



BASR

British Association for
the Study of Religions

Bulletin

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CONTENTS

1.	Editorial.....	5
2.	BASR Business:	
	AGM Minutes.....	6
	Treasurer's Report.....	9
	Accounts.....	10
3.	Reports and News:	
	The Religious Studies Project.....	11
	ENCBS Call for Papers.....	12
4.	Teaching Matters:	
	D. Corrywright.....	13
5.	Tributes: Nicholas Goodrick-Clark	
	Photograph and Obituary.....	14
6.	Conference Reports	
	BASR 2012: Bursary Holders' Report.....	15
	Modernism, Christianity and Apocalypse	
	(Bergen): Carole Cusack.....	17
	AASR & AABS 2012: Carole Cusack.....	18
	CESNUR 2012: George Chryssides.....	19
	ICCE: Margaret Gouin.....	19
	EASR 2012: Margaret Gouin.....	21
7.	Calls for Papers	
	<i>Religion</i> Special Issue.....	22
8.	Book Reviews	
	Douglas Pratt: on Nazir Ali.....	23
	Margaret Gouin on Wouter Hanegraaff.....	24
	Amy Whitehead on Nicholas Campion.....	25
	Emma Leverton on Paul Beirne.....	27
9.	Members' Recent Publications	
	Ron A. Geaves.....	28
	Rosalind Hackett.....	28
10.	Guidelines for Contributors.....	29
11.	Occasional Papers.....	30

ABOUT THE BASR

The British Association for the Study of Religions, formerly the British Association for the History of Religions (founded in 1954), is affiliated to the European Association for the Study of Religions (EASR) and to the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR) Its object is the promotion of the academic study of religions through international interdisciplinary collaboration. The BASR pursues these aims within the United Kingdom through the arrangement of conferences and symposia, the publication of a Bulletin and an Annual General Meeting. Membership of the BASR is open to scholars whose work has a bearing on the academic study of religions. Membership of the BASR confers membership of the IAHR and the EASR.

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the November 2012 edition of the BASR *Bulletin*, number 121.

This edition of the *Bulletin* resounds with the shout, 'the King is dead! Long live the King!' which, apart for the androcentric assumption, is a rather neat way of encapsulating the combined notions of continuity and change in one breath. For a fuller, rather more subtle and entirely wonderful exposition of these concepts combined one needs to read the short story in Jorge Luis Borges' *Labyrinths* where the author recounts an attempt to rewrite Cervantes' *Don Quixote* word for word. The fictional author is successful, though he feels a failure because the text cannot be the same in a new context.

Since the last edition we can announce that the association has a new President, Dr Graham Harvey, a renewed secretary, Dr Bettina Schmidt, a continuing treasurer, Dr Stephen Gregg, a new *Diskus* editor, Dr Suzanne Owen and a new *Bulletin* co-editor, Dr David Wilson. We would like to thank our outgoing President, Professor Douglas Davies, for his leadership, Graham Harvey for his work as editor for *Diskus* and Dr Helen Waterhouse for her editorial work on the *Bulletin*. Helen has, for many years, been a core member of the association and the executive in varied roles, as treasurer, conference organiser and *Bulletin* editor. We will miss her calm, wise guidance.

From one year to the next, those within the association engaged in teaching undergraduates may not see significant change in teaching content. But the context at the start of the 2012-13 academic year has changed considerably. Course charges have risen in many cases to £9000 a year in English universities for English and EU students – considerably more for international students. This has led to a decrease in applications for 2012, but applications for 2013 are currently higher than last year. For small departments in Religion and Theology such fluctuations can be significant. Sustainability in such an environment

requires aspects of continuity to maintain quality and the ability to adapt to meet the demands of new contexts.

Members will have seen that the website has been updated. The executive recognised the key role the website has in linking our work to a wider audience as an open access link to the association. The format and style was looking a little dated, it has been revised and we now have a more 'friendly' digital face (appropriately illustrated by photographs taken by our new President).

We have a broad range of inputs, contributors and content to this *Bulletin*. At the start we have the required publication of the minutes and accounts of the association provided at the Annual general meeting. This was held at the Annual conference and we include a full report of the conference by our bursary holders. Members will be aware that as a charitable organisation we fulfil our function by maintaining a scheme of bursary awards. Supporting graduate researchers to come to conference is one of the most important and worthwhile aspects of our work. Further conference reports from international events are welcome inclusions, as are reports and news on exciting developments, such as *The Religion Project*. We continue a specific sub section on 'Teaching Matters', which includes an invitation to contribute to a special edition of *Diskus* on pedagogy in the study of religions. We also include a tribute to Professor Nicholas Goodrick-Clark.

We continue to welcome members unsolicited input on specific developments or issues they would like to share with the association, as well as contributions to regular sections, reviews of conferences and events relevant to members' interests.

Dominic Corrywright and
David Wilson

British Association for the Study of Religions
Registered Charity Number 801567
(Affiliated to the IAHR and EASR)

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting

held at 11 a.m. onwards on Thursday 6 September 2012 at Winchester University

1. **Welcome.** After a short welcome by the Dean of HSS, Kris Spelman-Miller, of Winchester University, the outgoing BASR president Douglas Davies opened the meeting by welcoming all members (35 members attending).
2. **Apologies** received from Elizabeth Harris, Marion Bowman, Ursula King, Steven Sutcliffe, Margaret Gouin, James Cox and Matthew Francis
3. **Minutes of the AGM**, 6 September 2011 (published in the BASR Bulletin 119, November 2011). Accepted and signed.
3.1 Matters Arising (and not covered by any other item on the Agenda):
Item 4: Ron Geaves confirmed in response to a question that he will continue updating the AUDTRS handbook. Unfortunately many departments did not respond to his request to update the list of staff. Though his term as Secretary of AUDTRS will come to an end at the AGM of AUDTRS (8th Sept 2012), he will volunteer to proceed with updating the handbook for AUDTRS.
4. **Presidential address (Douglas Davies):** He started with expressing his gratitude to the members of the executive committee and in particular the secretary for their work during the last three years. It was a pleasure being president of the BASR. It was in particular good to see so many young scholars getting involved in the BASR in the last years. He also welcomed the establishment of the T&L group, in particular as the group managed to get funding to sponsor new developments.
DD mentioned that the Religion and Society project led by Linda Woodhead has changed the situation of religious studies in the UK. Scholars from other disciplines got involved in studying religion in the UK and increased the visibility. The clash of the two conferences was, however, very unfortunate. It is now important for the BASR as well as SOCREL to continue with the work of the Religion and Society project and to sustain the interest in the study of religions.
DD expressed his hope to see an increasing interest in BASR conference after REF, when the number of conferences will probably decline.
In conclusion DD stated that the public profile of the study of religion in the UK is better than often perceived.
5. **Welcome to Incoming President and Hand-Over:** Douglas Davies welcomed the new president, Graham Harvey, and wished him well for the next three years. Graham Harvey thanked Douglas Davies for his work and for his efforts to represent the BASR on national and international level.

[From this point onwards Graham Harvey chaired the AGM]

6. Secretary's Report (Bettina Schmidt)

1. The current membership list (including Honorary Life Members) lists two hundred and seventeen (217) members, nearly the exact number as at the last General Meeting (218) though the BASR gained new members and some (former) members stepped out of the BASR (or were deleted due to not paying fees for several years). It is an ongoing problem that several members have not paid despite several reminders by email and in writing (distributed via the Bulletin). The executive committee will make another effort to remind the non-paying members; otherwise they will be deleted in a few weeks.
2. The committee has met three times since the last AGM: in February at Oxford Brookes, in May at Liverpool Hope and just a day before the AGM at Winchester.
3. In addition to looking after the membership records the main work in the last twelve months has been the mailing list and other correspondences, including responding to consultations. BS urged members to support the work of the BASR by responding to emails about consultation papers. An important work of the BASR secretary is to summarize the opinions of BASR members in these issues and to convey them to the research councils or other bodies.
4. In order to increase the public profile of the BASR it is important to attend meetings organised

by the British Academy, the Research Councils or other bodies. Unfortunately most meetings are held in London, and it has become difficult for the Secretary to attend these meeting. She is therefore grateful to the outgoing president and other members of the executive committee to attend the meetings for the BASR. Reports about some of these meetings are regularly published in the Bulletin.

5. The BASR receives also emails about campaigns and other protest actions (e.g. in defence of Public Higher Education, or AHRC scholarship funding), and the secretary usually drafts a response after a discussion within the executive committee and in consultation of BASR members.
 6. On ongoing item is the Benchmark Exercise for Master degrees, led by George Chryssides for AUDTRS and supported by various members of the BASR as members of the working group. George Chryssides reported about a recent conversation with QAA and suggested several options. After a discussion with members the general consent was against pursuing the benchmark exercise, at least for the moment.
 7. BS reported about the interest of a delegation from China to meet with the BASR. However, as the BASR does not have a location in London and the delegation was unwilling to travel to any other location, the meeting could not take place.
- In response to a question whether it would be possible to write a letter to Linda Woodhead and to invite her and the members of the Religion and Society project to attend the BASR conference, it was confirmed that such a letter will be drafted.

7. Treasurer's Report and Account (Stephen Gregg)

(a table with accounts follows these minutes)

The treasurer explained the figures and highlighted the changes from last year and the AGM accepted them. Though the subscription went slightly up, the increase was due to the changed subscription rates (accepted at the last AGM). The ongoing problem was that many members paid the wrong rate or nothing at all.

In a positive note he mentioned the grant for T&L group and reported that the executive committee decided to support the Religious Studies Project and the Social Media group financially with £350 per annum (initially for two years).

8. Bulletin Editors' Report (Dominic Corrywright and Helen Waterhouse)

Dominic Corrywright thanked Helen Waterhouse for her great work as Bulletin co-editor since 2006.

He reported that some members have expressed their interest in receiving only the e-copy of the Bulletin. Bulletin editors will continue to produce hardcopies. However, if anyone wants only the e-copy, the member is asked to send an email to the Secretary.

He then reported that he brought a box of books for book review to the meeting and will distribute them after the AGM in the foyer to members who wish to review them for the Bulletin.

In response to a question it was reported that it has not been custom to send free copies of the Bulletin to RS departments. One month after the hardcopy is sent to all members, an e-copy is available open access via the website.

9. Diskus Co-ordinating Editor Report (Graham Harvey and Suzanne Owen)

The updated website of the BASR is live and contains now a T&L section as well as links to Facebook and the Religious Studies Project. Graham Harvey asked to photos for the website sent to him (in web-format).

The first articles of the 2010 issue (Birmingham conference) are online and more will follow soon.

The 2011 issue (Durham) is in preparation. Due to the changes that were necessary to update DISKUS (e.g. the articles are now in pdf format) there has been a delay but he hopes that the remaining articles will be available soon. The new DISKUS coordinator, Suzanne Owen, will start with the 2012 issue directly after the conference. The AGM expressed thanks to Graham Harvey for his work as DISKUS coordinator.

10. Teaching & Learning group (Dominic Corrywright and Stephen Gregg):

Dominic Corrywright reported about the first panel of the T & L group. Some of these and other papers will be published as a special issue of DISKUS. Denise Cush reported about the importance of having a link to the Religious Education Council. While she represents AUDTRS the BASR does not have any official representation. She proposed therefore to request at the RE Council BASR membership. Her proposal was seconded by Dominic Corrywright and

approved by the members.

Dominic Corrywright reported then about the ongoing A level consultation. He has drafted a response for the BASR though he is not optimistic that this will significantly influence government plans for A level redesign.

11. Social Media (Chris Cotter and David Robertson)

Both thanked the BASR for the support for the Religious Studies Project and other initiatives. After demonstrating the Religious Studies Project website to the members they presented the new Facebook site of the BASR. After a short discussion it was agreed that it would be better not to have BASR on Twitter, in particular as the Religious Studies Project already has a twitter account which covers BASR content. It was also discussed whether the BASR Facebook site should be restricted to members only. It was agreed to keep it open and firmly moderated (-> aimed at scholars interested in the subject). The AGM congratulated Chris and David for their initiative that has already increased the visibility of the BASR.

12. BASR/EASR conference 2013 (Ron Geaves)

Ron Geaves reported that the 2012 EASR conference was very well organised and attended by more than 300 scholars. The 2013 conference will become a special IAHR conference and will probably attract even more participants. Every delegate at the EASR as well as every delegate of the BASR conference received the first flyer with information about the conference. More information will be circulated via email. The secretary reported that she was impressed about the lecture rooms and accommodation during the visit of the executive committee in May 2012. She hopes that members encourage other professional associations with interests in the study of religions to organise (and perhaps sponsor) panels or even stream of panels for the 2013 conference.

13. Election of Secretary:

The BASR received one nomination: Helen Waterhouse and George Chryssides nominated to re-elect Bettina Schmidt as secretary. Approved by the AGM.

14. Co-opting new DISKUS co-ordinator Suzanne Owen and new Bulletin co-editor David Wilson to executive committee

The executive committee asked the AGM to co-opt as additional members Suzanne Owen and David Wilson to the executive committee. Suzanne will take over the coordination of DISKUS for the committee and David will become co-editor of the Bulletin. Approved by the AGM.

15. Honorary Life Member

The executive committee has received and approved the nomination of Prof Jim Cox for recognition as an Honorary Life Member of BASR on the grounds of his internationally important contributions to the Study of Religions (in particular his leadership among scholars of African religions and at Edinburgh University) and the important role he has played in BASR in many capacities, including serving as Secretary and President. Approved by the AGM.

16. Any Other Business

The president informed members about the next IAHR congress in 2015 and encouraged members to attend the congress.

He thanked Paul Hedges and Rohan Brown for their work in the organisation and running of the conference.

14. Date and Venue of the next meeting

The next AGM will be held during the 2013 conference at Liverpool Hope. Further details will be announced in the Bulletin and website.

BASR TREASURER'S REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDING 15th AUGUST 2012

By Stephen E. Gregg BASR Honorary Treasurer
at Winchester University Thursday 6th of September 2012

Treasurer's Report concerning Summary Accounts Statement for YE 15/08/12:

1. General income for the year was £9393, with subs up due to increase in rates. There are still members who are underpaying, and these are being contacted through email and the Bulletin. Major tranche of this increased income was £4768 grant from HEA for Teaching and Learning activities.
2. Inland Revenue: £551 represents the 2010-2011 gift aid claim. 2011-2012 claim will appear in next year's figures.
3. Bank Interest: Negligible as per recent years due to historically low base rates.
4. General expenditure for the year was £6422.
5. Printing and postage is largely unchanged at £489. The Bulletin is now available as a digital-only publication for those who wish to receive it in this format, which would of course save us further. It will remain in print also, for those who prefer that format.
6. Committee expenses are higher than last year due to costs for transport to the EASR in preparation for the Liverpool-based 2013 EASR conference. Also, some costs occurred during the last accounting period, but were claimed in this period.
7. EASR/IAHR Membership is reduced due to the removal of non-paying BASR members from our membership number statistics to EASR/IAHR.
8. Bank charges – bank transfer fees for paying our subscriptions to AESR and IAHR (and converting Sterling/Euros/Dollars) remain high. I continue to lobby for Paypal to be accepted as a form of payment, which would save these fees.
9. Insurance has been paid, but was paid after the year end, so will appear in next year's figures.
10. £968 of the T&L grant has been spent to date – largely the re-working of the BASR website to incorporate HEA materials, but this figure also includes some transport costs to T&L meetings.
11. Durham Conference – as this has been administered directly by the host institution, rather than through the BASR Treasury, there is just the one relevant transaction for this accounting period, which is a cheque made out incorrectly to BASR rather than St Chads. The Durham conference was challenging financially, due to lower than hoped attendance and increased costs for international speakers. The conference deficit was £2711.
12. General Fund: £18213, as a result of T&L grant and higher subscription income.
13. Conference Fund: £2125. This reflects the 'dip' following Durham. At the time of writing, Winchester conference outcomes are not known, although there is confidence that it will not be a negative impact above expected and budgeted costs
14. Bank Accounts: As of August 15th Bank Accounts totalled £20,339.
Summary of Financial Position: Overall, the finances of the BASR are sound with adequate reserves to ensure our successful continuation. The conference fund has reduced after Durham, and there will be associated costs with holding the large European gathering in 2013, although attendance numbers are projected to be high, and so a successful conference is anticipated.

**BRITISH ASSOCIATION FOR
THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS
ACCOUNTS as at 15 AUGUST 2012**

RECEIPTS				PAYMENTS			
General Fund	Notes	2011-12	2010-11		Notes	2011-12	2010-11
		TY	LY	Audit Fee		0	0
Balance at 16 August 2011		12592	11266	Printing & Postage Bulletin		-489	-479
Inland Revenue		551	0	T&L Grant	ii	-968	0
Subscriptions	iii	3933	3126	Committee Expenses	iv	-1762	-629
Bulletin insert fees		0	0	EASR/IAHR Membership		-376	-440
T&L Grant	i	4788	0	Bank Charges		-66	-48
Bank Interest		31	31	Insurance	vi	0	-334
		<u>21875</u>	<u>14421</u>	Balance in hand 15 August 2012		18213	
						<u>21875</u>	

Conference Fund		TY	LY		TY	LY
Balance at 16 August 2011		4776		2011 Conference Expenses	-2761	
2011 Conference Receipts		50		2012 Conference Expenses	0	
2012 Conference Receipts		60		Balance in hand 15 August 2012	2125	
		<u>4886</u>			<u>4886</u>	

BALANCE SHEET as at 15 August 2012

Cash Funds: Bank Accounts			Represented by:	
Lloyds Current	2797	116	General Fund	18213
CAF Cash	3447	783	Conference Fund	2125
CAF Gold	13752	16223		
PayPal Holding	313	192		
Petty Cash	25	60		
Cheques not yet presented	5	10		
Total	20339	17374		20339 6103

FINANCIAL SUMMARY UP TO 15 AUGUST 2012

Balance as at 16th August 2011	17368	Durham Conference 2011	
Total Receipts	9393	Total Receipts	vii 50
Total Payments	-6422	Total Payments	v -2761
Net Receipts/Payments	2971	Deficit/Surplus	-2711
Balance as at 15th August 2012	20339		

NOTES TO ACCOUNTS

- i HEA Grant
- ii Website fees and Travel Expenses
- iii Significant rise due to subs rate increase
- iv Includes travel expenses from this and previous accounting period claimed within this period
- v Represents Student Bursaries, St Chad's Fees & Keynote Speaker Costs
- vi BASR is insured and a payment was made for the current year, but not until after the accounts year end
- vii Conferences are now processed through Institutions, hence no income other than 'stray' payments

Affiliated to the
International Association for the History of Religions and
the European Association for the Study of Religions

Unlocking the Ivory Tower: The Religious Studies Project One Year On

Having made our first recordings for the Religious Studies Project at the 2011 BASR Annual conference in Durham - and as we have now entered into a formalised financial relationship with the BASR - it seems fitting that we should report on our progress a year on.

The Religious Studies Project (<http://www.religiousstudiesproject.com>) began simply as an idea for the authors to record a series of podcast interviews with some of the scholars we were beginning to come into contact with. We were in complete agreement that there was a need for such a thing, for undergraduates and postgraduates such as ourselves, for scholars in other disciplines who want to keep up with the field and - importantly, given the current charge for scholars to become more "engaged" - the general public. The reasons why other attempts had failed, we agreed, seemed obvious; bad interfaces, poor promotion, and recordings that were too long and abstruse. So we started recording the interviews that we wanted to hear - top scholars drawing on their most interesting research to talk about the fundamental methodological and theoretical issues of our field in a relaxed and concise conversation.

To house them, we set about building a website that was modern, independent of the restrictions and complications academic institutions can often foster, and integrated with social media. To this end, we asked Louise Connelly to join the team, and her knowledge of the pitfalls - and potential - of projects of this ilk has proven invaluable. Over time, we added other media: response essays, largely written by postgraduate students and early career academics, which critique, expand and/or reflect upon the week's podcast; our weekly opportunities digest, containing a mixture of calls for papers, conference announcements, job and funding adverts, helpful resources and other material collated from a variety of sources; our Facebook Page and Twitter Feed which, together, keep over 1000 active subscribers from across the globe informed about our activities, and provide spaces for lively discussion and debate; roundtable discussions with postgraduates and more established scholars discussing topical debates and practical issues; and a constantly-updated directory of links to

the websites of journals, RS departments, associations and other online resources.

Nine months and more than thirty-five podcasts later, the project is continuing to grow and develop. We have recently added a PDF summary of our opportunities digest to make it easier to share, and have also begun working with several publishers to produce book review episodes, in our edgy roundtable format. We've also started publishing reports of international conferences, something which has been a result of us expanding the team to include representatives on other continents. By the end of the year, we aim to have a team of interviewers based in the US, Australia, Scandinavia and the Netherlands. As well as broadening the pool of potential interviewees, this means the project can take a truly international viewpoint, and encourage discussion and collaboration between RS scholars - both tenured and hopeful - around the world. Furthermore, we hope that we can improve on the resources we offer, making the directory more international, and publishing articles of use to the next generation of RS scholars.

This project started life as a semi-serious discussion over a couple of pints of the good stuff. Initially we had very modest aims - perhaps we could persuade scholars presenting in the University of Edinburgh Religious Studies Seminar Series to give up a few minutes of their time to talk to us. If we were lucky, we might even be able to source some other interviewees on their way through the city. However, within a matter of months this had escalated into a second job for more than just the authors, and almost taken on a life of its own. As David stated in one of our roundtable discussions, our motto has somewhat become "Don't wait to be given permission... if it is interesting, it will work!" The RSP has been hard work, but it has also been a real lesson in just going out there and giving things your best shot. We have a lot of ideas for the future - some of which might work, some which might not - and our ethos is to continue complementing the excellent journals, conferences, associations and other resources already out there representing our field. That being said, our aim is to always keep pushing boundaries, challenging disciplinary norms, and helping/

RS research get the increased exposure and engagement it deserves.

If you are reading this bulletin, then you are in a position to help the project. That might mean simply telling your students about the site, or a particular podcast; it might mean printing off our opportunities digest every week and pinning it up in your department. But it could mean sharing your syllabus with us so we can tell you what we've already done - and plan what we still need to do. It could be suggesting someone who could give a great interview, or getting in touch to volunteer yourself. Or maybe you know of a postgraduate who would be a great addition to our team (especially if they're in Asia, South America or Africa).

And do consider sending us a report if you're going to a conference. We can be contacted via editors@religiousstudiesproject.com or through our Facebook page.

Also, if you want us to publicise something, oppsdigest@religiousstudiesproject.com is the address to use.

We are enormously grateful to the BASR for funding the project, and flattered that what we are doing can be beneficial to the field to which we are committed. We shall continue to seek support from various initiatives to support our work in breaking down boundaries within and without the ivory tower, pushing (dragging?) things forward. and challenging how our work is received by the public. Thanks to everyone who has made this possible and helped out along the way: the "Edinburgh crowd", especially Hannah Holtschneider, Jessie Paterson and Steve Sutcliffe; the BASR committee and members, especially Bettina Schmidt and Graham Harvey, whose interviews not only convinced us that the project could work but helped establish the "winning formula"; Carole Cusack, our biggest fan; all the RSP Team members, interviewers, respondents and reporters, thank you; all the interviewees, thanks for trusting us, especially in the early days; David Jack and Martin Eldon who helped with audio and design respectively; but most importantly, our anonymous supporters and listeners... and you for reading.

David G. Robertson & Christopher R. Cotter

European Network for Buddhist-Christian Studies (ENBCS) and the Catholic University of Leuven

History as a Challenge to Buddhism and Christianity

27 June – 1st July, 2013

The Old Abbey Retreat Centre, Ghent

CALL FOR PAPERS

The theme of the 10th ENBCS conference, to be held in cooperation with the Catholic University of Leuven, is: History as a Challenge to Buddhism and Christianity. Invited speakers will address five themes: the traditional concept of salvation/liberation history in Buddhism and Christianity; Jesus and the Buddha: Fact and Fiction; Buddhist and Christian Historiography; Dangerous Memory; Permitting Historical Consciousness in Buddhism and Christianity. Invited speakers include: Mark Blum; Terrence Merrigan, John Strong, Sven Bretfeld, Giovanni Filorama and Rita Gross.

In addition, papers from postgraduate research students and experienced researchers are invited for sessions on Friday evening and Saturday morning. The Network places great importance on giving postgraduate research students the opportunity to share their research and gain feedback. It also welcomes papers from experienced academics working within Buddhist-Christian Studies.

Proposals need not be on the theme of the conference but should relate to Buddhist-Christian Studies. Each paper will be allocated 30 minutes. It is expected that the actual paper will not last longer than 20 minutes leaving 10 minutes for discussion. Further details about the conference programme are available on the Network's website: <http://www.buddhist-christian-studies.org>

Proposals should include: your name, address and academic position/affiliation; title of paper; a synopsis of the content of the paper that demonstrates its relevance to Buddhist-Christian Studies.

Proposals for the consideration of the Network's Management Committee should be e-mailed to Dr Elizabeth Harris, President of the Network, by 31 December 2012: harrise@hope.ac.uk

TEACHING MATTERS

RECOGNISED EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

The numbers and modes of recognising excellence in teaching are growing. On a national level for a number of years there has been a Higher Education Academic supported venture to recognise excellence in the National Teaching Fellowship scheme (<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ntfs>). This scheme recognises up to 55 fellowships for proven excellence in learning and teaching with the nominal award and £10,000. In 2012 the NTFS is undergoing an evaluation of its impact – members may choose to go to the website and electronically record their views on the award.

A second national scheme, also organised and supported by HEA, is the Professional Recognition scheme (<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/professional-recognition>). This scheme is allied with the UK professional Standards Framework which provides a template for generic standards in the profession. The scheme has been reorganised for 2012 and now has four levels of fellowship: Associate Fellow, Fellow, Senior Fellow or Principal Fellow. Application is available by individual routes – direct to the HEA – or through HEA accredited institutional routes through continuing professional development courses.

Individual Higher Education institutions are slowly beginning to recognise the significance and value of such reward schemes. There are increasing numbers of internal teaching fellowships and awards. These are often linked to specific projects with definable objectives, though they combine reward and recognition for excellence in pedagogy also. Further developments that recognise the importance of teaching within the profession are the growth in career pathways related to 'student experience' for senior lecturer, principal lecturer, readership and professorships.

It may be on a purely financial accounting of University priorities that student income is increasingly important than research income and is driving this emphasis on learning and teaching in the profession.

Call for Papers to a Special Edition of *Diskus*

The 2012 Annual conference of BASR included, for the first time, a special panel session on

Teaching and learning in the subject area. The panel was convened by Dominic Corrywright and Stephen Gregg.

The panel convenors have agreed with the new editor to produce a Special Teaching and Learning edition of *Diskus* for Spring 2013.

We welcome offers of contributions. Deadline for papers: March 2013.

The style Guide will be available on the website.

For further information and papers please contact:

dcorrywright@brookes.ac.uk
s.gregg@tsd.ac.uk

Unistats and all that

It required no great statistician to point out that the old model of the National Student Survey was like the emperor with no clothes. The mode of gathering data, the methods for obtaining the data, selection of areas to be investigated and the analysis of the data were partial leading to frequently incomplete, inaccurate and impartial top-line data sets. The principle was good but the methodology flawed.

In 2012 a new system of reporting has been instituted. This revitalises the Unistats government supported website (<http://unistats.direct.gov.uk/>) with a new format for the data and an averaging of data from varied sources. The data is organised in terms of 'Key information Sets' (KIS) that are universally applicable and comparable across courses and institutions. Some of the criticisms over NSS questions – including student understandings of what each question actually means, the aggregation of student responses who are on combined courses and the interpretation of responses that are neither positive nor negative – remain significant in any use of KIS information. It is important to note that prospective students are increasingly using Unistats and internal managers will refer to this data in developing key performance indicators for measurements of subject success.

Course costs: My new intake of students have already informed me that each hour of their face-to-face contact costs them about £86.00. I am not sure if their maths is accurate, but the signal is evident – they will be judging the quality of their courses in terms of value for

money. Perhaps this is not a negative outcome if we are genuinely offering vibrant, challenging and exciting pedagogical experiences.

Dominic Corrywright
Oxford Brookes University

Professor Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke 1953-2012

Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke pioneered a new area in the Study of Religion as the first British professor of the western esoteric tradition and Founder of the Exeter Centre for the Study of Esotericism.

Nicholas was educated at Bristol University where he gained a First Class degree with Distinction in German, Politics and Philosophy. He moved on to Oxford to research for a D.Phil and his thesis, published as *The Occult Roots of Nazism* in 1985, established his reputation. This book, which has been translated into twelve languages and repeatedly reprinted, was followed by *Hitler's Priestess* (1998) and *Black Sun*: (2002).

From 1988-94, he worked at Oxford University as a Senior Executive of the *Campaign for Oxford*, raising over £20 million for the university. He was also General Secretary of Europaeum, a pan-European graduate school involving Oxford, Leiden and Bonn. Thereafter Nicholas was an independent scholar for some years writing books, including a major work on Paracelsus, giving lectures and extending his vast knowledge.

His first purely academic post was a Research Fellowship in the Western Esoteric Tradition funded by the Blavatsky Trust, at the University of Wales Lampeter. While there he published a monograph on *Helena Blavatsky* in 2004 and a similar work, jointly with his wife Clare, on another leading theosophist G.R.S. Mead in 2005.

In 2005 the then School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Exeter University, with generous support from the Blavatsky Trust decided to establish a Chair in Western Esotericism. Nicholas was appointed to this new Professorship and immediately established the Exeter Centre. Drawing on expertise from a range of disciplines,



Nicholas' team has fostered advanced research into historical and comparative aspects of the esoteric traditions from the Hellenistic period to the present day. The Centre has attracted MA and doctoral students and the recognition of scholars from all over the world, many of whose tributes to Nicholas can be seen on the internet.

Nicholas had an encyclopaedic knowledge and wrote a wide range of erudite publications. In particular, his book on *The Western Esoteric Traditions* published by Oxford University Press in 2008 has already become the standard work in this area and a reminder of the tragic loss to Religious Studies from his untimely death. He is survived by his wife, Clare, who continues to work in the Centre that he established in Exeter.

Paul Badham

BASR CONFERENCE 2012

Borders, Boundaries, and Transgressions: Within and Between Religions

BURSARY HOLDERS' REPORT

This year's conference opened with a question: 'What is the public benefit of the study of religion?' It was a question that was not easily answered in the plenary session by its four speakers—Abby Day, Eileen Barker, Tim Jensen, and Douglas Davies. This is hardly surprising because the question is a weighty one, one that could consume the entirety of the whole conference were the theme not already 'Borders and Boundaries'. Three of the speakers, Day, Jensen, and Davies, spoke with the assumption that there should be a public benefit to the study of religion. Jensen's optimism was particularly interesting in the face of his own personal horror story of media villainisation. Barker, however, expressed misgivings about the conscious pursuit of 'public benefit' by scholars. This was refreshing because many would consider this to be unquestionably good, raising the pertinent question, 'whose "public good" should scholars of religion be pursuing?' She insisted that the sociology of religion (or religious studies as a field in general) functions best when realising that different individuals and communities express different visions of the good.

in his outgoing presidential address, 'Boundaries of Life in Death', Douglas Davies traced the history of crossing boundaries in British burial practices, beginning with the 'provocative act' of Welsh nationalist William Price, who in 1884 was arrested for setting out to publicly cremate his dead son Jesus Christ. A taboo topic up to this time, cremation was thus subjected to the court's scrutiny and legalised in Britain not long thereafter. Davies suggests that the British have always proved to be radically transformative and lawless in terms of crossing the boundaries around death, the body, and socially palatable or sufficiently reverend acts of laying the dead to rest. The keynote concluded with a film, 'Natural Burial and the Church of England', by Sarah Lloyd, which introduces a British Woodland burial site and features interviews with the bereaved and those planning and describing their own burials—it shows their attempts at constructing an identity related not only to their 'living' but also to their 'dead self.'

The panel on 'Religion: Borders, Boundaries and Definitions' included presentations by Amy Whitehead, Joshua Rey, and Liam Sutherland. Whitehead, presenting the results of her fieldwork on power relations and performance of statue devotion occurring in two distinct religiosities, compared the venerative practices and relational encounters that take place around the statues of the Glastonbury Goddess and the Virgin of Alcala, a vernacular Catholic Marian statue in Spain. The study shows how the vernacular Catholic in Spain and the Goddess devotees in England have more in common than is usually thought, and how in both cases the statues are understood as relational beings with whom religious experiences are shared. Rey, an avowed interloper on the conference, discussed Wittgenstein and the concept of prejudice. While speaking from a theological perspective his analysis of prejudice could nevertheless prove illuminating in such areas as identity formation. Sutherland extolled the virtues of Neo-Tylorism, and there is, one could suspect, the beginnings of rival class of theory. At the least there is enough content to warrant new looks into the work of Tylor and how they might contribute to current studies.

This year's conference marked the inaugural year for the 'Learning and Teaching' focus of the BASR, facilitated by Dominic Corrywright and Stephen Gregg. It aims to address concerns regarding the pedagogy of teaching and learning in general, and the landscape of learning and teaching in theology and religious studies in the United Kingdom. Presentations in the Learning and Teaching panel included offerings by: Stefanie Sinclair, Christina Welch, Denise Cush, and Catherine Robinson. Sinclair introduced the concept of 'blended learning and tuition' and its relationship to religious studies as a field as well as digital technologies. Welch addressed the model of 'distance learning' and the problems it is bringing to education as a field. Cush presented the current trends in religious education at the school level, outlined its relationship to the field of theology and religious studies at the university level, and offered points

Lastly, Cush and Robinson presented a current university religious studies curriculum called 'the Living Religion Project', which integrates participant engagement from students with their research.

The 'Disputing the Borders of Religions' panel included a presentation by Graham Harvey on relationships with Yoruba Orishas based on a recent field visit to Southern Nigeria, as well as a collaborative project by Luke Fox and Suzanne Owen, who analysed the origins of the world religions paradigm from both a philosophical and a religious studies angle. Harvey advocated a material religion approach over a belief-centric one, particularly those that consider attribution of personhood to be a category mistake. He argued that systematic, doctrinal concerns are less important than the embodied performance of rituals of relating to these beings. Lastly he argued that there could be multiple modernities as a local hydroelectric dam contained a statue of the Orisha of thunder, Shango, who stood not as a symbol but as a powerful being that could be related to. Fox and Owen's central argument was that the paradigm was constructed in response to historical issues in Christianity by such figures as Hegel, Schleiermacher, and Lessing. The core assumption of the paradigm is that there is a natural core of all religions, which is itself immune to criticism, unlike its various 'aberrant' developments. These philosophers were then able to construct various hierarchical formulations of religions according to their closeness to this postulated 'natural' religion.

'Why does religion persist and what are the key problems of religion?' Douglas Pratt's keynote presentation addresses these questions by highlighting three key dimensions of religion. First, there is the 'narrative' aspect, which is inspirational, insightful, and identifying. The second dimension is the 'ethical' aspect, which regards the common values, the distinctive teachings, and cultural norms such as commandments, laws, and moral codes. The third dimension that Pratt identifies is the metaphysical aspect or worldview presuppositions, which he divides into two categories: on the one hand, there is the higher order concerned with time, knowledge, and the nature of realities, and on the other, there is the lower order that relates to spiritual entities, alternate realities, and superimposed dynamics and events. In conclusion, religion manifests persistent problems. It can make things worse or better. Religion today is at a crossroads: it can either regress into fundamentalist exclusivism, or ad-

vance into education and dialogical engagement, and gain a new self-understanding.

This year, the BASR included a reception and premiere screening for the forthcoming film 'Leap'. It is a documentary film tracing the spiritual journey of a Finnish ISKCON practitioner, Keshava Madhava Das (formerly Kenneth Kairenius). It is an evocative narrative that highlights his conversion into ISKCON, the deepening of his practice, his relationship with his guru, Radhanath Swami (formerly Richard Slavin), and the relationships and challenges he continues to face with the life path he has chosen.

The panel on 'Religion and its Borders with Science and Culture' included a presentation by Stephen Gregg and David Robertson. Gregg examined the relationship between religion and comedy, a subject that certainly cries out for more attention from religious studies. He noted that while there are certainly many sociological studies of humour, very few have addressed humour about religion. Robertson presented some of the data he had collected on Whitley Strieber's 'Dreamland Convention'. This was an illuminating talk as focusing on conspiracy theories and UFO phenomena it demonstrated the theme of the conference by pushing at the boundaries of what we think religion is.

The panel on 'Political and Social Borders and Boundaries' included presentations by Kit Kirkland and Joanne McKenzie. According to Kirkland, evangelical activists in Britain are motivated by three factors: 'denial of faith', 'life issues', and 'religious plurality'. Kirkland concluded, though there has been growing ecumenism amongst Christian activists, the movement remains on the fringes in terms of its location in society, its structural relations with the Established Church, and the weak political reception they have received so far. 'All One in Christ Jesus?' (with an emphasis on the question mark) is a title that aptly reflects what McKenzie has found through her research involving a series of semi-structured interviews with leaders of evangelical networks. While evangelicals voice concern over class divisions and social inequalities, class boundaries and a rhetoric of othering (e.g., the use of terms such as 'underclass' or 'benefit class') also persist in evangelical churches in Britain today. The presentation ended with a constructive discussion on how further qualitative data might be collected and analyzed.

The panel on 'Religion and its Borders with Science and Culture' included a presentation by Beth Singler and Nick Campion. Singler took on Jediism, a 'mock religion' potentially becoming very real, an interesting paper as it focused on what could well be a religion of the future. Campion, concerned with the question whether astrology is a religion, argues that it is

a matter of definition. Yet defining astrology as well as religion is problematic. He concludes by arguing that 'most astrology can be classed as a vernacular religion; therefore, boundaries exist in the imagination'.

Francesca Po, Liam Sutherland, Luc, de Backer, Jonathan Tuckett, Naomi Thurston

MODERNISM, CHRISTIANITY AND APOCALYPSE

UNIVERSITY OF BERGEN, 18-20 JULY 2012.

VENUE: HOTEL SOLSTRAND

This interdisciplinary conference, which was organised by Matthew Feldman (Teesside University) and Erik Tonning (University of Bergen) married literature, history, theology, and religious studies in considering the interactions of modernism, Christianity and the concept of the apocalypse. The conference took place at the entrancing Hotel Solstrand, which was established in 1896 and featured hot springs wellness treatments, and a justly celebrated restaurant, among other charms (see <http://www.solstrand.com/en/>). The conference was quite small, with 4 keynotes and 2 invited lectures, and 36 papers in parallel sessions. The keynotes were Professor Paul S. Fiddes (University of Oxford), speaking on 'Versions of the Wasteland: The Sense of an Ending In Theology and Literature in the Modern Period', Professor Emerita Marjorie Perloff (Stanford University), speaking on '“To Change Your Life”: Wittgenstein on Christianity', Professor Hans S. Ottomeyer (formerly of the Stiftung Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin) speaking on 'The Reason of Nature: The New Cosmos Around 1900', and Professor John Milbank (University of Nottingham), speaking on 'Sublimity and Apocalyptic: Christianity, Modernity, and the Future'. The invited speaker sessions were Professor Mary Bryden (University of Reading) on '“History is Done”: Thomas Merton's Figures of Apocalypse' and Professor Chris Ackerley (University of Otago) on 'The Nordic Vision of Malcolm Lowry's *In Ballast to the White Sea*'. The closing panel discussion was between Fiddes, Milbank, Ottomeyer, Perloff and Dr Malise Ruthven, titled 'Apocalypse Now? On Contemporary Uses of Apocalyptic Rhetoric'.

The quality of papers was very high, though the eclectic nature of the contributions did contribute to a sense of uncertainty regarding the preferred topics and preferred methodologies. For

example, there were papers on subjects that were very disparate. Classic Modernist poets such as T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, W. B. Yeats, and W. H. Auden were frequent touchstones, as were the history of Nazi Germany and of fascism in general (particularly in Scandinavia), questions regarding Vatican decrees and issues of gender within the Catholic tradition, and focuses on central individuals including Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Charles Taylor, and Samuel Beckett. The content explored and methods utilised ranged from very conservative Christian theological perspectives, through literature and 'spirituality', to political perspectives, to truly fringe topics such as twentieth century UFO and alien-based religions, and social scientific methodological lenses. There was a focus on the Judeo-Christian-Islamic family of monotheistic religions to the detriment of the conference theme (in that while Christianity was one of the three touchstones in the conference's title, it would have been informative to have heard scholarship on, for example, Hinduism, modernity and apocalypse, or the various applications of these themes in predominantly Buddhist Asia, including Pol Pot's declaration of 'Year Zero' in Cambodia, and the various applications of Maoist communist thought. Fascism attracted considerable attention, but Communism almost none, which was interesting. The intimate size of the conference fuelled interesting discussions over splendid breakfast, lunch and dinner menus. The presence of Brill, the Leiden publishers, was a positive influence that resulted in the offer of a conference volume, to be edited by Feldman and Tonning, and which is being prepared for publication in the second half of 2012.

Carole Cusack
The University of Sydney

Australian Association for the Study of Religion & Australian Association of Buddhist Studies

MULTIPLE RELIGIOUS MODERNITIES

CONFERENCE, 28-30 SEPTEMBER 2012
UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN SYDNEY (PARRAMATTA CAMPUS)

The 2012 AASR/AABS annual conference was organized by Associate Professor Adam Possamai (University of Western Sydney, Bankstown Campus), assisted by UWS colleagues including Professor Julia Day Howell, Associate Professor Judith Snodgrass (President of the AABS), Dr Alpha Possamai-Inesedy and Dr Irena Veljanova, and PhD student Alan Nixon. The conference opened on Friday evening with the AASR Presidential Lecture delivered by Professor Douglas Pratt (University of Waikato, New Zealand), 'The Persistence and Problems of Modernity: Continuity and Diversity'. Professor Pratt considered a range of contemporary manifestations of religion, including the recent espousal by popular philosopher Alain de Botton of the concept of 'religion for atheists', concluding that religion remained strong in modernity.

On Saturday the two keynotes were the Charles Strong Trust Lecture (see <http://www.charlesstrongtrust.org.au/>) by Associate Professor Carole M. Cusack (University of Sydney), and the plenary address by Emeritus Professor Gary D. Bouma (Monash University). Carole Cusack spoke on 'Fictional Religions and Religious Fictions: Narratives of Secularisation and Sacralisation at Play in Multiple Modernities'. She expounded the model of religious origin proposed by Robert N. Bellah in *Religion in Human Evolution* (2011), placing play at the centre of the process, and arguing that invented religions are important because they make transparent the process of the origin and formation of religions out of play and narrative. Therefore, invented religions are the culturally appropriate forms of the human impulse to religion in the twenty-first century West. Gary Bouma's lecture, 'Managing Religious Diversity', considered the implications of the recently re-

leased data from the 'religion question' of the 2011 Australian Census, the including 'No Religion' rising to 22.3%, making it the second largest 'religious identification' (if it can be designated) after Catholicism, at 25.3%.

Sunday's Penny Magee Memorial Lecture, 'Religion, Resilience and Climate Change: The Role of Religion in Uncertain Environmental Times,' was delivered by Dr Sylvie Shaw (University of Queensland), who gave an analysis of a research project about spirituality and environmental issues that she had been involved with in the wake of the Queensland floods of early 2012. The AGMs of the AASR and the AABS were held on Saturday prior to the conference dinner, at the picturesque historic building, the Boilerhouse, on campus. Gary Bouma was elected President, Anna Halafoff (Deakin University) was re-elected Secretary, and Matthew Dillon was re-elected Treasurer. There was some discussion of the bleak climate in which the academic study of religion found itself in Australia in 2012.

However, the overall mood of the conference was exuberant, with 89 papers, on a vast range of topics from Islam and queer theory, to the critique of the world religions model, to spiritual tourism and pilgrimage, to the John of God pilgrimage in Brazil, to an examination of Taiwanese bhikkunis, and to cow protection in Sri Lanka. There were a large number of postgraduate students and recent graduates who participated in the conference, and there was a strongly positive atmosphere and a sense of the vibrant nature of the field that pervaded the entire event.

Carole Cusack
The University of Sydney

Center for Studies on New Religions

ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2012

EL JADIDA, MOROCCO

The CESNUR (Center for Studies on New Religions) Annual Conference took place this year at Chouaïb Doukkali University, El Jadida, Morocco (20-22 September). In past years the venue has alternated between the US and Europe, but in 2011 the organisers decided to widen their horizons and chose Taiwan. This year Morocco was chosen as the place to explore the somewhat broad theme, 'Religion in a Globalized Context: The Mediterranean and the World'.

The venue not only ensured greater participation by North African colleagues, but encouraged greater exploration of Islamic themes and Muslim-related religious groups. Around 60 scholars attended and, as always, some presentations discussed specific religious groups, while others focused on themes, such as children in NRMs (New Religious Movements), rights of minority religions, and anti-cult measures against new religions.

Mormonism is always prominent at CESNUR conferences, but Mitt Romney's candidature in the coming US presidential elections gave it a particular relevance. On the final morning panellists discussed the role of the Mormon faith in American history and politics. The conference also came very soon after the news of Sun Myung Moon's death earlier in the month, and I had the pleasure of chairing a session in which James Beverley and Dan Fefferman presented outsider and insider perspectives respectively on the emergent schisms within the Unification Church, which seem likely to widen after the founder-leader's demise.

Inevitably standards of presentation vary at every conference. I have to say, however, that I was surprised that one or two presentations did not appear to refer to any published work, and seemed to be simply the impressions of the presenter. This came from one or two academics who are in post, rather than postgraduate students, who often take more pains to ensure that they impress their audience!

However, as is often the case, the networking at these events can be just as important as the proceedings, and it was good to meet new people as well as to have the annual reunion with old friends. Those who want more detail about the conference papers can read the cyber-proceedings at www.cesnur.org. The CESNUR web site also provides information about the 2013 conference, which will take place at Dalarna University, Falun, Sweden, on 21-24 June. The year 2013 has particular significance, being CESNUR's 25th anniversary. It is also the 25th anniversary of INFORM (Information Network on Religious Movements), set up in London by Eileen Barker to provide information and advice on NRMs.

George D. Chryssides
University of Birmingham

International Conference on Contemporary Esotericism

27-29 AUGUST 2012

UNIVERSITY OF STOCKHOLM SWEDEN

The First International Conference on Contemporary Esotericism was held at Stockholm University, Sweden, immediately following the EASR Annual Conference. It was attended by approximately 80 scholars from a wide range of countries and disciplines. Some had also attended the EASR conference, but it seemed that the majority were present solely for this conference—which is a tribute to the imagination and enthusiasm of the organisers, Kennet Granholm and Egil Asprem, in seeing contemporary esotericism as a topic worthy of a conference of its own.

There were four keynote talks (two each day, starting both the morning and afternoon sessions). In addition there were generally three parallel sessions for each time slot—one each in the morning and in the afternoon. The pace was more relaxed than the EASR, but this didn't imply any lack of commitment on the part of the participants: fewer sessions meant wider participation in each, and discussion was lively throughout. One thing I noticed was that delegates were very open about their participation in esoteric groups and activities, either as personal commitment or as part of their fieldwork. This was very encouraging and also added to the depth of the discourse.

The keynote presentations introduced themes of occulture (Christopher Partridge), gender (Jay Johnston), theory (Kocku von Stuckrad) and entheogens (Wouter Hanegraaff). In addition, various panels engaged with issues of race, politics (left, right and anarchist), theory and method in the study of esotericism, psychology, sociology, modern culture, and initiate/secret societies. The preponderance of young academics was very encouraging, and in particular the relatively high percentage of female scholars.

In the course of the conference it was pointed out how little attention race and gender, in particular, have received in the study of esotericism, both historical and contemporary. Wouter Hanegraaff also made the point that although much historical literature makes it clear that there was widespread experimentation with psychotropic substances during the 1960s (the era that may be said to provide the historical roots for the present neo-esoteric revival), contemporary esoteric studies tend to avoid this topic, or claim it is irrelevant, valorising instead the 'mystical' or visionary experience as a means to gnosis. This omission, and other lacunae in the study of esotericism, offer many opportunities to scholars in the discipline.

A round-table discussion concluded the conference, and served to draw together the themes of the conference and provided a final opportunity for extended discussion with the four keynote speakers. Of particular note was the concern that there is a lack of interdisciplinarity between scholars of esotericism and those in other disciplines such as religious studies, philosophy, sociology and anthropology. This needs to be addressed. The conversation was so lively that it was with regret the organisers had to declare the conference closed in order to proceed with a final extra event.

The organization of the conference, entirely done by volunteers, was excellent. A well-maintained website provided complete information ahead of time. The full book of abstracts, including the programme, maps of the venues and information on getting around in Stockholm, was sent by email to delegates several weeks in advance of the conference, and was also provided in print form at the conference itself. (An overview of the conference programme is still available, at time of writing, at <http://www.erg.su.se/contemporary-esotericism/conference-overview-and-schedule>).

Delegates registered separately for the highly successful conference dinner, a vegetarian meze-buffet at a popular Stockholm restaurant.

The final (extra-curricular) event of the conference was a walk through 'occult Stockholm' with Dr Thomas Karlsson, a founding member of Le Dragon Rouge magical order. Managing to keep around 40 delegates together through a succession of metro stations, he guided us around various sites in the city that have played a role in the recent occult history of the city since the 1980s. A limited number of participants were able to visit the Temple of Le Dragon Rouge, where Dr Karlsson explained many of the interesting features of the Order's practice and iconography. This final event provided yet another opportunity for intense conversations between delegates, and ended the conference on an exciting high note.

There were two other events of note at the conference. One was the pre-publication unveiling of the book *Contemporary Esotericism*, edited by conference organisers Egil Asprem and Kennet Granholm, which will be published by Equinox early in the spring of 2013. Versions of the four keynote presentations are in this volume, in addition to a wide range of papers, many by conference participants. The conference also saw the launch of ContERN—the Contemporary Esotericism Research Network (<http://contern.org>). It is hoped that ContERN will facilitate dialogue both within the discipline of esoteric studies, and between esotericists and scholars of other disciplines. ContERN will be arranging special sessions at the Fourth International Conference of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism (ESSWE), which will be held at the University of Gothenburg on June 26-29, 2013.

Margaret Gouin
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EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS

ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2012

SÖDERTÖRN UNIVERSITY, SWEDEN

The 2012 EASR Annual Conference, which was also designated as an IAHR Special Conference, was held on August 23-26, in Sweden. The conference venue was SÖDERTÖRN UNIVERSITY, located in the Flemingsberg area to the south of Stockholm. Södertörn is a very new institution, having been established in 1996 to help manage the student enrolment of Stockholm University, which had become overcrowded.

The general format of the conference was to have one morning time slot, a keynote address, and then lunch, followed by two afternoon time slots. Each time slot contained 12 parallel sessions. This made for a total of approximately 100 sessions (a few were cancelled), averaging three or four presentations each, plus the three keynotes. The day started at 9 a.m. and finished at any time from 5 to 6 p.m., depending on the length of the final session. There were evening events for first three nights: a welcome reception; a reception by academic publishing house Routledge; and the conference dinner. These were useful for socialising since the lunch break was short (only 1 hour) and delegates had to travel to and from the venue to hotels and hostels scattered around Stockholm, meaning there was no informal meeting place apart from the conference venue itself. In addition, a number of academic publishing houses had tables next to the main gathering area, and displayed an exciting variety of new publications, both monographs and journals.

The theme of the conference was 'Ends and Beginnings', and a rich variety of both were on offer. 'Ends' could be—and were—construed as anything from the termination of a historical period to individual death to eschatological theories and apocalyptic prophecies. 'Beginnings' ranged from the birth of persons to the birth of the so-called 'axial' religions and new religious movements to the reinterpretation of scriptures to the 'Arab Spring'. There were papers on religion in ancient Rome, medieval Europe and modern Africa; on ecology and animal rights activism; on ritual, food, literature, opera and architecture; on theory and practice, pluralism and secularisation. 'Religion' was theorised and 'god' was analysed. There was a series of ses-

sions developing various cognitive approaches; the relatively new field of the cognitive science of religion was, in addition, discussed by two of the keynote speakers, Ingvild Gilhus and Kocku von Stuckrad in the course of their very different presentations. There were many young academics and a strong showing of postgraduate students, many of whom were presenting their work alongside their more established colleagues.

A number of delegates commented on difficulties with scheduling—panels on related topics were sometimes scheduled to run simultaneously. This is not an unusual problem in such a large conference, and especially one where there was such an ambitious programme. Apart from some closed sessions which were arranged around specific themes with invited speakers, the organisers must have found it difficult at times to create common headings under which to group the wide range of papers on offer. A number of topics, including among others 'Presence of Death in lived religions' and 'Transmission of religious ideas—symbolisation and cognition', ran to two consecutive sessions. In addition, various organisations such as ContERN/ESSWE (contemporary esotericism), ISSNR/Finyar (new religions) and CPASE (Contemporary Paganisms and Alternative Spiritualities in Europe) also sponsored multiple sessions.

There were complaints that the format in which the programme was provided online could not be printed out on standard A4 paper ahead of time. This made it difficult for delegates to plan ahead—and with the large number of sessions and papers on offer, the ability to do so would have been very helpful. There was a wide range in room size—from a small 12-seat seminar room to the main auditorium—and it would have been impossible to estimate in advance the size of the audience of any one session in order to co-ordinate it with the size of the room. Unfortunately this meant that some of the sessions I attended in seminar rooms were seriously overcrowded; in addition to the level of discomfort for both the presenter and the listeners, this usually meant the rooms quickly became stuffy. Valuable time was lost finding

space for latecomers, rearranging projectors to get clear sight lines, and opening windows for ventilation; and it was often difficult for those who wanted to move between sessions to make a quiet exit or entrance.

Overall, however, the conference was well-organised and well-run. The Södertörn team and their assistants were pleasant, friendly and helpful, and quick to respond to any difficulties brought to them by delegates. The catering was efficient, with lots of food stations provided throughout conference area, so that delegates didn't have to spend most of their breaks waiting in line. The conference dinner, held in one of the University dining halls, was lively and most enjoyable. Graham Harvey and Ron Geaves made a presentation on the next EASR conference at Liverpool in 2013; this gave delegates the chance to sing a rousing polyglot version of 'happy birthday' to Graham. There was a live band later in the evening: I've been told that some people stayed dancing until the small hours!

Whatever difficulties delegates may have experienced in getting the exact mix they wanted of presentations and sessions, the discussion was lively at all times. It often started on the commuter train on the way to Flemingsberg, where there was no need of an EASR conference badge to identify participants—you just

had to look for groups of people clutching the distinctive black book of abstracts and conference programme, intensely involved in conversation and intermittently peering out the window to see if they'd missed their stop in the excitement of debate. The talk never flagged from the arrival at the station, up the two long escalators and across the university quadrangle to the conference building. Judging by the number of people I saw exchanging business cards and email addresses, many new friendships were forged and many connections made across disciplines and countries.

It was, for me, a great pleasure to make contact with European colleagues in my field and to find some distinctly European flavours in topics known only to me from UK conferences. I was also impressed with the interest shown in the cognitive science of religion, a field relatively little discussed in UK religious studies, although recently highlighted in the plenaries of the BASR conference at Durham in 2011. I look forward to the next EASR conference in Liverpool in 2013.

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RELIGION SPECIAL ISSUE CALL FOR PAPERS

The editors of *Religion* have reserved issue 4 (October), 2013 for submissions by UK-based scholars, provided that the journal receives enough submissions that are accepted after its peer-review process. Should the editors accept more articles than can be published in one issue, they will be published electronically by that date, and would then appear in print at a later date. If fewer articles are accepted than would be needed to make up a complete UK issue, they will still be published in that issue but alongside articles from scholars working in other regions.

Given the review process and possible requests for revision, submissions need to be received by January 2013. Submissions

received later will be considered in the usual way but cannot be guaranteed a final decision in time for publication in October 2013.

For author guidelines and submission details visit: www.tandfonline.com/rrel

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BOOK REVIEWS

Triple Jeopardy for the West: Aggressive Secularism, Radical Islamism and Multiculturalism

Michael Nazir-Ali (2012)
London: Bloomsbury

This is a mixed bagatelle of a book. The title is seductive and intimates the prospect of solid investigation and critical discussion, at the very least informed by substantial scholarship. The first clue to something being not quite right is the inclusion of multiculturalism as if it were an ideological perspective the equivalent of the other two. It may be contentiously viewed and hotly debated; it is hardly on the same level as the other 'isms'. The next clue is in the structure of the book – some 18 chapters divided in four parts. Only one seems to directly reflect the enticing sub-title of the book, one appears perhaps to allude to two of the sub-title's elements, and the other two, comprising over half of the chapters, appear to be collections of sermons, op-ed pieces, and other personal reflections on a range of topics simply grouped under two headings. Thus Part Three, 'Science: Evolution, bioethics and assisted dying' addresses those topics then adds a chapter discussing Mary Warnock's *Dishonest to God: on keeping religion out of politics* (London: Continuum, 2010). Part Four, 'Politics: Values and good government' comprises a collection of predominantly hortatory pieces that reflect on and respond to recent social and political events in Britain, and read rather like sermons. Perhaps that is how they began, at least.

The second part (Chaps 5-8), 'Religion: The threat of radical Islamism', is the one that reflects a measure of good scholarship, some solid investigation and critique, and raises a range of saliently discussed issues. Chapter Five stands out, comprising a very good discussion of Islamic law, freedom and social cohesion. It is followed by a short and pithy reflection on 9/11, a modest piece exhorting the West to not "abandon the world to extreme Islamism" (p. 83), and a four-page note on how Pakistan might be cured "of its radical Islamism" (p. 95). This reads like an opinion piece that never made it into the newspaper. And it is this variability of writing style and weight which

is of concern. As with Part Two, Part One, a discussion on the topic 'Society: The state and the good citizen', is also a mixed bag, including the shortest chapter – some three pages on happiness. Two chapters that range over contemporary contexts and issues besetting Britain today certainly contain a number of trenchant observations and good critical comment, but even here the sermonic tendency predominates. And the next shortest chapter, at four pages, simply responds to the question 'What comes after multiculturalism?' that in no way addresses the meaning let alone an analysis of multiculturalism as such. Indeed, other than clearly presuming the term refers to 'silo' multiculturalism only (thereby ignoring other forms and possibilities) the very phenomenon and nuanced discussions of what comprises multicultural British society and what this portends for the future is summarily brushed aside: "Multiculturalism also has its supporters, even though in recent years its failings have been manifest and it has been repudiated by the very 'establishment' that gave it birth" (p. ix). Whilst I wholeheartedly agree with the distinction Nazir-Ali draws between 'plurality' and 'pluralism', where the former names a fact or state of affairs, and the latter a stance toward, or ideological response about, said state of affairs, to draw the same distinction between 'multicultural' and 'multiculturalism' is to commit a category error, especially when asserting that "pluralism" and "multiculturalism" are effectively synonymous and that both are governed by the ideology of secularism.

Nazir-Ali, formerly Bishop of Rochester and now director of an Oxford-based Centre for 'Training, Research, Advocacy and Dialogue', evinces a distinctly dyspeptic tone. And the predominance of the sermonic is echoed in the final paragraph of the closing chapter: "It is my prayer and hope that what is found within these covers of this little volume will inform, encourage and challenge Christian participation in our national life" (p. 170). Certainly, there will be a cadre of followers of the good bishop who may be so encouraged, and a few others who might pick up the book simply to see where this ecclesial figure has got to, as did I. But there is little here, really, that adequately and critically informs, other than the one chapter I highlighted. The sense I am left with is of someone who, once in the thick of things, is risking losing touch. One can only hope that personal opinion

informed by engagement, which certainly seems to be the underlying basis of the book, will in the future take better cognisance of current critical scholarship. To be sure, aggressive secularism and radical Islamism are two issues of contemporary concern and the focus of much scholarly attention. And multiculturalism is also a vexed phenomenon attracting a raft of scholarly investigations and substantial critique. But the assertion that, together, these three comprise a 'triple jeopardy' is neither adequately argued for nor can it be simply assumed, as appears here to be the case.

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Esotericism and the Academy: rejected knowledge in Western culture

Wouter J. Hanegraaff (2012)
Cambridge University Press

x + 468 pp.

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Wouter Hanegraaff is known as a leading scholar and prolific writer in the study of Western esotericism. In his latest work, he 'sets out to explore the blank spaces on the maps of learning' (3) which he encountered when he first ventured into the field.

Bracketed by the Introduction and Conclusion, four chapters follow the development of Western esotericism from the 15th century beginnings of the Italian Renaissance up to the present day. By means of a meticulous analysis of primary and secondary sources, Hanegraaff exposes the apologetics, counter-apologetics and polemics by which esotericism became 'othered' an eventually excluded from the academy as unworthy of serious consideration.

In his final chapter, 'The truth of history: entering the academy', Hanegraaff focuses on the development of 'Western esotericism' as an academic subject, and in particular on the emergence of new theoretical and methodo-

logical frameworks for studying it. He examines the influence of the Eranos conferences and of individual scholars who participated in them. Early 20th-century historians of esotericism are discussed, with a particularly insightful critique of the role of Frances Yates in popularising the subject, and of a number of flaws in her grand narrative of the 'Hermetic Tradition'. This is followed by a study of the seminal work of Antoine Faivre, whose famous definition of esotericism as a 'form of thought' distinguished by four intrinsic and two non-intrinsic characteristics has had considerable influence on the field (353), although Hanegraaff points out that it is not unproblematic (360). The final section of this chapter, 'Esotericism in the Academy', pays particular attention to Kocku von Stuckrad's espousal of discourse theory. Here Hanegraaff makes clear that although he can see the value of discursive approaches, for example in analysing the process of identity formation, 'we cannot allow them to dictate or dominate the entire agenda of historical research' (366).

In his Conclusion, Hanegraaff reiterates the 'red thread' of his narrative, that the development of Western esotericism cannot be understood without recognizing that it results from 'an intellectual culture grounded in biblical monotheism and Greek rationality [being] forced to come to terms with the presence of *paganism*' (369, emphasis in the original). The attempt to accommodate, or alternatively to exclude, paganism in such a culture, has given rise to an ongoing process of identity formation whereby the 'esoteric' eventually became constructed as the 'Other' of modernity (374).

The study is impeccably researched, with close attention to original sources. The footnotes are extensive and detailed; the bibliography alone will be a formidable resource to anyone interested in the subject. The book is not, Hanegraaff is clear, a 'map of the domain', nor does he intend simply to write its history. This work is, to use a term coined by Jan Assmann and modified by Hanegraaff (375), *mnemohistoriography*—the historiography of Western esotericism as 'scholars and intellectuals have *imagined* it, ever since the time that its contours first began to be drawn' (3). It is informed by Hanegraaff's firmly-held belief that history must not be subordinated—or hostage—to theory. In this he pursues a project of *anti-eclectic historiography*, 'which does not select only what it believes to be "true" or "serious," but questions the established canon of modern intellectual and academic culture ... and recognizes that our common heritage is of much

greater richness and complexity than one would infer from standard academic textbooks' (377).

This well-written and thoroughly researched book is not the 'last word' on the subject of esotericism in the academy, nor indeed can it be, for Hanegraaff himself identifies in his Conclusion (378-79) many areas which still need to be investigated. But it provides a compelling account of how the study of Western esotericism got this far, and offers stimulating ideas for its future directions.

The book will be of interest to students of Western esotericism, history of religions, philosophy of religions, history of ideas and culture studies. It is also an excellent example of historiography in action.

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Astrology and Cosmology in the World's Religions

Nicholas Campion (2012)
New York University Press

Astrology and Popular Religion in the Modern West: Prophecy, Cosmology and the New Age Movement

Nicholas Campion (2012)
Farnham: Ashgate

Astrology has played a significant, even foundational, role in the development of human cultures. Persistent in its presence throughout history, astrology blends readily into and forms part of the colourful mosaic that is Western popular culture. Nicholas Campion addresses this often overlooked, yet significant subject matter in these two recent and complementary works.

Through a consideration of cosmology's relationship with religion, *Astrology and Cosmology*

in the World's Religions examines the importance of relating to 'the sky' in different regions in the world, and in both ancient and modern cultures. The book is 'the first to take a global perspective on the relationship between religion and cosmology. It is also the first to consider the uses of astrology across cultures and time periods as a means of enacting cosmic principles in everyday existence' (10). Eloquent and accessible, Campion uses 'mythic narratives' (1), origin myths, sacred calendars, magic, ritual, and the 'ways in which human beings locate themselves in space and time' along with sacred texts, magic, ritual, and theory (2) as mediums through which to address the historical and contemporary significances of cultural astrology in the world's religions.

Astrology and Cosmology in the World's Religions provides a useful, well structured and comprehensive guide to understanding the role of astrology in ancient and modern worlds. Each chapter addresses a different region and the religion. Beginning with two chapters that detail discussions of the themes that underpin cosmology, religion, and astrology, the book highlights the cultural significances of the stars in managing time, questions of destiny, understanding the self and the roles of human beings, and predicting the future. These first two foundational chapters set the stage for the other chapters which address the specific cosmological structures (and stellar focuses) of Australia, Oceania, North America, South and Central America, Sub-Saharan Africa, Egypt, China, India, Babylon, Judaism, Classical Greece, Christianity, and Islam.

The book's concluding chapter, which discusses Theosophical, New Age, and Pagan cosmologies, demonstrates how astrology manifests contemporarily and in Western, modern culture. In unique, yet often complementary modalities, these regions and their religions all have integrated cosmological views of earth and sky 'as a mirror'. Paying appropriate attention to their differences, Campion does not, however, assert that these cultures and regions are the same. Instead, the chapters 'trace the various understandings, practices, and experiences related to beliefs about the heavens in religions' because 'beliefs about the cosmos go to the heart of most religious traditions; by more fully understanding how the adherents of various religious traditions related the heavenly bodies of their lives and events on earth, we gain a deeper understanding of each tradition's core worldview' (10).

Particular attention should be drawn to Chapter 6, 'South and Central America: Salvation and Practice'. Here, Campion gives an account of the roles of the star in the 'best-known cultures of Mesoamerica' (54), the Maya, Aztecs, and in the Andes, the Inca. Campion says that South and Central American indigenous societies were harmonized with the stars through the use of codification and intricate mathematical precision. According to Campion, the Maya, Aztecs, and Inca shared the practice of managing time (nature, politics, power) through the use of rituals which were timed in accordance with certain astronomical patterns (65). These particular cultures are significant as they demonstrate what Campion calls these 'prime examples of "cosmic states" in which political and astronomical matters were intended to match each other in meticulous detail' (54). Here, earth, sky and divinity work in collaborative interrelationships which in turn produced foundational cosmological structures to these cultures.

Astrology and Cosmology in the World's Religions makes a vital contribution to the study of comparative religions, and contemporary and ancient human cultures. It will be of particular interest to astronomers, astrologers, anthropologists, and those who study religions in that it brings astrology, cosmology, and religion (past and present) into rich, fruitful dialogue.

The second book, *Astrology and Popular religion in the Modern West: Prophecy, Cosmology and the New Age Movement*, addresses the diversity found in astrology's uses and functions in Western cultures. In essence, the book does two things: First, based on original fieldwork which conveys the general public's attitudes toward astrology, Campion presents a detailed examination of the nature of astrology coupled with a rich discussion about whether or not it can be considered 'a New Age discipline or new religious movement'. He addresses these issues by examining astrology's contemporary and historical relationships with Christianity and millenarianism. Second, Campion engages questions of 'belief' in astrology. The questions that Campion raises about the nature of belief are both insightful and topical in the study of religions in that they can be applied to religion more broadly. Campion argues that: 'the notion of belief as a peculiar cognitive state is a nonsense, an artefact arising out of post-Enlightenment sceptical rhetoric, the assault on religion as uniquely false, and the pseudo-historical narrative of evolutionary cultural theory' (203).

Drawing on leading scholarship, such as Bowman, Primiano, York, Hill, Sutcliffe, and Hanegraaff, Campion critically tests diverse understandings of astrology against notions of religion and belief. He discusses astrology's location within the New Age, new religious movements, and as a component of modernity and post modernity. Addressing sociological theories of religion which maintain dichotomies such as 'official', or 'pure' forms of religion in contrast to 'popular', or 'folk' practices, Campion builds on Primiano's idea that 'Vernacular religion is, by definition, religion as it is lived: as human beings encounter, understand, interpret, and practice it' (Primiano, 1995: 44), arguing that astrology cannot be considered in 'pure terms'. He suggests that this would defy respectful engagement with the diversity found in the lived experiences and practices of human beings.

In terms of belief, Campion writes '...if astrology is a religion then it is a matter of practice rather than belief, of orthopraxy rather than orthodoxy: astrologers do not 'believe' in astrology, they 'do' it' (207). As an 'activist discipline' that promotes self responsibility and understanding, astrology sits nicely within New Age ideas, making it not only 'the lingua franca of the New Age but a key organising philosophy of it' (211). Campion argues that while astrology has been adopted by New Age thinking, research supports the assertion that it is not only a New Age phenomenon. He concludes with a discussion of astrology's role within modernity, arguing that being 'modern' does not necessarily negate the roles of astrology, but that astrology adds to the tapestry of religious change, i.e. 'Astrology exists within a view of modernity in which religion and spirituality are not dying out, as traditional secularisation theory claims, but diversifying' (216).

Based on Fetinger's notion of dissonance, Campion has 'removed the need to look for consistency of thought or practice amongst astrologers any more than within any other discipline' (204). Astrology, like all religions, cannot therefore be 'pinned down' to any one of the before mentioned frameworks. Making a unique advance in the understanding of vernacular traditions, Campion writes that astrology is, 'like any other discipline, marked as much by its diversity as by its uniformity' (203). Thus bringing astrology into conversation with religion, belief, the New Age, and modernity, this book is particularly valuable for anyone exploring phenomena such as prophecy, millenarianism, cosmologies, and new religious movements. It is therefore an excellent guide to

those seeking to understand how contemporary astrology works within Western popular culture.

Amy Whitehead

Su-Un and His World of Symbols. The Founder of Korea's First Indigenous Religion

Paul Beirne (2009)
Farnham: Ashgate.

In this book, Paul Beirne covers the Korean Cheondogyo religion (Eastern Learning, or the religion of the heavenly way) and critically assesses the use of two symbols which are identified as crucial from the very outset of the faith – *Yeongbu*, 'a supernatural talisman with inherent powers of protection from evil' and *Jumum*, 'a magic formula; an incantation; a conjuration' (74).

It is evident through the highly specific area being explored that the intended audiences are those with some background knowledge of the subject. This book provides a supplement to this prior knowledge because it analyses Cheondogyo in depth, specifically the symbols, which have not been previously explored in as thorough detail.

Beirne suggests that *Yeongbu* and *Jumum* are both axiomatic to the religion, describing them as 'the two symbols which formed the foundation of Su-Un's religion' (p. xiii). In addition, the author emphasises the importance of them in shaping the personal life of the founder. This is a particularly intriguing part of the book as Beirne composes a biographical account of Su-Un's life, documenting his shift from a spiritually unfulfilled 'underdog', changing into a great teacher, healer, and liberator of Korean people. The author recounts Su-Un's personal transformation after his first experience of *Yeongbu*: 'my body was strengthened and I glowed with energy' (39).

Su-Un's personal development can be seen as synonymous with the struggle Korea has had throughout history in overcoming foreign influence and oppression. This could be a motive behind why the author chooses to describe Cheondogyo as an 'indigenous' religion, a highly debatable term to give to a religion which

was formed in the mid 1800s. One could argue that the nature of the religion's inception and development as described in the book lends itself closer to the classification of a New Religious Movement (NRM). Regardless, classifying the Cheondogyo movement as 'indigenous' significantly demonstrates the author's intention behind this book - to display the movement as being distinctly and proudly Korean: 'from this point on there would be a new creation, a new nation and a new Way for his people to follow, one that would be distinctly Korean in nature, composition and location' (46).

Beirne makes a particularly captivating point by suggesting that the movement also goes purposefully against class-suppressing foreign powers: 'Su-Un realized that, if Korea was to be saved from invasion by colonial powers and if the people were to be revitalized (the two being inextricably linked), a religious rather than a political solution had to be sought' (26).

Interestingly, the author points out that the movement is in direct antithesis to Catholicism and Neo-Confucianism. For example, Su-Un names his religious movement *Eastern Learning*. This is obviously titled to be in deliberate opposition to *Western Learning*, the popular name for Catholicism at the time. It could be argued that Beirne, through highlighting Cheondogyo as both indigenous and against foreign powers, wishes to demonstrate both a political and spiritual rebellion as well as a patriotic, perhaps even nativist aspect to the movement.

In summary, *Su-Un and his world of symbols* is a fascinating book as it provides a unique perspective into the world view of Cheondogyo – a religion which is rarely analysed so thoroughly in the English language. What Beirne fails to do however is acknowledge the difficulties of classifying Cheondogyo as 'indigenous'. The term at the very least does capture the author's intention - to cement Cheondogyo as an expression of patriotism. Alongside the recognition and application of the two symbols, it presents it to be powerful, healing and liberating, and exclusively for the Korean people.

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"Devil Bustin' Satellites: How Media Liberalization in Africa Generates Religious Intolerance and Conflict." In: *Displacing the State: Religion and Conflict in Neoliberal Africa*. Eds. James H. Smith and Rosalind I. J. Hackett. University of Notre Dame Press, 153-208, 2012.

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'The Symbolic Walls of Deoband' *International Journal of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 23:3 July 2012 pp.315-329.

'An exploration of the viability of partnership between dar al-alum and Higher Education institutions in North West England', Islamic Studies Network Funded Projects Final Report 2012 http://www.islamicstudiesnetwork.ac.uk/islamicstudiesnetwork/projects/display?id=/projects/alldetails/islamicstudies/Jan_2011_Ron_Geaves

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Book reviews	500-800 words
Religious Studies in location	800 words
Changes and Movements	500-1000 words
Research in progress	800-1,000 words
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