

**AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGION**  
**And NEW ZEALAND ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGION**

**ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2017**

**Hosted by the Institute for Ethics and Society**

**The University of Notre Dame Australia**

**Broadway, Sydney**

**CONFERENCE PROGRAM**

**THURSDAY 7TH DECEMEBER**

11.00 – 12.00 *St Benedict's Hall* **ARC Centres of Excellence Information Session**

12.30 – 13.00 *St Benedict's Hall* **Welcome**

13.00 – 14.30 *St Benedict's Hall* **International Sociology Association Plenary Panel**

**“Thinking Beyond the West: Exploring New Approaches to the Sociology of Religion”**

Sociology has long used Western Christianity as a model for all religious life. As a result, the field has tended to highlight aspects of religion that Christians find important, such as religious beliefs and formal organizations, while paying less attention to other elements. The papers on this panel explore some alternative views that are grounded in Southern/non-Western cultural-historical contexts. These reveal aspects of contemporary religion that sociology's default view fails to notice.

Raewyn Connell

*Decolonising God*

Jim Spickard

*Learning from the Navajo: It's About Time*

Adam Possamai

*Pre-Reconquista Cordoba, European Settlement in Central Australia and France's Third Republic, and the i-zation of today's society: A sociology of knowledges across three periods*

Cristina Rocha

*Alternative Ontologies? The Case of the Brazilian faith healer John of God*

AASR would like to acknowledge the role of the Western Sydney University's School of Social Sciences and Psychology and the International Sociology Association in funding this panel

**14.30 – 16.00 Concurrent Session 1**

**Room 221 New Religious Movements**

Carole Cusack

*Anne Hamilton-Byrne and the Family: Charismatic Leadership in a New Religious Movement*

Anne Hamilton-Byrne (b. Evelyn Edwards c. 1920) is the charismatic leader of a secretive new religious movement called the Family (also the Santiniketan Park Association). The group coalesced in the early 1960s when yoga teacher Hamilton-Byrne met the English physicist and psychic researcher Dr Raynor Johnson, then Master of Queen's College at the University of Melbourne. The group attracted upper middle class professionals, held a mix of Eastern and Western religious ideas, and worshipped Hamilton-Byrne as Christ. Her control of members was near-total, and many criminal practices occurred within the Family (including the illicit adoption of approximately thirty children, false imprisonment, physical violence and non-consensual administration of illegal drugs). Yet police investigations and legal cases led only to trivial charges, and Hamilton-Byrne is alive today, in her 90s and suffering from Alzheimer's disease. Little academic work exists on the Family, but the recent publication of a book by Rosie Jones and Chris Johnston, *The Family* (Scribe 2017) and an accompanying documentary permit an assessment of Hamilton-Byrne's charismatic leadership, and comparisons to other beautiful and powerful female leaders of apocalyptic groups such as Mary Ann MacLean (The Process Church of the Final Judgement) and Elizabeth Clare Prophet (The Church Universal and Triumphant).

Ray Radford

*'You people don't know what the truth is ... truth is obsolete': New Religious Movements and Possible Future Scenarios in 'Transmetropolitan'*

Transmetropolitan, a long form graphic novel series (1997-2002), is the story of Spider Jerusalem, a gonzo journalist seeking to expose the truth in a futuristic world of lies. The first six issues, collected in a trade edition entitled 'Back on the Street', see Spider returning home to an unnamed east coast American megacity to resume his career as a journalist. In issue six, Spider and his assistant Channon attend a New Religious Movement (NRM) convention, held because a new religion emerges every six minutes. The city is full of technological marvels, allowing its denizens to be constantly connected or constantly distracted. Houses and apartments have mechanical 'makers' to reconstitute matter, creating new from old. The city's citizens can do and be what they wish, allowing seekers to join or start a NRM; that these religions are still created and are popular in a society that seemingly has it all, permits the exploration how NRMs in

society work. This paper investigates Transmetropolitan's author Warren Ellis' statement that "Science fiction is social fiction" to anchor the future NRMs in the series to ideas he found in his own world. The paper attempts to understand how NRMs created in the twenty-first century, were in answer to societal ills or injustices that required solutions. Transmetropolitan is set in an unknown future, but the society it portrays can be utilized to explore twenty-first century first world culture. NRMs were seen as a problem in the 1960s when first studied by sociologists, but are now regarded as a normal part of human social interaction, and have been facilitated by advances in Internet and communications technologies. Using Transmetropolitan as a guide for how we could view NRMs in the future, also allows us to explore the way that NRMs are designed to solve the ills of modernity (what was modern for Jim Jones, for example, reflects the fears and anxieties of specific times and places), which in turn reflects thoughts, attitudes and beliefs that become inherent in new religious movements.

Essi Mäkelä

*'It felt like we won' – Registering New Religious Communities in Finland*

In Finland, a religious community does not necessarily have to register, but since the population registry only recognizes the registered communities, registration is considered a confirmation of approval from the state and the society at large. To accomplish this, the communities must fulfill the requirements which are given in the Freedom of Religion Act and interpreted by an evaluative board. This way the newly established communities are challenged to define the basis of their practice, not only based on their interpretation of the legal texts, but also through the eyes of the specialists in the evaluative board. My paper discusses the grounds on which the evaluative boards have decided against registration in the cases of Karhun kansa, a Fenno pagan community, and Suomen Äärimmäisen Vapaa

Eristinen Liike (SÄVEL), a Discordian community. The definitions of established tradition and sacredness have been the focal points for both, although the approaches quite different. Karhun kansa managed to register, but SÄVEL did not. I argue that while seeking legitimation, the communities also seek to challenge the contemporary discourse of religion, for which the evaluative board gives personage. The registering process is a window into the growing diversity of the official religious field in Finland.

Geraldine Smith

*The Millennialists Project: A Comparative Study Between the End of Time Survivors and Survivalism in Western Modernity*

This paper examines the characteristics of modernity and its effects on religious and secular millennial movements. These include tensions that arise as a result of capitalistic motivations, hyperpluralism, the increasing subjectivization of truth, and growing feelings of anxiety, fear and instability. I will argue that these conditions have led to the growth of a diverse range of millennial movements. To demonstrate this, I will compare one secular movement in this apocalyptic milieu with one which is overtly religious. The methodology I will utilise to achieve this will involve an online ethnography of the articles, websites and YouTube videos produced by the two groups

and from the perspective of their unique manifestations within an Australian context. The two websites I have chosen to focus on from the Survivalist and Prepper movement are Aussurvivalist.com and the American Preppers Network (APN). These websites demonstrate the secular expression of end time anticipation, whereby their main objective is to provide a range of survival information on all forms of potential pending disaster. I will then compare the political and social dimensions of these groups to the Christian millennialist group the End Time Survivors (ETS). Led by Dave and Cherry McKay a movement mostly based in Australia but with significant global outreach. This movement derives its guiding ethos from a very particular reading of The Bible that prioritises the teachings of Jesus as an apocalyptic figure. What this comparison will highlight is the parallels of marginalised identities, political disillusionment, and the desire for social and world renewal. One of the most significant themes to emerge, as we will see, is the role of materialism – which operates as both as a force contrary to millenarian expectations also a point of salvation. Ultimately, I aim to explore these thematics through its most extreme manifestations to understand what it is to be a product of modernity, and what it is to try to escape it.

### **Room 222 Studies in Contemporary Christianity**

Geoff Troughton

#### *Christianity and the Peace Tradition in New Zealand*

In Australasia, the history of war and the roles of violence and conflict in shaping nationhood have been widely canvassed. By contrast, the national historiographies of peacemaking and opposition to war are markedly thinner. For various reasons, there has been relatively little attention given to the ideological and longer-term roots of such opposition – including religious dimensions. Drawing upon research undertaken for two volumes – *Saints and Stirrers* (2017) and *Pursuing Peace in Godzone* (2018) – this paper reflects on what those works reveal concerning connections between Christianity and peacemaking in New Zealand history. In particular, it addresses the extent to which such historic expressions of peace and anti-war commitment may be regarded as constituting a tradition.

Tracy McEwan

#### *Gen X Catholic Women: Challenges Shaping Religious Identity*

Unprecedented social and cultural change has intersected with post-Vatican II Catholicism to transform how Gen X Catholics understand and enact their Catholic formation. In particular, the development of women's rights in secular society through feminist social change agendas has challenged the Catholic Church's teachings on gender and sexuality and shaped the religious identity of Gen X Catholic women. Research demonstrates that Gen X Catholic women are on the margins of the Catholic Church in Australia and have pluralistic expressions of belief and practice that tend not to rely on the traditional authority of the Church. This research however is limited by its failure to account for gender and its focus on Church attendance and doctrinal compliance as measures of participation. Future research must acknowledge the breadth of diversity in Gen X Catholic belief and practice including the shift towards

individualistic spirituality and 'belief without belonging'. This paper proposes a new methodological approach to the study of Catholic identity that acknowledges the way that gender and socio-cultural change has resulted in multifaceted religious identities for Gen X Catholic women in Australia. It disputes the notion of a fixed institutionalised formulation of Catholic identity as a measure of adherence and practice and instead locates identity beyond the bounds of institutional belonging.

Peter Dobbs

*Biblical Perspectives on Marriage and Family*

Issues of marriage, gender, and identity have in many ways become the battle ground for a clash of cultural ideologies in western countries, including Australia and New Zealand. This has resulted in many Christians feeling a responsibility to define - and potentially advocate - their position on these topics. The bible is a key source of authority for Christians in defining these positions. This paper does not attempt to present a normative position of marriage or family, but rather provides a survey of the various perspectives of marriage and family revealed within the scriptural account. It also outlines how some of the biblical teachings on these issues have been understood and applied through church history. I conclude with a caution that theology must develop in response to social issues, but society must be allowed to inform theology, not form it.

Dianne Rayson

*Time for 'Earthly Christianity': Bonhoeffer in the Anthropocene*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) left an unfinished theology rich for exploration. This paper re-imagines Bonhoeffer's 'Worldly Christianity' – his famous theorising of what Christianity might look like in the post-war setting – in the context of the new age, the Anthropocene. The Anthropocene describes the present geological epoch determined by human action. The former age has given way to a new instability which threatens not only our fellow species, but human civilisation as we know it. It ushers in the age where religions must not only dialogue, but act to preserve and protect life. This paper interrogates a Christian understanding of the relationality of ecological Earth systems through the lens of Bonhoeffer's theology. It focuses on what Bonhoeffer calls the 'social intention of the gospel' and asks what such sociality means in the light of current understanding of interdependent relationships which make up the ecology of the biosphere. I suggest that Bonhoeffer's notion of sociality, coupled with tenets of his ethics, offer an Earthly Christianity with which to face the climate crisis.

16.00 – 16.30 *St Benedict's Hall* **Afternoon Tea**

16.30 – 18.00 **Concurrent Session 2**

*Room 221* **Religion and Politics**

Daniel Peterson

### *Islam, Blasphemy, and Human Rights – The Case of Ahok*

This paper asks whether or not Indonesia's national human rights law regime can withstand the rise of political Islam in that country. If it cannot, using Alfred Stepan's democratic theory of the 'twin tolerations', the paper argues that the ideological ramifications for Indonesia's nascent democracy are inherently undemocratic. The findings of this paper are based on two landmark blasphemy cases: the Indonesian Constitutional Court's 2010 material review of the country's Blasphemy Law, and the May 2017 decision of the North Jakarta State Court to convict the former governor of Jakarta, Basuki 'Ahok' Tjahaja Purnama, of blasphemy. Analysing both Ahok's legal defence, as well as the judgment of the court, what becomes clear is that, as long as the Blasphemy Law prevails in contemporary Indonesia, the country's national human rights law regime will remain dormant.

David Kim

### *A Socio-Religious Voluntarism: The Australian NGO Movement During the Korean War 1950-53*

The Korean peninsula, like Taiwan (1895-1945), was one of the colonies of Japan in the first half of the twentieth century (1910-1945). The end of World War II brought an opportunity to be independent, but the different ideologies of the Capitalist Bloc and the Soviet Bloc caused the Cold War. The Korean War (1950-1953) was the initial result of the political conflict. Australia did not have diplomatic relations with the unsteady nation until 1963, but the involvement of the Australian government cannot be disregarded. The Liberal government, led by Prime Minister Robert Menzies, immediately responded to the UN resolution (June 25, 1950) by offering military assistance. Then, was this military support the only aid for Korea? If not, how did Australia affect the war zone citizens? Was there any Australian NGO movement? If so, what did it do? This paper not only explores the social activities of the Victorian Presbyterian group, but also argues that the religious volunteerism of humanitarian aid, medical work, religious mission, and education was a significant refugee project in Pusan (temporary capital) and Kyungnam province.

Denys Shestophalets

### *Public Religions in Ukraine after the Euromaidan: Orthodox Churches, the State, and the Russian-Ukrainian Crisis*

The proposed paper will deal with the latest cases of the intertwining between religion and politics in Ukraine in the period after the Euromaidan protests of 2013-2014, focusing on the implications of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian crisis for the religious situation in the country. First, the study will present the diverse views on the current military conflict in Eastern Ukraine and the ways of its resolution expressed in the public discourses of the most vocal religious leaders and the official documents of major Ukrainian churches. Second, in connection with these views, special attention will be given to the religious policies of the post-Euromaidan political regime in Ukraine, in particular, its persistent attempts to unite major Orthodox churches in a single structure as a means of facilitating the political integration of Ukrainian society. The

paper will also analyse the government's policies intended to undermine the positions of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate which, while remaining the largest confession of Ukraine, at the same time is considered as the main agent of the Russian ideological influence.

Marion Maddox

### *'We are a Christian Nation': Tracking an Emerging Australian Folk Tradition*

Although relatively rare in formal political discussion, the idea that 'Australia is a Christian nation' has attained the status of political folk-wisdom. The 2011 Human Rights Commission report *Freedom of Religion and Belief in Twenty-first Century Australia* found 'A strongly held sentiment regarding the religious character of Australia was that Australia is a Christian nation – historically and currently – whose values and culture are based on Christian teachings' (p 22). The phrase is also a staple of letters-to-the-editor and talkback calls, emerging in discussion of such questions as various as immigration, national security, marriage law and public Christmas displays. At the time of writing, three political parties with federal parliamentary representation—One Nation, Katter's Australian Party and Australian Conservatives—refer in their platforms to the idea that Australia is a Christian nation. Through an analysis of archival data, this paper traces the emergence of an Australian tradition of Christian nationalism.

### **Room 222 Local and Global Religious Practices**

Danielle Raffaele

### *A Marion Festival in Southern Italy and Sydney's Northern Beaches*

My paper examines a unique annual festival celebrating a centuries-old Marian apparition in a small town in Southern Italy, and the parallel festival being conducted in Sydney. It will examine the role of the Virgin Mary and Saints in the Australian-Italian community on the Northern Beaches of Sydney.

Kathleen Openshaw

### *The 'Universal' Church of the Kingdom of God in Australia: Local Congregants and a Global Spiritual Network*

The Brazilian Pentecostal megachurch The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG/Universal) has a global network of branches. Its Australian headquarters is located in Liverpool, one of Sydney's most culturally eclectic western suburbs. This dynamic spiritual space is where ideas, people, material culture and spirits are exchanged from across the globe. This paper follows the journey of a single vial of Anointing Oil from the Holy Land to Australia and then on to a dying woman in South Sudan to illustrate the global flows that take place through the UCKG Australia. With each stop the vial accrues meaning and spiritual power before its final destination. Drawing on two years of ethnographic research, I argue that this vial highlights the importance of the UCKG's globally connected nature to its local migrant congregants. The UCKG's global matrix allows congregants access to, and enables them to pass on,

spiritual capital thus providing personal agency to overcome life difficulties via supernatural means. Through this vial's journey, I will show how global religious practices are locally lived and highlight the local spiritual significance of globally mobile religious material culture.

Breann Fallon

*From 'The Mission to Silence': The Changing Representation of International Jesuit Evangelism on Film*

The nature of international missionary work has altered radically in reaction to contemporary developments "in technologies of communication and travel that characterize an ongoing compression of space-time" (Brickell 2012: 725). More than this, the rapidly changing nature of the contemporary world places a question mark over international missionary activity as a whole. What is the place of this traditional faith-based activity in the present-day globalised, individualised, diversified world? In order to gain insight into the reception and place of international evangelistic mission in today's rapidly changing world, this presentation shall consider the representation of international Jesuit evangelism on the silver screen. Three cinematic representations of international Jesuit missionary work shall be considered in this presentation; Joffé's *The Mission* (1986), Berekford's *The Black Robe* (1991), and the Martin Scorsese's recent film *Silence* (2016). The comparison of these three films highlights the comprehension of international evangelistic mission, religious diversity, and personal spirituality in each film's own socio-historical context. Moreover, the comparison of these films provides some insight into the changing attitudes toward mission in the period of rapid change from the 1980s to the present. In particular, it is the contrast of Scorsese's most recent film *Silence* with its 20th century predecessors that will prove most central in gaining insight into the broad reception and place of international evangelistic mission in the rapidly changing contemporary world.

Christopher Hartney

*How Heaven Operates: The Divine Path to Eternal Life by Phạm Công Tắc (1946)*

In this article, I provide an assessment of a set of Vietnamese esoteric sermons from 1946. The sermons were delivered by Phạm Công Tắc (1890-1959), one of the most influential religious leaders in Vietnam during the twentieth century. His work in spiritism and séance in the lead up to 1925 resulted in the development of Caodaism, presently the largest indigenous faith system in Vietnam. He worked as the religion's chief medium, conveying numerous spiritual voices from heaven until the Vichy French took control of Indochina at the start of World War II. Phạm Công Tắc was exiled to Madagascar in 1941. Upon his return in 1946, the medium had changed into an esoteric visionary. He began a series of sermon-like accounts to the Caodai faithful of his astral travels throughout the various levels, offices, and palaces of heaven. His words were transcribed and published by his followers into a book *Con Đường Thiêng-Liêng Hằng-Sống*, which I have translated as *The Divine Path to Eternal Life*. Working over several years with colleagues Đào Công Tâm and Nguyễn Dung this presentation will provide the first academic assessment of this work. In demonstrating how heaven operated and how souls were created and saved or damned, Phạm Công Tắc sought to show his



followers what they must do to access the inner workings of paradise and achieve full spiritual realisation. This text is thus essential for understanding key aspects of modern Vietnamese soteriology.

18:00 – 19:00 *St Benedict's Hall* **Charles Strong Trust Keynote Lecture**

Jim Spickard

*Is Pluralism Enough? Reflections on the Management of Religious Diversity in a Time of Social Division*

Religious diversity is not new to human societies, but today's diversity is problematic in a new way. Massive international migration has spread disparate peoples across the globe, while increased religious individualism and cracks in the Westphalian state system have thrown new forms of identity to the fore. The result is a diverse intersectionality that at the present moment is a source of significant religious, ethnic, and political division. Are calls for pluralist dialogue and accommodation enough? This address will use recent developments in the U.S. to consider the effect of increasing economic inequality and shifts in the nature of the religious field on the possibilities for keeping the religious peace.

19:00 – 20:00 *St Benedict's Hall* **Welcome Wine Reception**

## **FRIDAY 8TH DECEMBER**

09.00 – 09.30 *St Benedict's Hall* **AASR Presidential Lecture**

Doug Ezzy

*'Good' Grief: Rituals of world repairing*

09.30 – 11.00 **Concurrent Session 3**

*Room 221* **Religious Diversity**

Mortaza Shams

*Pan-religious Social Theology: A Framework for Interfaith and Trans-faith Partnerships for Social Justice*

If religions, with the vast networks they possess around the globe and the massive number of motivated believers, decide to join forces to make their shared goals regarding social justice happen, then there will be a good chance that many of the social ills that are decaying human societies from within will be dealt with more effectively. Such partnership requires attention to theologies that respect each religion's firm core of beliefs regarding 'personal salvation', while at the same time encouraging religions to be soft and flexible at the edges in order to cooperate with others in effecting their social theological goals. It seems that the time has come for a second 'Nostra Aetate'; this time inclusive of all religions who believe in creation as God's gift that requires care

and respect, as well as those non-religious who may not share the same beliefs regarding creation, but who nonetheless appreciate the secular importance of such beliefs and the corresponding 'interconnectedness'. This is what must form and inform interfaith and trans-faith relations in order to make meaningful and fruitful cooperation for social justice both feasible and desirable. This paper stems from a research project I am conducting with Anglican Action/Mahi Mihinare to develop a faith-based model for the social integration of marginalized and troubled individuals within our societies.

Janis Lander

### *Transcending Religious Differences*

Traditionally religions have exercised authority because they are inextricably linked to specific cultures and tied to socio/political structures. However, in a time of mass migration, a global economic collapse, an unfair labor market, discreet cultural structures are crumbling. Most significantly, the Internet has created the first global culture and people from all cultures are able to engage in an ongoing dialogue that challenges many traditional belief systems. In the wake of a global social transformation and a technological revolution, it is to be expected that old paradigms will shift. This paper argues that it is precisely the willingness to relax the grip on the "traditional authority" of established religions that will pave the way to a new and transcendent understanding of the way to God. We are in the midst of a 21st century version of the Reformation, and no religion will emerge unaffected. It may well be that in managing religious pluralism domestically and internationally, the attachment to divisive cultural theories of God will be regarded as sentimental and disruptive. This paper argues that it is precisely in the transcendent nature of the mystical experience that we are able to transcend cultural conflict and contentious interpretations of the Divine. In accepting this intersection of religious and social transformation as an opportunity for reevaluation, and understanding that it is necessary to let go of historical belief systems that no longer serve these times, it is possible that we will find the way to a peaceful future for our troubled species.

Raphael Lataster

### *How the Cognitive Science of Religion Encourages Religious Diversity and Tolerance: A Case Study on Early Christian Sources*

Using contemporary research on the New Testament books as an example, this paper explains how the Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) can inform the understanding and interpretations of sacred texts. Focussing especially on memory, and the evolutionary development of the brain, I argue that ambiguity and agnosticism are essentially requirements of sound exegeses, leading to religious pluralism, and, ideally, intellectual humility and tolerance of such unavoidably diverse views. I note the irony that while scientific progress, including that of cognitive science and archaeology, increasingly prompts exegetes to abandon literalistic interpretations of holy scriptures, it necessitates the move towards pluralism, rather than towards some empirically-determined singular truth. I explain how certain insights from CSR are already being employed by scholars of the New Testament, and how they can sometimes lead to extremely unorthodox theorising about early Christianity.

Zenko Takayama

*The Cognitive Classification of Religious Concepts: Explaining Religion from the Viewpoint of Inference*

The more the diversity of religions increases, the more difficult it becomes to understand individual religions. In this paper, using the recent theory of cognitive science of religion, I will attempt to cognitively classify and understand religious concepts that are centralized in religions. In these days, while some religious scholars assert the difficulty to find a common feature shared by all religions, there is a tendency to inclusively understand religion by focusing on a particular form of cognition possessed by religious people. According to the theory, religious concepts can be classified into three categories, depending on whether they are formed/based on: 1) subject(s), i.e., deified, sanctified self of enlightenment or mysticism, 2) object(s), i.e., the gods of nature or sanctified things, and 3) nothing particularly, i.e., God, Universe, soul. However, why do people in different cultures believe in different types of religious concepts? This paper will attempt to give an overview of the response to this question. If people's beliefs in different religious concepts can be attributed to their cultures, we may be able to understand the cultures by analyzing religious concepts. By this analysis, we will clarify why people in different cultures believe in different types of religious concepts.

**Room 222 Sacred Secularities**

Anna Lutkajtis

*Western Meditation*

In contemporary Western society, meditation practices that were previously taught within the context of Eastern religious traditions are now increasingly being practiced in secular settings. The popularity of so-called 'secular' meditation has been due in large part to its acceptance within the medical community and resultant incorporation into Western therapeutic culture and practice. Over approximately the past forty years, thousands of research studies conducted on meditation suggest that there are many psychological and physiological benefits associated with the practice. However, a small but growing literature indicates there could also be serious risks associated with meditation, including severe and potentially long-term psychological disturbances. In the Eastern religious traditions, difficulties associated with meditation are acknowledged, and are usually understood to be either milestones on the path to enlightenment or the result of improper practice. Additionally, in these traditions, meditation teachers are equipped to deal with complications that may arise. However, in a Western secular context, negative effects associated with meditation have largely been overlooked or ignored in both the academic literature and in the popular media. This paper argues that this is largely because of three factors related to the secularisation process. First, in contemporary Western society the goal of meditation has shifted from enlightenment to symptom relief, leading to the assumption that meditation is harmless and 'good for everyone'; second, secular meditation has been decontextualized and divorced from the traditional religious literature and contemplative practitioners who could shed light on possible difficulties associated with

meditation; and third, the image of meditation in popular media has been manipulated to fit contemporary consumer demands for a secular Westernised therapeutic technique that can be commodified.

Zoe Alderton

*'As Holy as Serving the Homeless': Orthorexia as a Modern Religious Pursuit*

In the Middle Ages, several young women opted to starve themselves for devotion to God and rejection of their impure earthly bodies. This process of Anorexia Mirabilis is now seen as an historical artefact and is no longer endorsed or encouraged by the Church. Nevertheless, there are many contemporary practices of diet, exercise, and beauty that have comparable religious elements. One such behaviour is Orthorexia: a pathological fixation on eating 'pure' or 'correct' foods. These inflexible dietary rules (ironically) interfere with a person's ability to function normally or have a balanced approach to consumption (Bratman 1997). Despite this, orthorexics tend to feel graceful and prodigious as a result of their limited consumption. In this presentation, I explore how strict dieting leads many Australians to feel pure, holy, or set apart from the norm. I look at ways in which other religious practices like yoga and cyclical fasting have been co-opted into this pursuit of the pure body, and conclude by speculating on what these practises mean within our late-modernist concepts of 'religion'.

Tara Smith

*Esoteric Themes in David Icke's Conspiracy Theories*

What do the lizard illuminati and esotericism have in common? At first glance, perhaps very little. Whilst one belongs in the world of David Icke and millions of other conspiracy theorists, the other is a fluid term normally used to designate a distinct way of thinking in a context confined to early fifteenth century Europe until the twentieth century. However, on a closer inspection and by using Antoine Faivre's six-point typology (with the addition of a seventh criterion, a Gnostic World View), in this article I place Icke's seemingly strange and random discourse within an esoteric framework. Firstly, this article offers some parameters and justifications for using Faivre's typology, before entering a broader discussion on the nature of esotericism. Secondly, I place Icke's theory within its alien/UFO context as it offers an extra dimension to this study, as well as providing a brief description of Icke's Reptilian theory. Thirdly, I examine aspects of Icke's theory and worldview within the six esoteric markers according to Faivre's methodology outlined in *Access to Western Esotericism* (1994). Finally, I will explore a seventh marker, a Gnostic World View, to further elicit esoteric depth from Icke's Reptilian theory. The purpose of this article is not to legitimate or justify Icke's views, but rather place them within a distinctly esoteric and religious framework to allow a deeper understanding of such a controversial belief system.

Benjamin Banasik

*Apophatic Gaming: The Perpetual Journey to 'Catch 'em all': An Exposition of the Never-Ending Game Phenomena Through the Apophatic Lens of Jean-Luc Marion and Gregory of Nyssa*

Spanning over many genres, the desire to reach an unreachable promised finality which is purposely unattainable in certain games is a rare occurrence. This presentation covers the phenomena of endless video games such as Elite, No Man's Sky, Pokémon and Journey, which I argue foster apophatic practices. The unquenchable desire that is created by certain games is explained through the lens of distance by Jean-Luc Marion and the perpetual journey revealed through Gregory of Nyssa's apophatic exegesis of Moses' journey.

11.00 – 11.30 *St Benedict's Hall* **Morning Tea**

11.30 – 13.00 **Concurrent Session 4**

*Room 221* **Contemporary Religion in Australia and New Zealand**

Gary Bouma, Anna Halafoff, Andrew Singleton, Mary-Lou Rasmussen

*How Australian Millennials Negotiate Religious Diversity*

Data from focus groups that form part of an ARC funded study of the views of young (15 to 18 years old) Australians reveal some patterns and further questions about the shaping and co-relations of religious identity, the role of context (both community and school) and familiarity with people who are religiously other with attitudes and openness toward religious diversity.

Enqi Weng

*Observations on Religion as a Spectrum in Australian Media*

This paper aims to report from a PhD research that examined Australian media's constructions, representations and discourses on religion through an analysis of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's Q&A program. The research applied a broadened understanding of religion, viewed as a religious spectrum, and analysed how and when religion emerges from discussions through the main categories of conventional religion, common religion and the secular sacred. This methodology was adopted from a British media study (Knott et al., 2013). Overall, this research found that religion, as constructed on Q&A, only partially reflected the religious condition in Australia, and was not able to fully represent it in its substance and nuance, nor its breadth and depth. Religion, mainly through Christianity in its cultural and confessional aspects, continues to influence and shape Australian religion and public life despite its trend of decline as demonstrated by the 2016 Census. Concurrently, a variety of sacred expressions was also observed that corresponds with a trend towards religious diversification. This presentation will report on selected key findings, their significances, and propose potential research avenues to pursue.

Christopher van der Krogt

*Religious Education in Secular Schools: The New Zealand Dilemma*

The New Zealand state education system, especially its primary schools, is officially secular, yet many schools make provision for religious education. Under current legislation, schools can be theoretically closed while community volunteers – overwhelmingly evangelical Christians – conduct classes from a faith perspective. Children, or their parents, have to opt out rather than opt in, which raises problems of peer pressure and discrimination. In an increasingly pluralist but also more secular society, such arrangements appear even more anomalous than in the past. Over recent years, there has emerged a groundswell of opposition from secularists who see the privileging of a minority religious viewpoint as incompatible with genuine freedom of religion and with human rights legislation. After briefly reviewing the origins of the present situation and examining the tensions thus generated, this paper will evaluate the current demand for change.

Francisco (Paco) Perales

*Unpacking the Influence of Religion and Religiosity on Attitudes Towards Same-Sex Couples in Contemporary Australia*

Historically, the relationships between religion and the LGBT movement have been complex. In this paper, we use high-quality Australian longitudinal data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey (~12,700 individuals, years 2005-2015) to examine how religious denomination and religiosity (importance of religion to one's life; frequency of attendance at religious services) influence support of equal rights for same-sex couples. Our analyses consider (i) the direct influence of religiosity on such attitudes, (ii) heterogeneity in attitudes across and within faiths, and (iii) the moderating influence of religiosity on other factors affecting attitudes (survey year, education, socio-economic background, area of residence, cognitive ability). We find strong evidence that religiosity is associated with a lower likelihood of supporting equal rights for same-sex couples. However, the degree of such support varies markedly across and within faiths. Additionally, religiosity diminishes the positive effects on support of equal rights of self and parental education, year, cognitive ability, and residence in an urban area. These findings are important to contextualise debates surrounding the ongoing marriage equality plebiscite, and demonstrate the need for nuance when examining the intersections between religion, religiosity and social attitudes.

**Room 222 Non-Western Religions**

Praveena Rajkopal

*Risk Governance Through Spirituality and Grassroots Mobilization: Sarvodaya Movement's Spiritual Methods of Rural Transformation, Their Successes and Limitations*

The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement is a 59-year-old Sri Lankan social movement, which began in 1958 at a time when Western frameworks of development were dominating post-colonial social reformation in the Global South. Sarvodaya introduced a revolutionary method of social, economic, environmental and political risk governance that was based on spirituality and drew its authority for rural development through grassroots mobilisation. This paper examines the work of the Sarovdaya Movement in

five phases, spanning from 1958-2015, inquiring into the successes and limitation of the Movement's spirituality-based approaches to risk governance in the Sri Lankan context of globalisation and neoliberalism. Apart from an extensive review of literature conducted on the history of the Movement, the study is also developed based on in-depth semi-structured interviews with the Movement's Founder, the General Secretary of the Movement, three past Sarvodaya leaders, six past and present government officers, thirty Sarvodaya villagers from three post-disaster resettlement villages and the three Sarvodaya leaders of these post-tsunami reconstruction villages.

Will Sweetman

### *The End of Invention*

In the wake of Hobsbawm and Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition*, a host of flashy books and papers over the course of the 1990s and early 2000s proclaimed the (colonial) invention of everything from Hinduism to Homer, Shaka Zulu to World Religions. In the course of this joyful reimagination of the recent past, what was forgotten about Paul Brass's statement is that it was said (mostly) in jest. More careful recent re-examinations of the historical record have shown up the shallowness of the invention trope. This paper will survey recent work on the early conceptualization of Hinduism and Buddhism and argue that the end of invention is in sight.

Mark Mullins

### *Fundamentalism and Asian Religions: The Case of Shinto in Postwar Japan*

The category of "fundamentalism" is often regarded as a phenomenon associated with exclusivistic "religions of the book," and usually regarded as irrelevant or inapplicable in the study of Asian religious traditions. In this paper, I argue that fundamentalisms can also appear in the context of Asian religions, and examine developments in postwar Shinto to illustrate how this phenomenon is shaping contemporary Japanese religion and society, particularly as a religio-political movement. Over the past half century, the leadership of the Association of Shinto Shrines has been engaged in efforts to "recover" or "restore" the key elements (i.e., "fundamentals") of Japanese identity and tradition, which were destroyed by the process of imperialist secularization during the Allied Occupation of Japan (1945-1952). In 1969, the Association established the League Promoting Ties between Politics and Shintō (Shintō Seiji Renmei) to recruit politicians of the Liberal Democratic Party to bring their agenda to the Diet for action and restore Shinto influence on public life and institutions.

Ann Hardy

### *The Celestial Canopy: Māori Religiosity and Public Culture in Aotearoa/New Zealand*

According to Census data, in the last 16 years another 10 percent of the New Zealand population came out from under the sacred canopy of Christianity, with just 48.9 percent of New Zealander respondents (1,906,398 people) now affiliating with Christian denominations. This movement away from Christianity is evident amongst the core population groups of European, and especially Māori, New Zealanders, with 19.2

percent of the latter group disaffiliating from Christianity in the 7 years between 2006 and 2013. Although the majority of this group are joining the 42 percent of Census respondents who said they had 'no religion', there are other possibilities in the public realm that may reflect a nascent realignment with indigenous spiritual values and practices perceived as better attuned to Māori lifeworlds and aspirations. This paper discusses one such possibility: the two decades long endeavour to revitalise the winter commemoration of the rising of the Matariki constellation. Supported by the national Museum Te Papa Tongarewa and by a team of Māori scholars centered on Waikato University, this project has now moved on from educating audiences about the scientific and mythical nexus of Māori cosmological knowledge to the development of rituals that offer a participatory role to members of both Māori and general communities, and a non-Christian spiritual dimension to public culture in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

13.00 – 14.00 *St Benedict's Hall* **Lunch**

13.15 – 14.00 *Room 221* **AASR Women's Caucus**

14.00 – 15.30 **Concurrent Session 5**

*Room 221* **Contemporary Islam**

Alexia Derbas

*Young Muslim Women's Politics of Everyday Living in Digital Society*

Digital technologies have transformed how religion is experienced today. They have also magnified experiences of racism and sexism, while simultaneously providing spaces of resilience and community. This paper explores young Muslim women's embodied practices of social networking in an Australian context. Using digital diaries and in-depth diary-interviews - where diaries were reflected upon collaboratively between the participant and researcher - the research examines a small sample of women's everyday experiences of social media and the internet. The study shows that for women, Islam is constituted in new ways through digital media and cultures, and this includes an interaction with "offline", "traditional" religion and religious practices. Connections with other Muslims, with non-Muslims and with the Ummah are also constantly negotiated in ways that sometimes enforce traditional power structures, but also allow for a performance of the self that reconfigures power to centralise the individual's everyday practices. Islam and the internet come together to form individual religious subjectivities, impacted by attitudes towards online / "IRL" selves, and the consequences of presenting as a woman online. The paper will also begin to ruminate on the relationship between human, non-human and the divine in ubiquitous everyday interaction with devices.

Terry Lovat

*Islam's Credentials in Inter-religious Tolerance: Controverting the Stigma Through Sacred Source and Historical Evidence*



The paper presents a case around the interreligious tolerance credentials of Islam as a religious and cultural polity. Evidence for making such a case is drawn from Islam's most sacred sources, the Qur'an and Sunnah, as well as records from its interpretive and lived histories, including in the form of La Convivencia polities of medieval al Andalus, Spain. The paper proffers that education about Islam's credentials in interreligious tolerance should form part of religious and social education curricula in both Muslim and non-Muslim settings, so to controvert or at least confound the ease with which oppositional stigmas are proffered in populist media and discourse.

Amir Mogadam

*Pedagogy, Political Correctness and the Rise of The New Right*

There is a problematic and predominantly unconscious notion in the teaching of Islamic history that Islam constitutes a 'civilisation'. From this perspective, Islam is seen as a reified essence which explains the totality of Muslim being and behaviour. Such a notion, however, can be proffered to result from an ideological symbiosis between Western colonialism and Islamic thought formed during the European colonial rule, one that spawned an Islamic elite that has gone on to re-write Islamic history to serve its own interests. This paper argues that due to mentioned symbiosis and the postmodern notions of political correctness the self-critical approach towards the notions of religious and political past, one faces hasty and unsubstantiated projects under the banner of Islamic reform. Nonetheless these projects have fallen into the trap of essentialism which has led to the rise of radicalism, on the one hand, and the rise of the new right, on the other. This paper argues that providing the grounds for the nationalist and/or essentialist/fundamentalist interests of the ruling elite, education about the Islamic past has fallen into a closed circle of un-emancipatory linear narratives. It furthermore proposes a self-critical approach as a way forward for framing a more inclusive future.

Lisa Worthington

*Fatwa of the Heart: Reinterpreting the Qur'an in Progressive Islam*

There is a problematic and predominantly unconscious notion in the teaching of Islamic history that Islam constitutes a 'civilisation'. From this perspective, Islam is seen as a reified essence which explains the totality of Muslim being and behaviour. Such a notion, however, can be proffered to result from an ideological symbiosis between Western colonialism and Islamic thought formed during the European colonial rule, one that spawned an Islamic elite that has gone on to re-write Islamic history to serve its own interests. This paper argues that due to mentioned symbiosis and the postmodern notions of political correctness the self-critical approach towards the notions of religious and political past, one faces hasty and unsubstantiated projects under the banner of Islamic reform. Nonetheless these projects have fallen into the trap of essentialism which has led to the rise of radicalism, on the one hand, and the rise of the new right, on the other. This paper argues that providing the grounds for the nationalist and/or essentialist/fundamentalist interests of the ruling elite, education about the Islamic past has fallen into a closed circle of un-emancipatory linear narratives. It

furthermore proposes a self-critical approach as a way forward for framing a more inclusive future.

## **Room 222 Religion and Society**

Nicolas Thompson

### *Anglophone Liberalism and the Veil: Comparing Debates Over Nuns in the 19th Century and the Religious Garb of Muslim Women in the 21st Century*

Recent literature on Islamophobia notes how debate, abuse and even violence have focussed disproportionately on Muslim women who cover their heads. Nineteenth century Protestant anxiety about nuns is instructive in this regard. This not because the past can help predict the future, but because of the way in which it holds up a mirror to contemporary debate. Like traditionally-attired Muslim women, 19th century nuns made a suspect religious minority visible. But the problem wasn't visibility as such. Rather, the convent and the veil were read as challenges to the values, and particularly the gender norms, of emerging liberal democracies. Nineteenth century English-speakers regarded these (with some justification) as a distinctively Protestant project. Thus the 19th century obsession with convent life was more than just atavistic anti-popery. It also found a bien-pensant outlet in attempts to emancipate nuns into more "enlightened" expressions of femininity. A nun who abandoned her habit vindicated not only "true womanhood," but liberal values. In this emancipatory project, the tensions in the liberal account of freedom were already evident. Protestant society found it hard to believe that a woman would enter a convent voluntarily; she had either to be forced or duped. And so she must be "saved" and "liberated" into another highly prescribed expression of womanhood.

Joshua Boland

### *The Church of Jesus Christ and the Latter-day Saints, Same Sex Issues and the Symbolic Mediation of Social Change*

This paper argues that the elites of conservative Christianity strategically use religious symbols and tropes to maintain their authority and to craft institutional responses to changing social norms. This contrasts with other academic approaches that portray conservative religious institutions as either unwitting victims of changing social norms or as reactionary agents. The narratives they construct allow institutional elites to interpret, mediate, and purposively respond to fluid circumstances. Internally, it allows leaders to illustrate their mastery, power and credibility to members. These same discourses are also used to justify particular agendas and postures towards secular society. The dialectical relationship between these narratives and broader social forces is illustrated by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints' discursive framing same-sex issues in Church magazines since the early 1970s. Mormon elites have used different symbols, concepts and themes to engage with evolving social standards effecting same-sex issues. This has enabled the Church to respond to the traumatic effects of growing liberalisation and episodically engage secular society in pursuit of particular policies

Christina Rocha

*Pentecostalism and Social Class: Millennial Brazilians between Australia and Brazil*

Since the mid-twentieth century, there has been a massive global growth in Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianities, particularly in the Global South. Brazil is home of most Pentecostals in the world, and in general it attracts disenfranchised sectors of society, although in the last two decades it has made inroads into the aspirational middle-classes. As a result, churches subscribe to the Theology of Prosperity, concentrate heavily on tithing, spiritual warfare and exorcism, and are usually socially conservative. Many pastors have been investigated for money laundering and corruption. Some have been found guilty and jailed. This means that Pentecostal churches have been stigmatised in society. In this context, many middle-class millennial Brazilians, who have converted to Pentecostalism, struggle to find an acceptable home for their faith. I argue that they find this home in Australian seeker-friendly churches such as at Hillsong and C3 because they focus much less on spiritual battle and conservative values, and more on attracting people to church through informal and exciting services and an emphasis on inclusivity and love. Drawing on three years of multi-sited fieldwork research in Australia and Brazil, in this paper I analyse the experiences of millennial Brazilians in Australian churches and after they return to Brazil.

Adam Smith

*Re-Reading Australian Socio-Religious History: Technology, Menzies and the Politics of Protestant Virtue*

In 1972 (and 69, supposedly), Robert G. Menzies, leader of 'modern Australia' and conceiver of the Australian Liberal Party entered the ballot box to deliver his first preference for the conservative Catholic Democratic Labor Party. Little import has been made of this fact in historical narratives regarding the modernisation of Australia. This essay seeks to imbue this event with historical urgency with implications for the past, present and future of the socio-religious landscape of all nations. To do this, this essay applies a historical methodology that reads-in the implementation of mass state-run and consumer technologies, in particular the automobile, tram and train networks, television and radio technologies to the context, events and impact of R. G. Menzies. I impose that technology is a missing heuristic of Australian-specific historical analyses and that, coupled with a reading-in of 'religion' and 'ideology' as technologies, what I have labelled as 'Protestant virtue politics' can be seen as a key historical agent that was under immanent threat come the end of Menzies' tenure as a result of the industrialisation (up-scaling) of mechanical-technological culture. Making sense of Menzies' shift to the agrarian, business-regulation ideology of B. A. Santamaria will re-open the historical vaults and allow a more nuanced reading of Australian history.

15.30 – 16.30 *St Benedict's Hall* **Penny McGee Annual Lecture**

Alphia Possamai-Inesedy

*Reconsidering Religion, Belief in the Digital Social*

The expansion and democratization of digital technologies in conjunction with the significant shifts taking place with how people practice religion and belief through digital technology demands a re-imagination and expansion of our research abilities and knowledge. Yet, review of the literature on what 'we' do online reveals generalizations that not only reproduce normative power relations, but also feeds into the development of theoretical arguments that provide only partial repositories of knowledge. 'We' in the digital sphere, are overwhelmingly presented as white, middle class westerners. For social scientists to better understand how the digital world actively constitutes notions such as religious/ belief identity, social networks, embodiment and social institutions there is a need to avoid these generalities. This presentation argues for scholars of religion to take up the challenges and the promises of the internet, not only must we understand the power relations that are at play in the digital social, we must also critically approach the field with an emphasis on the particular where Issues concerning users' social position in terms of gender, class and ethnicity are crucial to consider.

16.30 – 17.00 *St Benedict's Hall* **Afternoon Tea**

17.00 – 18.00 *St Benedict's Hall* **AASR AGM**

19.00 *Hannibal's Lebanese Restaurant* **Conference Dinner**

*95-97 Glebe Point Rd*