

YANA: The official newsletter of the New Zealand Association for the Study of Religions.

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A vehicle for ferrying news and views among members and contacts of the NZASR



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Ancient Egyptian transportation

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Preface

It is with great excitement that the NZASR re-welcomes Yāna after a six-year hiatus. Yāna has served as a long-standing, if not always regular, vehicle for sharing the research and news of Religious Studies colleagues from around the country. This issue stands as the 63rd in a series, the content of which ranges from newsy updates and humorous anecdotes to hard-nosed scholarship. We look forward to Yāna's present rebirth, and we thank Comfort Max-Wirth for her hard work and vision in making this happen.

Dr Ben Schonthal

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News

Otago

Taneli Kukkonen has taken up an appointment as Visiting Associate Professor at New York University, Abu Dhabi, from June 2014-15. I was hired. I came onboard March 2013, to replace Erika Baffeli, who has moved to Manchester. Ian Harris, a well-known Buddhist scholar, has agreed to serve as visiting professor between February and May 2015 for us. In July 2014, Will Sweetman took over as Head of the Department of Theology and Religion.

Recent staff publications

Dawes, Gregory W.

(a) Edited Books

A New Science of Religion, edited by Gregory W. Dawes and James Maclaurin. Routledge Studies in Religion. New York: Routledge, 2012.

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Victoria

We have reworked and rationalized our 100-level course offerings, introducing a new course (Reli 113, "What is Religion? Identity, Experience and Practice") and revising the syllabi for others. We have also moved to half-year courses for Honours (excepting 489).

Religious Studies currently has eleven PhD students. Three PhDs have just passed their examinations. Current students include six students on full scholarship, with one more scholarship student due to arrive later this year. We have also had three recent MA completions.

Dr Michael Radich was nominated by his students for a VUW Teaching Excellence Award in 2013. Michael was the invited Numata Guest Professor of Buddhist Studies at the University of Hamburg, October 2013-January 2014, during which time he gave guest lectures at five other key European universities. He is currently a member of one internationally funded research project (based at Chengchi University in Taiwan, funded by the Shengyen Education Foundation), and is in the final stages of completing an edited volume of work resulting from a previous larger project (2010-2013) funded by the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation.

Associate Professor Joseph Bulbulia received a \$769,000 Marsden grant (1st June 2014 to 31 May 2017) to enrich the New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study (NZAVS) coverage of religion and spirituality at the level of communities across New Zealand. This includes the appointment of Dr John Shaver as a three-year Post-doctoral researcher to work on this project. The project will identify links across and within spiritual and community networks, assess patterns of stability and change in these networks over time, and measure their practical impact on the health, well-being, and the life-satisfaction of community members for his research on The Social consequences of Spirituality and Religion.

In addition, Joe is the Principal Investigator and Dr Geoff Troughton is an Associate Investigator for a project funded by the Templeton World Charity Foundation. They are working in conjunction with Associate Professor Chris G. Sibley from the School of Psychology (Co-PI), University of Auckland, who founded the New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study (NZAVS) in 2009. The question of how religion affects people at different

stages of their lives has been subject to longstanding debates. Debates persist because researchers currently know very little about how religion and spirituality affect people over time. This project is the first national scale longitudinal study that will track spirituality in the same individuals over time, making it possible to better assess patterns of stability and change. As such, this project will cast new light on the fundamental, yet poorly understood dimension of the human condition occupied by spiritual faith.

Departures: Two of our colleagues have recently left our programme. Prof. Chris Marshall, our expert in Christian theology, took up The Diana Unwin Chair in Restorative Justice in the School of Government at Victoria University. He had taught in our programme for nine years. Dr Art Buehler, our Islam specialist, retired after teaching at Victoria for 10 years. He is now in Amman where his wife is working for the Brazilian embassy there.

We have been working to secure a replacement for the Islam position. We hope to win approval to advertise for a position in Islam in the Asia-Pacific region.

We are pleased to offer a new course in our summer trimester this year, “Rasta, Vodou and Santeria: Religions of Africa and the Caribbean.” This course would be the first on African Religions taught in New Zealand in recent years, and draws on the expertise of two of our current PhD students.

Rick Weiss, lamenting the end of his Marsden grant, is working to finish his book manuscript on religious change in colonial India. The book examines the innovative projects of the Tamil mystic, Ramalinga Swamigal, and includes chapters on his use of print technology; his innovative food-giving practices; his claims to have acquired supernatural powers; and his debate with other Hindu reformers.

We have been pleased to host several research fellows this year. Zainal Bagir has been with us since July, 2013. Zain is an expert on Indonesian Islam, and is executive director of the Center of Religious and Cross Cultural Studies, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta. He has contributed to the research activities of the university and has taught two courses in our programme. In March we hosted Phillip Fountain of the Asia Research Institute of the National University of Singapore. Phillip gave a number of papers in his research area of development and religion.

Joseph Bulbulia was elected President of the International Association for the Cognitive Science of Religion on June 22 2014. You can visit www.iacsr.com for more information.

Prof. Paul Morris is spending time on his research at the Oxford University in the United Kingdom.

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Book chapter review

“God Bless Our Homeland Ghana: Religion and Politics in a Post-Colonial African State by J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu,” in *Trajectories of Religion in Africa: Essays in Honour of John S. Pobee*, ed. Cephas Omenyo and Eric B Anum, 48th ed., *Studies in World Christianity and Interreligious Relations* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014), 165–183.

This essay by Asamoah-Gyadu undertakes a “historical overview of the relationship between Christianity and politics in democratic Ghana as a case study of continent-wide development” (p.165). Taking off from the writings of J.S. Pobee, in whose honour the essays in this volume is dedicated to, Asamoah-Gyadu examines the ways in which the Mainline Churches (MCs) and the Pentecostal Churches (PCs) respond to the changing nature of politics since democracy was initiated in Ghana.

Asamoah-Gyadu draws heavily on a ‘comparison of interventions’ in Ghana’s Fourth Republic (1992-Present) between MCs and political authorities on the one hand, and that among PCs and political authorities on the other. This is understandable because most Christian engagement with politics in the early years of Ghana’s democracy (1950s) was dominated by the MCs, with most Pentecostal churches operating within a strictly religious sphere—focusing on winning souls (evangelism) and planting churches. Thus the open engagement of Pentecostals with political actors became more pronounced in the earlier 1990s-towards the beginning of Ghana’s fourth republican era.

Asamoah-Gyadu begins the discussion of these engagements by sketching the religious scene in Ghana. He describes its pluralistic nature as “a religious zoo, with different kinds of religious wildlife” (p.165). He also reiterated the popular notion that in African societies, religion is all-pervasive, with most communal and societal functions of the people inextricably bound up with religion (Pobee 1991), noting that “it is impossible to understand politics in contemporary Ghana without some knowledge of the role religion plays in it” (p.166). He proceeds to review some writings of Pobee on the subject of Religion and Politics and that of others, like Obiri-Addo and Elom Dovlo, who have followed on Pobee’s lead to research and publish on these interactions in Ghana.

Following Dovlo, Asamoah-Gyadu sought in this essay to contribute to filling the gap in aspects of the developments in religion and politics in Ghana from the regime of I.K. Acheampong—which ended in 1979- to the present democratic dispensation. He recounts the historical facts regarding the overthrow of the undemocratic regime of Acheampong, and the democratic government of Dr. Hilla Limann by J.J. Rawlings’ Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) and Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) respectively and how unsuccessful the PNDC was in dealing with the economic problems of the country which were the main justifications for the overthrow of Acheampong and Limann regimes. According to him, the harsh economic situation during the years of the PNDC, despite the help of international and multinational financial institutions drew the attention of the MCs – who used their historical and intellectual advantage in terms of stable structures, high intellectual resources, and rich historical ecclesial traditions to challenge the military regime. The MCs were those who boldly spoke when all dissenting

voices were silent because of fear of regime brutality. They (the MCs) called on the regime to fix the dwindling economic situation, repeal decrees on Preventive Custody Law and Newspaper Licensing Law, and draw a road map to return Ghana to constitutional rule.

Asamoah-Gyadu notes, however, that although the PCs did not have similar or same structures to either compliment or parallel what the MCs were advocating, they nonetheless relied on their comparative advantage in spirituality. He identified two key spiritual ways in which the PCs responded to the economic situation then. They used biblical precedence to interpret and explain the then state of affairs and responded to the development with prayer and prophetic declarations (p.170). In the process, while the MCs singled out the then ruling PNDC administration and blamed it for the woes of the nation, the PCs blamed the whole citizenry, insisting that God's judgment was on the country due to widespread (nationwide) immorality and corruption. For the PCs the lasting practical solution was for the whole nation and its leadership to repent of their sins. While not denying the support of the whole Christian community in championing the call for national repentance, Asamoah-Gyadu credits the Pentecostals, who particularly drew attention to the spiritual implications of this repentance for the nation. According to him the Charismatic wing (i.e. the Neo-Pentecostal strand) of the PCs, in particular, saw the problem of the nation as a war or a battle that can only be fought and won by the prayers of what Eastwood Anaba (founder of Fountain Gate Chapel), described as the 'Rapid Response Team' (a.k.a. God's End Time Militia) of the charismatic churches.

Asamoah-Gyadu notes a similar unparalleled approach of the two Christian strands during the transition to democratic governance in 1992. While the Pentecostals prayed, the Historic Churches (MCs), acting as 'Surrogate Opposition,' embarked on democratic education. Asamoah-Gyadu observes that though the contribution or effort of the Pentecostal prayers cannot be empirically verified, it was thought that the fact that Ghana did not degenerate into civil war over the disputed 1992 presidential elections, as was the case in other countries in the sub-region, was enough evidence of the efficacy of the prayers of the PCs.

The MCs and PCs also differed in their approach to peace during the 2000 elections. While the MCs, in collaborations with other civil society institutions organized sensitization programmes to promote peaceful elections, the PCs usually prayed for God's intervention through special prayer vigils. As Asamoah-Gyadu explains, the PCs adopted this approach believing that there are territorial and satanic agents who may want to use such elections to plunge the country into war – hence the need to nullify these sprits through 'travailing prayers.'

Asamoah-Gyadu also draws attention to the apparent struggle for religious leverage in the political sphere among the two Christian strands. He, for example, notes the outward disregard of the MCs towards the PCs when the former went into negotiations with the disputed 1992 presidential elections without inviting or seeking the inputs of the latter because of what Kwesi A. Dickson, then Chairman of the Christian Council of Ghana (CCG), perceived as a lack of disinterest in political and other temporary circumstances by the PCs, who he described as been primarily concerned with 'spiritual matters.' The MCs were, however, later to turn around to accuse the PCs when a member of the charismatic wing –

acting in his own capacity, honoured an invitation by the NDC (who were declared the winners of the elections) to a thanksgiving service in January 1993 for a successful transition—the MC, having boycotted that ceremony because of ongoing negotiations on the disputed elections. On the other hand, there is the example of the attitude of PCs who also perceive the MCs as been overly worldly. Asamoah-Gyadu, for instance, cites Anaba as describing the MCs as a ‘regular army,’ who he accused of having “become too complacent in their ways and over-clericalized to be effective” (p.171).

While criticizing what he describes as a ‘condescending attitude’ of the MCs towards the African Initiated Christianity – regarding the PCs as fringe religious groups that do not conform to what Christian G. Baeta (one time Chairman of the CCG) consider as “deviating from the mainstream of universal Christianity” (Fernandez 1970:288), Asamoah-Gyadu also questions the naivety of some Pentecostal leaders who support wayward political leaders in a bid to gain recognition and their simplistic approach to complex economic and political issues—an attitude which sometimes undermines the effort of the MCs in suggesting alternative measures to political leaders.

Asamoah-Gyadu explains the theological justification of the Pentecostal leaders in supporting incumbent governments, which has some parallels in African thought, that does not separate political and religious power, such that governments are seen as divinely bestowed or ordained and must therefore be cooperated with and not to be opposed. This contrasts with the position of the MCs who have been influenced by western institutions and therefore regard political power as vested in institutions. Asamoah-Gyadu, however, notes that despite these differences in the Christian response to national issues, the two Christian groups sometimes collaborate on political and national issues and or events. He recommends to the church to “strengthen existing positive roles and rethink the selfish ways in which religion is used,” in order to fulfil its obligation or responsibility of being the prophetic voice of the nation (p.182).

Asamoah-Gyadu also cites some examples of what Patrick Ryan (1984) describes as the manipulative use of religion by politicians, which has also been a feature (trend) in the 4th republican elections in Ghana (Acheampong 2010, 2013). An example is the ‘makeup of the Presidential ticket,’ where most political parties play the ‘religious card’ by usually choosing a Christian-Southerner as flag bearer (presidential candidate) with a Muslim-Northerner as the running mate (vice presidential candidate). By doing this, political parties seek to court the support of both Christians and Muslims who make up majority of the Ghanaian voting population, while at the same time maintaining regional and ethnic balance.

In this essay, Asamoah-Gyadu has succinctly articulated, comparatively, the Christian responses to political and national issues within a post-colonial African State-Ghana. He seems to suggest that there is a shift in the Christian leverage in the political sphere –where especially the charismatic strand of Pentecostals who hardly engaged political actors some three decades ago have in recent years become important players in the political landscape of Ghana—the MCs having dominated the scene since the colonial era.

The essay is also indicative of the fact that the leadership of the PCs have ‘found their political voice’ (Acheampong 2013). This is a different prophetic voice that is not

necessarily replicating (copying) the ‘response-approach’ of the MCs. The reason being that what informs the political interventions of PCs are not necessarily the same as that of the MCs. Again, the PCs are ably relying on their comparative advantage in spirituality. In the process a new approach in Christian response to political issues, which has some parallels in African religious thought has been introduced by the PCs in Ghana.

Generally, one would have thought that what informs the political engagements of these religious groups would have been grounded in theology or scriptures. However, as demonstrated through the examples in this essay, there is an indication that the political engagements of the Christian groups are not necessarily shaped by the biblical task, but by more complex factors, including their history, interest and the centrality of their teaching. For instance, as noted in the case of the Pentecostal, some of their responses are sometimes informed by a desire to gain recognition, approval and elevation in political circles. This brings into focus the idea that similar and or same political issues are likely to be responded to differently because of the complexity of the factors that may inform the religious responses to these issues.

It is also obvious that the confusion that sometimes emerge among the Christian groups, as a result of the different trajectories in the Christian response to political and national issues, stems from theological misunderstanding and differences in what informs the approaches in responding to national issues on both sides. Asamoah-Gyadu’s admonition to the church to strengthen its existing roles and rethink some of its responses is in the right direction since the Church should be seen as presenting a united front. From the different accounts presented in this essay, it is certain that but for in a few instances, the responses of each Christian group to political and national issues have been positive. Thus the strengthening of intra-religious dialogue among these umbrella churches will go a long way in helping each group to better understand the other’s ‘response-approach.’

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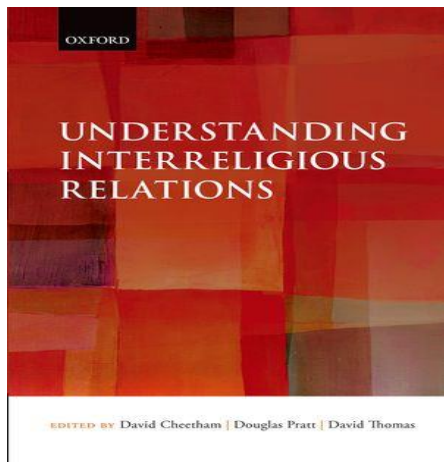
Review by Fredrick Acheampong

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New book announcements

Books



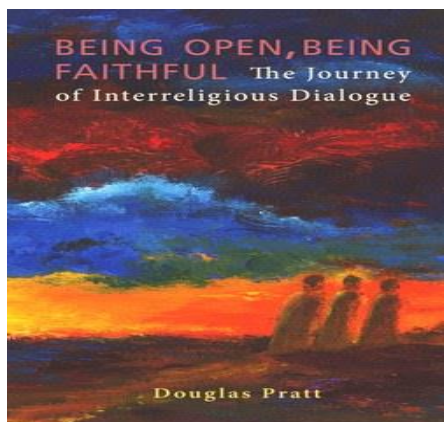
Understanding Interreligious Relations: edited by David Cheetham, Douglas Pratt and David Thomas

The ways in which religious communities interact with one another is an increasing focus of scholarly research and teaching. Issues of interreligious engagement, inclusive of dialogue more specifically and relations more generally, attract widespread interest and concern. In a religiously pluralist world, how different communities get along with each other is not just an academic question; it is very much a focus of socio-political and wider community attention. The study of religions and religion in the 21st century world must

necessarily take account of relations within and between religions, whether this is approached from a theological, historical, political, or any other disciplinary point of view.

Understanding Interreligious Relations is a reference work of relevance to students and scholars as well as of interest to a wider informed public. It comprises two main parts. The first provides expositions and critical discussions of the ways in which 'the other' has been construed and addressed from within the major religious traditions. The second presents analyses and discussions of key issues and topics in which interreligious relations are an integral constituent.

What does Christian identity mean in the face of religious pluralism?: Douglas Pratt

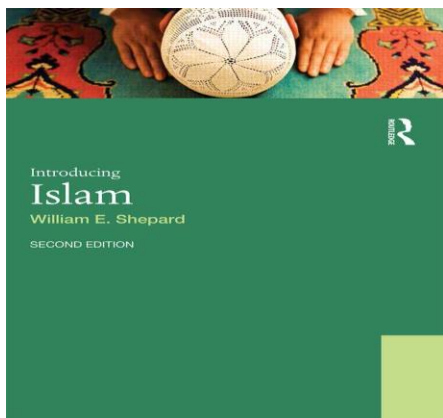


In some ways the frontier of global Christianity lies not in repairing its past divisions so much as bravely facing its future in a world of many other faiths and conflicting convictions. Douglas Pratt's new work is a brief history, astute analysis, and trustworthy guide for Christian encounter in this pluralistic environment.

A central argument of this perceptive work is that interreligious dialogue has moved so far as to

fundamentally change the attitudes and openness of world religious traditions to each other, promising a future more open and less hostile than one might otherwise think. Pratt presents and reflects on the recent history of interreligious encounter and dialogue, and he traces the manifold difficulties involved, especially as they are experienced in Roman Catholic and WCC engagements with other faiths. But Pratt does much more: along with the history of such encounters, Pratt examines the issue of Christian discipleship in the context of interfaith engagement, the operative models, the thorny issue of core theological commitments, and what, in Pratt's view, might be the shape of Christian identity in light of such encounters.

Introducing Islam, a textbook (2nd edition): William Shepard



The book is aimed primarily at first and second year university students but I believe it will also be helpful to many general readers and to more advanced students. It undertakes to present an empathetic as well as critical approach to the Islamic tradition, giving appropriate emphasis to both its diversity and its unity. The first part traces the history of the Muslim community from its earliest period to about 1700 CE. The second part presents the major topics of the tradition, including the Qur'an, the Sunna, Islamic law, theology and philosophy, the Sufi movement, the major rituals and art and culture.

The third part surveys modern developments in general and devotes chapters specifically to Turkey, Iran, Egypt and Indonesia and to the implications of globalization. This edition adds a chapter on issues related to gender, democracy and human rights. Further information can be found on the publisher's website at

<http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9780415533454/>

General announcement

The journal, *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue*, will from next year be published by Taylor & Francis and will have 3 issues per year.

Retrospective Interview with Prof. Chris Marshall (June 30th, 2014)



Yana had the rare privilege of sitting down with Prof. Chris Marshall for a chat.

Prof. Chris Marshall taught Christian theology at Victoria University's Religious Studies Programme for 10 years before being appointed as the inaugural holder of The Diana Unwin Chair in Restorative Justice in Victoria University's School of Government. He is married to Margaret, and they have adult sons, Peter and Andrew.

Yana: Who is Prof. Chris Marshall?

CM: Well, I was born here in Wellington, and studied at Victoria University, where I did an Honours degree in Geography and Anthropology. I then trained as a secondary school teacher, and taught geography and social studies for a year or two before deciding to embark on theological studies. I did a Bachelor of Divinity degree as an external student from the Melbourne College of Divinity in the late 1980s and went on to a PhD in New Testament at London University, under the supervision of the late Professor Graham Stanton, at King's College. I then got a job back in Auckland where I taught for 19 years at the Bible College of New Zealand (now called Laidlaw College). About 11 years ago, I saw a job advertised at Victoria and ended up coming back to Wellington and joining the Religious Studies Programme – in which I had been a student 30 years earlier. So I have come full circle.

Yana: What was your area of research and teaching in Religious Studies at Victoria?

CM: I was appointed to the St John's Senior Lectureship in Christian Theology within the Religious Studies programme. My two main undergraduate courses were on Jesus and the Gospels and on Pauline theology, and latterly also taught a course of Religion, Conflict and Peacemaking.

Yana: What does your new role as The Diana Unwin Chair in Restorative Justice entail? What do you do?

CM: Mine is one of about half a dozen "sponsored" chairs in the University, most of which are located in the Business School. Sponsored chairs are professorial positions that are funded by certain external stakeholders, with the occupants having special focus on the areas of concern to the funders. In my case, the Chair in Restorative Justice is funded by eight government agencies and one charitable trust, all of which are interested in the development and enhancement of restorative practices in New Zealand. The role has no fewer than 12 funding goals, which together come down to strengthening the foundations of restorative justice research, teaching, policy and practice.

Yana: All these institutions funding this chair means you get a huge paycheck, right?

CM: It's a standard professorial salary. But all the people and operational costs for the Chair come directly from external funding sources – everything from stamps to research assistants comes out my budget.

Yana: How different is this field from Religious Studies?

CM: It feels very different, primarily because the role doesn't involve so much teaching as before and I am now working in a different School, in a different Faculty, with different colleagues. I am also no longer the Head of School so I don't have all those administrative duties. On the other hand, the job is incredibly busy, building a whole new venture from scratch. But I'm enjoying it very much; it is pretty much starting with a blank piece of paper and making something new happen. And, as they say, 'a change is as good as a holiday' and it is very energizing.

Yana: Any reason for your move from Religious Studies to this entirely new field?

CM: The only reason was the opportunity this new position gave me to really focus on something I have given a lot of time and energy to over the past 20 years – something I really believe in. A lot of my scholarly work has focused on justice and peace issues. They are things that are really important for me. So this role allows me to focus on achieving something tangible in these areas, like 'saving the world'!!

Yana: How does your background in Religious Studies help you in your new role?

CM: Oh well, certainly my background in New Testament study and the work I have done in biblical theology and ethics have been very helpful in understanding restorative justice. Restorative justice is not a distinctively religious movement. There are lots of people involved in it who do not have any religious belief. But the insights of Christian theology and of Christians working in the criminal justice field have been a major contributor to shaping restorative justice practice. Religious traditions have a lot to say about things like confession, repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation, judgment, atonement and so on – all of which are relevant to restorative justice theory and practice.

Yana: What do you miss most about your teaching and research in Religious Studies?

CM: Well, I think one of the sacrifices was to decide that for the remainder of my career, most of my intellectual effort would be in the restorative justice field rather than in Religious Studies. It doesn't take long to get out of date in your field. If you don't keep up with the debates, with the literature and with the key names, it doesn't take long before you feel that you are no longer up with the play. At times I have felt twinges of regret about not being able to keep abreast of New Testament Studies because I love it so much and have spent most of my life doing it. I also miss my colleagues and of course, my students in Religious Studies. So that's the downside. But the upside is that all the things that I have come to understand through my previous work, I now have the chance to operationalize, to engage at a high level with policy makers about the issues I am most concerned about. So there are losses and gains, but I think this new role is a quite extraordinary opportunity, and one that my previous training has equipped me well for.

Yana: What do you see as the future of Religious Studies in New Zealand universities?

CM: I certainly hope it continues to be offered, because the religious dimension of human experience is absolutely worthy of university-level engagement. But I think the place of Religious Studies in public universities in New Zealand is under significant threat due to economic constraints. Not everybody with the power to decide how education budgets are spent thinks it is important to know about religion. It's ironic, really, as the Middle East dissolves into sectarian mayhem, religious studies positions are drying up in Western universities. So in a secular society like ours, Religious Studies is always going to be vulnerable to being seen as a kind of "nice to have," but not really essential. I think after 9/11, there was an upswing of interest in religion, and that could happen again, but at the moment its future place in university systems is fragile.

Yana: Any advice for up-and-coming scholars, like myself, in Religious Studies? With the dwindling fortunes of Religious studies in recent times, should we advise ourselves and move on to something more "profitable?"

CM: It's important to remember that the falling interest in or lack of understanding of religion is distinctively a Western problem. Most of the world is still "incurably religious," so I certainly don't think up-and-coming scholars should quit the field. But you probably won't be swamped with job offers from Western universities, at least not for some time to come. But if you do believe, as I do, that religion is an irreducible aspect of human experience, and an explainable one, then younger scholars should stay in the game because someone has to know this stuff.

Yana: Any new projects you are currently working on?

CM: The whole Restorative Justice Chair is a new project from the beginning to the end. I have several writing commitments I am working on, but I don't have a single narrow research project at this point. There is a clear research agenda attached to the Chair, but my role is as much to coordinate collaborative work in various areas as it is to do it all myself. Some topics are of particular interest to me personally, such as the role of restorative practices in the workplace, or the role of churches as restorative communities, or restorative approaches to the reintegration of former prisoners. But just what work I personally do in these areas still remains to be seen.

Yana: On a lighter side, if you had a superpower, what would you use it for?

CM: If I had a superpower, I'd use it to make peace. It must feel wonderful to have the ability to heal, whether it is as a surgeon or therapist or whatever. I think there would be no greater reward than to be a source of healing for others, so if I had a superpower, it would be the superpower that Jesus had – the power to heal and restore

Yana: Thank you very much, Prof. Marshall, for giving us your time, we wish you all the best in your new role as Chair in Restorative Justice.

Famous Quote on Religious Studies

"If I went back to college today, I think I would probably major in comparative religion, because that's how integrated it is in everything that we are working on and deciding and thinking about in life today." **John Kerry**, U.S. Secretary of State (07/08/13).

<http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2013/08/212781.htm>