



# NZASR Conference 2022

5-6 December, Te Herenga Waka – Victoria University of Wellington

Cover Art: Cauchi, Ben (2013) *The Thin Veil*. Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, New Zealand.

# Welcome from the NZASR

It is a pleasure to welcome you to Te Herenga Waka – Victoria University of Wellington, whether you’re joining us in person or virtually. This year, the conference programme includes 12 panels, 34 papers, a plenary session, and a keynote address. Individual paper proposals were grouped into panels in ways to facilitate stimulating discussions between participants. Many thanks to colleagues who assisted with the organisation of this conference, especially Will Sweetman, Joseph Watts, Priyanka Roy, and my fellow organising committee, Geoff Troughton and Philip Fountain.

Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to VUW’s Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences and the Templeton Religion Trust (Grant ID: 0418) for their support of this conference, and to the Religion Programme at University of Otago for sponsoring NZASR’s keynote.

Sara Rahmani  
Victoria University of Wellington

**Notes for Presenters and Session Chairs** | Each conference room will be equipped with a computer, data projector, a screen, and microphones. If you wish to use them, please bring your presentation on a flash drive or some other device and copy it on to the desktop before the session begins, so that the progress of each session is not delayed by technical difficulties. Conference coordinators can assist you with this process.

Each presenter on 3-person panels will have 20-minutes for their presentation and those on 4-person panels will be allowed up to 15-minutes. Please plan accordingly so that time is allowed for questions and discussion.

**Registration** | The conference will begin with tea and coffee served in the Alan MacDiarmid Foyer (AM Foyer) at 08:30 on Monday. Printed copies of the programme, including abstracts will be available at the registration table.

**Refreshment and Meals** | Morning and afternoon tea and coffee will be provided for all registrants. Lunch will be provided on Monday and Tuesday. All meals offer vegetarian and non-vegetarian options.

**Conference Dinner** | Apache, 122 Wakefield Street, Te Aro, Wellington

**Wifi** | Select the “WellingtonUniversityGuest” wireless network. You will be redirected to a web portal. Select ‘Don’t have an account?’ and follow the instructions to complete the sign in process. If you are not redirected, open a web browser and attempt to connect to <http://wifi.vuw.ac.nz>

Full instructions are available here:

<https://www.wgtn.ac.nz/digital-solutions/wireless-networks-and-internet/wellingtonuniversityguest>

### Conference Venues:

Alan MacDiarmid (AM) Foyer and Seminar Room 102 (AM102).

Laby Lecture Theatre 118 (LBLT118)



**Virtual Conference** | The conference will be livestreamed through two separate Zoom accounts (Stream A and B, which are linked to the corresponding Parallel Sessions A and B). Two conference coordinators will be running the livestreams, monitoring questions, and providing tech-support to all participants. Remote presenters are expected to participate via pre-recorded presentation and live Q&A. Please upload your video by 1 December, using the same (abstract) submission. If you have any questions about the virtual component of the conference, please contact Sara Rahmani.

### **Links for virtual conference attendees**

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| <b>Stream A</b> | <a href="https://vuw.zoom.us/my/nzasrsessiona">https://vuw.zoom.us/my/nzasrsessiona</a> |
| <b>Stream B</b> | <a href="https://vuw.zoom.us/my/nzasrsessionb">https://vuw.zoom.us/my/nzasrsessionb</a> |

## **Monday 5 December**

|             |  |                                    |
|-------------|--|------------------------------------|
| 08:30-09:00 | Registration                                   | AM Foyer                           |
| 09:00-09:30 | Welcome  | LBLT118/Stream A                   |
| 09:30-11:00 | Parallel Sessions 1                            | LBLT118/Stream A<br>AM102/Stream B |
| 11:00-11:30 | <i>Morning Tea</i>                             | AM Foyer                           |
| 11:30-13:00 | Parallel Sessions 2                            | LBLT118/Stream A<br>AM102/Stream B |
| 13:00-14:00 | <i>Lunch</i>                                   | AM Foyer                           |
| 14:00-15:30 | Parallel Sessions 3                            | LBLT118/Stream A<br>AM102/Stream B |
| 15:30-16:00 | <i>Afternoon Tea</i>                           | AM Foyer                           |
| 16:00-17:30 | Keynote Address:<br>Benjamin Grant<br>Purzycki | LBLT118/Stream A                   |
| 18:30       | <i>Dinner at Apache</i>                        | 122 Wakefield Street               |

## **Tuesday 6 December**

|             |                                   |                                    |
|-------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 09:00-10:30 | Parallel Sessions 4               | LBLT118/Stream A<br>AM102/Stream B |
| 10:30-11:00 | <i>Morning Tea</i>                | AM Foyer                           |
| 11:00-12:30 | Plenary: Wairuatanga o<br>ēnei rā | LBLT118/Stream A                   |
| 12:30-13:30 | <i>Lunch</i>                      | AM Foyer                           |
| 13:30-15:00 | Parallel Sessions 5               | LBLT118/Stream A<br>AM102/Stream B |
| 15:00-15:30 | <i>Afternoon Tea</i>              | AM Foyer                           |
| 15:30-17:00 | Parallel Sessions 6               | LBLT118/Stream A<br>AM102/Stream B |
| 17:00-17:30 | NZASR Annual Meeting              | AM102                              |

## NZASR Keynote Address

### **Moralistic Traditions and Social Complexity: A Mid-Life Crisis in the Evolutionary Study of Religion**

Benjamin Grant Purzycki, Aarhus University

[bgpurzycki@cas.au.dk](mailto:bgpurzycki@cas.au.dk)

Since at least the dawn of anthropology, the relationship between religion and morality has been a recurring, staple debate in the social sciences. Many have examined the correlation between social complexity and the so-called "moralistic traditions", often leading to heated debates positing their causal direction. This talk reviews the intellectual and methodological history surrounding these debates, attends to some of the contemporary discussions about the dynamism between social complexity and religious tradition, and points to emerging challenges to obtaining reliable resolutions.

## **Plenary: Wairuatanga o ēnei rā**

*Moderator:* Geoff Troughton

Māori understandings and experiences are central to any understanding of the landscapes of religion and spirituality in this country. This panel focuses on aspects of contemporary religion and spirituality among Māori in Aotearoa, paying particular attention to current debates, patterns of change, and negotiations of diverse and often competing spiritual traditions. The panel also seeks to open space for discussion of related issues pertinent to the study and interpretation of religion – and to the nature of lived religion in Aotearoa these days.

### **I. Syncretism and Māori Theology**

Byron Rangiwai, Unitec Institute of Technology

[brangiwai@gmail.com](mailto:brangiwai@gmail.com)

### **II. Te Whiwhi Moko Kauae: Touching the Soul where Jesus Cannot**

Gina Colvin, Te Ope Whakaora

[gina.colvin100@gmail.com](mailto:gina.colvin100@gmail.com)

### **III. Māori Christianity Today: Insights from Facebook**

Māmari Stephens, Victoria University of Wellington

[Mamari.Stephens@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:Mamari.Stephens@vuw.ac.nz)

## List of the Parallel Sessions

### **Parallel Session 1A – LBLT118/Stream A**

Session Chair: Geoff Troughton

- I. Michaela Richards: Restoring Taranaki Mounga: Sacred Space, Conservation and Governance in Aotearoa New Zealand.
- II. Paul Morris: The Religious Challenge of Biculturalism: Matariki and Mythology
- III. April Boland: Religion in State Ritual: Political Theatre in Contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand

### **Parallel Session 1B – AM102/Stream B**

Session Chair: Anna Halafoff

- I. Elizabeth Guthrie: Narada Maha Thera's dhammaduta in Indochina — 1933-1963
- II. Woramat Malasart: Anatomical Knowledge in the “Dhammakkāyassa-atthavaññanā”

### **Parallel Session 2A – LBLT118/Stream A**

Session Chair: Sara Rahmani

- I. Will Sweetman: Renderings of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa in Early Modern India
- II. Diana Cousens: Parallels in Ideas of Renunciation Found in Buddhist Monasticism and the Sufī text, Kashf al-Mahjub
- III. Bruno Shirley: A Cult of Maitreya in Medieval Sri Lanka

### **Parallel Session 2B – AM102/Stream B**

Session Chair: Christopher Longhurst

- I. Ann Hardy: Syncretic religiosity in a post-literate world: seeing ghosts in K-Drama
- II. Michael Toy: The End of the Digital is the End of the Human
- III. Sergei Sevriugin: Modernity, Formation and Missionary Discourse on the Korean Peninsula

### **Parallel Session 3A – LBLT118/Stream A**

Session Chair: Rachel Tallon

- I. Christopher Longhurst: The Systems and Culture that Failed Us
- II. Adrian Rosenfeldt: The New Millennium God Debate
- III. Hadleigh Tiddy: Seeding Buddhism in New Zealand

### **Parallel Session 3B – AM102/Stream B**

Session Chair: Mark Mullins

- I. Linghan Luo: Christianity in Japanese diaspora communities in New Zealand
- II. Karina Guthrie: Negotiating agency: A study of women's participation in Indian Sakta Tantra in the West
- III. Mehrnosh Lajevardi Fatemi: Imams in Muslim communities in Sydney (Reflection and analysis)

### **Parallel Session 4A – LBLT118/Stream A**

Session Chair: John Shaver

- I. Negar Partow: Religion and Politics in the First Feminist Revolution of the Middle East
- II. Mark Mullins: Unravelling the Symbiotic Relationship between Religion and Politics in the Post-Abe World
- III. Tom White: Floating Secularities: Polarising Pacific publics with a discourse of law and religion

### **Parallel Session 4B – AM102/Stream B**

Session Chair: Philip Fountain

- I. Rachel Tallon and Joey Domdom: Perceptions of being ‘different’ due to being a Christian in secular work contexts. Findings from a recent Aotearoa New Zealand study in the social services sector.
- II. Juliette Chevalier-Watts: Defending the Continued Relevance of Religious Charities Within Society – A Secular Perspective
- III. Hanyang Ge: Humanitarianism in New Zealand: religious refugees and engagement with resettlement actors

### **Parallel Session 5A – LBLT118/Stream A**

Session Chair: Philip Fountain

- I. Geoff Troughton: For Peace or Pacification? Christianity, Violence and Mission in the Nineteenth Century
- II. John Jones: King Jesus or Queen Victoria?: The abandoning of a nonviolent Christian ethic on the edges of Empire
- III. Anna Halafouf: Spirituality, Wellbeing and Risks

### **Parallel Session 5B – AM102/Stream B**

Session Chair: Michael Toy

- I. Richard Bonifant: Pluralistic Ignorance and the Anglican Church
- II. David Tuipulotu-Tuinukuafe: Ka ‘ai ha ‘ofa pea fai ki ‘Uluenga: Towards a 21st Century understanding of being leiti
- III. Hinako Yamaguchi: Reviving and Expanding Buddhism: The Role of Buddhist Temples in Japan’s LGBTQ Activism

### **Parallel Session 6A – LBLT118/Stream A**

Session Chair: Paul Morris

- I. Peter Lineham: Adventists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons and Exclusive Brethren: The Heterodox Christian Groups when the Mainstream declines
- II. Mike Grimshaw: Charles Brasch, Landfall and the spiritual resources of the people.
- III. Robyn Andrews: Exploring Impacts: Asian migrants in Aotearoa New Zealand Catholic Parishes

### **Parallel Session 6B – AM102/Stream B**

Session Chair: Sara Rahmani

- I. John Shaver: Religion, maternal support and child health in the Gambia
- II. Amina Hadžiomerović: Funerals with No Bodies: Rethinking Death, Self and Mortuary Rituals in the Aftermath of Genocide.

## **Abstracts**

## **Parallel Session 1A**

Session Chair: Geoff Troughton, Victoria University of Wellington

### **I. Restoring Taranaki Mounga: Sacred Space, Conservation and Governance in Aotearoa New Zealand.**

Michaela Richards, Victoria University of Wellington

[Michaela.Richards@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:Michaela.Richards@vuw.ac.nz)

This research examines the connections people have with the land, and how these shape and inform the work of conservation. Through a detailed qualitative study of Taranaki Mounga I explore how different actors imagine and enact ideas of sacred space. My research includes attention to the New Zealand Government, Māori, and other communities in the region as they engage in conservation work, including particularly pest control. Focusing on Taranaki Mounga, I explore how diverse communities in the region articulate their relationship with the mountain, and how this relates to their engagement with conservation. My research investigates the perspectives of diverse community groups, including community conservation organisations, Māori communities, tramping clubs, and other stakeholders. Therefore, the central research question guiding this research is: How do notions of sacred space or spirituality inform the ways people engage with conservation on Taranaki Mounga? This research seeks to understand what motivates people to engage in conservation work in order to better understand how to improve pest-control, environmental protection and ecological regeneration activities. My focus is on ideas of sacred space and spiritualities of the land, through which people value and relate to the environment.

## **II. The Religious Challenge of Biculturalism: Matariki and Mythology**

Paul Morris, Victoria University of Wellington

[Paul.Morris@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:Paul.Morris@vuw.ac.nz)

This paper explicates the impact of biculturalism on other religious traditions in Aotearoa. The first section explores the responses and strategies of several different religious communities to the incorporation of te reo Māori, and ritenga and tikanga at both the institutional and praxis levels. The second part focusses on Judaism and Matariki as a case study of tensions, parallels, and concerns as strategies of response. The conclusion attempts to conceptualise alternative responses and analyse their implications for a model of religious change in New Zealand.

### **III. Religion in State Ritual: Political Theatre in Contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand**

April Boland, Victoria University of Wellington

[Aprilangela2@hotmail.com](mailto:Aprilangela2@hotmail.com)

A comparative reflection on the performance of two State memorials in Aotearoa New Zealand: Anzac Day Dawn Services; and Ko Tātou, Tātou We Are One, a memorial service for the 2019 Christchurch Mosque attacks. The theatrical performance of State memorials aids in fostering Collective Effervescence, atmosphere, and immersion, thus informing the collective identity of an event's attendees. Performance elements on-stage are carefully chosen to elicit an intended reaction or reflection from the audience: music, lighting, silence, testimonial scripts, and more. Can the typically 'Christian' structure of State memorials in Aotearoa New Zealand be adapted for an ever-diversifying population?

## **Parallel Session 1B**

Session Chair: Anna Halafoff, Deakin University

### **I. Narada Maha Thera's dhammaduta in Indochina — 1933-1963**

Elizabeth Guthrie, University of Otago

[Elizguthrie@mac.com](mailto:Elizguthrie@mac.com)

Today, the Sinhalese monk Narada Maha Thera (1898-1983) is remembered for his missionary activities in Europe and North America and publications in English, such as Buddhism in a Nutshell (1933); students still study his primer, An Elementary Pali Course (1952). But his dhammaduta activities in Indochina are less well known. In July 2003, the Sinhalese newspaper Buddhist Times dedicated an issue to the memory of Narada Maha Thera. The article reported that he made no less than seventeen missions to Vietnam, and maintained a second residence at the Buddhist temple Ky Vien Tu in Saigon. Why did Narada Maha Thera focus his missionary efforts on Vietnam, a country with an ancient Mahayana Buddhist history? This paper explores Narada Maha Thera's dhammaduta activities in Indochina within the context of preparations for Buddha Jayanti celebrations in 1956-1957.

## **II. Anatomical Knowledge in the “Dhammadkāyassa- athavaññanā”**

Woramat Malasart, University of Otago  
[Woramatediri072@gmail.com](mailto:Woramatediri072@gmail.com)

A Siamese Buddhist palm leaf manuscript (ca. 1782-1851) titled Dhammadkāya or Dhammadkāyassa-athavaññanā ("Explanation of the Meaning of the dhammadkāya") compares the elements of the dhammadkāya with the physical attributes of the Buddha and instructs, in its final part, a meditation practitioner to use the dhammadkāya as a meditation object by visualising [the Buddha image that is implanted with the marks of the dhammadkāya listed in the Dhammadkāya manuscript]. With the close reading and translation of the manuscript, I will present (Buddhist) anatomical knowledge of human visual and hearing systems in the folios 7/1-7/2 and compare this distinctive information with the scientific knowledge of modern Anatomy (i.e., cochlea, inner hair cells, orbital bones, optic nerves, and eye muscles).

## **Parallel Session 2A**

Session Chair: Sara Rahmani, Victoria University of Wellington

### **I. Renderings of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa in Early Modern India**

Will Sweetman, University of Otago

[Will.Sweetman@otago.ac.nz](mailto:Will.Sweetman@otago.ac.nz)

As Peter Bisschop has recently argued, despite frequent references to the Vedas, the most significant sources for early modern European accounts of Hinduism are in fact the Purāṇas. It is often said that the Bhāgavata Purāṇa—by many accounts the most important of the Purāṇas—was first translated into a European language only in 1830 (by Eugène Burnouf). However, there are in fact at least six earlier translations—all partial but some substantial—into European languages (Portuguese, French, English and German). Three of these were produced by Indian intellectuals—two entirely. Three involved prior translation from Sanskrit into Indian vernaculars (Konkani or Marathi, Tamil, and Bengali or Hindi). Most had an impact in Europe, some through publication (or further translation into another European language), others through manuscript circulation among leading intellectual figures including John Locke and Henry More. This paper will survey these translations, the circumstances of their production, their impact on the European understanding of Hinduism prior to 1830 and the reasons for their neglect.

## **II. Parallels in Ideas of Renunciation Found in Buddhist Monasticism and the Sufi text, Kashf al-Mahjub**

Diana Cousens, Australian Catholic University

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The spirit of renunciation is a particular attitude focused on the spiritual path as the most important thing in life - as opposed to acquiring money and fame, for example. In this paper I will describe parallels in themes of renunciation in the eleventh century Persian Sufi text, the Kashf al-Mahjub by aAl-Hujwiri from Ghazni, Afghanistan, and Stanzas for a Novice Monk, attributed to the third century Indian scholar Nagarjuna. In both the Buddhist and Sufi texts themes of renunciation are demonstrated by limits on possessions, the value of fasting, the reverence for spiritual teachers and adherence to particular disciplines.

### **III. A Cult of Maitreya in Medieval Sri Lanka**

Bruno Shirley, Cornell University

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Scholars typically understand the soteriological goal of Sri Lankan Buddhism to be arhatship, enlightenment within the sāsana of the most recent Buddha Śākyamuni. Aspirations for rebirth in the sāsana of the future Buddha Maitreya are therefore dismissed as populist heterodoxy (Gombrich 1971; 2006; Mahadev 2016). However, a large body of literature from the medieval period (c. 500–1500) indicates a growing interest in the benefits—both mundane and supermundane—of such a rebirth among elite scholar-monks. On the basis of these texts, I argue for a radical revision of Maitreya’s role in the history of Lankan Buddhism.

## **Parallel Session 2B**

Session Chair: Christopher Longhurst, Te Kupenga  
Catholic Theological College of Aotearoa New Zealand

### **I. Syncretic Religiosity in a Post-Literate World: Seeing Ghosts in K-Drama**

Ann Hardy, University of Waikato

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Six decades ago Catholic media theorist Marshall McLuhan predicted in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962) that electronic media would shift the epistemic basis of Western society away from a paradigm based on written literacy towards one that was oral, tactile, and tribal (in Cuenco, 2021, see also Nayar, 2012). This presentation examines the appeal of a relatively new source of global ‘tribal’ media membership: Korean series drama, which has been growing its audience over the last four years through SVOD platforms such as Netflix. Specifically, it investigates the layered co-presence of aspects of Shamanism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Christianity in the many contemporary supernatural dramas which focus on restless spirits (ghosts) and the living humans who interact with them.

## **II. The End of the Digital is the End of the Human**

Michael Toy, Victoria University of Wellington

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Concerns of an exploitative relationship between humanity and technology is certainly nothing new. Substantial work in digital religion has mapped out the ongoing negotiations communities undertake when adopting new forms of technology. To thicken our understanding of the impacts of digitality especially upon the subaltern, this paper proposes we skip to the end, that is, to eschatology. This investigation of eschatology opens to a conversation of the telos not only of humanity but of humanity as inherently technological. By juxtaposing eschatological articulations of Deaf, queer, and migrant Christian communities, we thicken our understanding of the interplay between digitality, humanity, and religion.

### **III. Modernity, Formation and Missionary Discourse on the Korean Peninsula**

Sergei Sevriugin, Academy of Korean Studies  
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This paper focuses on the relationship between modernity and religion on the Korean peninsula by the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, whose influence can be noticed today as well. The interconnection between them is presented through a comparative discourse analysis of Protestant and Orthodox missionary rhetoric, which operated on a common Christian narrative but was fundamentally different in its attitudes towards religion. In contrast to Protestantism, which at that point earned the status of “ideal” religion, the Orthodox Church, full of “non-modern” traits, could not become the so-called “problematic Other” and thus was assumed as “old” and unhelpful.

## **Parallel Session 3A**

Session Chair: Rachel Tallon, Wellington Institute of Technology and Whitireia, Te Pukenga

### **I. The Systems and Culture that Failed Us**

Christopher Longhurst, Te Kupenga Catholic Theological College of Aotearoa New Zealand

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Speaking at the Faith-based Redress hearings of New Zealand's Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care, March 2021, the Metropolitan of New Zealand's Catholic Church acknowledged that “the systems and culture of the Church allowed abuse to occur [...that] these systems and culture failed you and must change.” An analysis of related theologically contested practices and doctrines in the broader Roman Catholic system and within the ecclesial cultural experience in Aotearoa New Zealand, probes what aspects of those systems and culture allowed abuse to occur. An indication is then given as to what changes may be needed.

## **II. The New Millennium God Debate**

Adrian Rosenfeldt, La Trobe University and Melbourne University  
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This paper examines the post 9/11 God debate in the West. Through a close study of prominent English God debaters, Richard Dawkins (scheduled to tour NZ in 2023), Karen Armstrong, Christopher Hitchens and Terry Eagleton, I argue that New Atheist and religious apologist ideas and arguments about God, science, and identity are driven by mythic autobiographical narratives and Protestant and Catholic cultural heritage. This paper will engage and inform those interested in contemporary religious controversy, as it illustrates how ideas that sometimes seem abstract or theoretical are deeply shaped by personal experiences, sometimes without the God debaters acknowledging or even realizing this.

### **III. Seeding Buddhism in New Zealand**

Hadleigh Tiddy, Independent Scholar

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One of the earliest Buddhist events to take place in New Zealand was a three-month retreat led by a Canadian Buddhist teacher known as Namgyal Rinpoche, on the shores of Lake Rotoiti, in 1973. This article provides a qualitative case study of the retreat, and shows how the practices and motivations of the group reveal and challenge the assumptions of some of the theoretical frameworks scholars have used to interpret the spread of Dharma to the West. Instead, I argue that a set of horticultural metaphors, proposed by Wakoh Shannon Hickey with the additional category of “seeding,” best describes the mechanisms of transmission that brought Buddhism to New Zealand.

## **Parallel Session 3B**

Session Chair: Mark Mullins, University of Auckland

### **I. Christianity in Japanese Diaspora Communities in New Zealand**

Linghan Luo, University of Auckland

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This paper explores why Japanese immigrants are more likely to embrace Christianity than people in their country of origin. According to the NZ Census (2018), ten percent of Japanese in New Zealand identify themselves as Christian, which is surprisingly high when compared with the one percent of Japanese in Japan. Moreover, more Japanese identified themselves as Christian than Buddhist in the most recent census, which is a significant change from the traditional pattern of religious affiliation in Japan, where Buddhism tends to be more common. In this study I seek to both documents how religious practice and affiliation of Japanese immigrants in New Zealand has changed, and identify the key factors that have shaped this process. This presentation will report some initial findings of what has motivated immigrants to affiliate with Japanese Christian organizations. Preliminary observations and interviews reveal that the new religious associations provide Japanese immigrants with a sense of belonging and contribute to the maintenance of ethnic identity and culture.

## **II. Negotiating Agency: A study of Women's Participation in Indian Sakta Tantra in the West**

Karina Guthrie, University of Otago  
[Karina@karinaguthrieyoga.com](mailto:Karina@karinaguthrieyoga.com)

This presentation will communicate the findings of doctoral research examining the role of feminine-centered spiritual practice on women's experiences of identity formation and agency. The thesis explores the uptake of the Sakta tradition of Indian Tantra, which focuses on the worship of the divine in its feminine form, by women in Europe, USA, Australia and New Zealand. It explores how women's spiritual practice influences their identity and whether it leads them to interrogate the nature of their participation in gendered power dynamics in the social and spiritual fields. The thesis expands on existing research into lived religion and argues for the importance of situating research on women's spiritual practice within the temporal, cultural, human and material frameworks that mediate how religious symbols are used by historically, socially, economically and politically situated women.

### **III. Imams in Muslim Communities in Sydney (Reflection and Analysis)**

Mehrnoch Lajevardi Fatemi, Western Sydney University  
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In recent years most Western countries, including Australia, have experienced increased immigration with accompanying issues surrounding religious diversity. This presents a major intellectual challenge at the community level for integration, with the majority of Muslims experiencing a shift in their spiritual capital in the new social context. Muslims may feel insecure, with a sense of spiritual segregation, and struggle to adapt to the new environment, including being able to accept the differences between western culture, religion, and their own new field. Some of these issues related to their religion are factors that affect Islamic leadership in social change. This empirical research draws on a series of 9 semi-structured qualitative in-depth interviews with imams in Sydney.

## **Parallel Session 4A**

Session Chair: Will Sweetman, University of Otago

### **I. Religion and Politics in the First Feminist Revolution of the Middle East**

Negar Partow, Massey University

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The Islamic Republic of Iran has been designed by Iranian clergy who have used their theological expertise to develop the first and only model of a modern Shi'a state. They argued that by an exclusively clerical governance system, national policies would not be deviated from the Islamic path. The hegemonic political culture that the Islamic republic developed, created a political and social system in which every political failure was to be a failure for Islamic governance. This entanglement undermined all political movements and opposition in Iran, as, they could be labelled as "enemies of Islam". I argue that the Iranian feminist discourse offered an alternative model of governance that could result in a positive change. This paper is based on a study that I have conducted on twitter posts about religion and politics in Iran since September 2022 as the revolution began. I followed comments on fifty Persian twitter posts that have been published by those who support the Women, life, freedom revolution to identify their approach towards the role religion and politics in their revolution. These comments are analysed in three categories of the role of religion in individual lives (civil liberties), in social relations, and in political actions. The findings of this research attest that by aiming to achieve equality, the feminist movement of Iran redefines secularity as a fluid concept that is developed

in the relationship between individuals, communities and the environment. By doing so, they undermine the dominance of politics and offer a holistic model that is concerned with the wellbeing of society rather than wining in normative politics.

## **II. Unravelling the Symbiotic Relationship between Religion and Politics in the Post-Abe World**

Mark Mullins, University of Auckland  
[mmul044@uoa.auckland.ac.nz](mailto:mmul044@uoa.auckland.ac.nz)

Over the past half-century, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the Association of Shintō Shrines have been engaged in collaborative efforts to “restore” Japanese values and traditions that were undermined during the Allied Occupation of Japan. Since the disaster years (1995/2011), LDP Diet members and prime ministers, particularly Prime Minister Abe Shinzo, increased their support for the Shinto political agenda to restore patriotic education, promote Yasukuni Shrine, and revise the Constitution. Following PM Abe’s assassination (8 July 2022), the influence of the controversial Unification Church on LDP politicians and their policies has been exposed and generated widespread criticism and public debate. This presentation will provide a brief update on recent developments and consider the fallout for politicians closely linked to organised religions.

### **III. Floating Secularities: Polarising Pacific Publics with a Discourse of Law and Religion**

Tom White, University of Otago; Leipzig University  
[Tomwhitesmailbox@gmail.com](mailto:Tomwhitesmailbox@gmail.com)

In the past decade, Fiji declared a secular state (2013), Samoa declared a Christian state (2017) and, in August 2021, Papua New Guinea's law commission advised the declaration of a 'Christian nation'. These reforms emerge from social upheavals sweeping the Pacific, including (i) the decline of traditional governing authority, (ii) the emergence of new, divisive forms of Christianity; and (iii) the broadening use of law on 'religion'. This paper examines how the Pacific's constitutional politics operationalises religion as a floating signifier. Through the conceptual oppositions of the religion/secular dual, lawmakers reimagine lines of political conflict and polemicise the public space.

## **Parallel Session 4B**

Session Chair: Philip Fountain, Victoria University of Wellington

### **I. Perceptions of Being ‘Different’ Due to Being a Christian in Secular Work Contexts. Findings from a Recent Aotearoa New Zealand Study in the Social Services Sector.**

Rachel Tallon & Joey Domdom, Wellington Institute of Technology and Whitireia, Te Pukenga

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The research study presented here sought to canvass how Christian practitioners at the 'coalface' of work in the social services navigated ethical tensions within their workplace. Our qualitative study involved in depth one-on-one interviews with 16 participants who identified as practicing Christians and were employed in a secular organisation that provided social services. A key finding was how the participants conceived of the perceptions that their clients, colleagues and employers had of them, related to their faith. We discuss the nature of these perceptions as they raise issues around disclosure of identity at work. Issues such as experiencing real or perceived stigma and conflicting values may be encountered by Christians in secular work contexts. We discuss the implications of these issues for Christian social service practitioners and their training. These findings may inform the research concerning spiritual and religious identity in secular contexts.

## **II. Defending the Continued Relevance of Religious Charities Within Society – A Secular Perspective**

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Whilst charity is an ancient concept, it remains a vital contemporary construct that fills social welfare gaps, and charity and religion have had a symbiotic relationship since time immemorial. As result of the importance of charities to society, charity governance is both a state and society matter, ensuring that charities meet their legal and societal obligations. In relation to meeting their legal obligations, and to ensure their continued legal legitimacy, New Zealand charities, as is the case in many common law jurisdictions, are governed by a number of stringent legal obligations. However, whilst their legal legitimacy may be confirmed, charitable social legitimacy has been challenged, and particularly in relation to the continued place of religious charities within the charity narrative. Indeed, there have been legal calls for the removal of religious charities as well as numerous and loud public voices echoing those legal calls. In the face of the ever increasing challenges to the legitimacy of religious charities, this paper focuses on the continued place of religious charities in society but through a secular economic lens as a way of providing objective and verifiable evidence that supports the legal legitimacy of religious charities in an allegedly secular society, and as a result will help enhance the quality of public conversations regarding religious charities.

### **III. Humanitarianism in New Zealand: Religious Refugees and Engagement with Resettlement Actors**

Hanyang Ge, Victoria University of Wellington

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New Zealand has established a refugee quota program since 1987 to facilitate the resettlement process. The often unarticulated assumptions within the secular state of New Zealand have made the interpretation of the process of how it manages religious refugees more complex. My doctoral research examines the politics and cultures of humanitarianism implicated in refugee resettlement in New Zealand. This presentation will focus on the engagement of government actors such as refugee quota selection officer, policy advisor and refugee liaison officer with Muslim refugees, providing some insights into the relationship between religion and secularity in the practice of humanitarianism.

## **Parallel Session 5A**

Session Chair: Philip Fountain, Victoria University of Wellington

### **I. For Peace or Pacification? Christianity, Violence and Mission in the Nineteenth Century**

Geoff Troughton, Victoria University of Wellington  
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In New Zealand and elsewhere, nineteenth-century Christian missionaries often cast their activity as one of bringing peace. By the postcolonial era, however, Christian mission had become roundly associated with the violence of depredations of colonialism; they were agents of pacification rather than peace. This paper reflects on the missionary peace gospel as it was understood, practiced, and articulated in New Zealand and further afield. It considers especially what such a focus on peace may yield for understanding dynamics of Christian mission in the nineteenth century.

## **II. King Jesus or Queen Victoria? – The Abandoning of a Nonviolent Christian Ethic on the Edges of Empire**

John David Jones, Victoria University of Wellington  
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Previously unexamined nineteenth-century materials from New Zealand Church of Christ archives highlight how this small, sectarian community in Aotearoa was more heavily impacted by survival concerns, both communal and individual, than by previously held nonviolent theologies. Formerly a pacifist community in the UK, emigrants to NZ recognised that stricter parameters of group inclusion (i.e. pacifism) threatened religious survival in their newfound numerical and geographical isolation. Individually, personal survival in the face of a perceived Māori threat catalysed the community's political theology from a normative State-critique to a thorough sanctification of State and its necessarily violent modes of maintaining law and order.

### **III. Spirituality, Wellbeing and Risks**

Anna Halafoff, Deakin University

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Contemporary studies of religion and society have focused mainly on religious diversity and the non-religious, with spirituality typically not taken as seriously by scholars, or in political spheres. Drawing on data arising from two recent Australian Research Council funded studies, this paper examines spirituality's associations with personal and planetary wellbeing and risks of dis/misinformation and harms. It argues that there is a need to move beyond the binary of the religious and non-religious, and to include an emphasis on diverse worldviews – spiritual, religious and non-religious – in scholarship, policies and curriculum to better reflect the lived reality of Gen Z Australians.

## **Parallel Session 5B**

Session Chair: Michael Toy, Victoria University of Wellington

### **I. Pluralistic Ignorance and the Anglican Church**

Richard Bonifant, University of Auckland

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I am currently researching the phenomenon of pluralistic ignorance in relation to the Anglican Church of New Zealand as the major focus of my Ph.D thesis. “Floyd Allport (1924; Katz & Allport, 1931) coined the term pluralistic ignorance to describe the situation in which virtually all members of a group privately reject group norms yet believe that virtually all other group members accept them.” (Miller & McFarland, 1987, p. 298) This paper describes this phenomenon and how it may be present within a hierarchically organised religious group to the detriment of that religious group’s ongoing development.

## **II. Ka ‘ai ha ‘ofa pea fai ki ‘Uluenga: Towards a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Understanding of Being Leiti**

David Tuipulotu-Tuinukuafe, University of Auckland

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This paper will aim to decipher the understanding of leiti, Tongan biological men who are characteristically feminine from a theological perspective. In 2018, a documentary, leitis in waiting, highlighted the strong contrast of extremes by Tongans viewing leitis. The documentary also highlighted strong anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric from Pastor Taukolo, a minister for the Assemblies of God in Tonga, with the importance of dialogue from Cardinal Mafi, Tonga's highest Catholic official. This paper aims to understand how do leitis and the wider Tongan LGBTQ+ community view faith and spirituality, and in the wake of strong anti-LGBTQ+ comments and actions by Pacific sports players, can Imago Dei, and the Lesbian rule allow young Tongan leitis and LGBTQ+ peoples to flourish secure in both their gender and sexual identity and faith as Christians.

### **III. Reviving and Expanding Buddhism: The Role of Buddhist Temples in Japan's LGBTQ Activism**

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Despite the ongoing homophobic sentiments in Japanese politics, the LGBTQ community in Japan has recently found an unexpected new group of allies: Buddhist temples. In the last couple of years, more and more Buddhist temples in Japan have begun to support the LGBTQ community through conducting gay weddings, organizing graves for gay couples, and giving posthumous names for transgender people. My ethnographic research, which involves interviews with select LGBTQ-supportive Buddhist priests and nuns, explores the motivations for promoting LGBTQ funerary services and same-sex Buddhist weddings. Among these are a commitment to envisioning an inclusive and egalitarian Japanese society, as well as the pressing need for Buddhist temples to stay relevant to people's lives and deaths.

## **Parallel Session 6A**

Session Chair: Paul Morris, Victoria University of Wellington

### **I. Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons and Exclusive Brethren: The Heterodox Christian Groups when the Mainstream Declines**

Peter Lineham, Massey University

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This paper focuses on how the fortunes of non-mainstream Christian groups have differed from those of the so-called mainstream churches over the last fifty years. These four groups historically flourished in their criticism of traditional Christian tenets and to a lesser or greater degree consciously separated themselves from it. Each of them is consciously global, with very limited local autonomy. All of them except the Brethren make available membership statistics which enable us to compare their changing fortunes in New Zealand compared to the rest of the world. Exclusive Brethren have chosen a path of increasing alienation and public opprobrium. Adventists have drawn closer to “mainstream” Christian groups a degree of congregationalism. Latter day Saints and Jehovah’s Witnesses continue a path of enforced unity, centralised judgement, and minimal congregational variants. Close attention to their New Zealand experience informs us of the impact of these approaches.

## **II. Charles Brasch, Landfall and the Spiritual Resources of the People**

Mike Grimshaw, University of Canterbury

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In March 1947, in his ‘Notes’ for the inaugural issue of the journal *Landfall*, Charles Brasch laid out his manifesto for the arts in New Zealand. While New Zealand was culturally a province of Europe, he believed a new form of culture could be developed, noting what Māori had achieved in relocating traditions to a new land. As Brasch stated: “To relate: that is one of the chief social – and spiritual – functions of the arts”; also declaring “What counts is not a country’s material resources, but the use to which they are put. And that is determined by the spiritual resources of the people.” Arguing that within the context of New Zealand post-war cultural nationalism *Landfall* is an unrecognized spiritual project, this paper reads Brasch’s *Landfall* (1947-66) as attempting to provide New Zealand with such ‘spiritual resources’ via the arts, identifying key moments, issues and limitations.

### **III. Exploring Impacts: Asian migrants in Aotearoa New Zealand Catholic Parishes**

Robyn Andrews, Massey University

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After some decades of declining church attendance, a number of Aotearoa New Zealand's Catholic parishes are now re-filling with recently arrived migrants, particularly Catholics from India and the Philippines. My recent research seeks to understand the experiences of the different groups involved in three catholic parishes. It is clear that the church is the site of a complex set of varied expectations, practices and preferences. While some intersections may be potentially disruptive, others demonstrate resilience, all in a unique setting where the shared key purpose of such culturally diverse groups coming together is to nurture and enhance the faith lives of individuals.

## **Parallel Session 6B**

Session Chair: Sara Rahmani, Victoria University of Wellington

### **I. Religion, Maternal Support and Child Health in the Gambia**

John Shaver, University of Otago  
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The higher relative fertility of religious individuals in contemporary settings represents a puzzle: Studies find a negative relationship between child number and developmental outcomes for each child; however, there is currently little evidence that children born to religious parents fare worse, despite higher fertility. Using anthropometric, demographic, religiosity and social network data collected from 705 mothers, their children, and 295 of their husbands across 23 villages in rural Gambia, we evaluate the hypothesis that religious systems motivate cooperative parenting behaviors among extended kin networks and unrelated co-religionists, to enable large families of successful children. Fertility in the Gambia is high, with women averaging over 8 births. In this high fertility setting, resource investments in children by people other than the mother are associated with increases in child growth. In rural Gambia, Islam structures daily life, and women who report higher levels of religiosity receive more social support, however, this support is not related to measures of child outcomes. This talk contextualises these mixed findings in the context of father's religiosity, social networks, and alloparental investments directed toward their children.

## **II. Funerals with No Bodies: Rethinking Death, Self and Mortuary Rituals in the Aftermath of Genocide.**

Amina Hadžiomerović, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology

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Concerned with conditions that suspend the ritual action, the present paper explores the improvisation of mortuary rites and rituals within the context of post-genocide Bosnia where more than 30,000 disappeared. To illustrate the complexities of disembodied loss, I analyse the case of the post-humous ritual of semi-consecration of the missing Bosnian Muslims and the meanings it holds for the surviving communities. Drawing upon the theory of Death Terror Management and my ethnographic fieldwork in Bosnia, I discovered that devising such ritual practice represents a defensive mechanism as a collective response to the trauma of perishment engendered through the experience of genocide.

Thank you for attending

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A few blank pages for your notes...







And one for your world-class doodles

