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## Preface

Welcome to the 65th edition of YANA, the “vehicle for ferrying news and views among members and contacts of the New Zealand Association for the Study of Religions.” The news from the various Religious Studies and Theology programmes across New Zealand indicate that 2016 was an exciting year and we are pleased to report them to our members. As usual, we would like to express our profound appreciation to the departments for sending us their news updates, Thomas White of Otago for the book review, and Prof. William Shepard for the interview. We would also like to thank our general membership for your favourable reception of and

positive feedback on the 2015 issue. Thank you all for your continued support, which has ensured the success of this newsletter for the past three years. We look forward to your submissions and suggestions for the next edition. We hope that you enjoy the read.

**Comfort Max-Wirth**

Editor, Yana

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## NEWS FROM PROGRAMMES

### Otago University

With the appointment of Dr John Shaver, Religion at Otago has returned to full strength. John Shaver holds a PhD with distinction in Anthropology from the University of Connecticut. His dissertation research examined the ways in which the traditional Fijian political hierarchy and caste system influenced the development of Fijian Methodism, and how the two interact in Fijian villages today. After graduating, John held two postdoctoral fellowships. The first was as Postdoctoral Fellow in Cognition and Culture at the Laboratory for the Experimental Research of Religion, where John was employed to conduct research with Tamil Hindus in Mauritius. He then worked for two years with Joseph Bulbulia on the New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study at Victoria.

At Otago, John's teaching will focus on psychological and evolutionary approaches to the study of religion, and religion in the Pacific. In addition to these courses, he will teach an introductory paper on Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. John has already been hard at work on some initiatives connected with student recruitment, including planning a contribution to the "Hands on Humanities" project, which brings school students to campus for a week in summer. The Department has also welcomed Dr Derek Woodard-Lehman, who will establish a presence in the capital for the Centre for Theology



**Dr Will Sweetman**  
Otago University

and Public Issues, while also contributing to distance teaching in Theology. Last year, Dr Don Moffat was appointed as Sir Paul Reeves' Lecturer in Biblical Studies at St John's College in Auckland and visiting lecturer at the University of Otago. Don teaches Otago papers from the college in Auckland and co-ordinates supervision of postgraduates in the Auckland region. The Department is now advertising another permanent, half-time, teaching fellow position in Biblical Languages.

Dr Ben Schonthal has continued to collect awards, prizes, and honours. To his Fast Start Marsden award ("Managing monks: Buddhism, law and monastic control in Southern Asia"), Ben has added a "top ten teachers" award

from the Otago University Student Association, and an Otago Early Career Award for Distinction in Research. The last is particularly notable as these awards are usually dominated by researchers in the sciences – Ben was the only Early Career awardee in Humanities in 2016 and one of only three from Humanities in the last five years.

Dr Elizabeth Guthrie-Higbee visited Vietnam and Cambodia as part of her work on the World Federation of Buddhists. In Cambodia she was joined by Will Sweetman and Akbordin Rattana at a conference on *boran kammaṭṭhāna*, a style of pre-reform meditation practice once widespread in the Theravādin sphere. Will continues as

Head of Department and has also recently published a reference work on Hinduism (Sage, 2016), which was co-edited with Aditya Malik and includes several contributors from New Zealand and Australia.

Greg Dawes has recently published a book, *Galileo and the Conflict between Science and Religion* (Routledge, 2016), which develops material he has been teaching in papers on science and religion in the Department. A second book, *Religion, Philosophy, and Knowledge* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) will follow later this year.

In addition to our permanent staff, a number of visiting and fixed-term staff have recently taught in the Department. Prof. Asanga Tilakaratne taught two papers on Buddhism in 2015. In summer this year, Dr Jonathan Jong offered a very popular paper on Psychology of Religion. Dr Majid Daneshgar has taught several papers on aspects of Islam, including the Quran and Hadith, and Islamic Law, and Dr Deane Galbraith has taught papers on Modern Judaism and on Paganism. All of these have contributed to strong growth in EFTS – as we enter the second semester our student numbers are at a twenty-year high.

Our postgraduates have also been hard at work. One PhD was awarded in 2015 (Nikki Aaron) and two MAs in 2016 (Danilo Giambra and Akbordin Rattana). Another doctoral dissertation has been submitted and three more are due to follow later this year. The postgraduates have also been getting out and about. In 2015 Keziah Wallis returned from fieldwork in Burma, and Linda Zampol D'Ortia has just completed a year as a Research Fel-

low at the Centro de História d'Aquém e d'Além-Mar (CHAM) in Lisbon. Linda has published two articles arising from her research on Jesuit missionaries in Japan, as well as presented at conferences in Boston, Bochum, Mexico City, and Lisbon. Helen Bradstock published a second article based on her work on religion in New Zealand primary schools. Other postgrads have presented at or attended conferences in Poland, Burma, Thailand, and the USA (Vermont and California) as well as in New Zealand. Thomas White has begun a PhD on the treatment of religion in Fijian constitutional arrangements, and Akbordin Rattana has continued from the MA to doctoral research on the *Pathamasambodhi*, a Southeast Asian biography of the Buddha.

Although it has now added two new editors not from Otago, *Relegere: Studies in Religion and Reception*, now in its fifth year, continues to be published from the Department (with Deane Galbraith, James Harding, and Will Sweetman as editors). As

well as publishing work by several scholars based in New Zealand, the journal has also published articles on New Zealanders, such as Colin McCahon and Charles Brasch. The journal welcomes submissions from postgraduates and has a regularly updated list of books available for review ([www.relegere.org](http://www.relegere.org)).

In 2017 the University of Otago will mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the introduction of the academic study of religion as a formal discipline (then under the name Phenomenology of Religion). To celebrate, we plan to hold a series of lectures by distinguished speakers, inviting them to reflect on the history, current practice and future prospects of the academic study of religion. In 2013 the Department began a biennial series of lectures named for Albert Moore, the first lecturer at Otago, who died in 2009. The lectures are made possible by an endowment given by the Moore family and other donors. The first two series were each delivered by a single lecturer, but the 2017 series will be different in that we plan to invite

several lecturers to contribute. The series will run throughout the academic year. Plans for the series are well advanced and confirmed international speakers include the following: Russell Gray (Max Planck, Jena), Mark Juergensmeyer (UCSB), Jonathan Silk (Leiden), Richard Sosis (Connecticut), Russell McCutcheon (Alabama), Aaron Hughes (Rochester), and Carol Cusack (Sydney). The series will also include speakers from New Zealand – we hope to announce a full list of speakers, dates and titles before the end of 2016.

Will Sweetman  
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## Massey University

Although the Religious Studies Programme is closed down, the teaching of Asian Religions continues at Massey through three papers:

169.101 Introduction to Asian Thought

134.221 East Asian Philosophy

134.321 Indian Philosophy

Dr Douglas Osto

Programme Coordinator,  
Asian Studies



**Dr Doug Osto**

Massey University

## NEWS FROM PROGRAMMES

### *Victoria University of Wellington*

Religious Studies at VUW was very pleased to welcome our new Islamicist, Dr Eva Nisa, at the beginning of 2016. Eva holds degrees from al-Azhar in Cairo and Leiden, took her PhD at ANU, and is a veteran of post-doctoral projects at the Universities of Hamburg and Amsterdam. She has a thorough grounding in classical Islam, and her current work focuses on contemporary issues, relying heavily on anthropological fieldwork and methods. Her current research agenda includes work on women, marriage, contemporary literature and writing fora, Muslim youth, Islamic speed dating, Islam on the Internet, and the role of al-Azhar University in spreading moderate (*wasatiyya*) Islam in Asia.

We were also very lucky to have John Shaver with us for the past couple of years as a post-doctoral fellow. John was an excellent colleague and teacher, and contributed greatly to the life of the department. It was therefore with mixed feelings that we farewelled him in May, when he moved to Otago to take up a new permanent position – lucky Otago (again)! We are naturally delighted for John, and for our colleagues in the sunny south, but his departure was also quite a loss for us.

Rick Weiss is on RSL for the second half of 2016, and is spending his leave in Heidelberg. Michael Radich returned in January 2016 from eleven months in Hamburg on a Humboldt Fellowship for Experienced Researchers, and took up the role of Programme Director.

Congratulations are also due to students who have graduated with PhDs: Amy Searfoss, for a

dissertation entitled “The Evolution of Evolutionary Explanations of Culture: How and why can a critical evaluation of costly signalling theory enhance our understanding of cultural practices?”; David James, for a dissertation entitled “Māori Orality and Extended Cognition: a cognitive approach to memory and oral traditions in the Pacific”; Barrie Davis, “Psychology, Cosmology and the Christian Concept of God: Reconciling Theology and Science”; and Anne van Gend, “Speaking of Mysteries: Atonement in Teenage Fantasy Books.” Devon Robinson also completed an MA with a thesis entitled “Religion and Social Capital in New Zealand.”



**Assoc. Prof Michael Radich**  
Victoria University of Wellington

such as those of Muslim feminists, brought further insight to the moral dimensions of Sharia.

On 18-20 November, 2015, with the support and assistance of several organisations (The National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Otago; The Religious History Association of Aotearoa New Zealand; and The College of St John the Evangelist, Auckland)

we hosted a conference timed for the centenary of the end of World War I, entitled “PEACE, NOT WAR, SHALL BE OUR BOAST”: Historical, theological and contemporary perspectives on peace and Christianity in New Zealand.”

VUW has also played host to several conferences and distinguished overseas guests. In August 2015 we hosted a symposium entitled: “Sharia in the Asia-Pacific: Islam, Law and Politics.” Scholars from Malaysia, the United States, Brunei, Darussalam, Australia, and New Zealand engaged with the concept of Sharia in its many dimensions, including the philosophical, legal, and political. Papers and discussions were presented on the implementation of Sharia in Malaysia; Aceh, Indonesia; and Brunei Darussalam. These presentations highlighted the diverse understandings and applications of Sharia, and the ways they relate to identity and community. Theoretical perspectives,

On 3-4 December, 2015, Philip Fountain co-organised a conference with Catherine Scheer (National University of Singapore) and Michael Feener (University of Oxford) on “The Mission of Development: Religion and Technopolitics in Asia.” The conference engaged in broad-ranging discussion about the relationships between Christian mission and development practice across the Asian region. The conference was hosted by the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore.

On 24 May, 2016, Philip Fountain and Prof. Bram Büscher (Wageningen University) held a workshop at VUW entitled “New Trajectories in the Study

of Development," which included considerable discussion about the intersections of religion and international aid and development. On 9-10 June, 2016, with support from the New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO, the New Zealand Aid Programme, and Victoria University, we hosted a conference on the theme "Woven Together? Christianity and Development Between New Zealand and the Pacific." The event brought together leading scholars and development practitioners to explore the complex relationships between Christianity and development across the

Pacific.

As part of our ongoing St. John's in the City Visiting Scholar programme, we co-hosted (with St. John's) two guest lectures: Dr Derrick Lemons, "Towards a Theologically Engaged Anthropology" (28 July 2016), and Prof. Paul Oslington, "Why do Economists Think that Markets Work?" (29 July 2016). As part of the same programme, a discussion evening was also mounted in a central city bar, entitled "The Human in Question," with discussants Prof. Oslington, Dr Lemons, Dr Eleanor Sanderson (Canon Theologian of

the Anglican Diocese of Wellington), and Dr Derek Woodard-Lehman from Otago. All events were very well attended.

Michael Radich

Programme Director, Religious Studies

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## Waikato University

Prof. Douglas Pratt is to be the co-investigator on a UK Arts and Humanities Research Council funded project (c. 300,000 GBP) "Christian-Muslim Relations, a Bibliographical History 1800-1914 (CMR1914)." This two-year project commences on 1 September, 2016, and is based at the University of Birmingham, UK. Working primarily from New Zealand, he has particular responsibility for designing, commissioning and editing

a two-volume "Christian-Muslim Relations: A Thematic History" work as a component of the overall CMR project. He has already been serving as a Team Leader, since 2012, with respect to the bibliographical history, since 1500. The thematic

history will involve a team of scholars world-wide and will draw on the entire bibliographical history from 600 to 1914. The publisher is Brill, with both online and hard-copy output.



**Prof Douglas Pratt**  
Waikato University

Dr Todd Nachowitz has been appointed a part-time Teaching Fellow in the Studies in Religion programme. He will cover for research absences of Prof. Pratt, who remains the programme con-

venor, and will assume all course convenorship responsibilities, together with taking over the first year RELS101 course.

Religious Studies at Waikato, having only recently been reconfigured as an interdisci-

plinary Studies in Religion programme and regained the status of a major, will now become one of the new suite of designated "minor" subjects and programmes for the BA and BsocSc, as a result of an overhaul of curricula and degree design within the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.

Prof. Pratt is a trustee of the newly formed Religious Diversity Centre of Aotearoa-New Zealand. Dr Nachowitz has been appointed as the Centre's Establishment Coordinator on a short-term fixed contract, working from Hamilton and Auckland.

Douglas Pratt

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## BOOK REVIEW

### *The Problem with Interreligious Dialogue: Plurality, Conflict and Elitism in Hindu-Christian-Muslim Relations*

*Muthuraj Swamy* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016). ISBN. 9781474256414. 248pp. NZ\$72.99

A traditional Indian folk tale, most familiar to the West through Godfrey-Saxe's poem, 'The Blind Men and the Elephant,' is at heart a parable about interreligious dialogue. It begins, 'It was six men of Indostan/To learning much inclined/Who went to see the Elephant/Though all of them were blind.' Each blind man touches a different part of the elephant - its leg, its side, its tail, its trunk, and so on, and then dogmatically – and erroneously – declares that the elephant is, a tree, a wall, a rope, a snake... etc. Both their conflict and their ignorance, of course, being quickly resolved if they could only listen and learn from each other's beliefs. With this principle in mind, the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Hindutva chauvinism across India has been met with calls for more interreligious dialogue. Yet, according to a new book by Muthuraj Swamy, interreligious dialogue would only make matters worse.

Swamy's *The Problem with Interreligious Discourse*, a recent addition to the Bloomsbury Advances in Religious Studies series, provides a detailed and thorough critique of the interreligious framing of conflict resolution dialogue in southern-most India. Drawing on his own work experience in interreligious dialogue, as well as extensive ethnographic research, Swamy presents a far-reaching indictment of dialogue practices as applied in the Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu. The charge-sheet lists three key failings of interreligious dialogue.

First, the structuring of interreligious dialogue to a "world religions" model (ie: Hindu, Muslim, Christian) – including the secular-religious distinction – radically misrepresents villagers' lived experiences [71]. Swamy draws on the now familiar arguments of Asad, Fitzgerald, Chidester, and others, to argue that the term "religion" is not descriptive, but political: a category historically deployed, from the top down, to homogenize and marginalize cultural difference in European colonial encounters [78-80]. As such, "religion" and particularly "Hinduism" – especially when used as a marker of "theistic belief" [75] – cannot accurately depict lived identity in rural south India. Swamy's ethnography later in the book supports this point, noting that villagers do not use the categories of "world religions," i.e. Hinduism, Christianity, etc., but specific schools. Why then does the "world religions" model continue to prominently figure in dialogue? Simply, because it enables religious elites to exert intra-religious authority. For instance, Brahmanism can be foregrounded as Hinduism proper, at the expense of the practices and beliefs of Dalits and Tribals [100].

Second, interreligious dialogue peddles what William Cavanaugh has called the myth of religious violence [112]. Swamy explains that interreligious dialogists in Kanyakumari claim legitimacy through the belief that misunderstandings of religion, or the manipulation of religion by political elites, are the principal causes of violent

conflict [113-116]. Dialogue is thus presented as necessary to prevent such misunderstandings, and resist such manipulations. This is pursued through affirming a more intellectually inclusive religiosity. Yet Swamy points out that these conflicts more often start from personal disputes or socio-economic factors, not religion [134]. His major case-study explains how the 1982 riots of Mandaikai were caste-based, fought between the coastal fisher-folk and inland villagers [139]. Religion was implicated to a degree, but intra-religious violence and cross-religious solidarity was typical across the conflict. Despite this, the Mandaikai riots are referred to by dialogists as a religious conflict between Christians and Hindus. This myth of religious violence, actively propagated by political elites in the BJP, and then uncritically spread by dialogue activists, Swamy writes, is a dangerous fiction [119]. It divides communities along externally imposed religious fault-lines, presents belligerent-groups and victim-groups as essentially of-a-kind, and decontextualizes violence from its non-religious origins and actors.

Third, interreligious dialogue is elitist [145]. It assumes the masses are irreconcilably, and yet simply, religiously divided, whereas, in fact, village life frequently transcends religious boundaries [148]. Holy festivals are broadly participated, and local myths often fuse with faith traditions. Swamy tells of one myth where the Virgin Mary, and the popular female

Hindu deity, Amman, are narrated as sisters [168]. Dialogists do not recognize either the multiplicity of villagers' various identities [148], or the complexities laying behind violent village conflict [199]. Their ignorance is compounded by the top-down delivery of dialogue initiatives, where activists "take dialogue" to the grassroots [147]. In addition to its underlying elitist assumptions, Swamy argues dialogue techniques are elitist too. Heavy on theology, based on orthodox scriptures, and overly cautious of syncretism, dialogue techniques fail to harmonise with the local concerns or lived religious practice of the common folk [152-157].

Swamy's volume is deeply critical of the political elite. In reference to a local conflict, Swamy states that "a political elite or a person with vested interests for power in such a situation will try to protect his or her power, never taking the blame on himself or herself lest it jeopardise the loyalty of the wider group and make them vulnerable" [177]. One wonders, perhaps, whether Swamy should be so quick to deny the elite their own multiplicity? For Swamy, conflicts are named "religious" to conceal the co-present or more dominating issues that may divide political support, such as how caste divisions in the Mandai riots would threaten the BJP. And likewise, conflict will be named "religious" for pushing voters into the arms of the Hindu nationalists [119]. Without making firm judgements on the origins of these conflicts, Swamy points to how simply the naming of violent conflict as "religious" has nefarious political advantages.

Swamy is also critical of the religious elite, who, desiring to affirm their relevance and status, position themselves centrally for conflict resolution, and re-inscribe the "religious" narrative established by the political elite. For Swamy, it is the religious elite who are blind to the more mundane nature of these conflicts, and blind to their own role in entrenching the very divisive discourse they seek to mitigate. And while Swamy is keen to point out that he is not romanticizing the village masses, he finds their response to religious difference healthier and far more pragmatic [170-173]. Religious difference is rarely essentialized as a marker of unapproachable otherness, or taken as grounds in-itself for a quarrel. We may even relay Swamy's observations back to the fable of the blind men, with the "elephant" an ever-present, undifferentiated part of the cultural landscape: a largely uncontentious, aspect of pluralist village life. It is only with the journey to the elephant by men of learning that it becomes an object for jostling intellects and tribal interests. The elephant, and the various ways it may be venerated, remains quite innocuous.

Swamy's book, I suspect, will find a welcome reception amongst interreligious dialogists, despite his reprimands contained therein. Indeed, given the intellectual energies deployed in such interreligious initiatives, both probing and reflexive, many of Swamy's criticisms will not have passed without reflection elsewhere. The increasing favour for "interfaith" over "interreligious" suggests the

religious elite are not altogether lacking the self-criticism that Swamy argues is absent. And while "critical religion" scholar Michael Marten argues the faith/religion switch hardly redeems the ideological bias of "religious" discourse, it does signal, at the least, an openness to reform. With the village folk consisting of much more than simply a triad of 'world religion' identities, could not Swamy's elite also have motivations more complex than simply power and status?

Swamy's writing style is clear and his overall argument diligently signposted throughout the book. It is well-structured, and Swamy deploys his primary data judiciously when making his case. In summary, the book is a salutary and provocative addition to the literature concerning interreligious dialogue, and a good read for those interested in the politics of religion in India (and elsewhere) in all its discursive messiness.

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## RETROSPECTIVE INTERVIEW

### *Professor William Shepard*

*University of Canterbury*

**YANA:** Who is William Shepard?

**WS:** I identify myself as a retired Professor of Religious Studies who is still very much interested in the subject. Apart from that, I identify myself as a Christian first and then an American and a New Zealander — I try to put the last two on an even level. I did my doctoral dissertation under the supervision of Wilfred Cantwell Smith and I am certainly very much influenced by his approach to the subject of religion — his emphasis on faith, tradition, and persons. This is why I tend to speak more of Muslims rather than Islam.

**YANA:** Did you run into any difficulties being both a Christian and an Islamic researcher during your time?

**WS:** No, it never presented a problem. As a matter of fact, I found out very quickly in Egypt that when asked if I was a Muslim, the best answer was not to say that “I am not a Muslim”; the best thing to say was “I am a Christian.” This was because if you were not a convert to Islam, the next best thing was to be a Christian. I must have been harangued one or two times for some of the terrible things Christians have done, but for the most part, when I met them face to face, they were too polite to do that.

**YANA:** What was your area of teaching and research at Canterbury?

**WS:** My main field of interest was and still is modern Islamic ideologies, especially the writ-

ings of the radical Islamist, Sayyid Qutb, but I also deal with the Islamic tradition generally, and to some extent with other religions. I have written one book and contributed to two others on Sayyid Qutb, all of these involving primarily translation. *Sayyid Qutb and Islamic Activism* (Brill, 1996) is a complex translation of Qutb’s book, *Social Justice in Islam*, which undertakes to show the changes from one edition to another (there were six edi-

Most of my teaching related to Islam, with some introductory teaching on Judaism and a few cross-cultural courses. Among other things, I taught a module on the religious dimensions of the Israel-Palestine situation, courses, including Islam in modern Egypt and Iran, and at the higher levels, seminars on al-Ghazali and Sufism. I have also given extension studies courses and lectures to community groups. I was particularly in demand during my first year in

New Zealand because of the Iranian revolution. As soon as I could, I got to know the small Muslim community in Christchurch and a little later the larger community in Auckland and elsewhere. I have written several articles about them; it has been interesting to watch the New Zealand Muslim community grow from less than two thousand when I first arrived to over 40 thousand now.

**Emeritus Prof William Shepard**

University of Canterbury



tions). I have also written several articles and book reviews relating to him. Recently I have written more generally on radical forms of Islamism. I have also written on the typology of Islamic ideologies and on comparisons of Islamic and Christian fundamentalism, and thus participated in the debate over the propriety of the term “fundamentalism” for Muslims. My doctoral dissertation (published as *The Faith of a Modern Muslim Intellectual: The Religious Aspects and Implications of the Writings of Ahmad Amin*, Indian Institute of Islamic Studies, 1982.) was on a secular thinker, Ahmad Amin. I have given some attention to other secular thinkers, as well.

**YANA:** What have you been doing after your retirement?

**WS:** I retired from teaching at the beginning of 1999, but I have continued my research and writing, producing a number of articles, encyclopaedia/dictionary entries and books and attended a few conferences. My major project, since about 2006 has been my textbook, *Introducing Islam*, published in 2009, with a second edition in 2014. This has forced me to review and extend my knowledge of Islam considerably. Work on the second edition coincided with the earthquakes in Christchurch and their aftermath. This meant added pressure, but it did sometimes take my mind off

the difficulties of the situation. So these are what I have been doing, other than family-related stuff.

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

**WS:** I did enjoy teaching. The discipline of teaching pushes you and challenges your knowledge to keep up to date with important issues in both your field of discipline and the world in general. Also, the contact with students and colleagues was refreshing. I do not have that kind of contact anymore, which was why I went to the Religious Studies conference in Queenstown recently.

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

**WS:** You are probably in a better place to answer that question. I only realized at the conference last year that Religious Studies was terminated at many of our universities. As far as I can tell, it was a decision from on high to cut back on the Humanities, but whether every university is doing that same thing, I cannot tell. One possibility — I have a sneaky suspicion that at the highest levels they have decided that universities should specialize and so, if the remaining departments do not fit the specializations as perceived by their various administrations, then they may be phased out like the others, since the administrations do not realize that all of us in the arts have something to offer. Religious Studies may be on shaky grounds here in New Zealand, but it is shaky elsewhere too, I believe.

**YANA:** Any advice for up-and-coming scholars in Religious

Studies? With the dwindling fortunes of Religious studies in recent times, should we advise ourselves and move on to something more “profitable”?

**WS:** I think that is a personal decision. If you want to teach at the university and do not care too much about what you teach—as long as you get to teach at the university—if that is your motive, then I think you should probably get out of Religious Studies. But if you really care about the subject and have got a passion for it, then I think you should do it. I suppose that more than anything, your passion for the programme and your ability financially to go through some dry periods after graduation until you find a job is key. But if you have to take care of family and do not have money, you probably can’t, and so would have to move on to something that will bring in some income quickly.

Part of the problem is that the liberal arts in general prepares you for a whole lot of things and not for any one thing in particular. Religious Studies does prepare you for any work that is cross-cultural. But few recognize this and we have not been successful at getting this message across. I think it would be a good idea for Religious Studies programmes to follow up with their graduates and find out what they have been doing post-graduation. I believe such information will help us to better tell our story about the inter-disciplinary relevance of Religious Studies as a field of study at the university level.

**YANA:** Any new projects

you are currently working on?

**WS:** Right at the moment, no, but what I want to do is to go back to my work on Sayyid Qutb. I have done some writing about him in recent years, but mostly based on previous research. I still have in my possession a large number of his writings and poems that I have not yet read, in particular his poems and much of his Qur'an commentary, and I need to keep up with what others write. I also want to put together the paper that I presented at the NZASR conference last year. It would be interesting to compare Qutb and Amin, since they overlap a bit and were both part of the literary movement during their time, though Qutb was a generation behind Amin.

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

**WS:** If I had a superpower, I would bring peace to the people of Syria and Iraq. I think that would be very nice, and there are a few other places in the world that could use some peace.



## NEW PUBLICATIONS

Andre, Virginie and Douglas Pratt, eds. *Religious Citizenships and Islamophobia*. London & New York: Routledge, 2016.

Berlis, Angela and Douglas Pratt, eds. *From Encounter to Commitment: Interreligious Experience and Theological Engagement* IKZ-Berner Interreligiöse Ökumenische Studien (IKZ-bios), Vol. 2. Bern: Stämpfli AG, 2015.

Mullins, Mark R. *Palgrave Studies on Religion and Society in Asia Pacific*. Palgrave Macmillan Press (forthcoming).

Mullins, Mark R. and Koichi Nakano, eds. *Disasters and Social Crisis in Contemporary Japan: Political, Religious, and Sociocultural Responses*, co-edited with Koichi Nakano. Basingstoke/NY: Palgrave Macmillan Press, 2016.

Mullins, Mark R., ed. *Critical Readings on Christianity in Japan* (editor). Volumes 1-4. Leiden: EJ Brill, 2015.

Nagy, Thomas Charles. *Catholic Shrines in Chennai, India: The Politics of Renewal and Apostolic Legacy*. Abingdon, Oxon, UK: Routledge, forthcoming September, 2016.

Pratt, Douglas, Jon Hoover, John Davies, and John Chesworth, eds. *The Character of Christian-Muslim Encounter: Essays in Honour of David Thomas* HCMR Vol. 25. Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2015.

Pratt, Douglas. “Religion Fixed and Fickle: The Contemporary Challenge of Religious Diversity,” in Douglas Davies & Adam J. Powell (eds.), *Sacred Selves - Sacred Settings: Reflecting Hans Mol*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2015: 101-122.

– “Theologie nach dem Dialog: Neue Wege christlich-muslimischer Beziehungen,” in Mohammed Gharaibeh, Esnaf Begic, Hansjörg Schmid and Christian Ströbele (Eds.), *Zwischen Glaube und Wissenschaft: Theologie in Christentum und Islam*. Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet 2015: 237-253.

– “Religion is as Religion Does: Interfaith Prayer as a Form of Ritual Participation,” in Marianne Moyaert and Joris Geldhof (eds.), *Ritual Participation and Interreligious Dialogue: Boundaries, Transgressions and Innovations*. London: Bloomsbury, 2015: 53-66.

– “Initiative and Response: The Future of Christian-Muslim Dialogue,” in Paul Hedges (ed.), *Contemporary Muslim-Christian-Encounters: Developments, Diversity and Dialogues* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 117-133.

– “Theology after Dialogue: Christian–Muslim Engagement Today and Tomorrow,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* Vol. 26/1, (January, 2015), 89-101.

– “Islamophobia as Reactive Co-Radicalization,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* Vol. 26/2 (April, 2015): 205-218.

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## GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

### 2020 IAHR World Congress

We are delighted to announce that the 2020 IAHR World Congress will be hosted in Dunedin, New Zealand, by Otago under the auspices of the NZASR, Tourism NZ, and Enterprise Dunedin. In the words of Dr Will Sweetman, the brain behind the bid to host the conference here in

New Zealand, "hosting the congress will be a way to strengthen the academic study of religion in New Zealand." For further details, check the IAHR website at <http://www.iahr.dk>.



### New book series by Palgrave Macmillan Press

A new book series, *Palgrave Studies on Religion and Society in Asia Pacific*, is being launched this year by Palgrave Macmillan Press. The aim of the new series is to promote contemporary scholarship on the Asia Pacific region, particularly studies that give attention to the interaction and mutual transformation of religions across national boundaries.

This is a multidisciplinary series that will include both historical and contemporary ethnographic and sociological studies, which contribute to our understanding of the traditional and changing roles of religion in multiple socio-political contexts in the region. Comparative studies that expand the scope of analysis beyond

the nation-state are particularly welcome, as well as those that address emerging issues and trends related to globalization, such as religious pluralism and social conflict over the re-emerging public role of religion, transnational religious movements, and Asian religions in diaspora communities.

### Thesis announcement

Morgan Leigh's PhD thesis, titled *Virtually real: being in cyberspace* (2014), is available from the UTAS e-repository <http://eprints.utas.edu.au/22422/>. See below for Abstract:

This thesis is an autoethnographic account of my search for the sacred in cyberspace. The research was conducted in the virtual world Second Life, and in particular in two role play communities set in Ancient Egypt. Virtual worlds are often criticised as unreal, as just games. Here I explore the ontological status of virtual worlds, recognising the priority for their inhabitants of lived experience over purely rational assessments. This research is unique and important as no monograph of role play communities in Second Life has yet been published, and yet tens of

millions of people spend an increasing amount of time in virtual and game worlds, often preferring them to the meatspace world. I recount my experiences with ritual in cyberspace, describing sacred virtual space, and its relationship to sacred meatspace from a Pagan perspective. I compare two initiation rituals, and describe how one produced the perception of sacred space, in both meatspace and the virtual world, while the other remained only a role play. Finally I analyse an opening of the mouth ritual to reveal the way we make sense of our own realities by building on and remixing what came before us, and to argue that there are many truths and that objectivity is impossible in the human condition. This

is the story of how I became one with my avatar, despite my best efforts not to do so. Themes of the fun economy, remix culture, and copyright inform the analysis in the thesis. I explore Castranova's concept of the fun economy, the amalgam of work, play and education which characterises twenty first century life in the developed world. Freedom and fun are the motivators for the inhabitants of virtual worlds and the bounds of these are defined by copyright. This issue is examined through the lens of the Second Life permissions system and the work of Lessig and his concept of remix culture. I argue that remix culture has permeated the entirety of human history, giving examples from ancient Egypt through to the present day, and consider the implications for human culture if

restrictive copyright laws continue to dominate legal frameworks, despite their failure to achieve their desired ends. Exploring our future in cyberspace though Kurzweil's concept of the singularity, I consider the possibilities of his predicted combination of the worlds of meatspace and the virtual.

**NZASR: NEW ZEALAND ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGION**

The New Zealand Association for the Study of Religions is the main professional body in New Zealand for academics and others engaged in the critical, analytical and cross-cultural study of religion, past and present. The NZASR is not a forum for confessional, apologetical, or other similar concerns.

The NZASR is a member association of the International Association for the History of Religions.

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*Jorge Cham*

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