

A photograph of a baptismal font, a large, ornate stone structure used for religious ceremonies. The font is octagonal and features intricate carvings, including a central panel with a floral or vine motif. A white plastic container, possibly for water, is mounted on top of the font. In the foreground, a metal bucket sits on a white surface. The background shows a church interior with people and a wooden floor.

BAAS bulletin

British Association for the Study of Religions

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WWW.BASR.AC.UK

ABOUT THE BASR

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

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editorial

I do not think that I realised, eight years ago when I was offered the role of Bulletin co-editor, quite what a distinguished lineage I was stepping into. The IAHR Bulletin (Britain) began in 1972, three years before the association was renamed the BAHR. Michael Pye was the first editor, followed by Ursula King (1977), Alistair Mason (1981), Kim Knott (1984), Julia Leslie (1992), Ian Harris (1994), Jim Cox (1997), Steve Sutcliffe (2000), George Chryssides (2002), Dominic Corrywright with Helen Waterhouse and then David Wilson (2006), and eventually me in 2013.

But this realisation also made me realise how young our field is... Events such as the formation of the IAHR or the first Religious Studies departments are only a couple of generations ago. And the world has changed massively since then, and the field with it. Each of us has taken the Bulletin a little further forward, before handing it on. And so we crawl steadily forward.

Taking on the Bulletin honed my editorial skills, and got me used to emailing senior scholars to ask them for things. It helped me gain an idea of

how learned organisations worked, when as a working class kid with no career ambitions I had never been in so much as a five-a-side team. Most importantly, it helped me feel I had a right to be in the committee, although I was inexperienced and unemployed with an incurable case of imposter syndrome. Maybe too it let people know I could be trusted - perhaps even with things which impact the field in more serious ways. Now that I pass it on, hopefully Theo will gain these things too - although I trust her already.

But my final word will be request for you all. Volunteer. For committee roles (whether BASR, the RSP, TRS UK, SOCREL, AHA, BA, anything), for REF panels, for advisory boards, for journalists, for anything and everything where RS has something to offer. And if you are not able to do that, then support INFORM. Our response to the BA Report made it clear that while we still bring in students, our voices are being drowned out at the institutional level. It will take time to change this. But we crawl steadily forward.

David G. Robertson, 11/05/2021



www.facebook.com/groups/490163257661189/



twitter.com/TheBASR

news, etc

UPDATE ON THREATS TO CHESTER

Colleagues at Chester wish to express their heartfelt thanks to the British Association for the Study of Religion for their support and solidarity at this difficult time. At this point the situation is ongoing, but they report that support from the BASR and other subject associations is making an appreciable impact on the process at Chester. It also powerfully makes the case for the field in a wider context of threat.

2021 BASR TEACHING AND LEARNING FELLOWSHIP

Each year, the BASR Exec awards a Teaching and Learning Fellowship to a colleague in recognition of their contribution to the student learning experience in the study of religions. This Fellowship includes an award of £300 plus a funded place at the BASR Annual Conference. The expectation of the person receiving this Fellowship is to write a short piece reflecting on current issues/ experiences of teaching Religious Studies in HE for the BASR Bulletin and help the Teaching and Learning Rep on the BASR Exec, Steffi Sinclair, organise the teaching and learning panel for the 2022 BASR conference. However, there is a lot of flexibility in how this could be approached.

If you would like to be considered for the 2021 BASR Teaching and Learning Fellowship or would like to nominate a colleague (or have any questions about this Fellowship), please get in touch with Steffi at stefanie.sinclair@open.ac.uk. Your application will need to be supported by a statement that outlines the contribution the applicant/ nominee has made to the student learning experience in the study of religions in HE with reference to any of the following four themes:

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

This statement can be provided either by the applicant themselves or by a colleague supporting the application. The deadline for nominations/ applications is the 1st of June 2021. We welcome applications from/ nominations for colleagues at all stages of their careers. Application Form at <https://basrblog.files.wordpress.com/2021/05/2021-basr-teaching-fellowship-application-form.docx>

UPDATE ON RESPONSE TO THE BRITISH ACADEMY

The BASR's Response to the British Academy's *Report on Theology and Religious Studies Provision in UK Higher Education* was published on February 22nd of this year. The data-driven response set out to challenge some of the damaging misrepresentations of the vitality of Religious Studies in the UK, and you can read it in full here. The response from RS scholars has been highly positive, however the report did not receive the same press attention as the BA's report did. In two other respects, though the Response has been successful. Firstly, it has already been used by members in departments facing closure and/or reorganisation (sometimes on the basis of the BA Report specifically) to present a strong counter-narrative and show how RS can be a good investment, attracting sustainable student numbers while contributing strongly to interdisciplinary research and teaching. Secondly, it has been received well by the British Academy themselves. The Policy Group, who actually carried out the Report, have acknowledged the criticisms of their approach and its damaging impact, while the TRS Unit have acknowledged other areas of weakness in how TRS is represented, and representatives of the TRS Unit and the BASR committee will be meeting during the summer to discuss ways in which we could work together for a more proportional representation in future. At this year's AGM, we will be suggesting some practical steps which members will be encouraged to consider, to build on this progress towards regaining visibility for Religious Studies.

Address from the outgoing President

My third year as President of the British Association for Study of Religions will come to an end in September when I hand over to the incoming President at the AGM. My term as President has been very different than expected, mainly due to the pandemic that impacted on all our lives in such a drastic and unexpected way. Within a few days, we had to move our teaching online and we quickly became used to online meetings and even conferences.

But the pandemic was not the only reason why my term as the president of the BASR was not as planned. My term also saw the publication of a devastating report about Theology and Religious Studies by the British Academy, which led to a further decline in recruitment. While we are not the only discipline in Humanities currently under threat, the report put us under a dangerous spotlight. The (unintentional) consequences will be further job losses in the study of religions across British universities, and a decline in research funding opportunities. While the British Academy never intended these outcomes, we have to live with them now nevertheless.

Just a few years ago, the future looked very different. In 2014, we celebrated the success of study of religions scholars in the REF. As grant initiatives such as the AHRC/ESRC Religion and Society Research Programme demonstrated, scholars across the disciplines showed that the study of religions was a way to understanding societies, past and present. The BASR pushed the boundaries even further, expanding our research into non-religion, atheism and the secular.

At the same time, the university landscape changed, which then impacted on our membership. While a growing number of universities are closing the single honours programme in the study of religions, the subject is still taught in various programmes across the universities. Consequently, our members can be found in departments of humanities, cultural studies, human geography, media, philosophy and more. I celebrate this diversity among our membership as it shows the significance of the study of religions. But it also leaves us open to threats and further job losses as we no longer have a strong voice in many universities.

Nevertheless, we can be proud that the BASR reflects the diversity of not just the discipline, but also of our society. I have been honoured to be the second President from a Welsh university and the fifth female President of the association that has been my academic home since my move from Germany to the UK in 2004. When I took over the presidency, the BASR made a stand against the insular thinking that had led to the withdrawal from Europe, and raised awareness for the international connections that puts the BASR at the heart of the International Association for the History of Religions and the European Association for the Study of Religions.

At the end of my third year, we look to the future with mixed feelings. But while the uncertainty of the future of the discipline in many universities is concerning, we can also celebrate the ongoing significance of the study of religions. The study of religions is not dying but is very much alive. And the BASR will continue to offer an academic home for everyone researching any form of religion, spirituality, atheism, secularity and more.



Bettina Schmidt, May 2021

BASR Annual Conference, 6-7 September 2021 School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh

“From Religious Studies to the Study of Religion/s: Disciplinary Futures for the 21st century”

Revised call for papers: New deadline 31 May 2021.

We warmly invite contributions to the BASR annual conference 2021. We have decided to move the conference entirely online, to be held on Monday and Tuesday 6-7 September 2021. An online platform offers the best opportunity to maximise participation and extend international access in the current health crisis. The BASR 2021 conference falls in the 175th anniversary year of the foundation of New College, home of the School of Divinity, and marks the 50th anniversary of the teaching of Religious Studies at Edinburgh. The conference is also designated an IAHR Special Conference and we look forward to welcoming our international colleagues.

We aim to discuss disciplinary and interdisciplinary pasts and futures in Religious Studies/ Study of Religion/s, with a particular focus on the future shape of the field in the 21st Century. After a period of sharp critique of many of the field's basic categories and axioms, it feels timely now to reflect on what the field has positively achieved, the challenges it has faced (and overcome), and the direction(s) it should now pursue. Our scope is the post-1960s period up to and including the present moment, during which Religious Studies emerged, consolidated and diversified as a recognised disciplinary field or 'brand'. Local and regional histories of the field during this period are welcome, particularly where they identify problems or strengths for the future, or can illuminate regional or international developments. We are particularly interested in exploring the grounds for positive and constructive disciplinary futures based on concrete methods and models for research and teaching.

We are delighted to confirm the titles of our two keynote papers:

‘The Collective Ownership of Knowledge: Implications for the Study of Religion/s in Local Contexts’
James Cox, Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies, University of Edinburgh

‘Studying Religions critically in Universities and Schools: bridging the gap?’
Wanda Alberts, Professor in the Study of Religion, Leibniz University Hannover.

The programme will also feature an international panel on the conference theme and a parallel online video and art installation, “RITES”.

Panel proposals should include a 200 word abstract for the panel as a whole and should identify a panel chair as point of contact. We encourage panel organisers to propose creative ways of customising the structure of their panel to facilitate stimulating and meaningful online engagement.

Individual abstracts for papers should be no longer than 200 words and carry a title plus author's name and institutional affiliation. Papers should last no more than 20 minutes including time for Q&A.

We will edit a peer-reviewed volume of selected papers under the conference title.

Registration for the conference will open in late Spring 2021. The cost of registration, for both presenters and non-presenters, will be as follows:

- Members of the BASR: Free
- Non-members (waged): £30
- Non-members (unwaged): £15

Please submit proposals via email attachment by 5pm on 31 May 2021, to Dr Claire Wanless (claire.wanless@ed.ac.uk). Outcomes will be communicated in early June.

features

Supporting Students to Engage with Research Ethics

Natasha Jones and Mel Prideaux

At the 2020 BASR Conference we presented our 'work in progress' developing a student research ethics resource as part of the Community Religions Project (<https://crp.leeds.ac.uk/>) and in response to the BASR Ethics Guidelines (<https://basr.ac.uk/2019/09/18/basr-ethics-guidelines/>). Although the project has been repeatedly delayed by COVID, we thought it would be helpful to say a little for the BASR Bulletin about the project and why we think it is valuable for undergraduate students to engage with research ethics, and the Guidelines specifically. We are reporting now on the process before Natasha finishes her studies, so that Natasha's experience and reflections can be shared with colleagues while they are still fresh.

Mel is Director of the Community Religions Project at the University of Leeds, which focusses on student research with and in local communities. The website is a space for student work to be shared with the local community and beyond and has been developed over many years with the assistance of undergraduate student interns. The development of this new feature of the website, a resource to support students to think about and engage with the ethical implications of their fieldwork, was prompted by the re-

lease of the BASR Ethics Guidelines. The Guidelines provide an opportunity for TRS students to discuss and explore the ethical issues of conducting fieldwork, beyond and alongside ethical approval processes. They are also an opportunity for students to understand ethics approval processes as part of a broader academic conversation beyond the sometimes 'tick box' university process experience.

Natasha is a finalist student at the University of Leeds studying Theology and Religious Studies. During summer 2020 Natasha was employed by the Community Religions Project to support the development of this new online resource introducing research ethics for TRS students, using the BASR Ethics Guidelines as a model. For Natasha:

"Before this project, I had only really engaged with research ethics through a fieldwork module in my first year. It was challenging at times, in part due to the pandemic, but involving myself in the nuances of research ethics was a very valuable experience. The opportunity to use that knowledge to create a resource that could be useful for undergraduates, like myself, is something I have found incredibly rewarding."

In this reflection she provides an account of some of the reasons she finds the engagement with research ethics, and the BASR Ethics Guidelines to be important:

“For undergraduates, engaging with research ethics is important because of the nature of undergraduate research itself. In my first year of University, one of my modules asked us to visit a place of worship for the day. People were kind enough to take the time out to talk to me, an outsider to the tradition and a student new to research, so it was only fair to be especially respectful and kind in return. From even very basic considerations like dressing appropriately, and making it clear that I was there as a student researcher, my fieldwork experience highlighted to me how important ethical considerations are. Whether in a first-year module like in my own experience or in a final year dissertation, our projects are almost entirely for our own educational benefit and development. This means participants are doing students like myself a favour by participating. Because of this, we are obliged to conduct ourselves ethically as we cannot necessarily offer participants any more beyond that.”

The BASR ethics guidelines are an especially useful resource for undergraduates, who are just getting to know the research process. Students can, especially in rushed and stressful times, neglect proper ethical conduct as a part of research. It can become a hoop to jump through, rather than the foundations of a valid and proper research project. Whilst some parts of the guidelines are not specifically relevant to undergraduates, such as covert research or publishing, the resource provides ethical guidance to students without being prescriptive. It highlights key areas for us to consider, such as informed consent or how to manage digital research. As students of religion, tensions which can sometimes become visible around religion means ethical considerations can be particularly crucial for us. The guidelines highlight these features of proper ethical conduct, without detailing the ethical issues of every potential scenario. Therefore, the guidelines not only guide, but empower students as researchers, asking you to reflect on your own project and make proper ethical considerations when carrying it out.

We look forward to sharing the completed resource with BASR members hopefully by the end of this summer!

GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

News Items	Up to 150 words
Conference Reports	500-1500 words
Conference Announcements	Not more than a single page
Book Reviews	700-1000 words
Features	Around 1000 words
Members' Recent Publications	Maximum 5 items

PLEASE SEND MATERIAL FOR INCLUSION TO tw36@soas.ac.uk
DEADLINE FOR THE NOVEMBER 2021 ISSUE IS **31 OCTOBER 2021**

conferences

Jehovah's Witnesses in Online Seminars

George D. Chryssides

The moving of conferences from traditional to online versions has probably enabled most of us to attend more conferences than ever before. Not only have they the advantage that we do not need to leave home, but they can attract an international group of participants simultaneously, who would probably be unable to travel from halfway across the globe. Over the past six months or so, I have been able to participate in three such gatherings, which were focused mainly on Jehovah's Witnesses. The first of these was scheduled to take place in September 2020 at Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania, on the theme of "Jehovah's Witnesses and Their Opponents: Russia, the West, and Beyond". The situation in Russia has aroused particular concern: since 2017, Jehovah's Witnesses have been outlawed as an "extremist" organisation, with the result that the properties have either been confiscated or destroyed, and they have been prohibited from congregating and evangelising. While most of the presentations were about Russia, others focused on allegations of sexual abuse, the anticult movement, and the

history of opposition to the Watch Tower organisation. The proceedings of the conference can be found in the online *Journal of CESNUR* (Center for Studies in New Religions), volumes 4(6) and 5(1). (Follow links on www.cesnur.org.)

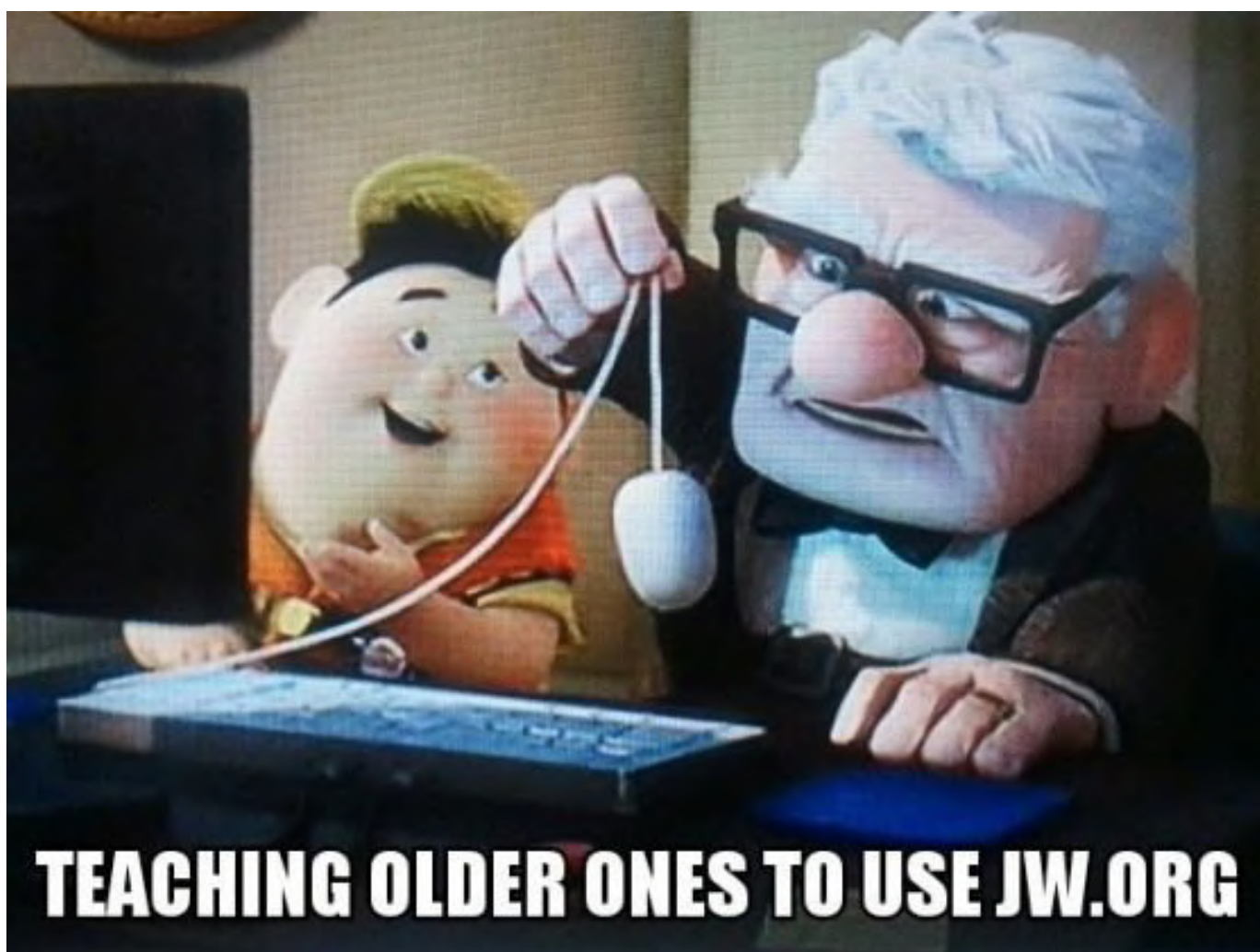
The second conference was hosted by the Sigmund Neumann Institute for the Research on Freedom, Liberty and Democracy, in conjunction with the University of Wroclaw, Poland. Although roughly half the presentations focused on Jehovah's Witnesses, the conference theme was religious freedom more widely. Once again, the theme of sexual abuse allegations was addressed, following rather poorly researched, but nonetheless influential governmental reports in the Netherlands and Belgium. The presentations will be written up in the journal *Religion - Staat - Gesellschaft*, published by the Neumann Institute.

Further controversy involving Jehovah's Witnesses occurred in Ghent, when in February 2021 the criminal court at Ghent ruled against

Jehovah's Witnesses in a case brought by a number of ex-members who claimed that they had experienced distress and hatred, being victims of the practice of shunning. (It is the practice of Jehovah's Witnesses to cease all social exchange with those who dissociate from their congregation, or disfellowshipped.) A webinar on the ruling was convened by CESNUR in collaboration with Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF), in which law specialists, sociologists, and scholars of religion discuss the issues. Willy Fautré, co-founder and director of HRWF, gave a presentation, and has written a short article in the online journal *Bitter Winter*, outlining the background to the case. This can be accessed at <https://bitterwinter.org/jehovahs-witnesses-disfellowshipping-practices-on-trial-in-belgium> The

webinar was recorded, and can be viewed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=sMoMpgLXLiU

One useful spin-off from these online events came when the organisers of the Vilnius conference wanted to ensure that my presentation looked as professional as possible, and they sent me on loan some professional equipment to record it. Having been impressed by it, I later priced it up on Amazon, and was surprised at how inexpensive it was. A small tripod and LED light make a considerable difference to one's appearance on screen and, since we are likely to do more online meetings and conferences even after the Covid epidemic is over, we would all do well to ensure that we present our material to best advantage.



Jehovah's Witnesses enjoy memes too! (Found on Instagram.)

THE ZOOM TAKEOVER - HOW THE INTERNET HAS ENABLED THE CONTINUATION OF INFORM SEMINAR EVENTS.

For many people worldwide, the past fourteen months have permanently altered the way society functions in their everyday lives. It is undeniable that one of the main transitions has been the shift onto internet-based platforms such as Zoom and Facetime. In July 2020, Inform (Information Network Focus on Religious Movements), with the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at King's College London, hosted their first online seminar event. With more than thirty years of seminar history behind them, this event set a precedence for the new era of their online communications. What was once a day-long experience filled with a diverse group of international speakers and luncheons has now transitioned into a condensed two-hour Zoom call from the comfort of the audience's homes. Since then, a further two hugely successful online events have taken place.

Inform seminars aim to unite individuals with a shared interest in the study of minority religions and the plethora of themes surrounding them. Traditionally, seminar audiences are made up of academics and other interest groups, including former and current members of religious movements, students, journalists, civil servants, lawyers and more. Since the outbreak of Covid-19, the online seminar themes have included discussions regarding Sexual Abuse in Religious Contexts and Religious Transmission. Most recently, a book launch event celebrated the newest title

in the Routledge Inform Series on Minority Religions and Spiritual Movements: *Reactions to the Law by Minority Religions*, edited by Eileen Barker and James T. Richardson.

Undoubtedly, the shift online has changed the structure of these events quite dramatically, but they have still managed to maintain their general foundations. All of the three online events have been opened by Inform's Honorary Director, Dr. Suzanne Newcombe, and have proceeded with talks from multiple speakers, including Marat Shterin and Jasjit Singh. For the majority, the ease of this online transition has created new opportunities and flexibility, however for others, the raising of a 'virtual hand' has not quite had the same effect.

The social elements of meeting and discussing topics with other like-minded individuals have now been replaced with virtual buttons that control your ability to speak and be seen. The loss of this in-person communication has affected many individual's abilities to create working relationships and share ideas.

Although the phrase "lets jump on a zoom" has become something of a second nature to most people, the transition onto an online platform was, and still is, challenging. While the worry of organising seating plans and venues has subsided, the shift has now placed a new emphasis on ensuring you have a strong WIFI connection and fully charged computer. Some of the main difficulties that have arisen from the online transition have been the impersonal aspects of online events. The social elements of meeting

and discussing topics with other like-minded individuals have now been replaced with virtual buttons that control your ability to speak and be seen. The loss of this in-person communication has affected many individual's abilities to create working relationships and share ideas.

Even though the online transition has raised issues, the success of these events has demonstrated the power of human adaptation. Although large-scale Zoom events were still mostly untested and unknown in summer 2020, the 'Sexual Abuse framed by Faith or Belief' seminar was a huge triumph that saw audience members virtually 'reunite' for the first time in months. Consequently, these online events have allowed Inform to expand their audience to an international level with relative ease. The effortless ability to connect with people in different time zones has become the future of many events and meetings. The benefits of the shift online can also be seen through a variety of previous logistical issues. For example, in some situations, online events can potentially make attendance easier for individuals who suffer from disabilities. Circumstances, like access restrictions, may have previously posed challenges for individuals to attend in person. Therefore, transferring online can allow for more inclusive and successful events.

The feedback from the second online seminar, 'Becoming religious - how and why beliefs and practices are transmitted' - held on the 14th of January 2021, highlighted the positivity of the shift. One audience member stating "This was my first time at an Inform meeting. I found all the speakers stimulating and it will take me some time to digest all that has been said. I hope to join subsequent meetings". In addition, Professor Kim Knott, a member of Inform's Management Committee, also summarised the event as "a rich portfolio of ideas, concepts, and thoughts", and these concepts "are what Inform is all about".

Furthermore, the shift to an online platform has allowed more time to be invested into social media coverage and growth. Since October 2020, Inform's Instagram following has grown by a staggering 59%, and the Twitter account averaging between 7,000 - 13,000 impressions every month. In addition to this, all online events have been recorded and published on YouTube (account name 'Inform'). Recording these events has allowed those who were unable to attend, or those who would like to revisit the seminar, to watch with ease. These progressions have benefitted the attendance at online events and demonstrated the powerful influence of social media in the current climate.

What Emily Cashen describes perfectly as "the Zoom boom" has created a greater appreciation for the power of the internet and the need for human connections in both social and work scenarios. The adaptation of Inform's events onto Zoom has allowed the community to stay connected and current. The effects of Covid-19 will be apparent for many years to come, but this experience will hopefully provide a greater appreciation for the power of the internet and the importance of in-person communications.

Inform's next online event will be held on Thursday 24th June, 5.30-7.30pm BST. The title of the seminar is 'Cult' Rhetoric in the 21st Century and it is organised in association with Aled Thomas (University of Wolverhampton) and Edward Graham-Hyde (University of Central Lancashire).

Ruby Forrester
INFORM/KCL

Image credits: Cover - "Hand sanitizer and font, church of St Michael's Without, Bath", by Marion Bowman. Page 4 - David G. Robertson. Page 9 - Public Domain.

reviews

RICHARD K. PAYNE. LANGUAGE IN THE BUDDHIST TANTRA OF JAPAN: INDIC ROOTS OF MANTRA. LONDON: BLOOMSBURY, 2018.

Richard K. Payne attempts to re-embed the practice and theory of some forms of esoteric Japanese Buddhism in the wider horizon of the spiritual, religious, linguistic and ritualistic worldview that can broadly be described as Indic, covering a multitude of traditions and texts synchronically and diachronically from Vedic times onwards.

He attempts to argue prevailing tendencies in Euro-American scholarship that would see Buddhism as a religion that is inclined towards ‘mystical silence’ and quiet meditative practice (p.65). Citing the Jesuit scholar Michel de Certeau (p.40), Payne discusses the conflict in Western mysticism in which language is at times seen as the barrier to absolute truth, as it can never be expressed in linguistic terms. However, language and revelation are also often paradoxically means to access that truth. In his study, Payne attempts to show how practices of Tantric Buddhism in Japan have Indic roots emphasising language that have hitherto been neglected in areas of Buddhist studies.

The book is neatly divided into thematically consistent chapters, starting with a more general discussion of what Payne understands by ‘extraordinary language use’, moving on to a more general discussion of the philosophy of language and how ‘extraordinary’ language, such as that used in Indic and Japanese Buddhist rituals, can fit into those categories. He focuses more particularly on the concepts and practices sur-

rounding mantra and dhāraṇī in Sanskrit, and daimoku, and nenbutsu in Japanese. Daimoku refers to the recitation of the title of the Lotus Sūtra among the Nichiren sects in the form of namu myōhō renge kyō, Nenbutsu refers to the citation of the name of Amitābha Buddha in the form namu Amida butsu, a practice found in the Pure Land traditions. These are described by Payne as examples of ‘extraordinary language’ as they are not propositional and do not convey information.

He then presents a cursory discussion of the Indic understandings, starting with the Vedas and moving on to Tantric traditions. The efficaciousness of mantras, he says, lies in their relation to the Vedas and how the Vedas are related to brahman—the absolute reality, which is at the same time the “word-principle” or “sound-principle” (śabdātattva).

An important tradition to understand Indic conceptions of language and the power thereof is also Mīmāṃsā, which is a Indic reflection on the meaning of ritual in texts and arrived at the conclusion that speech, and in particular Vedic speech, is constitutive of reality and a correct knowledge thereof allows for rituals to be performed efficiently. Payne draws from the pioneering works of Frits Staal (p.30-31) who discussed the ‘meaninglessness of mantras’, which Payne distances himself from, saying that language that is not communicative can still be meaningful as part of a wider ritual action.

The proper use of mantra “removes all impurities, purifies all knowledge and leads to release.”, influential Sanskrit grammarian Bhartṛhari also

noted in his Vyākhyapadiya, as mentioned by Payne. Mediaeval Śaiva Siddhānta also knows of the identity between a mantra and a deity, and in the properly non-dualist Śaiva traditions, such as the cult around the goddess Kubjikā, and broadly the Spanda, Krama and Kaula traditions, reality is seen as woven out of the Sanskrit syllabary and mantras are used for ritual transformation.

Payne also usefully discusses Buddhist conceptions of language as encountered in Abhidharma literature, paritta protective recitations, and later works, such as the Bodhisattvabhūmi and the Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa, that are commonly associated with 'Mahāyāna' Buddhism, which show that Buddhism is not merely a mystical doctrine of silence. His analysis of 'extraordinary language' is intriguing, and it is difficult not to notice that he only mentions Ludwig Wittgenstein's conventionalist understanding of language once, in which "meaning is use". The use of these mantras is perhaps not as 'extraordinary' as one might think if used against a coherent conventionalist understanding of language. However, he manages to differentiate it against 'ritual language', as not every use of language in ritual is extraordinary, or the notion of 'spells', which he finds too narrow and "semiotically paired in opposition with religion" (p.9) in Western scholarship.

To complete the picture of potential influences on Japanese Buddhism, and to more neatly distinguish between Indic and East Asian conceptions of language, Payne then discusses Daoism and Confucianism and their approach to language, such as the Daoist tendency to treat language with a degree of skepticism, and the Confucian emphasis on the usage of the correct terms as a means of social order and cohesion, which would somewhat differentiate them from

Building on those previous discussions, Payne discusses the relationship between the emptiness (Śūnyatā in Sanskrit, p.77-90) of all phenomena – a hallmark in many strands of Buddhism – and cosmogenesis as it can be found in Japanese tantric Buddhist traditions. He also discusses Buddhist epistemology, especially with regards to verbal testimony, in the works of such seminal Indic Buddhist thinkers as Dignāga, Dharmakīrti and Nāgārjuna.

Moving on from this, the book discusses more specifically the Clear Light Mantra and its role in Medieval Japanese Buddhist ritual where the practitioner undergoes transformation through the correct use of mantric verbalisations that is in line with prior Indic traditions. Then the oral-aural authority of the speech of the Buddha is discussed which is reminiscent of some scholarly discussions by Peter Masefield or Paul Harrison around whether Buddhism could be seen as a religion of revelation due to the role of speech in relation to dharma or dhamma (Pali).

This is then followed by a discussion of dhāraṇī in the Lotus Sūtra, highlighting the Indic background of the power of words, which are here primarily of a protective or apotropaic use, rather than a soteriological one. Lastly a discussion of practice called Ajikan takes place, in which the syllable A is visualised as a means of attaining knowledge and liberation. Looking more specifically at two practices of Ajikan, Payne, inspired by Staal, puts forward two corresponding syntactic models of the ritual structure, which helps put them into relation to other rituals, Buddhist or not (p.143-148).

Payne largely succeeds in showing the continuity between Indic and Japanese forms of practice, with a particular focus on how important language and ritual are to these traditions. The study therefore helps the reader understand the importance of cross-cultural modes of analysis that help enlighten various traditions through their interaction. Whilst the discussion of Indic sources is cursory, it highlights those tendencies that could indeed be found in Japanese Buddhist traditions, such as the efficaciousness of ritual invocations, the general conceptions of language, and the relation between language and reality. He is also successful in focusing on ritual and language, removing these Japanese traditions from the neo-Romantic and Protestantising tendencies in some Western or Euro-American scholarship that would neglect the role of ritualism, 'magic' and language in religious practice in Shingon, Pure Land, and Nichiren, as well as other Buddhist tradition. This suggests a positive view of the role of language in the process of obtaining awakening or liberation.

There would also be fruitful avenues of compar-

ative studies with regards to the role of the so-called 'barbarous words', that are, like many mantras, linguistically meaningless, but still play a powerful role in ritual magic in texts such as the Greek Magical Papyri (PGM). Here, one could perhaps move beyond the semiotic dichotomy between magic and religion. One might recall Matthew Melvin-Koushki's works on Islamic occultism, which highlights the 'lettrist' traditions in Islam in science, religion and magic. The book has extensive footnotes and a complete and helpful index that makes it easy to navigate the very compressed discussion of terms from several languages that one might not always be familiar with.

Overall, the book is a thought-provoking study that could of great interest to those interested in ritual, philosophy of language, Indian and Indic studies, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Japanese traditions. The cross-cultural approach, which reveals a strong knowledge of both Indic and Japanese Buddhism, and relates them coherently to each other, could well be the inspiration for further research projects in that area.

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EMILY SUZANNE CLARK AND BRAD STODDARD, EDS. RACE AND NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN THE USA: A DOCUMENTARY READER. BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC, 2019.

JEFFERSON F. CALICO. BEING VIKING: HEATHENISM IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICA EQUI-NOX, 2018.

Two books with quite different structures, historical spans and starting points offer perspectives on the enduring and current issue of how race and religious innovation intersect in the US.

Race and New Religious Movements in the USA, edited by Emily Suzanne Clark and Brad Stoddard, collects and introduces a range of texts spanning two centuries of American history from the early 19th to the early 21st centuries.

The introduction briefly but efficiently frames the following material, underlining that the modern conception of race is 'neither a neutral nor a historical constant' (p.3), and that such constructions were (and are) deployed to justify and reinforce existing hierarchies, in a process through which 'imagined racial categories were perceived to be real, biological facts' (p.3, emphasis in original). In the US, the building of the nation itself was based on two factors with strongly racialised aspects: economic power which relied upon the enslavement of Africans, and westwards expansionism which relied upon colonising violence against indigenous peoples (p.4). Religious developments in that country, then, have often been preoccupied with race, and the examples covered in the book thus focus primarily on relations between white Americans, Native Americans, and Black Americans.

Judaism and Jewishness appear only within that framework; whether in the claims of the Nation of Yahweh or the Commandment Keepers, where Black Americans claim to be the true Biblical Jews, or as the subjects of mistrust and hatred by the Ku Klux Klan and Aryan Nations. The Nation of Islam and the Moorish Science Temple of America both orient themselves towards the Muslim world from a specifically Black American perspective. Elsewhere, sections on Conjure, the Ghost Dance movement, and Odinism involve religious movements understood internally as arising from African American, Native American and white European traditions; others involve interpretations of Christianity with reference to race and ethnicity, from the white supremacy of the Aryan Nations to the anti-racism of the International Peace Mission Movement.

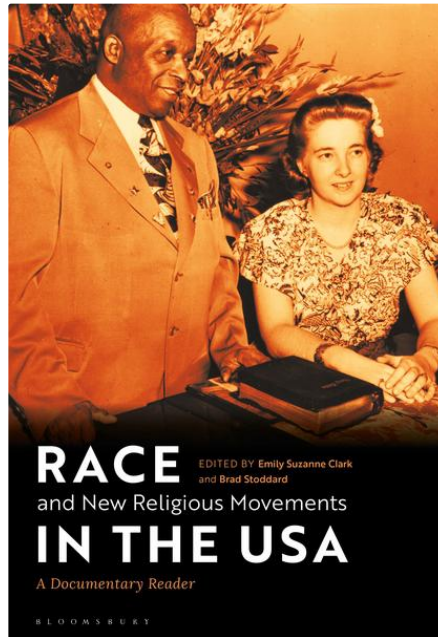
For each of the seventeen distinct religious traditions covered, an editor's introduction of two or three pages is followed by a series of documents relating to that tradition. Though ably setting out the historical context, these introductions are necessarily short, and sometimes as a result provide merely the bare bones of intriguing stories. Short lists of texts for further reading are included, as many readers I'm sure will be keen to discover fuller details behind, for example, matter-of-fact reports about the religious leaders of Mormonism ('An angry mob of

non-Mormon men dressed up as Native Americans murdered [Joseph] Smith and his brother on June 27, 1844,' p.27) or the Moorish Science Temple of America (Noble Drew Ali, 'who died under somewhat mysterious circumstances in 1929,' p.101).

New religious movements that prompted more violence are also considered. The introduction to the Ghost Dance Movement mentions not only the 1890 massacre at Wounded Knee of Lakota participants by the US Army, but also the 1973 occupation of the same town by the American Indian Movement; the documents chosen move in a few short pages from a concerned outsider's perspective in the months preceding the earlier violence, to a contemporary white ethnographer's perspective, to a restrained but devastating portrayal of the aftermath by Dr. Charles Eastman, a Santee Sioux educated at a mission school and employed by the US Government. Jim Jones' Peoples Temple movement is included too, their anti-racism in contrast to several of the groups surveyed in the volume which espoused racial separatist or even outright racist white supremacist views, yet this movement also led to horrific violence at Jonestown. This is a strength of the book, in that it presents deeply complex religious approaches to race, which sometimes extend to volatility and even to extreme violence.

The collection is at its best when presenting documents which discuss a particular religious movement from contrasting perspectives, or which deal with changing approaches to race within that community over time. The juxtaposition of three texts on Mormonism is striking: an excerpt from the Book of Mormon is a scriptural assertion for relating sinfulness and distance from God to darkness of skin in Native American-

ans; the next document, an 1860 'Sanitary Report' by a US Army surgeon, shows how non-Mormons drew on ideas about polygamy to describe Mormons as akin to a race unto themselves where 'physical degeneracy is not a remote consequence of moral depravity' (p33); the final document in this section is the declaration by which the Church in 1978 accepted a revelation that, in contrast to its prior history, men in good standing could finally be ordained 'without regard to race or color.' That example is one among many documents excerpted in the book where religious ideas about race intersect in interesting ways with gender. The combination of historical emic and etic views powerfully and succinctly articulates the complexity of how social and religious processes of racialisation function.



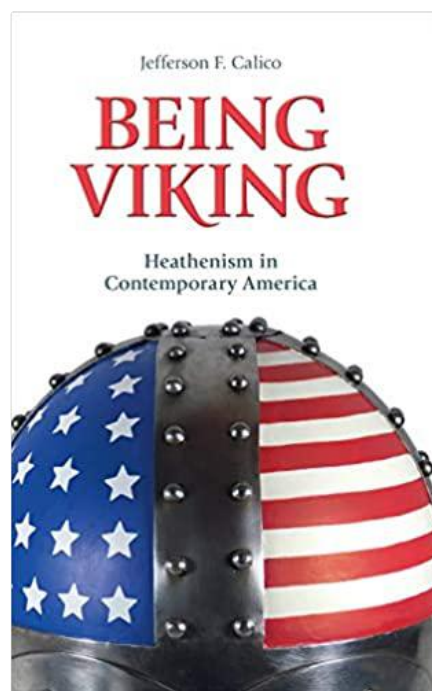
The diversity of sources is fascinating, encompassing medical reports, government committee hearings, legal judgements, testimonies, contemporary ethnography, pamphlets, sacred texts, revelations and exegeses. Perhaps beyond the reasonable scope of a collection, but intriguing nonetheless, are links and contrasts between religious groups. For example, in the Moorish Science Temple's description of Marcus Garvey as a modern analogue of John the Baptist, and in the Commandment Keepers' identification of religious significance in the line of Solomon and Sheba through Menelik down to Haile Selassie in the 20th Century, there are connections to important religious movements beyond the US such as Rastafari and Coptic Christianity. Or, connecting two religious groups both featured in the collection, David Lane is an important character in the Christian-derived Aryan Nations, and the later Christianity-rejecting Odinist texts, with the structure of this documentary reader not designed to explicate the background of this personal ideological transition. The book is ne-

cessarily broad rather than deep in its treatment of each example, but will prompt new critical reflections on the materials it uniquely brings together. Seeking to explore 'the larger, more influential, or more innovative social groups who taught and who believed that religio-racial theologies are essential aspects of their identities, paying particular attention to groups commonly designated new religious movements or emergent religions' (p.3), the volume convincingly accomplishes its task.

Overlapping with the final section in Clark and Stoddard's book which covers Odinism, is Jefferson F. Calico's *Being Viking: Heathenism in Contemporary America*. This is a detailed treatment of Nordic pagan practice in the US, taking in ethnographic details from time spent with a number of different heathen groups. The author is well-read around important areas of practice, combining insights from older sources influential on academia and practice alike with newer respondents from both areas. This is particularly fitting since he describes the high value set by the groups he studies on knowing the 'lore', encompassing historical and archeological scholarship as well as the sagas and more recent interpretations by practitioners. Calico provides excellent passages which introduce and explain, for instance, different understandings of magic in paganism, controversies regarding the introduction of new material into treatments of the runes, and complexities regarding lore given that many key texts are extant only through preservation by medieval Christians.

The book clearly articulates how and why heathens distinguish themselves from other pagans in a New Age milieu. This is accompanied with an excellent overview of the relevance of Bourdieu's habitus, distinction and taste, grounded in

consideration of the author's own reaction to the ritualised sharing of drinks. In a few places though, the book takes rather for granted the accuracy of his sources' depictions of what they are defining themselves against. At times this means that portrayals of American cultural and religious 'others' of the heathens are oversimplified. White Protestant Christianity and consumer capitalism may be hegemonic in the US, but they are not as monolithic as is sometimes implied here, and the value of hearing how heathens have different and, to them, better values and practices is diminished in repetition. The book is longer than it needs to be and could have benefitted from more rigorous editing of some repetitious passages without losing important material, and the writing is overcommitted to conceiving of heathenry as a watershed (or, in British Geography English, a drainage basin) with different rivers and tributaries, a sustained metaphor which becomes contorted beyond any usefulness to the reader.



The chapter on meat and sacrifice is rather mixed. A vignette where the ethnographer tells his son that dinner at a meeting will be pulled pork, before being overheard by an elder who corrects them that the feast will be 'blótted pig', neatly encapsulates how ideas about specialness, ritual and consumption are shaped in language and social interaction. But in thinking further about how eating habits are constructed by heathens, Calico lapses into dramatic oversimplification, as in his claims that vegetarian and vegan choices are 'ethical extremes' (p.313) while '[a]dvertising, convenience,

and the cost of food seem to be the primary factors shaping American eating habits and not ethics at all. The practice of eating continues to be bereft of ethical context' (p.312). This may indeed be how heathens imagine a

mainstream against which they define themselves, but the researcher must be wary about reproducing such ideologically loaded generalisations.

More concerning in this respect is the book's inconsistent approach to issues of race and racism. The chapter devoted to 'metagenetics' deals directly and competently with the range of ideas about ethnicity and religion in heathenry's recent past, providing a clear account of how the racialised claims of important figures such as Stephen McNallen retreated in the 1980s from the pseudo-scientific and instead 'shifted towards the propagation of a race mysticism' (p.187). In some of the other discussions, readers are reminded of the racial essentialisms of some heathen thinking, such as the highlighting of how Stephen Flowers (aka Edred Thorsson) downplayed Guido von List's connections to racist *völkisch* ideology while adopting much of his material on runes. But in other areas, racist elements or connotations are glossed over. While the dedicated chapter on racism appears early on in the book, there are still earlier mentions of ideologues such as Paul Waggener, Flowers and McNallen which pass without mention of their histories of racist pronouncements. The latter two are by far the most cited individuals, with their work sometimes introduced without consideration of how their racist ideologies might intersect, for example, with their views on family structures, gender, authority and ritual participation. Calico quotes participants in Waggener's group the Wolves of Vinland talking in social Darwinist terms about essentialised heroic masculinity and ecstatic tribalism, before noting that 'Observers of the far right see the slow creep of crypto-fascism in their movement' (p.416). The Wolves of Vinland's relationship to the extreme right is not slow or creeping, nor is it very cryptic: it is a group obviously and explicitly founded in fascist ideology, aesthetics, and the valorisation of violence. Academic perspectives on such groups should not need to ambivalently outsource such conclusions to prevaricating references to other 'observers,' particularly given the prevalence of mystification, plausible deniability, dogwhistles and the weaponization of irony in contemporary fascist cultural interventions.

Race and New Religious Movements in the USA is highly successful in its aim 'to identify and highlight that the blending of religious and racial discourses is a persistent theme in American history' (p.6). *Being Viking*, while sometimes excellent on that topic, is ultimately too tentative, wishing to compartmentalise its treatment of racists while continuing to extensively discuss their ideas in other realms of religious culture. As the two centuries of American religious history surveyed in Clark and Stoddard's collection indicate, such issues cannot be so easily dealt with and set aside.

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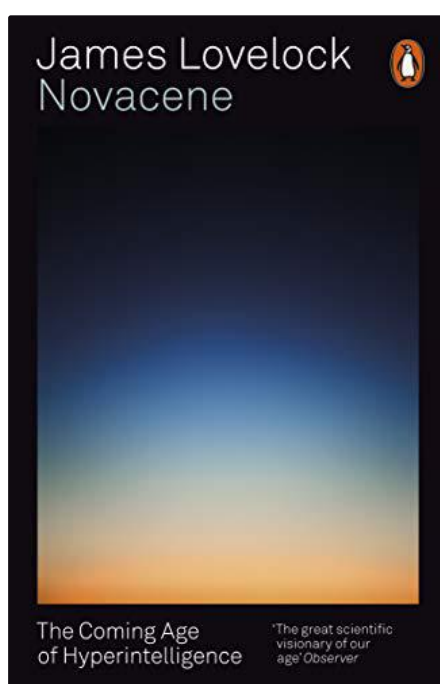
JAMES LOVELOCK. NOVACENE: THE COMING AGE OF HYPERINTELLIGENCE. ALLEN LANE, 2019.

James Lovelock developed the Gaia hypothesis. The hypothesis remains controversial in some quarters but it has many well-known advocates including the French sociologist, Bruno Latour (p. 17). Reduced to its simplest, the hypothesis states that the evolution of life on earth is not merely the adaptation of organisms to diverse, local ecological niches and habitats, but also that the process of adaptation is complex, and includes the adapting of the planetary environment to make it hospitable to life. In short, the hypothesis assumes that the interactions of living things with the planetary environment constitute a dynamic system of relationships that help sustain life.

The Gaia hypothesis has not only been endorsed by French sociologists; it has also been taken up by environmentalists. Lovelock's hypothesis points to the co-implication of numerous local eco-systems and organisms and their interactions in a complex, global system that adapts itself to sustain life, and the vulnerability of that system to various sources of disequilibrium, in particular the impact of human life-styles on it. The term "the Anthropocene" was coined by Eugene Stoermer to describe this, and Lovelock locates its beginning with Thomas Newcomen's

invention of the steam engine in 1712. The advent of mass, industrial society in the nineteenth century and the expansion of capitalism into a global system of consumption in the late twentieth pose a fundamental threat to the stability of Gaia and, as a consequence, to all life on earth.

In this book Lovelock proposes the idea of a subsequent third era to the Anthropocene he calls “the Novacene”. He describes the Novacene as an age when “energy is converted into information” (p.39), and predicts humanity’s replacement by “cyborgs”, entities that “will have designed and built themselves from the artificial intelligence systems we have already constructed” (p.29). At the heart of this prediction is not any opposition of fleshy, emotional humans to cold, unfeeling machines and neither is it meant to call to mind iconic human adversaries such as the Terminator or Cybermen. Rather, Lovelock is in thrall to a curious informational theology developed by John Barrow and Frank Tipler in a 1986 book called *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle*. A key element of this theology is the assumption that information is “an innate property of the universe” (p.26) and that beings will evolve to interpret it in order for the cosmos to attain self-consciousness. For Lovelock, “we alone, among all the billions of species that have benefited from the flood of energy from the Sun, are the ones who evolved with the ability to transmute the flood of photons into bits of information gathered in a way that empowers evolution. Our reward is the opportunity to understand something of the universe and ourselves” (p.75). If evolution is a process for the selection of conscious beings able to “lead the cosmos to self-knowledge” (p.29), then the cyborgs, according to Lovelock, are the next step.



Lovelock offers some intriguing ideas about our cyborg progeny, including their methods of communication (p.100), their physical appearance (p.95) and the scope of human interactions with them. For example, Lovelock states that artificial intelligence operates some 10,000 times faster than human cognition (the calculation is based on the transmission speed of a signal sent along a copper wire compared to one sent along a neuron) (p.81). Given that humans are, by the same measure, some 10,000 times faster than plants, “the experience of watching your garden grow gives you some idea of how future AI systems will feel when observing human life” (p.82). The cyborgs of the Novacene, then, will not at all be like us; humanity will slowly fade from its earthly stage, displaced by these new beings charged with the task of enabling the cosmos to achieve self-knowledge.

There are no prizes for spotting that Lovelock’s argument is embedded in a doubtful teleology. If Hegel once imagined the world arriving at self-knowledge through the notion of freedom, Lovelock widens the stage to the cosmos via the notion of information. According to Lovelock, human beings, despite their imminent displacement by cyborgs, are “the chosen species” (p.30) – chosen presumably for their skills in the interpretation of information – in the cosmic journey towards self-knowledge. But how does Lovelock imagine these human acts of interpretation and what kind of self or subject is the cosmos supposed to be? Finally, what place does Gaia and the climate emergency occupy in all of this?

On interpretation, Lovelock leaves his reader with a number of clues. One place to begin is with his representation of on-going arguments between eco-modernists and deep green environmentalists over the Anthropocene. Lovelock

asks, rhetorically, “what are the facts?” and then states that “we must abandon ... politically and psychologically loaded idea[s]” (p.69). To see the facts we must see clearly, and to see clearly we must shed unhelpful opinions, ideas and dispositions which may distort our vision. But in the first paragraph of the book Lovelock writes that it was “when humanity developed the tools and ideas to observe and analyse the bewildering spectacle of the clear night sky [that] the cosmos begin to awaken from its long sleep of ignorance” (p.3). If some “politically and psychologically loaded” ideas obstruct the discernment of facts, which “tools and ideas” is Lovelock thinking of when he imagines his putative observers of the firmament, and how did they give those observers their clarity of vision? How do we know which ideas and tools enable observation and analysis and which ones do not? Regardless, it seems that such problems will not bedevil the hyperintelligent cyborgs to come. Lovelock says that they will be telepaths, which he describes as a form of more or less instant and intuitive communication, seemingly one in which no interpretation is necessary: “think of how much information we derive merely from the sight of a human face. Even before a word is spoken, we are possessed of a profound awareness about the state of mind and the personality of someone we have just met” (p.100).

Upon such acts will a cosmic subject attain self-knowledge. In the meantime, however, we must presumably accept our assigned roles in this psycho-drama. Lovelock’s informational theology is also a kind of quietism that requires us to accept the Anthropocene as “a product of evolution” and as “an expression of nature” (p.70) rather than as the outcome of dynamic structures of political and economic inequality, for which the earth and human populations have been treated as resources to be used up in the pursuit of power and profit. Lovelock may have given us Gaia with its complex religious and cultural resonances as a way to think about our relationships with other species and the earth, but he offers us nothing useful here.

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JORDAN PAPER. CHINESE RELIGION AND FAMILISM: THE BASIS OF CHINESE CULTURE, SOCIETY, AND GOVERNMENT. BLOOMSBURY, 2020.

This book presents something of the summation of a career’s worth of study of Chinese religion in a format accessible to non-specialist readers and with learning points for scholarship in general. Arguing that Western scholarship has distorted the field of “religion” in China, Paper’s compelling thesis is that an understanding of the family unit in its broadest sense, or familism, is the basis of how the Chinese have shaped and orientated their worldview. Moreover, Paper argues that this is not distinct to China but also found globally.

Chapter three, “Familism: The Global Context of Chinese Religion,” is key to Paper’s argument. Though, for those unfamiliar with the Chinese religio-cultural landscape, his first chapter provides an excellent overview of the patterns of folk and popular religiosity that will be essential reading. However, here also we meet some idiosyncrasies in Paper’s usage that will, perhaps, confuse some readers. Firstly, while helping dismantle the “world religions paradigm” Paper nevertheless freely employs the term “religion” without too much problematisation. I believe that arguments that we can totally remove the term “religion” from the scholar’s lexicon are often beyond the mark of what is reasonable and smack more of identity claims for scholarly tribes than balanced assessment, so I would not dismiss Paper’s argument on this count. But this leads us into a second issue, which is that he then makes his own divisions of “religion”, such that he speaks about Daoism as “an institutionalized esoteric religion, differing from Chinese Religion which is a diffuse religion” (p.21). Paper’s contention that what he terms familism has been the mainstay of Chinese religio-cultural practice over millennia is I think beyond doubt, but then talking of differing “religions” in China (e.g. Buddhism, Daoism, the state), only one of which is “Chinese Religion” (his capitals) may be confusing. I understand his reasoning, but this is unfortunate, as the book is primarily accessible to non-specialists and makes important points for wider scholarship. Thirdly, Paper sometimes

has what seem to be partisan readings, telling us that the Daodejing is not about “mysticism” (presumably, inward contemplation and philosophical reflection on this) but “political control” (p.21) which is correct if we look at its original context, but from the second century CE onwards its standard recension and interpretation has placed it firmly within what we may term “religio-cosmological” interpretations (notwithstanding that the “political” and “religious” were never distinct in the Chinese context). That this is a relatively short book that covers much ground may account for why some wider complexities of which Paper is fully aware are not apparent.

Within the space of this review, perhaps only two further issues can be touched upon. The first, is the global context in which Paper makes his argument around familism (see pp.49-50). Having compelling shown familism’s role in what

he terms “Chinese Religion”, Paper suggests that it has actually been the norm across many other societies including the Sinitic-influenced world, Africa, Polynesia, Southern Europe, and parts of the Americas (p.54). If Paper is correct, and his argument seems sound in general principles, scholarship has committed at least two errors. On the one hand, as noted, misrepresenting the realm we term “religion” by focusing on certain areas and neglecting others. On the other, a failure to take due count of what comparative studies may show us.

Scholarship over recent decades has tended to focus on the local and particular, by emphasizing the specialist over the generalist, stressing cultural-linguistic difference, and being wary of comparison because of some poor practice, but this latter has led to a widespread – and undue – neglect of comparison. Paper suggestively posits what a “Chinese approach to studying religion” may add comparatively (pp.59-60). Paper

also proffers an argument that an evolutionary approach will help, but with only three pages devoted to this (pp.50-53) he doesn’t make what could be a stronger case seeking support from evolutionary anthropology and cognitive neuroscience. To go somewhat beyond the terms of this review, such approaches are at the very least suggestive that we would expect to see considerable common cultural activity in contradistinction to the emphasis of the cultural-linguistic turns on cultural and linguistic particularity, with recent studies pointing to much that binds us with at least other higher primates, let alone other humans.

Secondly, while the final three chapters (pp.7-9) are a bit disconnected from the main argument, they weave a useful narrative in understanding why China has often been misunderstood. Indeed, these chapters may be key learning points for readers. Chapter 7, in particular, argues that

the Chinese have a different conception of freedom of religion from the West. Paper may come across as being apologetic for China, but his arguments are important correctives showing how many Chinese view the world through a very different lens based in familism. As China becomes a global power this is important reading.

Paper’s book is an important contribution to any scholar or student of religion who wishes to understand our globalised world more fully. His arguments on familism are surely applicable beyond the Chinese cultural realm,

while this book will help the reader gain something of an “insiders” perspective into the Chinese way of life and thinking. It is therefore highly recommended, notwithstanding some technical quibbles which may arise.

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"these are the doctrines, rituals, or signs that men and women have picked up in their hands and are using to engage their immediate world, taking us well beyond empty claims about what a religious culture 'means' or what 'religious' men and women 'believe' or have been taught."

(Orsi, Robert A. 2003, 173. 'Is the study of lived religion irrelevant to the world we live in?', Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 42: 169-74.)