read by a wide audience in both religious studies and social sciences departments looking to connect their thinking with a game that is of vital importance to a large percentage of the world’s population.

Michael Truman
VU, Amsterdam

CUNDALL JR, M (ED) (2026): SACRED LAUGHTER: HUMOR AND LAUGHTER IN RELIGIOUS, CULTURAL, AND MYTHIC TRADITIONS, BLOOMSBURY: LONDON, Hbk £85; 248P. ISBN: 9781666973044

This new volume brings together eleven case studies of the role of laughter and humour in different religious settings. It covers a range of religious traditions, historical periods and geographical settings, from the laughter of the Ancient Egyptian gods (Chapter 2: Hingson) to the clown ministries of modern Christianity (Chapter 7: Sills). Its primary focus is laughter, not humour, though inevitably it also has much to say on the latter, as well as on the closely connected themes of joy and playfulness. And while the sub-heading suggests a not-wholly re-

ligious focus, every case study is within what scholars of religion would consider our home ground.

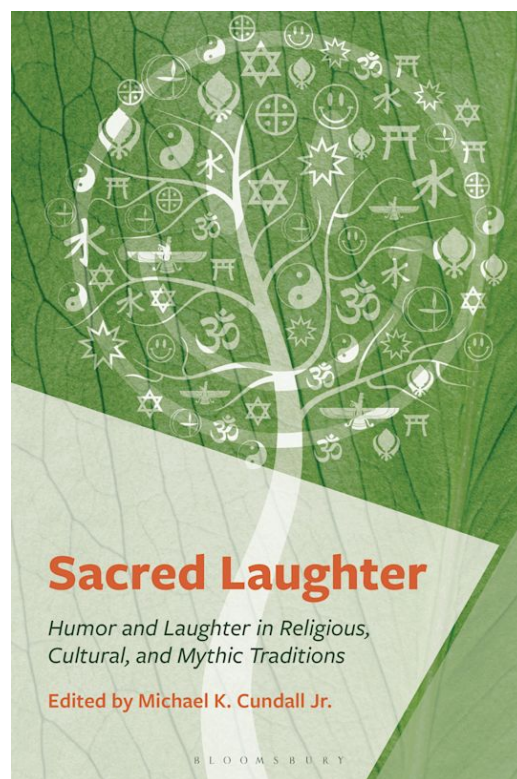
It is notable that the volume describes itself as an “anthology” not an edited volume. This perhaps softens the disappointment that, while there is much to praise in the individual chapters, the Introduction - the main contribution of the editor, Cundall, a philosopher of humour - contains little of value. At less than six pages, it is half enthusiastic but unfounded generalisation, and half poor-quality chapter summary. The first half is largely concerned with pushing back against the idea that laughter and the sacred do not belong together, and claiming that humans have been laughing for longer than they have been religious (both in evolutionary terms and in terms of an individual’s childhood experiences). There is no real discussion of terminology or conceptual frameworks, and little attempt to articulate the thematic interests of the volume. The chapter summaries are of varied lengths and presented as entirely unconnected to one another. Technical terms and non-English words are reproduced in the summaries without glosses, making some of them incomprehensible without first reading the chapters themselves.

The Introduction ends in a strange and abrupt manner (perhaps the Acknowledgements were originally meant to follow here?), but not before mentioning an Epilogue, to which I eagerly turned in case this is where we should find the attempt at synthesis and a drawing out of the bigger implications of the collection. But, at a page and a half, this simply repeats the Introduction’s generalisations about the importance of laughter, and contains an offer to edit more such collections in the future. This is not an offer that I would like to see accepted, as the opportunity that the editor has missed here is significant. A good quality collection on a common topic should demand more from its editors, who can extend the significance and importance of a volume through careful framing and drawing together of key themes and questions.

And common themes and questions are not hard to find. Many of the chapters start by address-

ing the idea that, while religion is serious, laughter is irreverent or inappropriate. Hence, for example, we encounter the idea that Jesus never laughed (Chapter 1: Lindvall & Palmisano) and nor did the Buddha (Chapter 5: Gardner), or that Mohammad declared that laughter is only possible for those ignorant of the truth (Chapter 4: Ahmed & Mohamed). Yet each of these chapters then exposes this dichotomy as simplistic, offering multiple examples of humour and laughter in positive settings, as diverse as ritual, satire, or even simple joy at the opportunities for charity. In other contexts, there is no such tension as the starting point. In Ancient Egypt, laughter is a key activity of the gods, and essential to the maintenance of the cosmos (Chapter 2). The connections between comedy and cosmos also play out through trickster characters in North American narrative (Chapter 3: Danišová-Bartošková) or Hindu deities such as Krishna (Chapter 8: van der Velde). In sub-Saharan Africa laughter binds together gods and men (Chapter 9: Igboin), while laughter is described as the lifeblood of Shinto (Chapter 11: Ugoretz) and features prominently in Japanese festivals (Chapter 6: Scheid).

The contribution this volume makes to the study of Buddhist humour is particularly impressive. Chapter 5, “Buddhism, Humor, and Laughter” by Richard A. Gardner, is simply the best overview of Buddhism and humour that I have encountered – and I have read most, as this is an area I am currently researching. It manages to navigate all forms of Buddhism, ancient and modern, scripture and ritual, and even through to the laughter of contemporary teachers. All is meticulously researched, and several of the discussions – for example of the extent to which Zen koans are comic, or the historical development of “laughing Buddha” images – are rich enough to have been chapters in their own right.



Gardner’s contribution is then complemented by an intriguing and rigorous study of Mongolian Buddhist humour (Chapter 10: Fiadotava) that takes us deep into a specific and under-studied cultural context.

In summary, there is much to find joy in – and laugh at – in this valuable volume. The editor should be congratulated for bringing this anthology together, and for editorial efforts within the chapters (each of which includes a reflection on contemporary relevance, for example). But while future volumes on this theme would be more than welcome, an alternative editor, one more inclined to do the legwork of pulling out threads and implications, would be preferable.

Naomi Appleton
University of Edinburgh

MCVEIGH, B (2025): THE VESTIGES OF JAPANESE SPIRITUALITY: CHALLENGING THE STANDARD MODEL OF RELIGIOUS HISTORY, BLOOMSBURY: LONDON, Hbk £85; 154 P. ISBN: 9781666977936

American psychologist Julian Jaynes (1920-1997) published one influential book, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (1976). His idea that modern consciousness was a comparatively recent invention and prior to that humans experienced auditory hallucinations that were interpreted as coming from God/the gods is controversial and has not gained traction, though it has some admirers. The author of *The Vestiges of Japanese Spirituality: Challenging the Standard Model of Religious History*, Brian McVeigh, is one of the principal disseminators of Jaynes’ ideas, and a researcher at the Julian Jaynes Society. This is an interesting short book in which McVeigh proposes that a Jaynesian perspective can provide new data on Japanese religions, both old and new.

McVeigh's doctorate on Sukyo Mahikari (Princeton University 1991) was viewed as difficult because he used this Jaynesian framework. Some material in this book derives from that piece of research. The first two chapters set up the methodological framework; Religious Studies has what McVeigh calls a "standard model" which he wants to upend, and Jaynes' ideas are given a careful exposition as possible alternative model. For this reader, Jaynes' ideas feel dated, which is unsurprising. In fifty years methodology has moved on; the subfield of cognitive science of religion (CSR) has been growing in significance in the last three decades, and many of Jaynes' contentions can now be framed as early humans (Bronze Age onwards) not being in possession of "theory of mind" (a concept that did not exist when Jaynes was devising his framework). Nevertheless, this book has some value.

Chapter 3, "Historical Background to the Emergence of Japanese Spirituality," begins with archaeological cultures in Japan, and notes that "[i]n a little over one millennium, Japan went from a hunter-gatherer population to boasting the Nara state". The Emperor as ruler combined the roles of king, priest and shaman. For McVeigh shamanic religion shows the vestiges of the bicameral mind, and he carefully details two types (spirit journeying and becoming possessed by a spirit) of experience that shamans manifested. Chapter 4, "The Building Blocks of Japanese Spirituality," examines the key texts Kojiki and Nihon Shoki for evidence of changes in mentality, discusses the interrelationships of Shinto and Buddhism, the different kinds of supernatural beings in Japanese religion, and concludes with a close examination of female shamans (mikos) and what the author terms "the oracular mindset".

Chapter 5, "Another Japanese Religion: Shugendō," examines the mountain ascetics from through the Jaynesian paradigm. Shugendō came into existence around the ninth and tenth centuries, and practitioners (shugenja) developed spiritual powers while in the mountains and engaged with both Buddhas and kami. Chapter 6, "Spirit Possession as a Vestige of an Earlier Mentality," examines the way different mental states align with the bicameral model,

and emphasises how human mental states are embedded in a specific "cultural matrix". The brief "Conclusion" reiterates the value of the Jaynesian approach. This book is interesting because it illustrates the positives and negatives of a researcher having a 'strong programme' which shapes the raw data s/he collects. McVeigh's research is valuable, but this reader does not think this study is likely to cause an uptake of Jaynes' framework. It is likely to remain a curiosity, an outlier in Religious Studies and in other disciplines.

Carole M. Cusack
University of Sydney

FRIEDRICHS, J (2025): INTEGRATION IN MULTICULTURAL ENGLAND: COMMUNITY RELATIONS BETWEEN MUSLIMS AND NON-MUSLIMS, BLOOMSBURY: LONDON, Hbk. £90. 249P. ISBN: 9781350555242.

There have been a number of studies over the last thirty years or so on Muslims in Britain, perhaps led by the groundbreaking Islamic Britain by Philip Lewis (first edition 1994), in which he drew to a significant extent on his doctoral thesis examining the life of Muslims in Bradford. Others have looked at the life of Muslims in various parts of Britain and examined such issues as their awareness of self-identity and their involvement in politics.

Jörg Friedrichs sees his study as distinct from these. Rather than concentrating on Muslims and their communities per se, his aim is to consider community relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. Interestingly his title indicates an examination of such relations in England rather than Britain and to do this he chooses to concentrate on three inner city locations which he sees as usefully offering differing contexts and therefore perspectives on the issues at stake. These are Halifax in W Yorkshire, Shadwell and Wapping in the East End of London and Lozells in Birmingham.

All these are Muslim majority areas surrounded by larger areas where Muslims are not the majority. He sees this as ensuring a controlled approach. The examples are from areas often associated with Muslims in the popular mind: the North of England, the W. Midlands and London. The Muslim majority (mainly Pakistani) Park Ward of Halifax is contrasted with a larger surrounding white British population, both working class. Here Muslims are seen to have a wealth of community structures, their white counterparts less so. The Shadwell area of the East End of London is within an area that has, over a long period of time, been the first to receive migrants from a variety of backgrounds, many of whom have gone on to move to more prosperous areas. Currently the largest Muslim group is of Bangladeshi origin, with others such as Somalis and Albanians more recent arrivals. This area, including white working-class people, is seen as an area of deprivation. The third chosen area, Lozells, offers the opportunity to look at a multiethnic, indeed a 'super-diverse,' context, but with Muslims also originating largely in Pakistan or Bangladesh. In describing these examples, he is careful to define his terms, especially what he means by community.

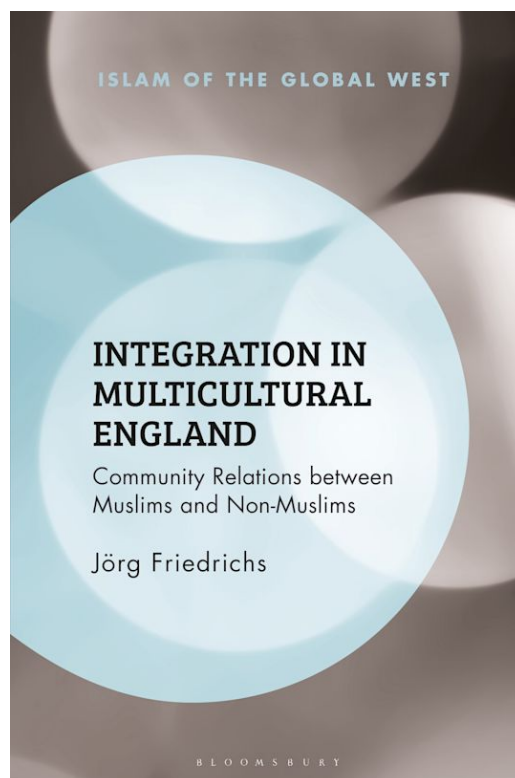
Friedrichs sees people on the ground as the 'experts' as these are the people who can speak from first-hand experience about relations between communities. He wishes to enable them to speak for themselves. To do this he avoided the use of 'gate-keepers' in looking for participants in his research. This approach, however, meant that only a few participants were women. He had also planned initially to fa-

cilitate group discussions but abandoned this and replaced group discussion with 'virtual conversations.' This clearly involved an interpretative element by the author, which some might see as problematic.

Drawing upon the concerns expressed he highlights the role of the debate around 'multiculturalism' and integration. Did the respondents see themselves as part of a multicultural society and did they see multiculturalism or integration as the way forward for them? Friedrichs suggests that most of his respondents, whether from Muslim or non-Muslim communities prefer language that suggests integration, though this might also suggest that there is a false dichotomy in his terminology. He found that his interlocutors were generally not interested in 'headline' issues such as radicalism or Islamophobia. Rather for them what might be called mundane experiences were of higher importance, such as raising their families or sending children to school. Members of communities in all three areas developed strategies for at least rubbing along with each other and whilst conflict did sometimes raise its head, it tended not to

develop into violence. To some extent the concept of acculturation was viewed positively by Muslims, in the sense that it was important to adapt to the wider society whilst remaining faithful to community norms. He stresses that there is no coherent non-Muslim 'community' to adapt to beyond a wider societal mainstream.

Overall Friedrichs's research with its pragmatic emphasis suggests a hopeful prospect. The book might be said to have at least two target



audiences. On the one hand it is academic in nature and methodology, but it also aims to lend insights that may be of practical value to decision makers in society. Whilst the author gives very good reasons for the choice of the three areas of field work, with varying populations, it would have been good to see some choices with even greater contrast. I find it interesting that Leicester, despite it being the first city in the UK to attain a non-White majority population, is not often used for this kind of academic study. It does have much in common with Birmingham though on a smaller scale. One distinctive reason often given for why Leicester has often been held up as a beacon for good inter-religious relations is that many of those who immigrated following their expulsion from countries like

Uganda and Malawi were twice migrants. As such they had already developed positive relations between the different communities whilst living under British rule in E Africa and brought these relationships with them.

Despite the small print, which particularly affects the clarity of the tables, this is an accessible book. The author clearly signposts his work throughout, reinforcing the points made. This should particularly help the reader who is looking for advice in practical areas, such as work with local authorities and on-the-ground agencies.

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Independent Scholar

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- "Nobody Left Behind: Older Adults and Hong Kong Baptist Churches," *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, vol. 53, no. 1, pp 25-39.
- with Claire Hiu-ching Cheung, "Caregivers who Left: Hong Kong Older Adults, their British Migrant Children, and Hong Kong Christian Communities—a Group Study from Psychological and Theological Perspectives," *Social Sciences*, vol. 15, no. 2, 218.

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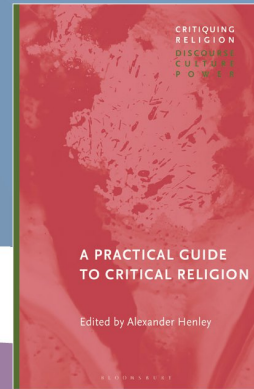
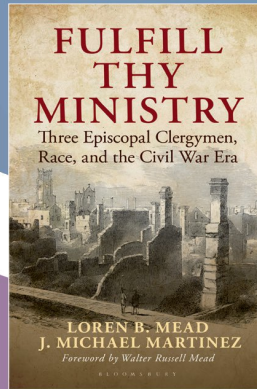
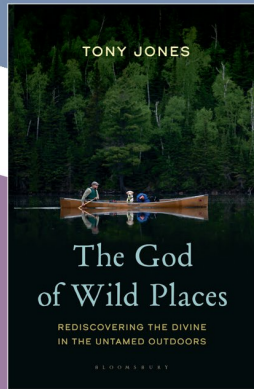
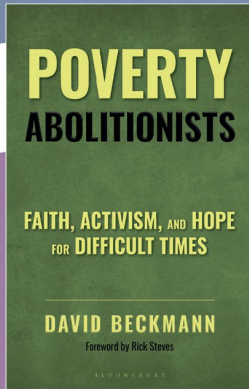
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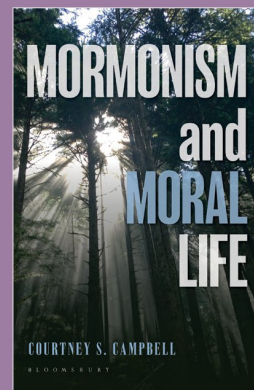
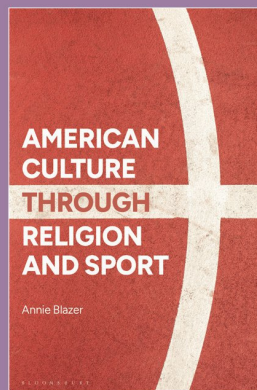
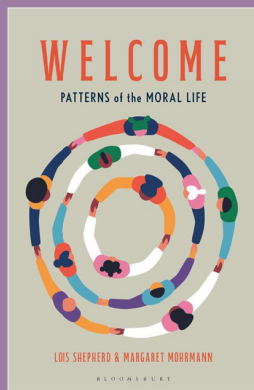
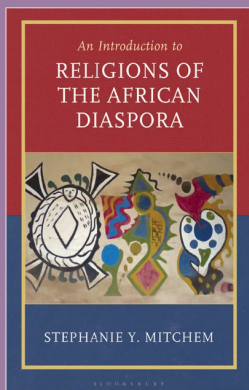
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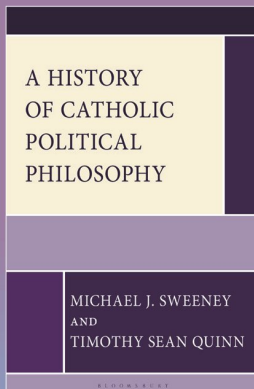
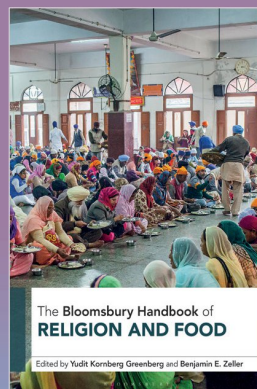
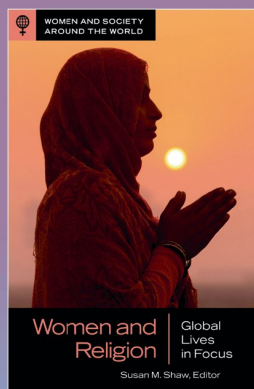
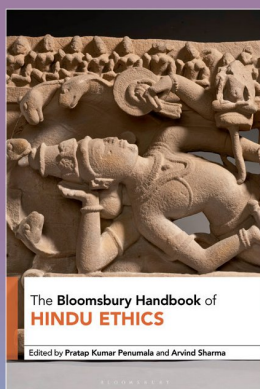
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"there is no such thing that answers to the name 'religion'; there are only distinct phenomena that sometimes co-occur and are contingently related to one another, sometimes in things we habitually label religious and sometimes in things that we habitually label secular.."

Jong, J. (2015), 'On (Not) Defining (Non)Religion', Science, Religion and Culture 2 (3):15-24.