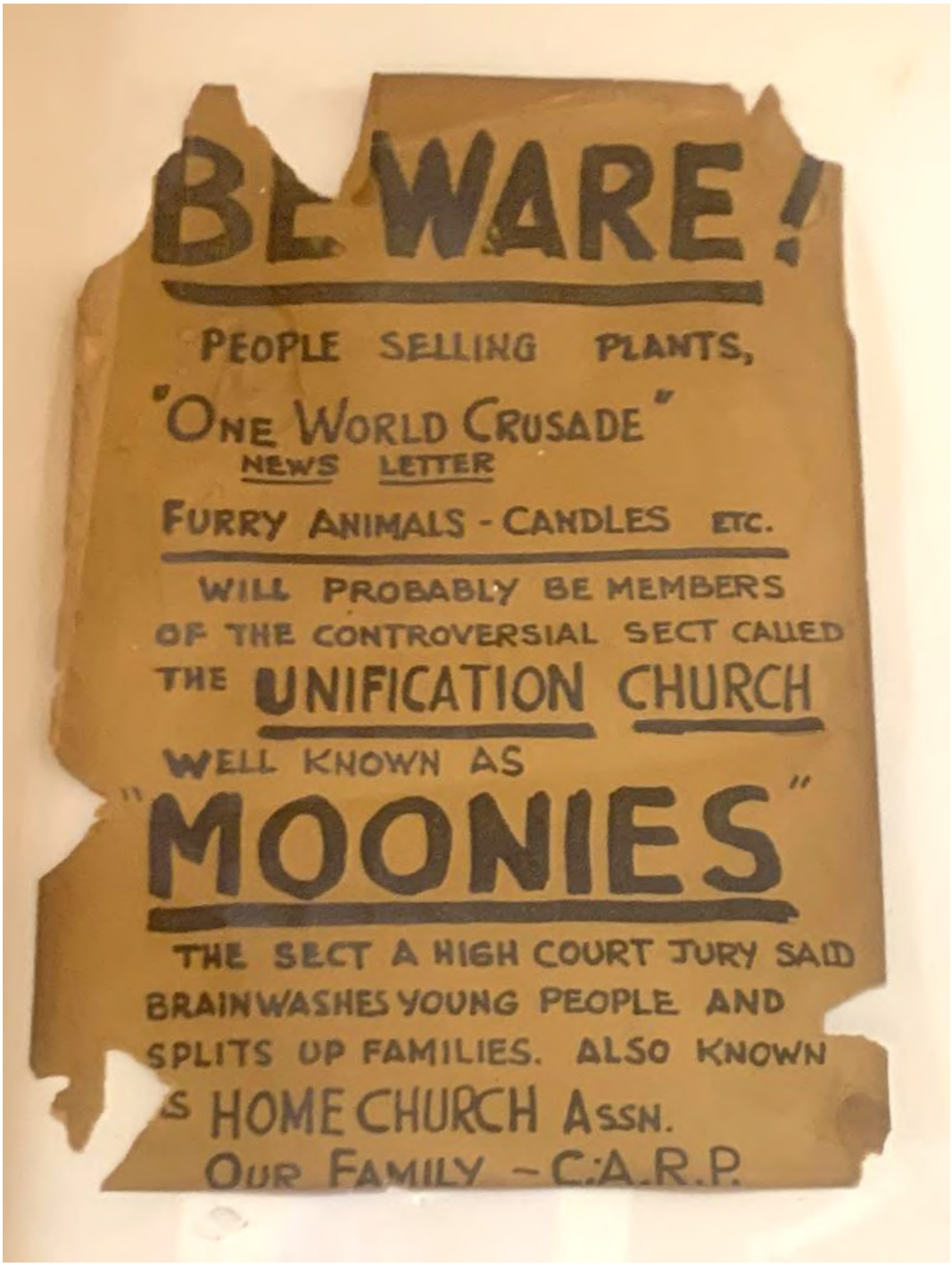
BASR bulletin
British Association for the Study of Religions



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ABOUT THE BASR

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

All correspondence concerning the BASR should be sent to:
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COMMITTEE

editorial

Welcome to the May 2024 edition of the BASR Bulletin. I am grateful to Theo Wildcroft for giving me the opportunity to write this issue's editorial to discuss the upcoming BASR annual conference at the University of Leeds on September 2-4, 2024.

This year's theme is an increasingly important one in the scholarly study of religion: 'Reckoning with the Past.' There will allow our conference to cover themes such as the decolonisation of the study of religion, anti-racist education and education about the slave trade; in addition to the history of religious studies and colonial impacts. Simultaneously, religious institutions are also reckoning with their own problematic histories, which we're sure to explore in this conference. The study of religion has always thrived as an interdisciplinary endeavour and this conference is no different – if your research touches upon these themes, we encourage you to submit a proposal and get involved with the proceedings. Before departing the conference, be sure to take the opportunity to explore the many wonderful things to see at the city of Leeds – I've been based here for the past two years and can attest to its brilliance.

Once again, we are working with CenSAMM, allowing us to broaden the scope of the conference to issues pertaining to apocalypticism, millenarianism, and environmental concerns. We are also receiving support from the Hibbert Trust and are grateful to both for their enthusiasm and support. Collaborations such as these are essential as we continue in precarious times for Higher Education.

On that note, it is important to note the elephant in the room. As Stephen Gregg mentioned at last year's AGM, we are increasingly keen to receive offers to host our annual conference from BASR members – thus far, the vast majority of BASR conferences have been organised/hosted by committee members and their respective institutions. This is difficult to sustain. Yet conferences are part of the lifeblood of the BASR – it is not only important to the discipline and our research community, but also its nurturing of future generations of scholars. Attending BASR conferences has been instrumental in my own career, and I know that I'm not alone in that regard. Beyond that, hosting the BASR is a great opportunity in itself – so please do speak to a BASR committee member if this interests you!

Teaching and learning can often be sidelined in academia in favour of conversations surrounding research, but these are also utterly essential to the future of our discipline. The study of religion works best when making a public impact, and our students are often our largest public. This year's conference will include a Lightning Talks panel for Masters students/early postgraduate researchers to present brief talks on their on-going or recently completed projects.

The contents of the bulletin speak to the vibrant community we have within the BASR and the work we do – including conference reports, teaching and learning activities, Meet the Members reports, and, sadly, reflections on departed colleagues. The recent announcement of closures at the University of Kent is a sobering reminder of the ongoing challenges we face; yet, as current affairs demonstrate, our disciplines are needed more than ever. I suspect these conversations will be prominent when we gather in September to seek collective ways forward. Please do share the CFP far and wide (along with the #BASR2024 hashtag) so that we can ensure as broad and lively conversations as possible.

I look forward to welcoming you, with my co-organiser Mel Prideaux, to Leeds in September!

Aled Thomas
University of Leeds

news, etc

2024 BASR TEACHING AND LEARNING FELLOWSHIP

Each year, the BASR Exec awards a single Teaching and Learning Fellowship to a colleague in recognition of their contribution to the student learning experience in the study of religions. This Fellowship includes an award of £300 plus a funded place at the BASR Annual Conference. The expectation of the person receiving this Fellowship is to write a short piece reflecting on current issues/ experiences of teaching Religious Studies in HE for the BASR Bulletin and help the Teaching and Learning Rep on the BASR Exec, Steffi Sinclair, organise the teaching and learning panel for the 2025 BASR conference. However, there is a lot of flexibility in how this could be approached.

If you would like to be considered for the 2024 BASR Teaching and Learning Fellowship or would like to nominate a colleague (or have any questions about this Fellowship), please get in touch with Steffi at stefanie.sinclair@open.ac.uk. Your application will need to be supported by a brief statement that outlines the contribution the applicant/ nominee has made to the student learning experience in the study of religions in HE with reference to any of the following four themes:

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

This statement can be provided either by the applicant themselves or by a colleague supporting the application. The deadline for nominations/ applications is the 21st June 2024. We welcome applications from/ nominations for colleagues at all stages of their careers.

TEACHING AND LEARNING PANEL (BASR CONFERENCE 2024)

Teaching and Learning in Religious Studies Higher Education: Reassessing Teaching about Religion and the Natural World

After last year's hugely successful BASR conference on "Environmental endings and religious futures", and in the context of increasingly urgent warnings about the potential effects of anthropogenic global warming, this seems an important time to evaluate and reassess how teaching and learning in religious studies engages with the natural world.

Leading on from last year's discussions, we are inviting proposals for a panel that aims to stimulate discussion around critical, ethical and pedagogical aspects of teaching about religion and the environment in the current age of climate crisis. We especially invite papers that provide critical and/or experience-based reflections on the teaching of religion(s), nature and the climate crisis with a view to furthering the conversation around these and related issues.

Papers might touch on a wide range of themes, for example: whether the climate emergency opens up new opportunities for teaching to engage with students' own subjective responses to nature; what ethical implications arise when teaching about religious responses to science-based predictions of potential impending catastrophe; how the developing climate crisis impacts on wider teaching about religion(s) and worldviews; and how we can develop a curriculum that tackles religion and climate change from a genuinely interdisciplinary perspective.

Please send your proposal along with your title and institutional affiliation to the panel convenors: Dr Stefanie Sinclair (stefanie.sinclair@open.ac.uk) and Dr Claire Wanless (claire.wanless@ed.ac.uk) by 31st May 2024.

PRACTICE IN DEVELOPMENT: SPECIAL ISSUE

LGBTQ+, diverse sexual orientation and gender identities, and faith in development

This special issue seeks to address the multiple and overlapping issues that emerge between people with diverse sexual orientation and gender identities and faith actors in the context of international development. We invite papers that critically engage with the current academic debates and practice/policy approaches, addressing the experiences of people with diverse sexual orientation and gender identities and faith actors in international development to find constructive paths forward. We approach 'international development' in the broadest sense of the term and view it as processes aimed at bringing about positive social change, be it in the Global South or North. This includes work that may not be perceived as 'development' by those working on it. We are particularly interested in papers from people who are part of diverse sexual orientation and gender identities communities and/or faith communities as well as people from the Global South, racial, ethnic and religious minorities, and other marginalised groups. The special issue will include both full academic articles and shorter practice notes reflecting on learnings from practical work.

For further information, contact Jennifer Philippa Eggert (jennifer@jliflc.com).

CALLS FOR XXIII IAHR WORLD CONGRESS NOW OPEN!

The calls for individual papers and closed panels & roundtables for the XXIII IAHR World Congress are now open! The deadline for all submissions is 1st December 2024. However, we kindly ask you to not wait until the last moment to submit: we expect an overwhelming amount of proposals and it will be impossible for us to process them all simultaneously. That's why we've introduced rolling admission: your proposals will be reviewed within three months from submission. The sooner you submit, the sooner you will be notified about our decision and you may be eligible for an early bird fee when registering.

To submit a proposal, please register first.After registration you will be prompted to sign in, upon which you will be able to submit a proposal. Upon signing in, you will be able to choose between individual paper submission and roundtable & closed panel submission. When submitting an individual paper, you may (but don't have to) assign you proposal to one of the fifty-one open panels. For both individual paper and roundtable/closed panel submissions, you will be asked to select one of the six streams in the "Options" tab.

Your proposal will be reviewed within three months from submission. You will be notified about our decision as soon as the reviews are complete.

For all information, see: https://iahr2025.org/

LAUNCH OF THE RELIGION RESEARCH GROUP AT BRUNEL UNIVERSITY LONDON

BASR members Dr Eleanor T. Higgs and Dr. Owen Coggins, with their colleague Dr. Sam Han announce the launch of the Religion Research Group at Brunel University London. Brunel does not have a Religious Studies department, so the new Religion Research Group exists to connect colleagues at the university working on diverse dimensions of religion in different disciplines, including psychology, sociology, anthropology, law, history, education, social work, and media studies. For us, 'religion' includes traditions, beliefs, groups, and practices, in plural sociocultural, political, and legal contexts, and in interaction with arts, media, and political movements. Through transdisciplinary research and scholarship, RRG members are engaged with theoretical innovations and in conversation with grassroots organisation and communities. We generate new knowledge about religion, belief, and practice - and we bring critical perspectives to existing knowledge.

From our different disciplinary locations, Religion Research Group members conduct critical, socially engaged, and participatory research with groups and communities in different parts of the world. We are longstanding and active participants in relevant scholarly associations including the British Association for the Study of Religions (BASR), British Sociological Association Sociology of Religion group (BSA SocRel), Centre for the Critical Study of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements (CenSAMM), International Society for Metal Music Studies, and the International Association for the Study of Religion and Gender (IARG). Research projects of RRG members have been funded by the American Historical Association, the American Institute of Indian Studies, the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), the British Academy, the Druze Heritage Foundation, the Issachar Fund, the John Templeton Foundation, and the Leverhulme Trust. Current and planned activities include a working paper seminar series, a guest lecture series, and collaborative research projects.

For further information and other enquiries, contact eleanor.higgs@brunel.ac.uk, owen.coggins@brunel.ac.uk, or sam.han@brunel.ac.uk.

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conferences

'35 YEARS OF INFORM' SEMINAR KING'S COLLEGE, LONDON, JANUARY 2024

The most recent Inform conference was held at King's College's Bush House on the thirteenth of January, with the various featured speakers all actively acknowledging and celebrating the milestone of the charity's 35th year of operation. The importance of Inform within the field of New Religious Movement (NRM) studies cannot be understated – an importance which cannot be appreciated without acknowledging its founder Professor Eileen Barker. As a seminal figure in NRM studies, Barker's hugely influential *'Making of a Moonie: Choice or Brainwashing?'* (1984) provided a sympathetic perspective, with the rejection of the 'brainwashing' thesis in favour of the demystification of NRM conversion processes. Emblematic of Barker's work, Inform has sought to prevent the harm that can be caused through misinformation about minority religions, by bringing the insights of academic research into the public domain.

The event saw a prompt start with Amanda van Eck Duymaer van Twist, Georgie Chryssides and Marat Shterin all providing short introductions – each speaker elaborated on the evolving face of the study of New Religious Movements, and how adequately equipped Inform is to facilitate collaborative conversation between communities for years to come. The last of these commencing addresses came from Professor Barker, who delivered a heartfelt speech conveying the importance of those who have dedicated their time to sustaining Inform's existence. Equal parts modest and moving, her words united those in attendance who stand as representatives for several communities who, like Barker, are primarily interested in the study of "peculiar people." Linda Woodhead then provided the event's keynote address, speaking at length about Inform's firm power as an "antidote" to unproductive and stereotyped conversation between members of conflicting communities.

The first panel platformed the stories of several members and ex-members of a range of NRMs. As honorary director Suzanne Newcombe identified, Inform is far from the official expert in the context of people's lived experiences, and so it is the essence of this panel that exemplifies Inform's emphasis on the triangulation of data through several sources and networks. The panel opened with secretary of the Pagan Federation, Vivianne Crowley, who detailed the way in which Inform provided necessary demystification amidst the satanic panic scare of the early 1990s, and in assisting in the federation's longstanding battle to be recognised as an official registered charity. Hazel Barlow, a former member of the Unification movement, then provided a short speech on the ways in which Inform was a source of valuable clarificatory information in both her personal and academic life, praising Professor Barker's foresight in creating such an important educational organisation. Next to speak was full-time staff member of the Church of Scientology, Graeme Wilson. Wilson honoured Inform in its role of "filling a vital need" in the context of clarifying academic truths against sensationalised media stories, offering "a much-needed sane alternative." Wilson praised the charity's power to "resolve situations of disharmony and conflicts and repair upsets" caused by misinformation. The panel closed with William Haines, a current member of the Unification

movement. After Haines joined the movement, his mother was understandably concerned as a result of widespread media misinformation. Haines personal reflection commended Inform for their work in supporting concerned relatives through the provision of unbiased and factually correct information about the Unification movement.

The second panel platformed various academics who have engaged with Inform over its thirty-five years of operation. First to speak was Professor Milda Alisauskiene. Marking her initial interactions with Inform as a "turning point" in her academic career, Alisauskiene detailed how Professor Barker's agreement to supervise her master's thesis cemented Barker as a role model in her life. Within an event which had so far highlighted Inform's importance in a British context, this speech branched explored Inform's global relevance. Alisauskiene remarked on Barker's constant academic communication with the Lithuanian Centre for New Religions Research and Information, to demonstrate how inspirational Barker's forethought has been in the creation of like-groups worldwide. The next speaker was Susannah Crockford, who originally came to Inform to consult its database, yet eventually became an Inform staff member after being inspired by the interactions with members of the public via the phone lines. It was these conversations that, for Crockford, emphasised how imperative Inform's work is in manufacturing spaces which don't ridicule members of NRMs, and take people and their testimonies seriously. Next to speak was Professor Abby Day, who reflected on her upbringing in the heart of North American cultic discourse of figures such as Jim Jones and Charles Manson. Highlighting the demystifying power of Inform's services, Day reflected on how these people were deemed "strange" because they were "made strange by those in established religions who wanted to view themselves as more authentic or established." The 'academics' panel closed with Professor Jean La Fontaine, who gratefully reflected on Inform's capacity in making her academic research into 'satanic panic' a reality, effectively turning something which "sounded like a dangerous or ridiculous" idea into an approachable task.

The penultimate panel of the day saw several professional speakers detail the ways in which they, or the communities they have attended on behalf of, have benefitted directly from the services provided by Inform. First to speak was Revd Pedr Beckley, who accentuated the applicability of Inform's work and services in all faith communities. Following Beckley was Henri de Cordes, the former President of Belgium's CIAOSN, an organisation which acts as a junior sibling to the "grown-up" Inform. De Cordes specified how the two organisations have existed as key players in a mutually beneficial academic microcosm. The next speaker was retired civil servant Hugh Marriage. As an instrumental figure in the securing of Inform's first government grants, Marriage detailed how his own department within the Home Office which was initially responsible for 'cult' management was grossly underinformed – until Inform became involved in an advisory position. As a member of the Estonian Ministry of the Interior with twenty-five years of history with Inform, Ringo Ringvee then emulated Marriage's experience in an international context. Retired solicitor Kim Speller then highlighted how he had personally sought the informed testimonies of several Inform members to aid in numerous childcare cases concerning wardship in the wider familial context of a New Religious Movement. This panel closed with the words of Jim Walters, director of the LSE Faith Centre. With the aid of Inform, Walters highlighted how he is now able to appreciate the complex intersectionality of the ways "big religion" can inform "small religion," and vice versa. This panel was both necessary and enlightening in terms of contextualising Inform in spheres that lie outside of academia.

The final panel was delivered online, and saw three American scholars beam into the proceedings. The first of these was Gordon Melton, who stressed the importance of fieldwork in religious studies, claiming that it is amongst the worst of trends in modern religious studies to neglect its importance. Susan Palmer then spoke of the equal status that Inform gives to members of NRMs alongside academics and officials, thus providing a space for product conversation to take place. The last speaker was Catherine Wessinger, who echoed many of the sentiments expressed throughout the day.

Wessinger's speech concluded with a personal plea to both Melton and Barker to write and reflect collaboratively on "the influence they've had over NRMs behind the scenes." Wessinger praised the organisation for the important work that it has done, and will continue to do.

Inform's 35th anniversary seminar proved to be an event which was as inspiring as it was honorary of both Professor Barker and Inform itself, accurately managing to balance a reverence for the established legacy of the charity and optimistic postulation as to what Inform may go on to become over its next thirty-five years of existence. It is thanks to the enlightening, touching, and often humorous tales of those in attendance that the legacy of Professor Barker and Inform could be properly honoured and celebrated, in an event that truly highlighted Inform as a meeting place for open, productive conversation between academics and those associated with a range of New Religious Movements.

Erin Clark
University of Leeds

IAHR SPECIAL CONFERENCE UNIVERSITY OF TOKYO, DECEMBER 2023

"Can the IAHR be engaged and relevant without being political or confessional? The position of "science (wissenschaft)" in 2023."

This conference was convened in response to three recent debates within the IAHR—the ongoing debate regarding updating the constitution and potentially the name of the IAHR in light of developments since the Marburg statement of 1960; the resulting debate about the relationship between the study of religion and different conceptions of "science"; and the recent statement in support of the Ukrainian Association, an unprecedented political intervention from the association. Details of the first two points, including discussion of the debates to date, can be found in previous BASR Bulletin issues 140 (June 2022, 12-13) and 139 (November 2021, 17-20), as well as the IAHR e-Bulletin Supplement (November 2019). I'm sure that readers will forgive me for not rehashing the sometimes-heated debate again here, beyond the necessary background context.

The conference opened with welcome addresses from IAHR President Tim Jensen and Satoko Fujiwara, Secretary General of the IAHR and President of the Japanese Association (JARS), and who also organised the conference. This was followed by the keynote from Nancy Cartwright—not the one from The Simpsons, the one from Durham University who is President of the International Union of History and Philosophy of Science and Technology. Her presentation, "Objectivity, Values and Commitment in Science" (presented remotely, though with numerous slides) was a masterful overview of the current position(s) of philosophers of science in regard to "objectivity", "positivism" and "science", and how different disciplines (both STEM and social science) are grappling with similar issues to Religious Studies.

Two questions in particular came to the fore. First, is science singular, or plural? Cartwright explained that in her field, "today, virtually no-one believes that there is a purely formal scientific method", and introduced us to three of the most significant contemporary approaches to understanding how much we can actually know about material reality. Scientific Perspectivism, associated with Ronald Giere, attempts to mediate between objectivism and constructivism by arguing that while claims can be true in a qualified and conditional sense, they cannot be proven in any absolute sense, as rather they are always properties of the interaction between the material world and human observers. Pragmatic Realism, associated with Hasok Chang, agrees that universal truths about material reality are impossible, and proposes a practice-based approach based on what we do with science in which a statement can be considered true to the extent that it works coherently with other activities to achieve our aims. As such, knowledge is regarded as an ability rather than something that one simply possesses. Lastly, Standpoint Theory, associated with philosopher of science Alison Wylie, argues that knowledge production is situ-

ated within a hierarchical structure of power relations, and is conducted by individuals whose experience and social context shapes what they know and how they know it. Yet marginalized groups (the "outsiders within") can have an epistemic advantage by offering perspectives that challenge dominant paradigms, thus contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the world. It was enlightening to see that other disciplines are wrestling with the same questions, but as I have been arguing for a few years now, as a discipline framing itself as a science, and dealing with claims about "belief", "faith", even "Truth", Religious Studies is long overdue in addressing our epistemic contradictions and evasions. It was encouraging therefore to hear these issues being directly addressed in responses from Jeppe Jensen (Aarhus) from a critical perspective, and Kevin Schilbrack (Appalachian State) from the perspective of philosophy of religion.

The Roundtable Session at the end of the first day included a speaker from every continent bar Antarctica, representing the USA, Mexico, South Africa, Bangladesh, Japan and the UK. Each was asked to give a ten-minute presentation addressing any combination of the conferences key questions as they saw fit. What was remarkable was how much agreement and overlap there was between the papers, given that there was no prior coordination between them. Amy Allocco, from Elon University, North Carolina, discussed how the AAR have sponsored initiatives designed to promote the positive effects of religious diversity, as well as making political statements, so long as they advance their mission to enhance the public understanding of religion. Blanca Solares Altamirano, from the National Autonomous University of Mexico, reflected on the roots of the IAHR in the Eranos circle, and asked how the study of religion might contribute to understanding "the spiritual crisis or loss of meaning in our days?"

Denzil Chetty, from the University of South Africa, delivered for me the standout paper, addressing "knowledge inequalities and its situational dynamics" from the perspective of the Global South. Whose knowledge, whose science, does the study of religion qua science defend? Prof. Shahnaj Jahan, from the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh, talked about approaching the question as an archaeologist, where the focus on material objects means that there is little space for confessional concerns. The problem is not the name, she argued, but that we must be firmer with our colleagues on this position, and better at communicating it to the public. And so, I felt more confident in arguing in my paper that, whatever else it may be, religion is a political term, and that the critical turn is essential to globalising the study of religion and making space for other knowledge formations. The final presenter was Shusuke Yamane, now of the National Institute of Technology, Maizuru College, Japan. A graduate of the so-called Kyoto School of the philosophy of religion, who argued vehemently against the inclusion of the word "science" into the constitution, Dr Yamane drew on William James to argue against this, for a more pragmatic theory of truth.

The second day began with an open panel of papers. This was a somewhat eclectic and uneven selection, with some presentations wildly misjudged in terms of content, level and political rhetoric. But there was a superb presentation from IAHR Treasurer, Andrea Rota, entitled "Neutral. All too Neutral? Contemporary (?) Challenges in the Study of Religion". Echoing the panel of delegates from the previous afternoon (again, without planning), he called for "a decolonial theory of religion" approached as an "ecology of knowledge", and laid out three methodological maxims to achieve this: 1) axiological neutrality (excluding evaluative value judgements), 2) methodological naturalism (which to me seems clearer and more accurate than "methodological agnosticism"); and 3) "suspension of truth statements".

After lunch, the final panel was work-in-progress presentations from PhD candidates at the University of Tokyo's Religion department. Aya Oba introduced their research among monks using a Death Studies approach. Aki Murakami presented fascinating research looking at the relationship between RS and Buddhist theology in Japan—which had striking parallels with the UK situation. Mina Lee was next, presenting her research among Jewish communities in Korean ghettos. She was also brave enough to directly refer to Gaza, which shamefully few of her more secure colleagues were. Hiroki Tanaka gave an impressively theoretically sophisticated presentation comparing secularism in France and Japan, with a focus on public scholarship and anti-cult rhetoric. Ikuo Tsuboko closed with an eloquent presentation on the relationship between "scientific" and "confessional" studies, focussing on the work of Charles Taylor. The standard of the presentations was high across the board, speaking to the quality of teaching in the faculty.

This was followed by the International Committee Meeting (the contents of which we will leave to the IAHR Bulletin to relay), and the conference closed. But for the international delegates, the organising committee had arranged two trips, beginning the following morning—a one-day tour of sites in Tokyo, and a three-day tour to Kyoto. For those staying in Tokyo, our attentive student guides took us to several Shinto shrines, including the Meiji Jingu shrine, dedicated to the Meiji royal family, where we were given an excellent personalised tour by a Shinto priest, the beautiful Tsukiji Honganji Pure Land Buddhist Temple whose fittings and architecture mixed Indian and Japanese motifs, and the bustling Sensoji Temple, by the famous Kaminarimon Gate and Nakamise shopping street, where we were taken into the inner temple by the priests. Perhaps the highlight, however, was a visit to the headquarters of Soka Gakkai International, where we were treated to lunch, a presentation on the group's peace lobbying and an audience with SGI Director General for Peace and Global Issues Hirotsugu Terasaki. While the atmosphere was more akin to a corporate boardroom meeting than temple, we were all impressed by Terasaki's direct but measured answers to our questions.

The group that went on the three-day Kyoto trip, led by Professor Satoko Fujiwara and assisted by several students, took the train past a stunning view of Mount Fuji and visited mainly a wide selection of different Buddhist sites, including the famed Golden Pavilion (Kinkaku-ji), seeing different styles of gardens (water, moss and dry), as well as a temple complex with an impressive collection of bonzai trees. Some Buddhist sites embraced new technology in the form of an 'android' bodhisattva (Kannon) speaking lines from the Heart Sutra and small Buddhas attached to drones inspired by raigō paintings depicting the descent of Amida Buddha on a purple cloud to take deceased believers to the Western Paradise. There was such a variety, even between different Pure Land groups, making it impossible to characterise Japanese Buddhism as a whole.

A full transcript of the international panel will be published in a forthcoming IAHR eBulletin, and the conference proceedings will form the basis of a future volume of Equinox's IAHR Book Series.

David G. Robertson with Suzanne Owen.

features

A note on a new archival resource at The New Library, Llanilltud Fawr/Llantwit Major

Steven Sutcliffe

Many Bulletin readers will remember the late Dr. Terry (D.A.T) Thomas (1931-2011) as a warm and long-serving colleague in BASR and in the Religious Studies department at The Open University. I was fortunate to be supervised as a PhD student by Terry between 1994 and 1996. Terry was BASR secretary from 1987 to 1993 and the founding editor of the BASR Occasional Paper series in 1991, and worked hard to promote the association and spread the message of the value of the Study of Religion/s as a disciplinary field. He was appointed Staff Tutor in Religious Studies at The Open University in Wales in 1971 where he taught for 25 years and where he was involved in the production of the pioneering course 'Man's Religious Quest' in 1978 and later 'The Growth of Religious Diversity' and 'Religion in Victorian Britain'. In 1988 he edited *The British: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices 1800-1986* for John Hinnells' and Ninian Smart's series 'The Library of Religious Beliefs and Practices' and a revised version of his 1983 doctoral thesis at the University of Nottingham was published in 1999 as *Paul Tillich and World Religions* (for more details, see the tribute by Beckerlegge, Chryssides and Sutcliffe 2011 plus Terence Thomas Bibliography 2011).

A small personal archive of Terry's early papers has now been lodged with The New Library and will in due course become available to researchers interested in Terry's work and in related matters on the history of BASR and the Study of Religion/s in the UK. It all began with a communication in 2021 from Terry's son, Huw Thomas, to Stephen Gregg, BASR President. Stephen passed on the query to me as one of Terry's final PhD students. Since Terry's PhD had analysed Paul Tillich's thought, especially in relation to 'world religions' (Thomas 1999), I initially contacted the Paul Tillich Society in the US. They were keen but unable to accept an analogue archive. Dr Russell Re Manning then kindly put me in touch with Richard Parry, founder of The New Library. The rest, as they say, is (recent) history.

Most of the archive contents sorted into bundles on my kitchen table: February 2022

Terry Thomas in India in 1963

The archive consists in paper documents mainly connected one way or another with the work of the German-American philosophical theologian, Paul Tillich (1886-1965): for example, notes made by Terry from Tillich's papers, copies of Terry's papers given at associated conferences and correspondence with the Tillich Society.

There is also scattered wider correspondence (sometimes quite brief) including with Thomas J.J. Altizer, Mircea Eliade, Michael Pye and John Heywood Thomas. There is not much on Terry's later interests in methodology and disciplinary formation in the Study of Religions (Thomas 1984) and in the historical sociology of religious diversity (Thomas 1988) so the archive must be seen as a very particular slice of Terry's scholarship. A further shift in Terry's interests came after he retired from the Open University in 1996 and became increasingly interested in the new cognitive science of religion and in naturalist explanatory theories of religion. An autobiographical fragment in my possession poignantly documents this personal shift over the decades from the Tillichian theology of his early career to naturalism and atheism.

It's important to see this archive in context: in the first place, as the early fruits of a particular, 'local' (Welsh) biography - Terry was a Welsh speaker - within a UK history of the study of religion/s in the wake of the pivotal 'turn' at Lancaster and elsewhere in the late 1960s; secondly, as the early steps in an intellectual journey from a theology of culture and interfaith encounter, to historical sociology, and finally to a naturalistic model of religion. Along the way, like many other British contemporaries, Terry engaged enthusiastically with the international scene: for example, he was a participant at the select 1988 conference in Marburg on the disciplinary shape of the Study of Religion/s (Pye 1989) and he analysed the politics of late Victorian studies of religion at the IAHR congress in Mexico City (Thomas 2000).

This new archive therefore is a valuable resource which documents the early research formation of an important scholar in the Study of Religion/s at both UK and international levels. It provides a fascinating new piece in the complex jigsaw of our field and reminds us of the value of disciplinary historiography for understanding where we are now. And if we don't write our own history someone else may do it for us.

Acknowledgments
I am grateful to Huw Thomas for permission to reproduce the attached image of Terry and for sharing files of Terry's unpublished draft material as well as trusting me with the archive as a whole; to Dr Jo Miller, who created an initial catalogue of the contents; to Dr Russell Re Manning at Bath Spa University for putting me in touch with The New Library in Llantwit Major, and to Richard Parry, founder of the New Library, for accepting the material in March 2023.

Teaching about religion and the climate crisis:

A specifically religious studies approach

Clare Wanless

The climate emergency is one of the defining moral and social issues of our time. Proper understanding of it must involve appreciation of the role that religion(s) play(s) in where we are now, and in our responses to the crisis. It is therefore increasingly important for curricula of religious studies departments to find engaging and relevant ways of addressing both the climate crisis itself and related issues of human relationships with the natural world.

However, in designing religious studies curricula about the climate crisis, there are certain traps that are easy to fall into, and that mirror the wider challenges facing our discipline. First is the danger of leaning too heavily into engaging with religious arguments. It is easy to see how this can lead to discussions that are primarily theological and/or that privilege Christianity. Alternatively, in then focusing on the responses of non-Christian and/or non-Western religious communities, we can end up pivoting towards a world religions paradigm, or even a kind of tokenising orientialism. Either way, there is a danger of privileging top-down structures at the expense of personal religious experience. How best to approach teaching about religion and the environment in order to avoid these dangers?

Based on a course I taught at The University of Edinburgh, this article discusses three inter-related dimensions of teaching about religion and the climate crisis. These are: (1) modeling nature and the climate; (2) subjective responses to crisis: and (3) political, structural and social issues. A course can bring together a variety of case studies that focus on aspects of each of these three dimensions, highlighting the ways in which they interweave. This will provide a deep, inter-disciplinary but RS-led understanding of the intersection between religion and the climate crisis, which students can then develop in ways that are appropriate to them. The following sections provide some example suggestions on how each of these themes might be approached so as to emphasise the connections between them.

Modelling nature and the climate

This theme looks at the ways people in various contexts frame nature and the natural world, to make it something that they can understand on their own terms, relate to, and perhaps influence. Firstly, how do people respond to the inherent power of nature, both as a destructive force and as a sustainer of life? Case studies illustrate how anthropomorphising nature can provide a way of modelling its patterns as personality, and as a route to forming a constructive relationship with it. This can be compared with enlightenment trends towards rationalising and instrumentalizing nature through measurement and experimentation (Golinski 2019), and the later trend towards romanticisation that leant into radical acceptance of nature as an uncanny, dangerous and disruptive force that is intricately tied to our vulnerability as living beings (Mayer 2018).

Building on these initial themes, we can then explore how people model and justify their sense of moral obligation toward nature. Notions of human dominion over nature can be discussed not only in terms of theological justifications but also in terms of their utilisation as a way of underpinning and justifying racist attitudes and colonial power. The paradigm of stewardship over nature that has more recently become prominent in religious environmentalism can be discussed as a way of recasting dominion as responsibility to better suit modernity and its environmentalist concerns (Chaplin 2016), while still maintaining something of its theological and anthropocentric core. These paradigms can be further explored by comparison with notions of kinship with nature, which provides an emphasis on interconnectivity and uses personhood as a way of developing an attitude of relational empathy with aspects of the natural world (Rountree 2012).

Subjective responses to nature and the crisis

This theme explores the place of personal, subjective and spiritual responses in mediating our feelings about nature and subsequently also our response to the climate emergency. I have found this an especially valuable theme, because of the opportunities it affords to use students' own subjective responses to nature to help them engage critically but also empathetically with a range of responses to nature and the climate crisis. Individual and group reflection on exercises like the Deep Time Walk and the Sit-Spot exercise have been especially valuable for this. They can help underpin exploration of a range of topics.

The Deep Time Walk
www.deeptimewalk.org

This "walking audio history of the living Earth" was developed by educators at Schumacher College. Participants walk 4.6km, while listening to an audio play through their mobile phone. This leads them through the 4.6 billion year history of the Earth at a rate of one million years per metre walked, while encouraging reflection on various aspects of deep time. Topics covered include the timescales of the earth in relation to human timescales, and how humans relate to and impact the natural world. The listener is also encouraged to empathise with various elements of the natural world.

Firstly, eco-spirituality can be thought of as a sense of profound and motivating personal connection with nature or particular elements of nature. Numerous aspects of eco-spirituality can be explored, including (for example) how the British road protesters formed a sense of embodied connection with nature in a kind of untutored grassroots eco-paganism that helped to underpin their protests (Harris 2014), and how surfers have developed a kind of informal aquatic religion based on a sense of personal connection with the ocean, that has in turn served to bring them together as a community (Taylor 2010).

But also, subjectivity is important in helping us to understand the profound impact that climate anxiety can have on people and communities, and the role of religion and spirituality in mediating responses to this. One response can be for communities to develop a kind of unspoken social contract to ignore the problem and carry on as normal (Pihkala 2018). Alternatively, a profound and debilitating sense of loss can develop (Albrecht 2019). Responses can develop predicated on (for example) hope, denial, radical acceptance, or attempting to develop a relationship of constructive empathy with nature (Haraway 2016).

Political and social issues

This theme explores some social and political aspects of our relationship with nature and environmentalism, especially with respect to gender, race, and indigeneity. It allows us to probe how relations of power can mirror and mutually reinforce how we construct our relationship with the natural world.

With respect to gender, one useful case study is the relationship of British ecofeminism with political protest movements of the late twentieth century and with the Goddess movement, and subsequent debates around essentialism (Gaard 2011). Another is the Chipko movement of 1970s India, which facilitates discussion of a grassroots conservation movement with collective women's leadership and built on sacrality of the local forest (Vandana 2016). Discussion of environmentalism in the United States allows us to explore not only how environmentalist narratives based around white experience can alienate and exclude other ethnicities (Carter 2020), but also how academia itself can overlook and deprivilege cultural environmentalism in non-white cultures (Baugh 2020). However, discussion of eco-Womanism enables exploration of the development of a radically inclusive spiritual ecological praxis from the lived experience of black women in the United States (Maparyan 2016), also linking to ideas of intersectionality.

The Sit-Spot Exercise
sacredearthland.co.uk/what-is-a-sit-spot-and-how-do-you-do-it/

This exercise was originally developed by Jon Young to help people develop and experience an empathetic relationship with specific elements of nature. It involves choosing an easily accessible personal space in which to sit for a short time every day to spend time with nature, cultivating a sense of mindful empathy with the elements of that space. Students can continue the practice for as long as feels useful to them and critically reflect on the experience. This provides useful subjective context for discussions around eco-spirituality.

Another important area is indigeneity, how we think about our relationship with the land, and various religion-related claims to land rights. Discussion might focus on how colonial narratives based on Christian ideas of dominion have facilitated the alienation of communities from their rights to their land (Berne Burow et al 2018), and how decolonization seeks the problematization and dismantling of such narratives. Comparative case studies can include the protests around the Alta Dam and the Dakota Pipeline (Kraft 2020).

Conclusion

Linking together these three themes using case studies such as the ones mentioned above provides an especially potent opportunity for exploring how religion and religious narratives mediate between individual spiritual experience, religious communities, and a wide range of social and political issues. This kind of specifically religious studies led approach helps students to critically reflect on their own experience, and also develop an empathetic yet critical personal response to climate justice, the natural world, and wider societal concerns.

The World Religions paradigm revisited

Moojan Momen

I think the readers of this Bulletin are very familiar with the way that the word "religion" and "world religions" have been problematized by scholars of religious studies. The word "religion" originally meant something close to the present day meaning of piety or righteousness. The later use of it by (mainly) European Christians to mean a system of beliefs and practices held by a group of people arose during the 19th century as an accommodation to a growing awareness, especially among colonial powers, that other peoples had sophisticated systems of practices and beliefs. Thus this concept of religion emerged within a particular Eurocentric historical and cultural concept. It was largely the result of the worldview of those scholars who wrote on this subject in the 19th century. By prioritising scripture and theology (rather than, say, holy law or mystical experience) as being the core of "religion", these scholars were able to build up a worldview in which there was hierarchy of religions with Christianity at the top as the most advanced and highly evolved religion; montheistic religions with a scripture were next down the hierarchy (Judaism and Islam); next were religions with a scripture, beliefs and a civilization (Hinduism and Buddhism). These were the "Big Five". Other religions such as the archaic religions of Greece, Rome and the Fertile Crescent were valued because of the light they shed on Christianity. On the lowest rung of the ladder were the "primitive" (including pre-Christian European) religions of the native peoples of the world. The concept "religion" became, in the 19th century, a tool of colonialism, creating a normative worldview that cast Europe and Christianity as the apex of civilization and thus justifying the colonialist enterprise of "civilizing" the rest of the world. This was a way of exercising power and a justification for the use of force. In the 20th century, an effort was made to reduce the triumphalism of the concept of religions as conceived in the 19th century. Out of this the "World Religions" paradigm was conceived by Ninian Smart and others in an attempt to be pluralistic. But this paradigm also had hidden colonialist aspects – the topics under which each religion was descibed were drawn from Chritianity.

A paradigmatic example of this concept of "a religion" occurred in India. When the British came to India, they were faced with an extraordinarily diverse and seemingly chaotic array of practices, some of which could be identified from within the British mindset as religious, but others where is was difficult (and usually unhelpful) to distinguish "religious" traditions from social, family or tribal ritual and traditions. Most of these practices were local and had little in the way of elaborated belief systems associated with them, but some were supra-local and these usually had a more elaborate belief system. The resolution of this was to create an artificial religion-secular divide and then to call the religion part of this divide "Hindu", a term that was originally (as Hind or al-Hind) a geographical one assigned to the lands beyond the Sindh river by Iranians and later by Muslim conquerers, and only gradually came to be used to designate their religious beliefs. Even then, it originally referred non-specifically to those residents of India (or more specifically northern India) who were not Muslims, and it did not describe any specific religious practices or beliefs.

The creation of a religion called "Hinduism" stems mostly from the efforts of Western scholars to fit the culture of India into a pre-conceived Western pattern of "religions". To a large extent, they had a pre-conception of religions as having scripture, a priestly class, a theology of salvation and concepts of an after-life, and so they picked out a textualized, Brahmanical Hinduism and made this into the "religion" of India, whereas in fact it did not fit with the practices of the majority of the inhabit-

ants of the sub-continent. Indeed as Timothy Fitzgerald commented, the putative religion "Hinduism" is perhaps located "more in secular universities in Euro America than in Indian villages." At best it was "a Europeanised version of the dominant Brahmanical ideology" and of little relevance to the villagers who made up the vast majority of India's population. A parallel process occured with the other cultures of the world, including Japanese, Chinese, African and native American.

Following on from this, scholars of religion, such as Tomoko Masuzawa, Suzanne Owen and James Cox have considered the concept of "religion" and its derivative "world religion" as an essentialising and problematic construct; a reification that constrains a rich and diverse human experience into a narrow Eurocentric and Eurohegemonic framework. They have suggested alternative frameworks for studying and teaching this phenomenon.

I want to make it clear that I have no problem with this line of thinking and my intention is not to contradict any of their findings or to push back against this trend. I do however have a problem with one result of this line of research. Whether scholars like it or not, large numbers of people across the world now see their identity in terms of the World Religion paradigm. In India, for example, the majority of the educated population consider themselves as belonging to a religion called Hinduism. The process of the "Brahmanization" or "Sanskritization" of the vast variety of local deities and religious practices is well under way. And of course the politicization of Hinduism in the form of aggressively Hindu political parties is having a major impact on the country. A parallel process is going on in the Islamic world culminating in the rise of political Islam, with Buddhism in Sri Lanka, and many other examples. In the United Kingdom, the existence of such organizations as the Hindu Council UK, Muslim Council of Britain, and Network of Buddhist Organisations is evidence that the World Religions Paradigm is deeply entrenched in the consciousness of these communities. It is a source of identity for large numbers of people.

Thus the concept of "religions" and "world religions" began as an academic exercise by white (mainly male) scholars in 19th century Europe, but an exercise with a colonialist and hegemonic background and consequences. It has now however been thoroughly taken on board by many millions of people who self-identity as one of these "world religions". The theorizing of 19th Century Western scholars has become a lived reality throughout the world. Would telling the rest of the world that they have identified with an imposed illusory construct (in effect, that what they think is their reality is false) not be replacing 19th Century colonialism with a neo-colonialist turn be a hegemonic exercise in telling people who they are and what they should be thinking?

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meet the members

GEORGE D. CHRYSSIDES

I first became acquainted with BASR in 1992, at the invitation of Terry Thomas, who was then the secretary, and who was trying to boost the organisation's dwindling membership. There were only twelve of us who met for the annual meeting at King Alfred's College (now the University of Winchester), but Terry succeeded in getting the organisation to grow rapidly. I became the Bulletin editor from 2002 to 2006, and was made an Honorary Member in 2009, after retiring from the University of Wolverhampton the previous year.

I was a part-time tutor for the Open University, in which Terry was part of its Religious Studies team, and who helped to pioneer the "Man's Religious Quest" course, subsequently renamed "The Religious Quest". Terry was keen to encourage students to undertake fieldwork, which was new to me at the time. Since there were few religious communities other than Christian churches in Plymouth, where I was then living, a weekend in London became an annual event for my students, when we visited Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim and Sikh organisations.

Fieldwork was much easier when I moved to Wolverhampton in 1992. When I inaugurated a module on new religious movements, I was determined that fieldwork should be an important part of students' study. The Jehovah's Witnesses' City Overseer was particularly helpful to us, and was instrumental in sparking my own interest in the Watchtower organisation, which had been unduly neglected in academic study, and on which much of my work now focuses.

What do I like about it BASR? It's a friendly, supportive organisation, where it's good to meet up with old friends and new researchers, to showcase parts of one's own work and to keep abreast of what others are doing. I'm a regular attender at its annual conference, having only missed one meeting since my first one.

SUZANNE OWEN

I joined the BASR as a postgraduate student and attended my first BASR conference in 2003 at University College Chester, as it was then, where I gave a 'lightning talk', as part of a works-in-progress panel, on a debate about researching Native American religious traditions. James Cox, my supervisor, was then the Honorary Secretary of the BASR, the position I hold currently. I enjoyed the conference and had hoped to return for the next one. However, as a postgraduate on a limited budget, the next BASR conference I could attend was in 2006 at Bath Spa. I don't think I've missed one since.

From 2013 to 2022, I was the coordinating editor of DISKUS, the Journal of the British Association for the Study of Religions (now JBASR), the first publication venue for many of us. My article, 'The Production of Sacred Space in the Mi'kmaq Powwow' (DISKUS 11 [2010]), was inspired by Kim Knott's presentation at a BASR conference applying Henri Lefebvre's spatial analysis to the study of religion.

During my PhD studies, I was aware that I would find it difficult to get a post in Religious Studies because I wasn't researching a 'world religion'. With that in mind, I became a tutor in three subject areas at Edinburgh: Religious Studies, Canadian Studies and Social Anthropology, and researched as much as I could on methodological aspects of studying religion. The problem was, most positions advertised in Religious Studies stated a preference for a specialist in a 'world religion'. Often, in the UK at least, positions went to people without a Religious Studies degree, making it all the more frustrating. However, just as I was finishing my PhD, I was lucky to get a Teaching Fellowship in World Religions at the University of St Andrews, which no doubt helped me get the part-time lecturing position at Leeds Trinity (though I was the second-choice candidate). Two of the modules I was given to teach were World Religions 1 and World Religions 2. A little exasperated, I presented a short paper on the issue at the University of Stirling and was persuaded to publish it as an article ('The World Religions paradigm: Time for a change', 2011). Eventually, I was able to change the modules, dropping any mention of 'world religions' except as a topic examining the influence of this type of categorisation.

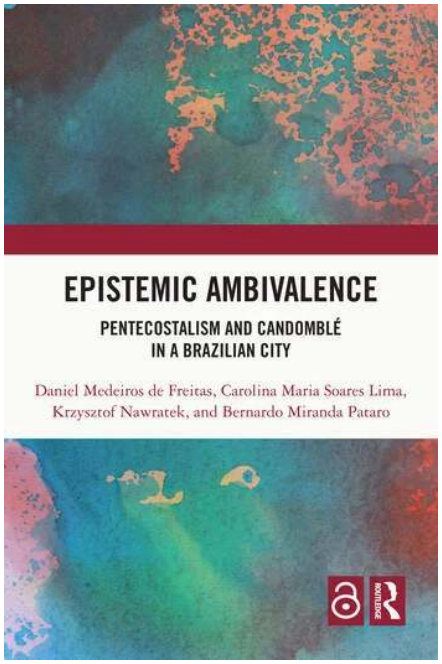
I am thankful to the BASR for providing a space to explore ways we might teach and research 'religion' beyond the artificial boundaries persistent in our field, and also for the fellowship, making the conference seem more like a holiday or an annual meet-up of friends.

reviews

FREITAS, D. M. DE, LIMA, C. M. S, NAWRATEK, AND PATARO, B. M. (2024) EPISTEMIC AMBIVALENCE: PENTECOSTALISM AND CANDOMBLÉ IN A BRAZILIAN CITY. ROUTLEDGE. IX + 108PP. HBK £130. ISBN: 978-1-032-16312-3.

"Ambivalence" – a synonym for uncertainty, doubt and inconclusiveness – stands right at the centre of this intriguing volume. Where once we moderns knew all about religion, now it seems, the architecture has changed.

The subtitle of the introductory chapter is, 'The confusing religious landscape in Brazil', and it opens with two quotes from interviews conducted by the authors in the city of Belo Horizontale that strike right to the heart of any sense of stable ground. The first interviewee says, "I am evangelistic, but I do not like to follow the church's doctrines" while the second states, "I do not go to church … I do not have any religion. I believe in God, not a religion" (p. 1). Later, we are furnished with statistics about Brazil's religious populations including Census data specifying numbers of Catholics and Protestants (pp. 51-2; see also p. 4), as well as maps detailing the distributions of religious infrastructures in Belo Horizontale (pp. 55-64). Perhaps we are on solid ground after all. At one level, it is no surprise, given Brazil's colonial history, that the majority of Brazilians identify as Catholic. Catholic places of worship have played a structuring role in colonial urbanism; they occupy key locations in the planned urban fabric predominantly in the older, more established neighbourhoods of towns and cities, and Belo Horizontale is no exception (p. 5 and p. 60). And, amidst the demolitions, renovations and new developments of the city, the Catholic Church has, unsurprisingly, exerted a gravitational force not merely upon the shape and texture of urban space in Brazil, but in the very definition of 'religion' itself, including in the idea that Candomblé and other Afro-Brazilian religions are evil. But with significant decreases among those identifying as Catholic in the Southeast of the country (p. 52), the presence of temples is no guarantee for the presence of worshippers (according to one study conducted in Rio de Janeiro in the late 1990s, only 18% of Catholics attend church on a weekly basis, p. 92).



By contrast, Pentecostal, charismatic and evangelical populations are growing nationally and in Belo Horizontale, their infrastructures spreading in areas of new and often precarious urban development for example along "major traffic corridors" (p. 59) as well as at the peripheries of the city, in rented spaces and in re-purposed older buildings "where the Brazilian State has been absent in providing basic services" (p. 103), although they are also sometimes built from scratch to compete "for symbolic dominance" (p. 62), such as the main church of the Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus (IURD). But evangelical success in areas experiencing rapid urban change also points to "fluid loyalty among Protestants, with many … attending different temples or switching between churches" (p. 54) as well as "a more informal and

ephemeral territorialisation within urban areas" with Pentecostal churches often showing signs of "recent renovations, [and] makeshift construction solutions" (p. 56), suggesting simultaneously a vibrant and elusive urban footprint. Moreover, the fact that Pentecostal groups mobilise television among a range of media including also radio stations and newspapers as well as content on digital platforms, points to another index of the spatial, albeit one not tied down to any conventionally emnbodied materialisation of urban experience.

Finally, the infrastructures of other religions such as Candomblé and Umbanda are often invisible, as their spaces typically lack external, identifying features and their practices depend on oral (rather than textual) sources for transmission and are also often shrouded in secrecy (p.95). Yet in the Concórdia neighbourhood of the city, which has a substantial black population, the terreiros are discernible (p. 64). This selective visibility is compounded by the "syncretic strategies" (p. 27) of Afro-Brazilian religions which in some instances "self-describe as part of the Catholic Church" (p. 53) but in any case, are typically moving blends of practices, materials and ideas drawn from a variety of cultural and religious resources, constituted at least in part by historical experiences of racism and economic inequality.

Central to this study in uncertainty are the trans-disciplinary methods of the research team, which are summarised in the final chapter as a "phenomenological-hermeneutical-decolonial approach" (p. 98). One might question the preponderance of classical scholarship from the Global North that frames key points of orientation in the book, notably Mircea Eliade and Pierre Bourdieu but also Simmel and Lefebvre, even if none of them would have approved of this book's embrace of uncertainty. Towards the end of the research project the team goes back to the field and to some of their interviewees, "to return part of the knowledge shared with these people and [to] understand their thoughts about our arguments. We strive[d] to ensure that we … [were] not creating a narrative that does not relate to the reality of their experiences. However, the discussions only partly addressed our arguments, [and] instead tended to open new paths of inquiry and ask further questions. It made us realise that our research will not end …" (p. 98-9). The research questions and arguments, then, did not reveal an exquisitely delimited and detailed field of study or advance new empirical data framed and made newly accessible by an innovative theoretical model. "While conversing with people, we gained a deep understanding … but when we turned to writing, we found ourselves slowly losing this understanding" (p. 104). In the spirit of indeterminacy and deconstruction the final chapter includes a reference to Babel, the demolition of which cuts humans off from the promise of perfect intersubjective understanding, and condemns them to the labour of translation and interpretation, to which this book is testament.

Paul-François Tremlett,
The Open University

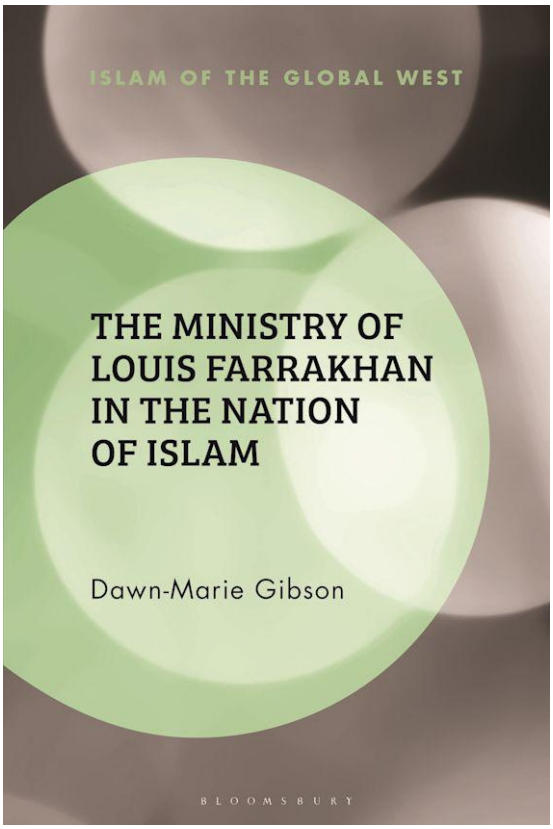
GIBSON, D-M. (2024) *THE MINISTRY OF LOUIS FARRAKHAN IN THE NATION OF ISLAM*. BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC: ISLAM OF THE GLOBAL WEST. 200 PP. HBK £85. ISBN: 9781350068520.

Dawn-Marie Gibson has authored several important texts on the Nation of Islam, which have aided greatly our understanding of the movement. In this new book she tackles the controversial and little understood figure of Louis Farrakhan, leader of the NOI since he revived the original Nation in 1979.

Farrakhan is as much a myth as a man. For many of us the myth overtakes any conception of him as a person. Still, this is a short and easily digestible book. Beginning with a necessary overview of the history of the NOI, and its critical personnel – Wallace Fard Muhammad, Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X – Gibson leads us through the evolution of Louis Walcott into the original NOI's Minister Louis X and then into Louis Farrakhan, leader of the revived NOI.

From Malcolm X's acrimonious departure in 1963 until Elijah Muhammad's death in 1975, Farrakhan was effectively second-in-command of the original NOI, his militant passion and ded-

ication to the cause of African Americans via the mythology and approach of the NOI replicating that of the lost frontman. In some important ways Farrakhan's background reflects that of Malcolm X. X was born to a West Indian mother and African American father who were committed Garveyites; Farrakhan was born in 1933 to a West Indian immigrant single parent, Sarah Manning, who herself was a Garveyite and later follower of Elijah Muhammad. Several factors embedded a deep conservatism in him: as well as the gender role expectations of early 20th century Black America and Garveyism, his father was a philanderer who Manning left her husband for, but played no role in Louis's life. Unlike X however, Farrakhan appears to have been a content and committed Christian prior to his conversion – brought about by explicit targeting from Elijah Muhammad, who perceived something important within him.



The story of Farrakhan is a fascinating one – the pivot of which is his being passed over to lead the NOI after Elijah Muhammad's death in 1975, in favour of Muhammad's son (and FBI choice), Warith Deen – who led the NOI quickly away from the peculiarly Fardian (and peculiarly Black American) aspects, into Islamic Sunni orthodoxy. Farrakhan first ceded to Warith Deen, then left to revive his music career, before finding himself compelled to revive the NOI in its original form. He even claimed that Elijah had been taken by God and was not dead.

It would be difficult to author any book on Farrakhan, or the NOI, without mentioning the persistent allegations of antisemitism. These, and his rejection of them, are mentioned in the book's second sentence; the subject constitutes a fair proportion of Gibson's index references and a dedicated subsection (pp.97-102). Indeed, a full investigation of the history of the Nation of Islam's antisemitic rhetoric, accusations, and defences awaits writing. In Malcolm X's infamous meetings with the KKK it was dislike for Jews over which they apparently bonded; it also marked a primary step into the spotlight when Farrakhan defended then-presidential Jessie Jackson, accused of referring to New York and Jews as Hymie-town and Hymies respectively (although Jackson assured Farrakhan that he had not uttered such). The emergence of antisemitism within the Black radical tradition is one of the saddest occurrences, and little explanation of it is made in this text (indeed, it has to my mind never been given a satisfactory explanation and I wonder whether it can really be as simple as a competition for principle persecuted minority status in America).

Gibson deals with the subject frankly and without apology, noting Farrakhan's "deep distrust of Jews and a belief that their support for civil rights was directly tied to a larger goal of controlling Black leaders." (99) In some places however her descriptions could be aided by deeper contextualisation and examination; she writes that Farrakhan "appears to have attributed the NOI's newfound acceptance [during the early 1970s] as a result of the lesser influence of Jewish Americans in civil rights organizations" (71), but as Marc Dollinger has shown, the Jewish American establishment had been anything but opposed to the NOI in earlier times (it was only during the late 1960s that the emerging rift between Black and Jewish causes prompted a re-evaluation). Unfortunately Gibson does not cite Dollinger, or attempt to assess the validity of Farrakhan's statement.

Indeed, this is a short book and one feels it could have benefited from more in depth analysis of the social forces that were operating and influencing Farrakhan as he rose to prominence, honed his doctrine, and then retreated to the shadows. The centrepiece of the book, around which it is structured, is the Million Man March which he organised in 1995, and which represented the peak of his public presence. However, this focus occludes some other interesting aspects.

One fact that is not mentioned is Farrakhan's support for the Black Hebrew Israelites who emigrated to Israel in 1969; known as the Original Hebrew Israelite Nation or African Hebrew Israelites, this group maintained an illegal presence for two decades, growing to number many hundreds, and engaged a war of attrition against the state, until their acceptance of each other in the 1990s. To Israel's dismay, they welcomed Farrakhan on an unlikely (and undercover) visit to Israel in 1978, and he took up their cause in 1984 when Israeli determination to end the stalemate led to renewed persecution. Their leader Ben Ammi shared a stage with Farrakhan when he spoke at the Million Man March.

All criticisms aside, Farrakhan has done much to help Black Americans, and his persistence paid off as the NOI's work in communities and prisons garnered much respect. Farrakhan as a vocal and powerful advocate for Black America, and critic of the establishment, should not be dismissed based on his bigotry. Gibson's book is an important contribution to our understanding of the man, and deserves a place on every scholar's shelf.

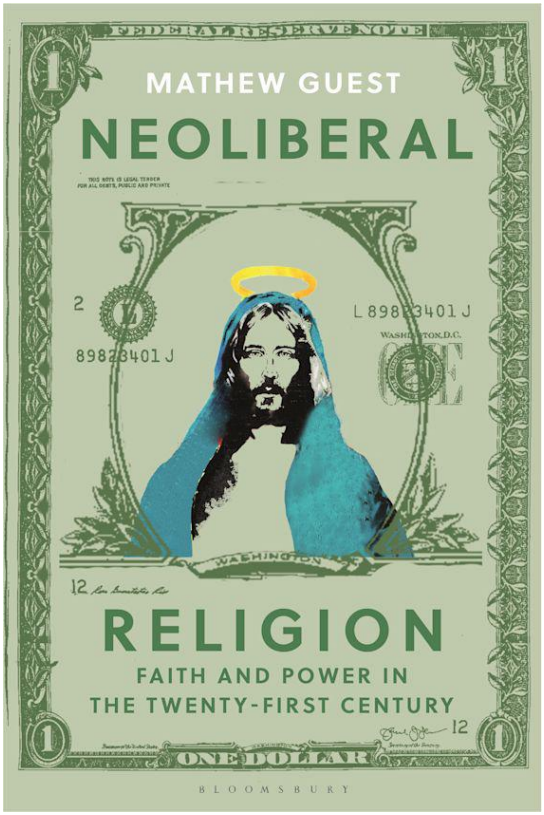
Michael T Miller

GUEST, M. (2022) *NEOLIBERAL RELIGION: FAITH AND POWER IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY*. BLOOMSBURY. 203 PP. PBK £22.99. ISBN: 978-1-350-11638-2.

Matthew Guest's 'Introduction' to this timely volume includes a definition of neoliberalism as the "elevation of the sovereign individual" (p. 2), that is an individual that seeks freedom from all bonds of cultural, social or indeed religious restraint in order to pursue her or his (rational) interests. While these interests remain bound within the law, according to Guest, the Covid pandemic illustrated that in the UK, many regarded the observation of restrictions on their movement as an unbearable if not indeed tyrannical burden, despite the fact that disciplined social distancing was, in the absence of a vaccine, the only effective circuit breaker to mass infection. According to Guest, the pandemic "exposed the embeddedness of neoliberal assumptions" in society (p. 3), namely the willingness of individuals to prioritise their own private self-interest over those of wider publics. For Guest, the ubiquity and perniciousness of said "neoliberal assumptions" demands three moves: firstly a "rethink of how the sociology of religion is conceived", secondly "concerted engagement with other disciplines" and thirdly, a "jettisoning of strict notions of ethical neutrality" (p. 4). I would suggest that it is Guest's discussion the last of these that is of most interest and importance and I highlight it here partly because it has been omitted from some previous reviews of the book.

The sociology of religion has, since its inception, been dominated by the concept of modernity and the assumption that modernity's ever-expanding and disenchanting energies, signal the eclipse of religion. In the second half of the twentieth century this assumption coalesced into the secularization thesis which has dominated the field ever since. Arguably, a more interdisciplinary sociology of religion is now emerging from the shadow of the secularization hypothesis which for Guest means rethinking the field "through the neoliberal lens" (p. 15). This lens focuses attention upon the "affinity" (ibid) between diverse forms of religion from Pentecostalism to New Age religions of the Self with neoliberalism, generating "an argument about the expansion of cultural affinities between certain kinds of thinking and social organization and certain forms of religion" (p. 20) (I might take issue with the term "affinities" which seems to assume the attraction of essences or intrinsic qualities to each other. A more appropriate term could be "articulation" which means "any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice" [Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 105]).

The book proceeds with a series of chapters in which Guest skilfully navigates, on behalf of his reader, literatures addressing religion and markets, religion, populism and nationalism, religion and the power-knowledge nexus in the post-truth era, religion, securitization and the state, religion and the self, religion and difference and neoliberalism, the secular and non-religion. As such, Guest argues that five "cultural forces" are driving the articulation of religion and neoliberalism, specifically (i) "marketization" which "draws religious movements into the logic of commercial markets", (ii) "populism", which "reshapes opportunities for political engagement", (iii) "destabilization of knowledge" which "exposes new ways in which religious innovations become plausible and visible in the public realm", (iv) "patterns of securitization" which "reveal how religion becomes a target of state regulation" and (v) "heightened individualism" which "converges with marketization to produce market orientations to religious selfhood" (p. 166). Importantly, given that woven throughout are paradigmatic cases of economic exploitation, racial prejudice and the stigmatization of communities, Guest is right to argue that the sociology of religion's "neoliberal lens" must, at the same time, be an ethical one (p. 167). If Hayek argued that liberal values were best embedded by allowing markets to establish their own equilibrium without interference from the state, neoliberal experiments in places as diverse as Chile (1973) and Russia (following the fall of the Soviet Union in the 1990s) suggest that the political conditions most conducive to neoliberal capitalism are not liberal democracy but authoritarianism if not indeed fascism. According to Guest, "the tendency to treat market forces as best unhindered by moral discourse means there is a logic within neoliberalism that resists moral conversation", which "is why that conversation is especially important" (p. 169).



As Guest makes clear, the sociology of religion is no stranger to ethical and moral debates, but sociological research into religion has typically been pursued according to arguments about "methodological atheism" (p. 172) and the dangers of subjective bias. The whole argument about separating facts from values is, however, questionable. Guest finds useful alternatives in the critical sociology of the Frankfurt School and feminist theory, both of which have long distinguished between traditional theory which, under the guise of objectivity has tended to affirm the existing structures and norms of society and critical theory, which is explicitly guided by values which propose the progressive transformation of society (pp. 176-8). Yet even as he notes the complex institutional structures ("the university") within which sociologists of religion are enmeshed and the differing layers of responsibility and accountability that the pursuit of research generates to co-researchers and communities, to peers and colleagues and to institutions, Guest seems so struggle somewhat under the weight of his own undertaking, rather blandly concluding that "ethical questions are likely to be even more unavoidable for the sociology of religion in the future" (p. 182). Notwithstanding, this is a significant volume and Matthew Guest should be praised for his thoughtful navigation of a series of complex, inter-disciplinary debates, and for his attempt to push the sociology of religion into a new direction.

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HARRISON, P (ED). (2018) *SETTING OUT ON THE GREAT WAY, ESSAYS ON EARLY MAHAYANA BUDDHISM.* EQUINOX PUBLISHING. 320 PP. HBK £75. ISBN: 978 1 78179 096 0.

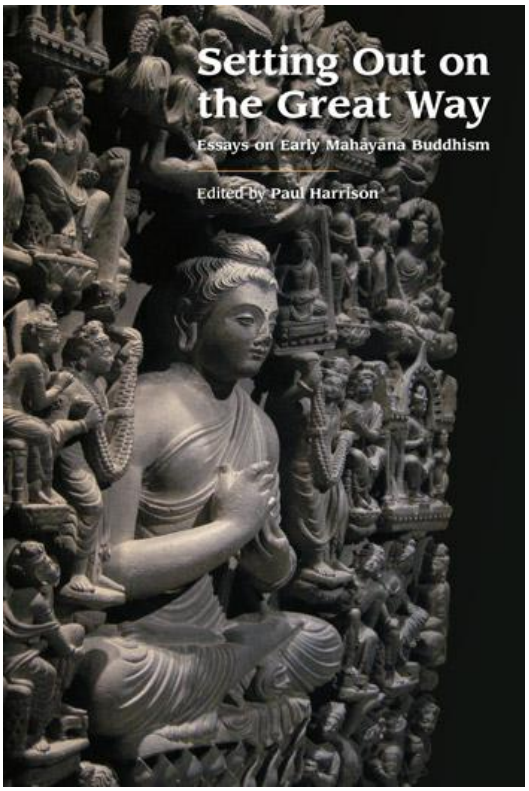
This review must begin with an abject and sincere apology for being so very late, but even now I would like to make modest comment on this complex and in many ways challenging publication. I understand that it can still be acquired, and librarians with an area for Buddhist studies are positively encouraged to find space for a hard copy. By way of excuse for lateness, I plead reflection on the general elasticity of time, especially when it comes to Mahāyāna Buddhism. What, after all, are a few fragile human years against the backdrop of even just one *kalpa*, or the incalculable lifespan of a *tathāgata*?

Indeed, when was the Mahāyāna itself set in motion? The contributions to this work range over two or three centuries. And what was set in motion, a distinctive teaching, a spiritual impulse, a modified form of monastic discipline? Or do we regard as the main characteristic a flowering of mythology and cosmology going far beyond that characteristic of earlier phases of Buddhism? The phrase "setting out" does imply the agency of those who first proposed or initiated the "great vehicle" (the Mahāyāna), and that they set out on a new path, or a greater path, or at least a newly conceived version of the original path. But who were they, and what exactly did they propose? The contributors to *Setting out on the Great Way* are evidently conscious that they and others have been working on the matter for a long time, and yet the field investigated still seems to be quite untidy. For example, the editor Paul Harrison himself signals a notable divergence over the so-called "forest hypothesis" which is now critically reviewed by fellow contributor David Drewes and noted as being quite absent from a sutra from Gandhāra studied by Otto Strauch (see below).

The underlying question is how did the earlier phases of Buddhism come to morph into that great religio-cultural flowering known as the Mahāyāna? For it surely did, and it is counterproductive to complain of the evils of essentialism (as on page 23) if that means that coherence is denied altogether. This does seem to be the drift of Paul Harrison's introduction, where we are already given the somewhat impatient view (not further argued in detail) that the Lotus Sutra is "unlikely to be an early Mahāyāna sutra anyway" (p. 13)! Leaving aside precise questions about what would count as "early" (The Perfection of Insight sutras admittedly have pride of place, see studies elsewhere by Edward Conze and Lewis Lancaster) such an attitude perhaps explains why for more than a century no self-confident Indologist has taken the trouble to provide an up-to-date translation of the Lotus Sutra, that is, since Kern's pioneer English in Max Müller's *Sacred Books of the East, Vol XXI*. This appeared in 1884 (following Burnouf's posthumous French version of 1852) – with some rather wild footnotes about solar mythology. In the meantime, students using English have made do for decades with various competing translations from Kumarajīva's Chinese (with its different ordering of chapters), worthwhile though these may be in themselves. But there is no doubt that "the Lotus" was a relatively early Mahāyāna composition, or compilation. If some parts are later than others, then some parts are, after all, earlier.

It comes as something of a relief to read in the second contribution to this volume, Peter Skilling's "How the Unborn was Born - The Riddle of Mahayana Origins" that the Mahāyāna can be briefly characterised under two points, namely advocacy of the bodhisattva path as the way to Buddhahood, and the idea that "all dharmas are unborn and unceasing" (p.34). The second of these points is summed up as meaning that dharmas (i.e. all the analysable factors of existence) are without substance (one might gloss as "persistent substance") or own-being (presumably rendering *svabhāva*). While this corresponds approximately to the already current ideas of impermanence and non-self, it is taken up into the idea that dharmas are "empty" (of substantial being) and therefore cannot be perceived or grasped. I would further explain that to understand this is to let go of them and thereby to be released. Skilling suspects that these two points cannot be separated, and indeed he is right, for this is, as a spiritual process, the very path of the bodhisattva (or *bodhisatva*, as he

learnedly prefers to spell it, see his footnote 1), who is then devoted to freeing others from their entanglements. So perhaps there is a kind of "essence" to the Mahāyāna after all, even though this term has recently become so unpopular. In what may seem to some to be a slight jump, Skilling sees the further elaboration of this path, indeed the very task of a bodhisattva, as being summed up in a widely commended "concern for the preservation of the three jewels," a theme found in a variety of texts, and certainly popular in Theravada lands. There are long quotations about this with Sanskrit and Tibetan in the footnotes. In conclusion we learn from Skilling that the Mahāyāna was "born as a congeries of pragmatic, liturgical, and metaphysical innovations in response to the centuries of change that followed Śākyamuni's great decease." (p.53) This may be true enough, and yet one misses the connection back to the two leading points set forth at the outset; rather we now learn, for example, that the Mahāyāna is "a path of merit and a path of protection" (p.54), also a view current in Theravada lands, and indeed that the Mahāyāna is needed to "come to the rescue" in this insecure world (p.55), and so forth.



The theme of a *multifaceted* development is taken up approvingly by Johannes Bronkhorst who sets out its main exponents beginning with the work of Gregory Schopen in a helpful manner. The current trend, for also espoused by Harrison, Shimoda and Boucher in this volume, is to argue that the origin of the Mahāyāna is not to be found in one single element. Bronkhorst's main concern however is to highlight the emergence of a particular theme current in Greater Gandhāra, namely to the effect that the dharmas commonly listed in Buddhist texts were themselves alone the locus of reality, rather than any more complex entities deriving from them. This then became the backdrop for the further assertion that even the last-analysis dharmas do not exist but are empty (of own-being). This does not necessarily explain the provenance of all aspects of the Mahāyāna, the bodhisattva ideal for example being another matter, but it does suggest a specific locus for one leading feature, says Bronkhorst. He refers to this development as an "intellectual revolution" (and indeed *abhidharma* is often categorised as an intellectual matter), but it might equally be regarded as a spiritual shift (see further below).

With reference to Gandhāra the question of geographical divergence is raised, and with it social rather than intellectual divergence. This seems to have provided the underlying tension for the so-called "forest hypothesis", previously advanced by Harrison and others. The attraction of this hypothesis, i.e. that the Mahāyāna was developed by spiritual adepts who had withdrawn from society, is supposed to have lain in a certain tiredness with an apparently increasing focus on lay devotees. It is in this sense a social theory; but unfortunately, it is one which lacks any substantial sociological basis and (naturally) is no longer accessible for fieldwork. In the contribution by David Drewes entitled "The Forest Hypothesis" it is also criticised for other reasons. In particular, he argues that it was unduly influenced by assumptions about the importance of attainment of enlightenment in this life spread by Suzuki Daisetsu, who himself is said to have over-corrected the older Anglo-German idea that Buddhism as set out in the Pali Canon was a more or less rational matter. Although Suzuki was pursuing and pro-

moting his own agenda, it may be commented in passing that the idea of "attaining Buddhahood [i.e. enlightenment] in this very life" (*sokushin jōbutsu*) in fact has a substantial pedigree in Japanese Buddhism. Note also that while Harrison, in his introduction, seems to be reluctantly withdrawing from the "forest hypothesis" he also holds out the prospect of a further critical examination of the arguments adduced.

There is rather more sympathy for the significance of the presumed "forest monks" in Daniel Boucher's "Recruitment and Retention in early Buddhist Sodalities" in which the idea of a single hypothesis of origin for the Mahāyāna is again rejected. Boucher draws analogies from the various strains and tensions exhibited by the pioneers of modern-day new religious movements to seek hints as to why new texts were pushed forward by a variety of new groups that, taken together, came to be regarded as the Mahāyāna. Fascinating though such speculation is, it unfortunately remains in the realm of speculation due to our inability to access any substantial evidence from a social field. The argument is best taken as a healthy reminder that new texts, with shifts of vocabulary and thought, were indeed produced by real persons, even if their identity, not least thanks to the very nature of the "thus I have heard" sutra genre, is lost from view. In this respect the innovators were in any case very different from any modern counterparts in new religious movements, who usually cherish a personality cult.

Similar hints from phenomena nearer to our own times are offered by Douglas Osto in "Altered States and the Origins of the Mahayana". The point is argued in persuasive detail and indeed it was surely the case that at least some Mahāyāna texts corresponded to "visions" or "trance-like states" which could be reiterated precisely with the help of the texts in question, and in at least some of which a marvellous *samādhi* is imaginatively set forth, opening up a vision of new worlds, or in new-speak, multiverses. His exploration is reminiscent of, but apparently not dependent on discussions of this subject current in the late nineteen-sixties. Full marks to Osto for mentioning the Lotus Sutra in this regard. He might have gone on to discuss the very genre of "visualisation" sutras, but of course these were later, and Sanskrit originals are mainly unknown. Both Boucher and Osto, in their own ways, are addressing what I used to call "the psychology of sutra production" and this is surely an aspect worthy to be carefully reflected upon, and indeed suggestively treated in these papers. But clues to the processes may be found above all in the texts themselves. I would here merely suggest that the psychology of Buddhist sutra production (focused on the phrase "thus I have heard") is rather different from that of the production of "holy scriptures" or "bibles" as in the American Church of the Latter Day Saints (Mormons) or in some of the new religions of Japan such as Tenshō Kōtai Jingū Kyō.

In Sasaki Shizuka's contribution, "The Concept of 'Remodelling the World'" similar considerations are hovering in the background, without becoming explicit. He focuses on the appearance of the fascinating Buddha known as Akṣobhya, whose deeds, vows and visions are set forth in a sutra regarded as being very early, even pre-dating the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*. Be that as it may, it is of primary significance as an early example of the way in which the early Mahāyāna imagination worked. Subliminally, the parallel with the sutras concerning Amitābha will not fail to make itself felt. The paradoxical effect of the *Ārya-Akṣobhya tathāgatasya vyūha* coming into prominence, particularly through the work of Satō Naomi, is on the one hand to relativise the high visibility of the Amida texts of Pure Land Buddhism, and on the other hand to increase the venerable appearance of such texts in general in the early development of the Mahāyāna. That makes it easier for Amida Buddhists to argue that their key writings are typical of original Mahāyāna (even if not demonstrably the very earliest) and thereby even true to original Buddhism (as Mahāyāna is presumed by Pure Land followers to be). It should be noted that Sasaki is not actually arguing this; but what can be drawn from his presentation is that the imaginative invention of further "worlds" as in the case of Akṣobhya Tathāgata was a persistent element in the original Mahāyāna mix. A consideration of emptiness alone is not enough.

Nevertheless, the notion of emptiness is persistent, and we have already seen that Johannes Bronkhorst seeks to work out its

provenance. It would have been helpful if his contribution had been directly followed by that of Ingo Strauch on "Early Mahāyāna in Gandhāra: New Evidence from the Bajaur Mahāyāna Sūtra" a text which the author had previously studied in detail (see his bibliography). Strauch checks this text with respect to a number of leading ideas commonly reckoned to characterize the Mahāyāna, some of which are in evidence here, while others are not. Of particular importance in the text are the notion, and the articulation, of the bodhisattva path. In this path is emphasised a meditational feature described as "non-apperception" but while the notion of emptiness is apparently hovering in the background it is rarely mentioned as a term. The plurality of buddha-fields is regarded as "a foundational idea", and one of these is none other than Abhirati, the world of Akṣobhya mentioned above. Amitābha and his "pure land" however are notably absent. Above all it is remarkable that there are no references to *prajñāpāramitā*, the perfection of insight (or wisdom). This absence does not necessarily imply a marked difference of thought, for Strauch sums up the approach of his text as a kind of "rhetoric of negation", typical of what might be termed the emptiness tradition.

Finally, we turn to the presentation by Rhi Juhyung entitled "Looking for Mahāyāna Bodhisattvas: A Reflection on Visual Evidence in Early Indian Buddhism" which is accompanied by figures of Buddhist statuary, some waring turbans. While the paper is learned, informative and interesting, it does not really add any crucial clues to the so-called "riddle" of Mahāyāna origins. Not that this is any fault of the author. Rather, if we follow carefully the variations introduced, the statuary seems to have lagged behind the texts and the meditations and visions which inspired it. In this perspective it is appropriate that Rhi's account appears at the end, together with some welcome illustrations of bodhisattva figures from Gandhāra. Though evidently hard to identify, these do show at least that Mahāyāna devotion was turning towards such figures as well as to the Buddha himself, thus intimating ever greater complexity.

Reflecting partly divergent views presented at a conference, this book does not quite get to have a common program. Though parts may be read with much profit, there is evidently still no clear consensus about when, where and how the Great Vehicle came to be set in motion. There is also no clear consensus about methodology. Of course, Indologists will always salute philological work, and that is fine as far as it goes, though some readers may find the number and complexity of footnotes rather tedious (sometimes with lengthy and potentially anachronistic quotations from Tibetan). Insofar as Mahāyāna is regarded as having been somehow "new" then analogies from more recent examples of innovation in religion are not inappropriate. But the problem is an old one, and in some ways a general one. After all, when, where, and how did Gnosticism, the Renaissance, the Reformation, Tantra or neo-Shamanism get going? How do streams of tradition and clumps or clusters of innovation need to be analysed, defined and assessed? If the search for a single "essence" is chimeric, how many characteristics make up an apple, or a pear, or an onion, and which ones?

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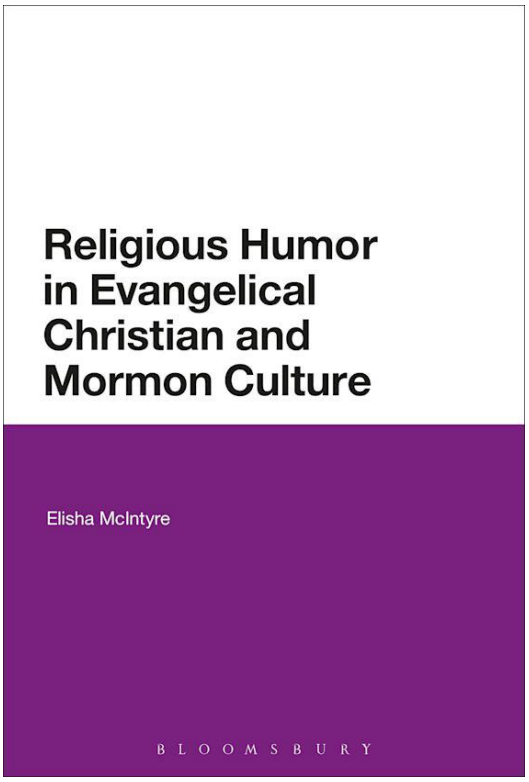
MCINTYRE, E. (2018) *RELIGIOUS HUMOR IN EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN AND MORMON CULTURE*. BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC. 221 PP. HBK £108. ISBN: 978-1-3500-0548-8.

This entertaining book is delightful to read and yet academically excellent. Elisha McIntyre opens with a joke – "Who was the greatest comedian in the Bible? Samson. He brought the house down" (p. 3) – and builds a fascinating argument about the way humour is deployed in conservative religious cultures. Humour is potentially anarchic and offensive, especially humour that deals with the sacred and religion. McIntyre's interest is in religious humour, not humour about religion; that is, it is intended to be experienced and enjoyed by people in the faith community. Chapter 1, "Evangelicals, Mormons, and Popular Culture," traces how evangelical Christians and Mormons participate in popular culture. The "Mollywood" film industry makes appropriate films for Mormons, most often romantic comedies in which drinking coffee (let

alone alcohol) and hand holding (let alone kissing) are not permitted, yet couples come together in ways that charm the Mormon audience and respect its faith. The second chapter, "Introducing the Challenges of Humor," acknowledges that the type of humour that Mormons and Christians find acceptable is severely restricted, and appropriate humour must be clean. Later McIntyre notes that humour in faith contexts has humility at its core.

McIntyre admires the evangelical comedian Chonda Pierce, who "infuses her entire shows with her Christianity" (p. 87), while still being able to discuss female sexual states such as menopause and body image (which inspires her hilarious riff on Spanx, or "shapeware," the controlling undergarments that middle-aged women have recourse to in order to reinstate their waists and a more youthfully attractive female shape). McIntyre argues that such jokes avoid blasphemy and promote faith. Chapter 4, "Appropriate Humor II: Clean and Dirty Humor," explains that obscenity, foul language, and vulgarity are explicitly prohibited from humour that promotes faith and amuses the faithful. These ideas of clean and dirty humour are built upon ideas of the body either as pure or as polluted. So "swearing, toilet humor, and sexual humor" (p. 97) are not allowed in faith communities, and the importance of not corrupting children is signalled by the use of the term "family-friendly" (p. 99), which holds to strict boundaries. Clean sexual humour refers only to marriage but can be controversial. Thor Ramsay's routine concerning he and his wife experiencing IVF to have children is quite explicit in certain ways, yet acknowledges God's contribution to his family unambiguously.



The next chapter, "Appropriate Humour III: Safe and Subversive Humor," notes the distaste for humour "based solely on attacking and insulting others" (p. 135). Christian and Mormon humour is likely to be non-hostile and non-subversive. McIntyre analyses the evangelical sitcom Pastor Greg in detail, and discusses comedians including Thor Ramsey, Brad Stines, and Chonda Pierce as purveyors of riskier, critical comedy that could be perceived as hostile on occasion. Stones, in particular, practices aggressive comedy. He says "as a Christian, I am not allowed to hate people, but I'm commanded to hate ideas that are different than God's" (p. 159). The Mormon magazine Sunstone is another example of subversive humour; well-known for "witty cartoons alongside …[and] penetrating articles of social commentary" (p.163). The illustrations are very amusing, and a range of Sunstone cartoons are included. The "Conclusion" reiterates the evangelical and Mormon comedians' claim that popular culture can entertain acceptably, as long as it is not offensive to religion. McIntyre notes how religious comedians negotiate the boundaries of taste in their communities, and how they keep the goal of honouring God front and centre.

The study of religion and humour is a small subfield and there are many opportunities for it to expand. McIntyre's book is unique, as most studies treat comedy and comedians outside religion(s) making jokes about religion. Here the focus on insiders, theological humour, and the production of comedy (films, stand up, cartoons, and jokes) that the scholarly audience is likely to be entirely unfamiliar with is refreshing, entertaining, and informative. This book is highly recommended.

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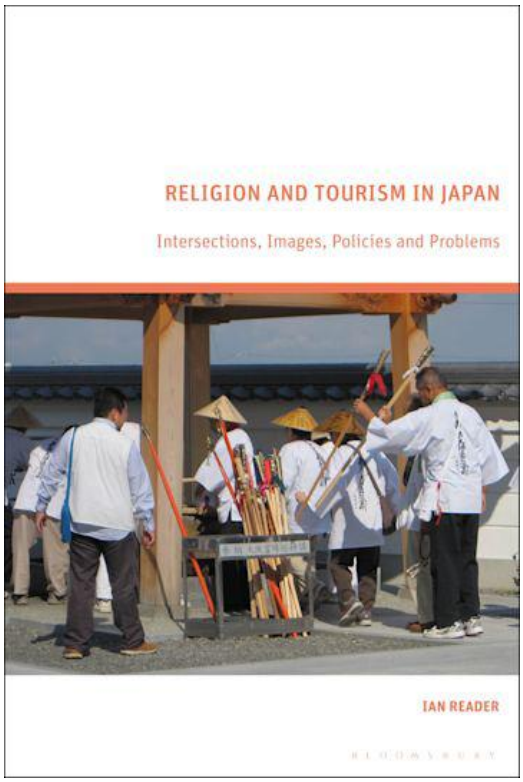
READER, I. (2024) *RELIGION AND TOURISM IN JAPAN: INTERSECTIONS, IMAGES, POLICIES AND PROBLEMS.* BLOOMSBURY. 257 + XI PP. HBK £85. ISBN: 978-1-3504-1883-7.

Ian Reader has produced a well documented and tightly argued book that shows, as the author sets out to do, that, within the broad remit of secularism's grasp, tourism has meant that religious sites, especially pilgrimage trails, have become dominated by leisure and heritage disourses that crowds out their "religious" significance within Japan. If critical readers worry that these terms do not "properly" apply to Japan, Reader fully justifies his utilisation of them in his first chapter giving a local and indigenous context, relating his work to critical studies on the concept of "religion" in Japan.



The book consists of six main chapters as well as a substantial introduction and conclusion (or chapter 7). The introduction starts with a vivid description of how a "religious" site is contrasted with a "tourist" site by a bus driver taking visitors to what he seemed to regard as something which should be the former but has become regarded as the latter. It also opens up many of the terms and issues that arise in later chapters, with particular chapters, while focused on differing case studies, also taking on specific issues. Chapter one takes on definitions of the two key terms "religion" and "tourism", which includes both a critical discussion of the wider disciplinary fields, as well as the local context regarding what they mean in Japan. Reader makes a key point which is that often scholars of tourism operate with uncritical definitions of "religion", but equally religious studies scholars are naïve in how they conceptualise "tourism". He also, rightly, takes issue with any conception that these two are opposites and must be envisaged within a zero sum game mentality. He demonstrates that aspects of what we may term "tourism" has roots within Japanese history both as a term and a concept, with a long association with many pilgrimage trails and sites. One note that may be raised here for readers of the book, is that there is a lot of repetition of themes, issues, and arguments between the chapters. This, for myself, was somewhat tedious, and went beyond simple reminders. Nevertheless, I do not raise it as a critique because Reader may well be alert to the fact that some readers will only read one or two chapters; many chapters would be ideal class readings. His approach helps include in each chapter critical issues on terminology, the political context, and the Japanese historical context around these issues.

Chapter two then addresses the development of transport networks – often at first bus tours, later railways, but also considering the rise of car ownership – alongside state policies on tourism. Chapter three then specifically takes on the status of secularism within Japan's constitution, and so how "religious" sites (often officially registered as such) can be promoted and supported by the state by framing them as part of "culture" or "heritage". Chapters four to six take on particular locations as case studies, but also set them in the context of specific issues, though these often overlap and intersect. Chapter four on the Shikoku pilgrimage looks at how representations in popular television and media affect the image and popularity of sites. The next chapter takes another pilgrimage trail, Saikoku, and shows how railway companies helped popularise it and how, in particular, the question of food, especially sweets, became associated with the temples and shrines. The sixth chapter then takes on the tradition of Shugendo and its association with particular mountain re-

gions, showing how practitioners both resist and encourage the more touristic elements, and what this means for tradition. As mentioned above, many issues recur across these chapters as issues typically affect the sites in general, which has the benefit of allowing chapters to be employed as class readings in that most of the core issues will be included in any chapter, but does add to a sense of déjà vu for a reader of the whole book. Notably, the focus in the case studies is not so much the sites themselves, though their history and development is well described, but the wider issues that concern the book's argument.

Chapter 7, or the "Concluding comments" which are a full chapter length, bring together the arguments and issues in the book. Key in this is that religious institutions have often acted from a position of weakness in the modern period, needing both visitors and money, and so they actively cooperate in what we may term the commoditisation of their temples, shrines, and pilgrimage sites. Unease with this is balanced against pragmatism. As noted above, Reader resists the religion-versus-tourism binary, rightly noting how what we may term leisure and commercialism was in place in pre-modern Japan. But he also shows why, especially over the last few decades, we see something quite radically new in how this is managed. The author also shows how the heritage and culture discourse, including sites becoming UNESCO world heritage sites or recognised as significant in Japan, feeds into a change in how these sites are understood and need to operate. The way that government is integrated into this, with tourism being a key government policy for many rural areas, where these sites are often located, must frame the "heritage" angle above "religion" as the state cannot be involved with the latter. There is a Japanese dynamic, but one which is not unique to that context. Some other arguments also arise within his discussion and conclusion, but I raise these as some of my major takeaways in a rich discussion.

In conclusion, Reader offers an important contribution not simply to the study of religion in Japan, but also to studies on religion and tourism, and wider arguments around how religion is commodified and repackaged in the contemporary secular, social media saturated, and capitalist landscape. Insights beyond the Japanese context, though these are not Reader's concern, certainly will strike thoughtful interlocutors grappling with this book. It is another sign also that Bloomsbury is a place where a lot of the most interesting scholarship in religious studies is emerging. Every serious library in the study of religion, and especially in religion and tourism (and popular culture) should include this book.

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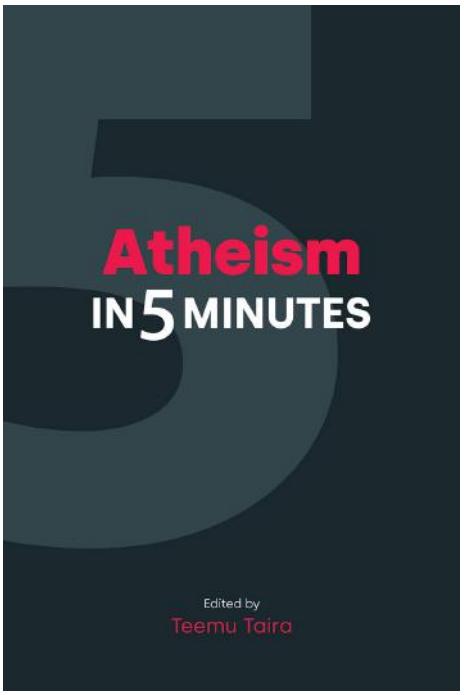
TAIRA, T. (ED). (2022) *ATHEISM IN FIVE MINUTES.* EQUINOX PUBLISHING. 280 PP. HBK £70. ISBN: 9781800502369.

Atheism in Five Minutes is a collection of short essays edited by Teemu Taira. It is a concise yet comprehensive exploration of atheism. The book provides readers with an understanding of what atheism is and is not and its implications for society and individuals. It is a thought-provoking and accessible introduction to atheism, making it ideal for newcomers and those seeking to deepen their understanding.

The book is structured straightforwardly, each chapter focusing on a specific aspect of atheism. A leading scholar writes each of the sixty-four chapters, drawing on the latest research. They offer concise and thoughtful answers along with suggestions for further reading. The book is ideal for classroom use and personal study. Some of the questions the book asks include: Are children born atheists? (pp.185-188). Do atheists have rituals? (pp.224-226). Are atheists immoral? (pp.231-234). How has atheism related to politics? (pp.117-120). Why do some atheists remain members of religious groups? (pp.156-159). Is it challenging to be an atheist in Muslim countries? (pp.67-70). Do atheist parents have atheist children? (pp.189-192). Why are there so few black atheists? (pp.109-112). Has the Internet made atheism

more popular? (pp.92-95). The authors skilfully navigate through various philosophical arguments for and against the existence of God, shedding light on the complexities of theological discourse while maintaining a straightforward approach. The book addresses common misconceptions and stereotypes surrounding atheism, debunking myths and clarifying its moral and ethical implications. It emphasises the compatibility of atheism with values such as compassion, empathy, and social justice, challenging the notion that atheism necessarily leads to nihilism or moral relativism.

One of the book's strengths lies in its examination of the diversity within atheism itself. The book delves into different forms of atheism, from secular humanism to existential atheism, highlighting the nuanced differences in their approaches to life's existential questions. Through this exploration, readers gain a deeper appreciation for the richness and complexity of atheist thought. Another strength of the book is its discussion of atheism's relationship to religion. Paul-Francois Tremlett acknowledges the complex interplay between atheism and religious belief, noting that atheism can exist alongside various religious traditions and that not all atheists are hostile to religion (pp.79-82). The book examines the role of atheism in secularism and the separation of church and state, arguing that atheism can provide a valuable perspective in promoting religious freedom and equality. Throughout the book, contributors engage with critical philosophical and ethical questions that atheism raises. They address the challenge of morality without religion, arguing that moral principles can be grounded in human reason and empathy rather than divine command. The book also explores the implications of atheism for concepts such as meaning and purpose in life, suggesting that atheism can offer a sense of freedom and responsibility to create meaning for oneself.



In addition to its intellectual exploration of atheism, the book also touches on its practical implications for individuals and society. Ryan Cragun and Peter Klug discuss the stigma often faced by atheists, particularly in religiously conservative societies, and the importance of promoting tolerance and understanding (pp.148-155). They also consider the role of atheism in contemporary debates on science, education, and public policy, highlighting the need for evidence-based decision-making and critical thinking.

Despite its brevity, Atheism in Five Minutes is a rich and thought-provoking read that covers several topics with clarity and insight. Contributors do not shy away from addressing challenging philosophical issues, including topics such as the problem of evil, the nature of consciousness, and the meaning of life with intellectual rigour, encouraging readers to reflect critically on their beliefs and assumptions. The book is accessible and engaging, making complex ideas accessible to readers of all backgrounds.

While the contributors acknowledge the global diversity of religious belief, the book focuses primarily on atheism in Western societies. A more extensive exploration of atheism in other cultural and religious contexts would have enriched the book's analysis and provided a more comprehensive understanding of atheism as a global phenomenon.

In conclusion, *Atheism in Five Minutes* is highly recommended for anyone interested in exploring

the concepts of atheism and secularism. The contributors' clear and concise writing styles and insightful analysis make this book an invaluable resource for understanding the complexities of atheism and its implications for individuals and society. Whether one is a sceptic, a believer, or somewhere in between, *Atheism in Five Minutes* offers a compelling insight into a topic that continues to spark debate and inquiry in the modern world.

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"The Greek term theorein: a practice of travel and observation, a man sent by the polis to another city to witness a religious ceremony. 'Theory' is a product of displacement, comprising a certain distance. To theorize, one leaves home. But like any act of travel, theory begins and ends somewhere."

(James Clifford, "Notes on Travel and Theory" (2010), p1)