



# bulletin

British Association for the Study of Religions



143: November 2023

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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.

All correspondence concerning the BASR should be sent to:

Dr Stephen E. Gregg,  
Department of Religion and Philosophy,  
MC234 Millennium City Building,  
University of Wolverhampton,  
Wulfruna Street, Wolverhampton, WV1 1LY

### COMMITTEE

#### *President and Chair*

Dr Stephen Gregg - s.gregg@wlv.ac.uk

#### *Secretary*

Dr Suzanne Owen  
- s.owen@leedstrinity.ac.uk

#### *Treasurer*

Dr Christopher R Cotter  
- c.cotter@lancaster.ac.uk

#### *JBASR Coordinating Editor*

Dr Suzanne Owen - s.owen@leedstrinity.ac.uk

#### *Bulletin Editor*

Dr Theo Wildcroft - theo@thewildcroft.com

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# editorial

Welcome to the November 2023 edition of the BASR Bulletin.

As usual, this November issue is mostly filled with the stuff and processes of Religious Studies scholarship – November is when we send you our AGM report, conference proceedings, and lots of book reviews from those of our members who had time for some summer reading, and this time is no exception.

For our May editions, we are always in search of articles from our members. These can be more speculative and reflective than your average academic publication. If you've got an idea for an opinion piece or a reflection on the state of an aspect of the discipline, your thoughts, and even your rants, are welcome here. Please get in touch. It would be nice to have some less familiar names contributing, and my deadlines are quite flexible.

I've been editing the Bulletin for a while now, and while it's been a deliberate policy to share editorial duties with more of the BASR committee, so you can get to know them a little better, I'm aware that at some point that should also include me. So here I am. It's a timely reminder that your BASR is run for you, by volunteers from among you, so please, don't hesitate to put yourself forward to help, whatever your role within academia or independent scholarship. I know we're all busy, and many of us underpaid, and as a committee we try very hard to make sure everyone's roles aren't too onerous.

This term I have had the joy of picking up the Dharmic Worldviews module that was so ably run by Wendy Dossett, who retired from the University of Chester earlier this year, to add to my existing teaching at the Open University. There is a familiar joy in taking nervous first-years through their first serious introduction to dharma and karma, Sikhi and Jainism, and I hope the contemporary constraints of HE allow them to invite me back next year. However, I've been more aware than ever of the very real and human reality behind discussions of Engaged Buddhism and the *Bhagavad Gita*.

In the past few years at conferences I've noticed an increasing turn towards what we might even call engaged Religious Studies – or at least a turn into a more deliberate positionality regarding social and political issues. The University of Chester hosted an innovative conference on spiritual abuse in 2021. The YDYS Yoga Studies conference in Krakow 2022 involved discussions both in and out of panels on not just abuse but also cultural imperialism and appropriation. This year's BASR conference of course was on the extremely timely theme of 'Environmental Endings and Religious Futures'. More on that from our conference bursary holders below.

Next year's BASR conference will be on the theme of 'Reckoning with our past'. I can't think of a more perfect opportunity to reflect on the history of the discipline and its complex entanglements with colonialism, neoliberalism and geopolitics. Nonetheless, when I think about one of my favourite definitions of religion as "the doctrines, rituals, or signs that men and women have picked up in their hands and are using to engage their immediate world" (Orsi 2003: 173), it's been hard in recent weeks to consider scholarship as an effective response to the doctrines, rituals or signs that human beings have used to justify war, terrorism or even genocide.

I think we are all very aware at present that religion is not just sound, spectacle and optional mysticism, but above all, people, struggling with identity, grief, rage and hope, as well as belief and ritual. Perhaps this is the justification more of us need not to bracket the big questions out of our research, even if it means risking murmured rumours that we might be committing theology. My thoughts are above all with those colleagues, friends and their loved ones caught up in unstable and unsafe places, be that Palestine or Israel, Ukraine or less media-friendly conflicts. As my own respondents would say: *lokaḥ samastāḥ sukhino bhavantu*.

Theo Wildcroft  
Open University

## 2023 BASR2 TEACHING AND LEARNING FELLOWSHIP

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

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

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

This statement can be provided either by the applicant themselves or by a colleague supporting the application. The deadline for nominations/ applications is the 1st of July 2024. We welcome applications from/ nominations for colleagues at all stages of their careers.

## MEET THE MEMBERS

At our last committee meeting, we hatched a plan to get to know our members better. We'd like to start a new feature in the bulletin in which you get to meet a few of your colleagues. Think of this less as a form of self-promotion, more of a written version of those conference conversations where you introduce yourself to interesting looking people and find out all the fascinating research that they do. Please volunteer, otherwise I'll have to hassle the committee!

What I need from you, if you'd like to take part is a headshot-style photo of you, so that we can recognise you, and then about a paragraph for each of the following:

- A short biography including where you work now, if you are working. (Independent, emeritus and doctoral researchers all welcome)
- How you came to join the BASR, and what you like about being a member. (This also helps give us some feedback about what's working)
- What you are working on at the moment. (This is where you get to be all enthusiastic about your latest project or role)

Email these to me at theo@thewildcroft.com, and I'll hopefully gather enough to put a few in each edition.

## **BASR ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – 15.00-17.30 - 12/09/23 CLARE COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE**

### **1. Welcome**

Stephen Gregg opens the conference and thanks Clare College for hosting it and CenSamm for their contributions and support. This was followed by welcomes from Joseph Webster the conference organiser, James Crossley of CenSamm and Professor Esra Özyürek of the Faculty of Divinity.

### **2. Apologies**

James Cox, Steven Sutcliffe, Peggy Morgan, Marion Bowman, Bettina Schmidt, Liz Harris, Douglas Davies, George Chryssides, David Robertson.

### **3. Minutes of the previous AGM.**

3.a. No matters arising.

### **4. President's Report (Stephen Gregg)**

SG continues to reflect on inclusivity and diversity, such as through bursaries with a view of expanding and restructuring them – instead of a one-year bursary they can have a two-year bursary, to help make a substantive involvement with support in the second year by buddying the first-year recipients, with the aim of bringing people into the BASR community. Next SG spoke of the challenges for ECRs (Early Career Researchers) and employment and will look at paid opportunities the BASR can offer. JBASR is supportive of ECRs, too, in offering publication opportunities. The archive in Bodleian needs to be updated so we will put a call out to help with that. Continuing to move toward a greener BASR, conferences will be vegetarian/vegan default (as is the case with this one), when it's in our control. We also seek volunteers for conference organising going forwards and we still aim to have an online event. We plan conferences two years ahead.

### **5. Secretary's Report (Suzanne Owen)**

BASR will also offer support to those organising future conferences. We can produce a how-to guide for organising BASR conferences as well. I have also been attending British Academy meetings, where EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) and support for ECRs are at the forefront of discussions, and also TRS-UK, covering similar topics, and the Arts and Humanities Alliance (AHA), which are concerned about recruitment and also redundancy threats in the subject area.

### **6. Treasurer's Report (Chris Cotter)**

See below

### **7. Committee Reports**

#### **7.a. JBASR (Mel Prideaux)**

One of the things BASR does is the journal and the latest edition is close to publication (published the next day). It's open access so we can do things differently with articles, reflections and roundtable reports. Next issue is on the theme of this conference. We could also do special issues on a particular theme and with guest editors, moving toward using the online system more fully. Grateful for Aled Thomas for help. There are continuing issues with the DOIs but this being addressed.

#### **7.b. BASR Bulletin (Theo Wildcroft - ed)**

The Bulletin is also open access with two issues a year. It includes conference proceedings, op-ed

pieces, book reviews, etc. The BASR conference report comes from bursary holders.

### **7.c. Social Media and Website (Aled Thomas)**

The website is doing fine. Social media, though, is more complex since Twitter became X followed by a migration away from the platform. Engagement is noticeably down. It is now more fragmented across different platforms. Open to suggestions for which would be the more useful of the new platforms.

Michael Pye adds a comment to promote Dolmen, the English-language list of the EASR. It is unmoderated though has a code of conduct.

### **7.d. Teaching and Learning (Steffi Sinclair)**

A Teaching and Learning Fellowship is awarded each year in recognition of innovation and transformation in teaching and learning in study of religion. £300 plus conference bursary for the next conference and co-organises a panel. This year it goes to Claire Wanless at the University of Edinburgh. Claire joins us online to receive the award in recognition for her contribution to engaging students with the themes of nature, the environment and climate justice in the study of religion. Steffi finishes by saying we will apply to rejoin the RE Council and join EFTRE (the European Forum for Teachers in Religious Education), both for maintaining links with religious education.

### **8. Proposal for lifelong membership of the BASR**

Stephen Gregg on behalf of the BASR awards this to Graham Harvey. This was proposed by Bettina Schmidt and the committee agreed unanimously.

### **9. Nomination for President Elect**

Paul-François Tremlett was nominated by Bettina Schmidt and seconded by David Robertson. Duly elected.

### **10. BASR Conference 2024 (Mel Prideaux)**

The next BASR conference will be in Leeds 2-4 Sept. The theme is "Reckoning with our past", to include decolonisation, etc. Mel will be organising this with support from Aled Thomas.

### **11. Any Other Business**

Cambridge mosque visit details from Steffi Sinclair.

Paul Tremlett has prepared with David Robertson a festschrift for Graham Harvey – a draft of which was presented to Graham.

### **12. Date and location of next AGM**

Leeds 3rd September 2024

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## **BASR TREASURER'S REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDING 15 AUGUST 2023**

Dr C.R. Cotter, BASR Honorary Treasurer, University of Cambridge, 12 September 2023

1. General income for the year was £4,494 This is in line with most recent years and is made up largely of membership subscriptions, with smaller amounts for bank interest and receipts from our 2022 conference.

2. Subscriptions: Slight decrease on last year. We have had 17 new members join this year, and a few more are pending due to delays on the Treasurer's end. Quite a few lapsed payments in the past year, and we are due another round of attempts to get folk to resubscribe. We currently have 205

paying members, and 13 life members. 2022/21 we had 208 paying members. In 2020/21 it was 251. We have not increased our subscription rates during my tenure, and the committee may consider doing this soon.

3. General expenditure for the year: £13,604. This is incredibly high, due to a large deposit that needed to be paid to Clare College before the 2023 conference. Although this was in part because of the college system at Cambridge, this practice seems to be becoming much more common. The money will come back to the BASR, through conference fees and our sponsorship from CenSAMM and the Faculty of Divinity at Cambridge.

4. Committee expenses are still low, but now that 'normal' service has resumed, we can expect these to increase with in-person attendance at various meetings.

5. Insurance remains in place, with our 2023/24 payment falling outside of this accounting period.

6. The BASR will continue to sponsor the Religious Studies Project at £500 per year, but there are now several years of back payment due.

7. Our subscription payments to the EASR and IAHR are down slightly due to our slight decrease in membership numbers. These accounts only include payment to the IAHR. Payment to EASR and TRS-UK has occurred, but outside of this accounting period.

8. BASR members are reminded that they are encouraged to contact the committee if they would like small amounts of financial support for events. At present these will be handled on a case-by-case basis and judged against the BASR's constitutional aims. If the volume of applications increases significantly, we will need to develop a policy on such support.

9. Bank Accounts: As of 15 August our bank Accounts totalled £16,014, an increase of £9,109. This decrease is largely explained by the deposit paid to Clare College, and the books should balance again once the books have been closed on that conference.

10. Summary of Financial Position: If we take out BASR2023, this was another fairly typical year, and we remain in good financial health. We experimented this year with subsidising elements of the conference, and with giving more full and partial (£150) bursaries. Conferences likely to keep increasing in price going forward, and we must consider how best to deploy our resources. We always welcome comment on spending decisions, as well as suggestions and applications from members for the future allocation of funds in keeping with the BASR's constitutional aims.



# conferences



## **BASR ANNUAL CONFERENCE, 11 - 13TH SEPTEMBER 2023, CLARE COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE**

This year's BASR conference was held at Clare College Cambridge, and was sponsored by the Centre for the Critical Study of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements (CenSAMM), in what proved to be a nourishing and provoking partnership. The theme was "Environmental Endings and Religious Futures", and structures of feeling emerged over the course of the conference around both catastrophe and hope, with many panels presenting an energizing tension between decolonization, and new frontiers of protest, systems, and digital worlds.

Twenty-six panels were presented in four streams, with the sessions in the Riley Auditorium being broadcast online in a hybrid style. This report is written by the grateful bursary recipients, who did not between them attend every panel, but offer reports on the panels they did attend.

Day 1 of the conference kicked off with a panel on faith-based climate activism. Marie-Thérèse

Talensby opened with her paper exploring the experiences of eco-anxiety and eco-grief within faith-based climate activism, which drew on both her ongoing doctoral research and experiences as a practicing psychotherapist. The panel continued with a paper from Jonathan Coope, analyzing how "Intervention points" can be used to demonstrate religious narratives surrounding environmental decline, catastrophe, hope and renewal, and how exploring these religious insights could benefit the wider study of eco-crises. The panel closed with a paper from Jodie Salter exploring the role of faith-based organizations in climate action at the United Nations. Presenting fieldwork findings from her doctoral research, Jodie examined how these faith-based organizations respond to climate change through their own distinctive styles of moral-focused campaigning.

Simultaneously, the Cambridge Anthropology-Theology Network (CAT) facilitated the first of their series of panels, discussing futuristic and apocalyptic imaginations in response to the climate crisis. The first paper by Mark Borthwick discussed the thought-provoking case of salmon farms and the discourses of representa-



tional and non-representational storytelling. Here, Mark discussed the potential of salmon as a cultural storyteller, and exhibited how the ability of animals as a lens to engage with both representational and non-representational cultural knowledges gives them great potential as rhetorical tools to access environmental knowledges with policy-influencing heuristics. The second paper by Akeem Adagbada examined the Eurocentric perspectives that continuously marginalize the former colonized nations with a focus on African communities. Akeem presented findings of his fieldwork that involved the study of traditional rites within the Indigenous communities concerning environmentalism. Overall, Akeem's research demonstrated the urgency of decolonising the methodological approaches within theological studies and the study of non-Western religions and anthropology as the field that developed its roots from colonialist oppression. The final paper was presented by Hina Khalid, who discussed the eco-theological narratives within Quranic passages. Here, the Islamic perspectives on the natural world were explored through the interpretative notions of the Prophet's words. As such, Hina argued for climate change to go beyond the physical sphere and instead extended this environmental matter to the crisis of spiritual orientations. Within this framework, Quranic idioms of environmental obligations and hope for the future were explored to demonstrate the responsibility within the Islamic climate change perspectives. A lively discussion on colonialism, representation, and indigeneity followed.

The second panel of the day, titled 'Seeking Environmental Justice: Identity, Risk, Voice, and Power', explored the narrative of climate injustice and the power dynamics within its discourse. Firstly, Rejoice Chipuriro presented fieldwork findings from a Zimbabwe case study in which female farmers' voices were highlighted. The connection to land and agricultural practises and other Indigenous ways of knowing identified in this fieldwork highlights the necessity of including community members in the policy planning that concerns climate-related agricultural adaptation measures. Chipuriro's work elucidated the importance of climate adaptation measures to go beyond extant phys-

ical and social structures, and include the voices of the most marginalized. The second presentation featured Suzanne Owen's doctoral findings on Indigenous misrepresentation concerning climate activism. Three case studies were discussed in which non-Indigenous individuals assumed a false ethnicity for personal gain. However, Suzanne highlighted that these misrepresentations highlight matters of Indigenous importance that otherwise struggle to be foregrounded in the debate. The last presentation discussed the risk reduction regime in a case study of a Colombian city, Mocoa. Ayesha Siddiqi presented the fieldwork findings in which the climate disaster of deadly landslides was often ascribed to the displaced workers, whose 'immorality' induced such environmental misfortunes. Notably, the immoral activities of displaced workers prompted religious communities to associate sin with punishment, blaming other inhabitants rather than focusing on governmental responsibility to prevent and protect from such natural disasters.

The final paper session of day 1 saw a hybrid panel on understanding evangelicalism through gender, climate, and politics. The first paper by Christabelle Thwaites discussed her doctoral fieldwork, researching experiences of purity culture from women within British evangelical Christian communities. Within this paper, Christabelle focused on presenting the various ethical and methodological challenges that have emerged across her fieldwork, considering issues of privacy and objectivity when working with sensitive data. The second paper of the panel came from Rex Hamilton, who discussed how eschatological concerns are presented within evangelical Christian hymns, and how they can be analyzed as a means of understanding various Christian responses to the climate crisis. In particular, Rex notes how these hymns present a consistent narrative that the fate of the world is - ultimately - in God's hands, and the implications that this belief has on Christian attempts to navigate eco-crises. Susannah Mandel continued this reflection on evangelical responses to the climate crisis, exploring the broader themes of apocalypticism and millenarianism within right-wing US political rhetoric, its weaponization against minority communities, and the intersections between

US evangelicalism and contemporary climate denialism.

Day 2 opened with a panel on 'Developing Trends in the Study of Minority Religion', with a particular focus on 'cult' rhetoric. The panel opened with a paper by Bethan Oake, which discussed the resurgence of premillennialist 'Satanic cult' conspiracy theory rhetoric online, noting how its theorists present themselves as 'anti-cultists', yet can - and have - also be labeled as a 'cult of conspiracy' in themselves. From this, Bethan argues that popular 'cult' rhetoric is being engaged in a variety of, sometimes conflicting, contexts and ideologies that are currently being overlooked within research. This was followed by a paper by Edward Graham-Hyde who, using his online survey data, analyzed the variety of ways in which divisive 'cult' rhetoric can be seen to be being used within everyday social media discourse. Edward also emphasized the connection between popular 'cult' rhetoric and online conspiracism, in particular the prevalence of QAnon and COVID-19 conspiracy theory rhetoric within responses to the survey, and in comments on the online marketing tools used to find participants. Aled Thomas, who also chaired the panel, then presented a paper on public perceptions of 'New Religious Movement' (NRM) researchers. In this paper, Aled noted how NRM researchers can be perceived and labeled as 'cult apologists' from a public perspective, providing important insight into why this is occurring and how it can be addressed by NRM scholars - notably, through a more public-facing approach to their research.

After a coffee break, another panel focused on teasing out the many fibres of environmental protest, under the title: "Extinction Rebellion: Buddhist, Christian, and Post-Christian Perspectives". Extinction Rebellion was a frequent touchstone for conversation throughout this conference, with several scholars focusing on XR in attendance at this panel. Maria Nita opened with an exploration of how the protest actions of Extinction Rebellion and Just Stop Oil have the semiotic function and phenotypic appearance of ritual. Nita explored how through manifesting vulnerability in direct action, protestors are producing ritual artworks, and report experiencing internal spiritual transformations. This thread

was picked up by Zoe Zielke, who is embedded in a network of 200 Extinction Rebellion Buddhists, who report the power of maintaining meditative stillness even when being dragged away from the picket line by police. Rolf Scheuermann, trapped in a train-tunnel during this panel, presented instead via teleconference on day 3, leaving these two papers more time to be analyzed, and the scholars were treated to rigorous questioning on the nature of post-Christian spirituality from Eileen Barker and Katherine Swancutt as a result.

Day 2 also featured the second Cambridge Anthropology-Theology Network panel on the theme of "Beginnings, Endings and Futures between Anthropology and Theology". Susie Triffitt, CAT founder, took a break from her usual role as chair to present on the emerging role of Tiktok as a place for evangelical exploration. Susie makes a thoughtful argument for the home being an increasingly important location for Christian exploration in a post-covid world, and explores the role of algorithmically curated content in undertaking both Christian, and new atheistic, evangelism, with case studies of young people who converted to Christianity in isolation during the pandemic. Through this Susie deftly explores the methodological tension between theology, which suggests that the problem of evil is the main reason that people do not believe, and anthropology, which says that suffering is a main draw towards religious belief. This tension was explored further by Jenia Gorbanenko, whose PhD is part of ETHNO-ISS, a multi-sited ethnography of the International Space Station, and who explored how both anthropology and theology have responded to the challenges of self-conception presented by the new frontier of space.

This year's BASR AGM session briefly outlined the BASR's activities and related events. Well attended by conference attendees, we started with a welcome from the Honorary President of the BASR, Stephen Gregg, who introduced the colleagues involved in the running of the association. Chris Cotter, Honorary Treasurer of the BASR, summarized the association's financial performance and informed the members about the association's financial ability to provide more bursaries to early career researchers compared

to last year, (thank you!), and announced his intention to resign as treasurer. Paul-François Tremlett was formally appointed as the incoming president, after a transitional period of 12 months. We discussed the latest published articles in the Journal of the British Association of Religions and the opportunity to submit articles for peer review. We also honoured the appointment of a lifetime BASR membership to Graham Harvey. Overall, this year's AGM summarized the association's progress and continuing development with the announcement of next year's BASR conference to be held in Leeds.

The last session of Day 2 closed with a remarkable lecture presentation by Dr. Katherine Swancutt. Dr. Swancutt traveled from King's College London to provide a provoking lecture concerning the animistic imaginations within a Tibeto-Burman group of Southwest China. The scientific policy making structures of deforestation were confronted with indigenous perspectives on forest protection policies. Within such cosmological beliefs, the respect towards land spirits and animistic imaginations of trees were confronted with China's science-based forest protection policies. As such, Dr. Swancutt's lecture highlighted the urgency of connecting with the indigenous communities regarding environmental policies for greater understanding and, ultimately, the necessity of taking into account indigenous values of caring for land throughout policymaking.

The day's business concluded, conference attendees retreated to St. Clare's Great Hall for a formal dinner. In keeping with the BASR's environmental commitments, this meal was vegetarian, and blessed with an abundance of seasonal cauliflower and beetroot. Many of us then retreated to various pubs, where lively and nourishing conversations continued for as long as Cambridge's landlords would allow.

Day 3 opened with a further Cambridge Anthropology-Theology Network panel. Simon Gathercole began with a presentation on how the combination of eschatological expectation and the delayed parousia led to the early Church operating with a cognitive dissonance which is similar to modern millenarian movements. Cognitive dissonance emerged as the theme of the

panel, with Philippe Thalmann exploring visions of the future in the minds of conservatives living through Saudi Arabia's 'Petrol Apocalypse'. Philippe paints an evocative picture of taking refuge in a car, stationary but with engine running, to benefit from the air conditioner during a powercut, and hearing from a local: "Oil is our material prosperity, but it will be our ruin". This was followed by Anna Kolendo's early-stage thesis report outlining how she intends to explore apocalyptic dissonance amongst Christians facing rising sea levels in the Pacific Islands. This panel, which explored apocalyptic thinking in both past and present, from the perspectives of both the net exporters and net victims of the climate crisis, was followed by a lively question and answer session.

The morning also featured a panel exploring radical environmentalism and conspiratoriality. The first paper was presented by Ruby Forrester and Shanon Shah, which addressed Bron Taylor's categorisation of 'radical environmentalists' as distinct from those who utilize environmentalist rhetoric to advocate for violence – such as Theodore Kaczynski (the 'Unabomber'). Forrester and Shah explore Taylor's model of radical environmentalism, and the ideology of Kaczynski, through analyzing the complex beliefs, ideas, and tactics of Mexican-based group 'Individualidades Tendiendo a lo Salvaje' (ITS) through the lens of accelerationism and millenarianism. Continuing this theme of millenarianism within ecology-focused groups, Theodora Wildcroft then presented a paper on the surge of 'conspiratoriality' within alternative health and wellness movements – particularly over the pandemic. Theodora explained how researching these conspiratorial attitudes could help in providing a useful framework for predicting the emergence of other 'socially-contagious' forms of meaning-making, that appear to combine both fears of present disaster/corruption and hope for future ecological and social revolution.

The final paper session of the conference saw a panel focusing on themes of apocalyptic discourses within contemporary Paganism. Joseph Sedgwick presented a paper on his ongoing doctoral research which explores the identity of Scottish Pagans, balancing the consideration of both online and offline activity to provide a hol-

istic understanding of what it means for individuals to identify as 'Pagan'. Joseph's research in particular centers on exploring the idea of conversion, and how both these digital and in-person activities play a role along individuals' paths to Paganism. This was followed by a paper from Angela Puca, which investigated a range of perspectives and approaches to apocalyptic narratives within contemporary Paganism. Angela explored a range of unique themes that emerged within these narratives, noting in particular how their focus on cycles of life, death, and renewal distinguished them from more monotheistic perceptions of apocalypse. Evidenced through Pagan environmentalist action, Angela also explained how these narratives provide Pagans with a sense of empowerment and responsibility towards the Earth as opposed to promoting despair. Katrina Oliveira Bezerra then closed the panel with her paper entitled 'Can magic change the planet's future?'. Katrina's paper provided an in-depth exploration of the notion of magic in contemporary Paganism,

focusing on three categories - participatory, ritual, and symbolic - and how these influence Pagan perspectives of nature.

This conference proved to be a stimulating and meaningful event, and for some scholars, it represented their first chance to interact with academic colleagues since before the pandemic. Promising methodological questions emerged over the course of the conference, particularly around the role of academics in understanding and enabling meaningful systems change, as inspired by the important work of interlocutors. We are grateful to those who made the gathering happen, and are encouraged and revitalized to continue with both our own research, and to contribute to the ongoing life of the BASR.

Mark Borthwick  
Anna Elzbieta Kolendo  
Bethan Oake  
Susannah Mandel



**NEW AND MINORITY RELIGIONS, CRISES and RESILIENCE: OVERCOMING INNER AND EXTERNAL OBSTACLES, 20-23 JUNE 2023, VILNIUS UNIVERSITY, VILNIUS, LITHUANIA.**

CESNUR 2023 was organised by the Center for Studies on New Religions (Turin), the International Society for the Study of New Religions (ISS-NR), the Religions Research and Information Center (Lithuania), the Lithuanian Society for the Study of Religions, and Vilnius University Institute of International Relations and Political Science. Sessions were in the Institute building on Vokieciu Str. 10. The program began with a walking tour of Vilnius, a fascinating, compact city that is home to 570,000 people and was celebrating 700 years in 2023. The opening plenary was on “New and Minority Religions, Political Religion, Crisis, and Resilience in Different Contexts” and was chaired by Milda Ališauskienė (Vytautas Magnus University). The three papers were by CESNUR stalwarts Eileen Barker (LSE) with an overview of the types of challenges likely to be encountered, J. Gordon Melton (Baylor), on the Worldwide Church of God, and Edward Irons (Hong Kong Institute for Culture, Commerce and Religion) on the CCP as a new religion or pseudo-religion.

The first paper session was on “The Resilience of New Religions and Esotericism” chaired by PierLuigi Zoccatelli featured my own paper on G. I. Gurdjieff and Eriko Kawanishi (National Museum of Ethnology Center for Cultural Resource Studies, Osaka) on spiritualism in the United Kingdom. The other papers were by Bae Kyuhan and Ko Namsik (Daejin University, Korea), on “Disasters and Religious Response” and Karolina Maria Hess (Jagiellonian University) on “Margins of Religion and Culture: Goddesses and Sexuality as Double Taboo in the Paintings of Erwin Sowka (1936-2021).” The conference Welcome Drinks was held at the Medininkai Restaurant in the historical quarter of the city that evening. The second day began with a plenary titled “Rethinking ‘Spirituality’ in an African Context: The Revelation Spiritual Home, Etic and Emic Perspectives” which featured Massimo Introvigne (CESNUR), Rosita Soryte (European Federation for Freedom of Belief), Thembev Tulwana (Revelation Spiritual Home, South Africa) and Palesa Hloele (African Hidden Voices Research

Institute). There is a strong commitment to members of NRMs speaking and informing scholarly audiences about their religions at CESNUR, evidenced by this session. On Wednesday I chaired a session on “European Religious Pluralism: Resilience and Controversies” which featured PierLuigi Zoccatelli (University of Turin) on Buddhist organisations in Italy, Bernadette Rigal-Cellard (Bordeaux Montaigne University) on Scientology in Paris, and Attila Miklovicz (University of Pecs, Hungary) on Scientology in Hungary.

There were sessions on religions that I was not able to attend, including the Korea new religion Victory Altar and the Jehovah’s Witnesses, both on the afternoon of Wednesday. The final session that day was on Tai Ji Men, a new religion for Taiwan. On Thursday the day opened with “New Religions and Resilience in Taiwan”, chaired by Ed Irons. The papers included Fiona Hsin-Fang Chang (Weixin Shengjiao College, Taiwan) on “Connecting the World: Weixin Shengjiao’s Rituals for Transcending the Cross-Strait Relationship,” Benjamin Penny (Australian National University) on “A New Religion Tells its Story: The Weixin Shengjiao Historical Exhibition, 2013,” and two other papers illustrating aspects of this interesting new faith.

The next session, on “Lithuanian and Baltic Perspectives” was also chaired by Milda Ališauskienė, and featured Audrius Beinorius (Vilnius University) on the Lithuanian Anthroposophical Movement, Ina Kiseliova-El Marassy (Lithuanian Culture Research Institute) on the Sufism of Algis Uždavinsys, Ina Kirnicanska (Daugavpils University, Latvia) on the Old Believers of the Latvian Republic, and Eglė Aleknaite (Vytautas Magnus University) on Esoteric Paganism in Lithuania. I attended the “Old/ New Trends and Controversies” session that afternoon and heard Tara Smith (Harvard University) discuss Genesis II, the church that advocated bleach to cure Covid-19, among other diverse topics. The final session was a plenary titled “Crises and Resilience of the Ancient Baltic Religion in Contemporary Lithuania: The Case of Romuva” which was amazing, as the panel discussion was lively and relevant, and the co-founder and high priestess of Romuva, Inija Trinkūnienė, was present. This was an enormously special occasion for me, as I had become

interested in Romuva through the work of Michal Strmiska (SUNY) who was at CESNUR 2023, in 2012.

As is traditional, the final day of CESNUR was spent on a field trip to sacred sites in Lithuania, the Pyramid of Merkinė and the Karaite worship center in Trakai. The evening of Friday 23 June culminated in the Midsummer Celebration, to

which all delegates were invited, led by members of Baltic Pagan and Traditional groups in the Vilnius Verkiu Park outside the city. CESNUR's annual conference is a vibrant event that engages scholars and practitioners in productive and critical ways.

Carole M. Cusack  
University of Sydney

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# reviews

**ANDERSON-FAITHFUL, S., AND HOLLOWAY, C. (2023) *WOMEN AND THE ANGLICAN CHURCH CONGRESS 1861-1938: SPACE, PLACE AND AGENCY*. LONDON & NEW YORK: BLOOMSBURY. 272 PP. HBK £85. ISBN: 9781350324183.**

In this book Sue Anderson-Faithful and Catherine Holloway, both at Winchester, introduce the reader to the Anglican Church Congress, held annually from 1861 to 1925, and intermittently until its final iteration in 1938. Congress offered a select class of Anglican women an important platform and an audience, and their contributions offer a series of snapshots through which to track the development of Anglican thought and practice on 'women's issues' (p.65). The authors describe their methodology as an application of Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' of habitus, field, and capital (pp. 6-7). This theoretical framework is minimised, with greater attention paid to rich detail in exploring Congress women's biographies, their contributions, and the reception of those by other women, the Congress, the Church, and the press. The Bourdieuan concept of 'reproduction' (pp.190-1) is perhaps most useful in explaining the relationship between the conservatism of the vast majority of the women and their investment in what we might characterise as 'progressive' social action. While applying an analytic lens informed by 'space, place and agency', Anderson-Faithful and Holloway refer to feminist thinkers, notably Doreen Massey; but insights about women's (social, spatial, or theological) 'place' are not as strongly made as those about space or agency.

The Anglican women who developed their own voices at Congress, while (re)articulating and (re)constituting Anglican orthodoxy (or, less often, contradicting it), were drawn from a close-knit middle-class 'clerical milieu' (p.24; pp.110-11). Their access to Congress was explicitly authorised by men – often their own clergy

husbands or fathers (pp.183-4). Of the most prominent women involved, most were also active in creating or enlarging other spaces and places for Protestant women (pp.21-22; see Chapter 3). These include, perhaps most obviously, Mary Sumner, founder of the Mothers' Union (pp.97-9), and leading figures in other groups including the Girls' Friendly Society, the Girl Guides, the Girls' Diocesan Association, the World's Student Christian Federation, the Young Women's Christian Association (p.67, p.100; p.167).

Anderson-Faithful and Holloway's work provides necessary context for understanding the parallel and interlaced development of these Christian women's and girls' organisations, which were often in competition with one another for personnel and beneficiaries. The Anglican Church's official relationship with the Mothers' Union and the Anglican Church Congress makes their provision of space for women's contributions to the life of the Church of England and Church in Wales different in kind compared to ecumenical and para-church organisations like the Girl Guides and the YWCA. Anderson-Faithful and Holloway demonstrate this difference by showing how women Congress speakers' personal connections to clergy and their roles as missionaries or deaconesses (pp.47-74) informed the content of their contributions, as well as the possibility of speaking in the first place (p.73; pp.97-122). Indeed, their audience responded favourably to women speakers when they confirmed the virtues of Christian womanhood in their appearance and character as well as their demonstration of 'Anglican religious knowledge' (p.73). The impression given is that women at Congress confirmed orthodox positions and promoted gender complementarianism and domesticity, a result of their own conservatism as well as the subtle and consistent institutional policing of women's socio-theological imaginaries.

The book's declared focus on analysing the Anglican Church Congress and women's roles in and contributions to it, somewhat understates the historical scope of the study. The authors connect the institutional form of the Congress to women's organisations that paralleled and interlaced with it in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, and identify the social and political positions these networks made available to middle-class, white, English women. The Anglican Church, and in particular the Congress itself, provided a hierarchical, bureaucratic, and processual model on which many women's societies and membership organisations of the mid-to-late 19th century patterned themselves. This is observed in chapter 4 (see for example pp.103-6), which also notes the surprising degree of overlap between the women of the Anglican Church and its satellites, and the National Union of Women Workers. Prior to the Equal Franchise Act in 1928, as the authors note, these spaces were vital for women who found few stages on which to make political interventions (p-p.106-12).

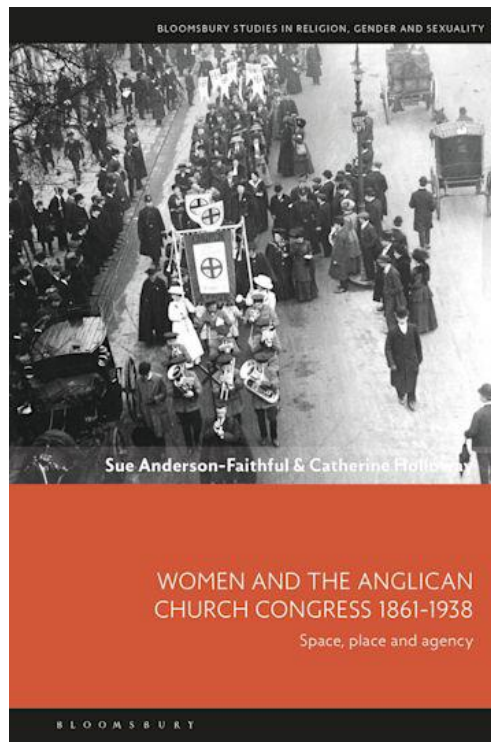
This overlap of overtly religious women's spaces with churches and trades unions, further illustrates the degree to which voluntary, committee, and church work, as much as they formed a 'woman's public sphere' were the avocations of a particular class of woman; the wealthy English 'upper/middle "landed classes"' (p.154). Congress women navigated public space by invoking the figures of 'lady beneficient', mother of Empire, and the 'angel out of the house', and they did so in ways that benefited them personally as much as benefiting society (p.105). Their work was not limited to advocacy for women in the Church or related to church matters, but also in advocating for the education of girls, temperance, care of 'the poor', and women's suffrage and employment. The authors refer to the 'reciprocal endorsement between

space and speaker' (p.151), a well-observed transactional relationship in which the women speakers at Congress gained a certain status, or enhanced their existing status, by association with Congress and the Church; at the same time, the Congress gained 'dignity and appeal' from including these women in its programme. Throughout the book, a formal association with the state religion is shown to have acted for middle-class women as a legitimising factor (e.g. p.120) across their wide range of advocacy and political interventions. However, as Anderson-Faithful and Holloway note, there was always a diversity of theological and political opinion among this class of Anglican women and these differences were often evident in their contributions to Congress (pp.114-20).

I felt the authors could have taken more care to rewrite phrases and terms that reflected the ableist perspectives of the women being studied. This relates to the discussion throughout of many Congress women's concerns regarding the treatment of disabled people. For example, the terms 'mental asylum' (p.76), 'mentally incapacitated'

(p.107), 'retardation or backwardness' (p.155), and 'physically and mentally degenerate paupers' (p.161) evidently reflect the language of the era, but reusing them without comment is careless. Overall, *Women and the Anglican Church Congress 1861-1938* will be useful for postgraduate students and scholars of gender and Anglicanism, not only for its detailed reporting of the data (such as the number and identities of women speakers at each congress) but for opening this class of prominent Anglican women to a social and political analysis beyond the typical focus on piety and domesticity.

Eleanor Tiplady Higgs  
Brunel University, London





**CHRYSSIDES, G. AND COHN-SHERBOK, D. (EDS). (2023) THE COVID PANDEMIC AND THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS. LONDON & NEW YORK: BLOOMSBURY. 233 PP. PBK. £19.99. ISBN: 9781350349636.**

Beginning towards the end of 2019 in China, the Covid-19 virus spread rapidly throughout the globe, bringing illness and death in its wake. Both governments and societies devised strategies to deal with this phenomenon, with lockdowns and vaccinations becoming the main weapons to reduce the impact of the virus. A key role was also played by faith communities and their members, often providing support to those afflicted at local level. How these communities handled both the existential challenge to faith and the practicalities forms the subject matter of this book. The essays in it were commissioned as the levels of infection subsided (in parts of the world where there had been effective vaccination programmes). With a Foreword by Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, an overall Introduction by Christopher Lewis, former Dean of Christ Church Oxford, two contributions each from members of fourteen different religions, the editors, Dan Cohn-Sherbok and George D Chryssides, have achieved an insightful collection of reflections on the pandemic. Each of the contributors writes as an insider to their community. Whilst the editors have carefully drawn them from different traditions within religions, each writes not as a representative of their own tradition but offering a personal reflection on their experience.

The contributors were each asked to address five questions, moving from the existential to the practical and with a mind to the future:

1. How does your faith explain why such events occur?
2. How has it affected your religious practice?
3. What changes has it necessitated?
4. What differences might we expect once the pandemic is over?
5. What have we learned from it?

Some essays clearly follow the pattern of these questions, whilst others offer a more integrated

approach, so the reader needs to tease the answers out. Drawing on the responses to the questions, the final two contributions of the book are from the two editors, 'Covid and Theology' by Cohn-Sherbok and 'What have we learned?' by Chryssides.

A variety of issues are addressed, reflecting the nature and priorities of the faiths concerned. Whilst some themes cut across the religions, others are more faith specific.

Cohn-Sherbok offers a very neat summary of the response from each faith to the existential questions raised by the pandemic, so readers might find it helpful to look at his chapter as a guide before tackling each of the contributions in turn. The title of his chapter, including as it does the word 'theology', is perhaps not so helpful and he uses this term by extension to cover the basic stance of each religion. He recognises that whilst for some thinkers, such as members of the so-called Abrahamic faiths, tackling the question of theodicy is central, for others it is irrelevant, even for theistic Hindus for example. However, the Abrahamic faiths offer different responses to the problem of evil, with Muslims for example, looking to the providence of God and Christians to the engagement of God in the suffering of the world to be seen supremely in the suffering of Christ on the cross. None of the contributors, however, suggest that Covid is a punishment from God.

It is impossible in a short review to comment on each of the 28 contributions by faith practitioners, but as someone familiar with the multi-faith nature of the city of Leicester I was interested to read the contribution of George Merchant Ballentyne. He writes as a Baha'í, but his work during the pandemic was as Voluntary and Community Sector Engagement Manager in the City Mayor's Office at Leicester City Council. Thus, his contribution gives an insight into the practicalities of how faith communities more widely dealt with the pandemic. Leicester, because of its demography and the way in which Covid had embedded itself, spent more time in lockdown than any other part of the country, with what others referred to as the first and second lockdowns blurring together. Once restrictions began to ease Ballentyne visited various places

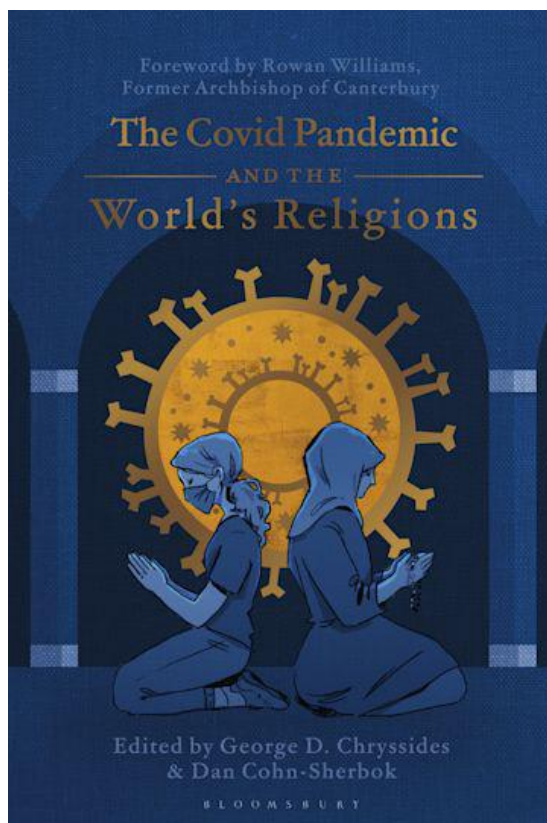
of worship and community centres and was one of a team ensuring government guidance was followed, giving him a unique insight to issues around compliance.

In the long weeks of lockdown ‘in the privacy of my chamber’ he drew inspiration from the words of three founding figures of the Bahá’í faith, each of whom spent lengthy periods being incarcerated. The importance of individual scriptural reading perhaps meant isolation was less problematic for Bahá’ís than for those members of faiths for whom ritual, especially the sacramental involving material objects, was central. Moving beyond the first question and especially on to questions 4 and 5 Ballentyne wrote ‘Bahá’ís are more likely to ask what insights can be gained, what lessons can we learn about living together better? Rather than wonder, “What kind of God would let this happen?” with the implication that looking to future action is more significant.

It is this issue of change, both during the pandemic and looking to the future that the second essay by Chryssides examines. He draws attention to the challenges to sacramental practice as well as the use of technology, particularly the moving online of communal activity. This has perhaps been one of the most widespread changes in practice across a range of faith communities. Whilst for many it was ‘second best’ others found it liberating. In particular, those who were housebound found the ability to participate through Zoom offered a richness of encounter from which they had previously felt barred. The strict limitation on numbers allowed to attend weddings and funerals led to livestreaming of these events. For many this was painful, indeed traumatic, but for some it meant the possibility of at least a virtual at-

tendance rather than no attendance at all. Many who did not have the technological skills at the onset of Covid 19, (and indeed most had not heard of Zoom) gained confidence in going online. Indeed, perhaps this use of online contact, both live and recorded, is the most widespread legacy of experimental changes in practice during the pandemic.

This is a book that will act as an excellent resource to those who wish to study the effects of the pandemic, whether from the perspective of policy making by government or faith communities as well as those who wish to reflect on the challenges to faith and practical ways of addressing those challenges, should a similar event occur in the future. The insights can be seen by extension to apply to other situations, not least to the importance of caring for the environment. Perhaps those religions who see humanity as part of the natural world rather than in dominion over it, have resources more easily to hand.



As I write this review the UK Covid-19 Inquiry is gaining much attention. It is difficult not to draw the conclusion that faith communities responded in a more measured way than those in government, the impact of whose decisions they had to deal with. There are many, too, who think and act as if the pandemic is over, but this is by no means clear. By the time this is printed cases may well be on the rise again and faith communities along with wider society may have a chance to demonstrate what has been learned in its handling.

Angela Jagger  
Independent Scholar

**EAGHLL, T. AND KING, R. (EDS.) (2022) REPRESENTING RELIGION IN FILM. LONDON & NEW YORK: BLOOMSBURY. 264 PP. PBK £21.99. ISBN: 9781350140806.**

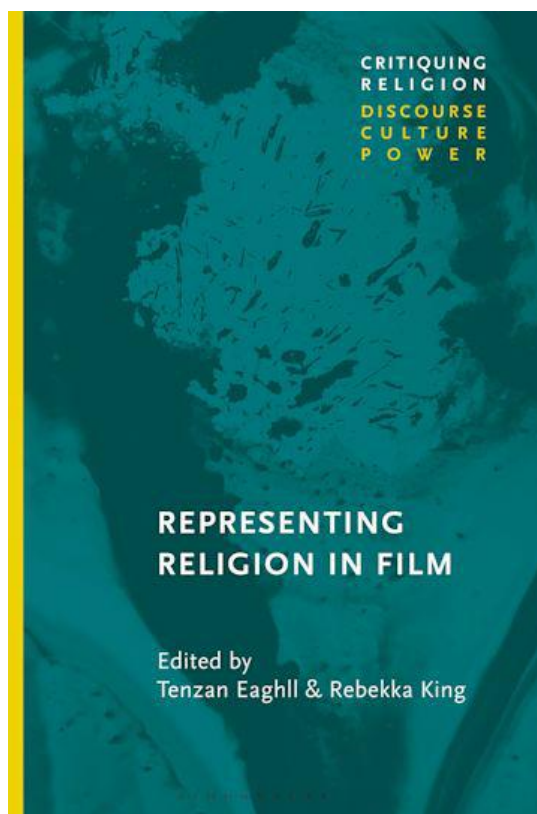
In the introduction to this edited collection, Tenzan Eaghll (p.1) suggests that there are three main approaches to the study of religion and film: theological, mythological, and ideological. He goes on to argue that although the first two methodologies are flawed in their assumptions about a sui generis phenomenon of religion, they are nonetheless dominant paradigms in the field and therefore he offers this edited collection *Representing Religion in Film* as a corrective (pp.2-12). Ideological is not defined in a classically Marxist way by the editors, nor do they suggest that it is simply a top-down process, whereby those in power use propaganda to trick other classes into participating in systems of economic, social and political power relations that are not to their advantage (Eaghll, p.14). Instead, the collection is informed by a model more in keeping with Althusser's work, in which audience members also participate in the structures of society and their representation, albeit even when they are not to their objective advantage, and therefore 'scholars need to pay close attention to how representations of religion in film and film criticism conceal issues of race, class, gender, colonialism, secularism, and capitalism' (Eaghll, p.15). He also stresses how important this process is when discussing matters relating to religion, because of the ways in which religions can universalize and naturalize things that are actually the products of unequal power relations in societies.

The problems with works labelled by the editors as theological or mythological approaches are a

matter for debate. Plate (2003, 2009) for example, pays considerable attention to approaches to global cinema and to audiences' creative engagements with popular films, an approach which goes beyond essentializing religion. Nonetheless, *Representing Religion in Film* is an excellent collection offering fresh perspectives on a wide range of films including *A Wrinkle in Time* (2018), *The Secret of My Success* (1987) and *Religious* (2008). At least five articles focus on race relations, with representations of Asian religions in

*The Darjeeling Limited* (2007) and *Cloud Atlas* (2012) and the examination of the trope of the white savior of Japanese Christians in *Silence* (2016). The analysis of *The Revenant* (2015) locates the film in the history of representations of Native Americans by dominant Hollywood paradigms and *The Wind Journeys* (2009) is explored through the perspectives of indigenous South American peoples. The article on *Hereditary* (2018) asks some important questions about tensions in horror films between supernatural and psychological themes, and apocalyptic themes

are examined in both *Hellboy* (2004) and the *Terminator* films (1984-2019). Finally, the article on *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* (2017) reveals flaws in typical mythological analyses of Star Wars films, suggesting how this installment in the series engages with those critiques and asks difficult questions of audience expectations. Taken together, this collection offers thoughtful, well researched and considered articles and should be on the reading list for scholars interested in research and teaching on religion and film. However, its impact is broader than that, because it asks core questions about the role of scholarship on religion and how this scholarship might and should be rooted in understandings of social and political contexts of reli-



gious practice and its representation. I would therefore suggest that it also be included in reading lists for students taking core modules in the study of religion that introduce them to critical debates in the field as these articles not only contribute to these debates, but do so in a provocative and engaging way that is accessible for readers who also engage with visual culture.

Louise Child  
Cardiff University

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**JONES, D. LOVE, M. AND PINN, A. (EDS) (2023) SPECULATIONS ON BLACK LIFE: THE COLLECTED WRITINGS OF WILLIAM R. JONES. LONDON & NEW YORK: BLOOMSBURY. PP. 240. Hbk £85. ISBN: 9781350338746**

William Jones (1933-2012) is most known for *Is God a White Racist? A Preamble to Black Theology* (1973), which offered a comprehensive critique of the Black Theology developed by James Cone et al. Black Theologians, following a long tradition of Black biblical interpretation, saw the situation of African Americans as repeating the type of the Israelite bondage in Egypt, and proposed that God was an ally of oppressed peoples and thus was working with them to end their predicament. But Jones perceived an inherent flaw in this position: the fact that this injustice showed no signs of ending meant an equal – or better – case could be made for the proposition that such a deity either does not specifically care about Black folks, or is actively persecuting them. In terms of Liberation Theology, this critique was poignant and is still perceived as an important caveat to conceptions of divinely mandated racial justice.

The present text, collecting a number of articles and conference papers, offers a glimpse into texts less well known. Divided into four sections, the volume presents his thoughts on humanism and Black humanism; philosophical theology and theodicy; the politics of race (including on education, violence, and “anti-powerism”); and finally reflections on Jones’s work by the editors.

Jones was a Unitarian minister and saw the human being as functionally ultimate – that is, the autonomous free will of humans was a critical

notion. As a result he argued for what he termed Humanocentric theism, that is, a theism wherein human freedom was prioritised over divine omniscience and any other features which might serve to override free will (in fact the ultimacy of human freedom was itself grounded in divinity and the creation of humanity in the image of God). Any other proposition, he claimed, would lead to a cosmos where injustices were accepted as divine will; in such a cosmos it would be impossible to challenge the status quo or agitate to end oppression, because their justice was ensured by the mere fact of their existence. However, Jones’s commitment to rational thought and analysis is demonstrated by his subjection of even his own theory to rigorous analysis, admitting the perhaps devastating caveats, among several others, that his Humanocentric Theism could guarantee neither the overcoming of quietism nor the eventual victory of good in society.

Throughout, Jones is committed to honest analysis, and forms his conclusions based on the validity of arguments. This extends to his willingness to question fundamental theological presumptions:

“The theologian of liberation... must identify those tyrannical beliefs and attitudes, such as quietism, which smother the impulse toward liberation. Only after these inauthentic elements of the tradition have been isolated, sterilized, or neutralized, can the theologian of liberation entertain conformity to that tradition. Otherwise, he runs the risk of knowingly endorsing and perpetuating ideas and concepts that undergird oppression.” (p.33)

Such assumptions include Christianity itself, and even the goodness of God – this final question, he claims, is crucial and must be answered with evidence, but it is one usually presumed away. For Jones however, the Christian God “has not been sufficiently cross-examined to determine the nature of His responsibility for Black suffering.” (p.33)

These questions are particularly potent at the present time as growing numbers of Black Americans move away from the church and embrace other movements (particularly Black Hebrew Is-

raelism). The charge that there are particular elements within Christianity – of any kind – which are “counter-revolutionary” in that they operate counter to the goal of Black liberation, appears to be growing: that Christianity is a slave-religion, designed to keep Blacks subservient to white Europeans, previously limited to the Nation of Islam, can now be heard regularly on street corners and YouTube debates.

And so, if religion is essentially soteriological and liberation is a necessary component of salvation, then whatever religious mode is the best route to salvation should be sought. Jones argues for the validity of humanism as a form of Black religion, against suspicion that it is merely “white religion in blackface” (p.28). Indeed, “It is generally agreed that white Christianity has in the main hindered the cause of Black liberation. Nor does Black Christianity have an unblemished record as a liberating agent.” (p.28) This Black Humanism, or Black non-theism, can be traced throughout Black life in America, through the secular songs which accompanied the spirituals and often ridiculed or scorned the religion of the slave master.

This “competing, albeit minority, tradition in Black religion” (p.41) shows that “Afro-American religion must be approached as a multi-faceted phenomenon that comprises the full spectrum of theistic and non-theistic options” (p.44). This goal of reasserting the broad existence of religion beyond mere theism, of not collapsing Black religion into theism, is argued throughout. Jones argues for black humanism as a theology of liberation, evolving specifically to deal with the needs, questions, experiences, of Black Americans: “The radical theological questions that Black humanism raises grow out of the context

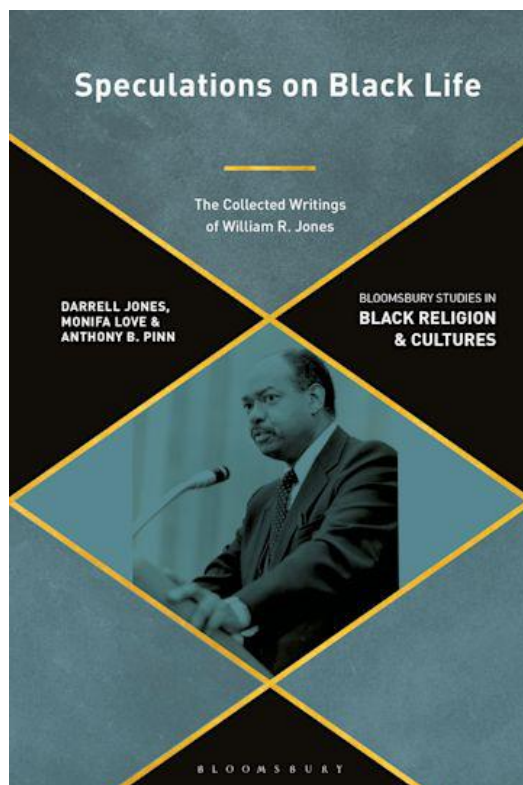
of Black oppression. They cannot be reduced the protests of a brainwashed Black who has been seduced by white western secularism” (p.48).

Throughout, Jones is lucid and perspicuous. Fully committed to the hard work of ethics while challenging any uncritical acceptance of inherited truths or divine mandates, he is also critical of the Unitarian tendency to place reason in its place, but is especially damning of the desire to

proclaim Absolutist ethics. These are “the cloak of the absolute [which] allows a human voice to masquerade as God” (p.147) and vindicate humans from doing the hard work of thinking about our actions and their effects.

Speculations offers a welcome and timely glimpse of a thinker who deserves more acknowledgement and is recommended for all interested in theology and black liberation.

Dr Michael T. Miller-  
Wierzbicki  
Independent scholar



**NEWTON, R. AND V. TOUNA (EDS). (2023) FIELDNOTES IN THE CRITICAL STUDY OF RELIGION. LONDON & NEW YORK: BLOOMSBURY. PP. 224. PBK £21.99. ISBN: 9781350251656.**

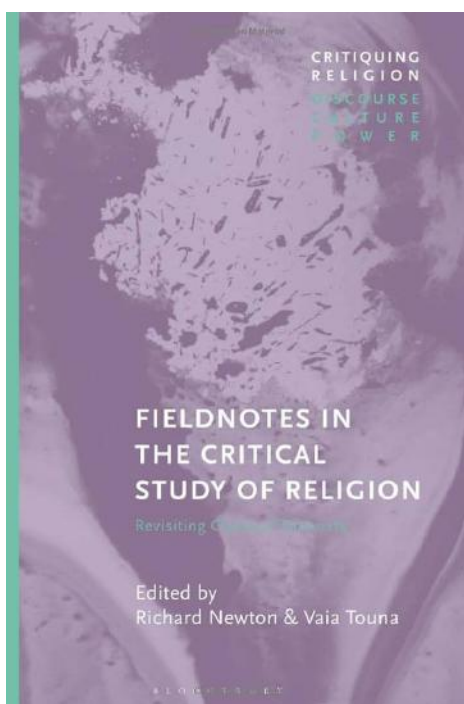
Touna introduces this collection by addressing a common tendency found not only among scholars in the field of Religious Studies but across academia in general: the inclination to defer to a canon of thinkers who collectively represent an established, authoritative past within the discipline. Recognizing the potential challenges inherent in such deference extends beyond the obvious issues related to antiquated perceptions of identity, which we now understand to be both intersectional and adaptable. Touna's objective with this work is to shed light on how el-

evating a group of scholars who are widely acknowledged, if not universally endorsed, can inadvertently hinder comprehensive critical engagement with their contributions. This limitation extends to the broader evolution of discourse in the field. A modern scholar of Religious Studies who includes perspectives from the likes of Weber, Jung, or Muller likely does not interrogate them with the same rigour as previous scholarly work. In other words, everybody knows what they say and by virtue of their continued mention, things get sloppy.

Stemming from informal debates and conversations, this work invites critical engagement with these scholars, but beyond that, the structure of the work also disrupts our understanding of the canonical scholars beyond the usual critical angles of post-modern inquiry. Chapters 1 through 13 each present a quotation from a 'classic' scholar which are not the most expected passages, but quotes that may diverge from the prevailing impression of the canonical scholar in question. Each passage is engaged by a modern scholar as one would approach notes from ethnographic field-work—products of a time and place and over which the observing scholar has little control. The quotes were chosen by the editors and assigned to the writer, frequently with discord in mind—the paired scholars' disciplinary foci and their respective quotes are often seemingly incompatible.

The collection begins with Hughes and McCutcheon's tidy summary of the development of Religious Studies. They begin with Enlightenment discourse, which has progressively faded from relevance, and follow its transformation into the exploration of elusive experiential phenomena to the 'history of ideas.' The authors firmly situate the evolution of this narrative history within the context of Empire and its associated colonial values, as one would expect.

But after establishing the historical context and recognizing the problematic aspects of the past, the authors caution against placing that past a safe distance from our present. Contemporary scholarly endeavours cannot sever the development that shapes inquiry today. Instead, they propose acknowledging the limitations of both canonical and modern scholars in shaping understanding of past works. They advocate for a middle path, rejecting both uncritical acceptance and wholesale rejection. By acknowledging the inherent limitations in our academic inquiries, which are often constrained and potentially flawed yet can yield useful and unexpected insights, the authors prompt us to apply the same principle to the revered and rejected figures of the past.



In each subsequent chapter, readers encounter a thoughtfully curated excerpt from canonical scholars, complemented by a contextualization and response provided by a selected scholar who offers an unexpected and distinctive viewpoint. These chapters collectively offer diverse perspectives, with several notable highlights, including drawing attention to scholars like Kitagawa, long overshadowed by Eli-

ade in the Hyde Park School, whilst also asking scholars to interrogate their own assumptions about them. Frederich Max Muller's work, as presented in this collection, champions the pursuit of objective comparative study in alignment with the natural sciences. However, the selected quote suggests that such innovation would lead to the emergence of Christianity as the 'true and sacred character' of the modernizing world. Considering his work is anchored in the privileged position of colonisation, Nongbri notes the obvious problems, but also cautions that swinging the other way comes with its own blind spots.

The journey and positionality in Wilfred Cantwell Smith's selected passage facilitates Edith Szanto's needed exploration of what inclusivity ac-

tually looks like when we study religion in a developing and globalised world. Szanto's work pivots from Smith's experiences, underscoring the crucial importance of actively pursuing a deep understanding of the structural and political boundaries that greatly impact the study of religion in our constantly evolving global context. Also notable is Esaki's examination of Malinowski's critique of sociological approaches to religion, which, employing *The Matrix* as a lens, delves into not only the apparent tension in the chosen passage but also our individual positions and roles within the system. This discussion is a clear and essential choice for inclusion in any foundational course in Theology and Religious Studies.

The examples mentioned above provide a mere glimpse of the valuable insights this work offers. As a curated collection, which emerges from ongoing dialogues and debates among contemporary scholars in the field, it is inherently limited in scope. Nevertheless, the unique structure and approach to these discussions would be exceedingly valuable in a teaching context focused on foundational aspects of the discipline but proves an exemplary and innovative example of critical engagement that moves beyond expected paths of inquiry.

Kristi Boone,  
University of Leeds

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**TURNER, A. COX, L. AND BOCKING, B. (2020) THE IRISH BUDDHIST: THE FORGOTTEN MONK WHO FACE DOWN THE BRITISH EMPIRE. OXFORD: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS. PP 320. HBK: £28.99. ISBN: 9780190073084.**

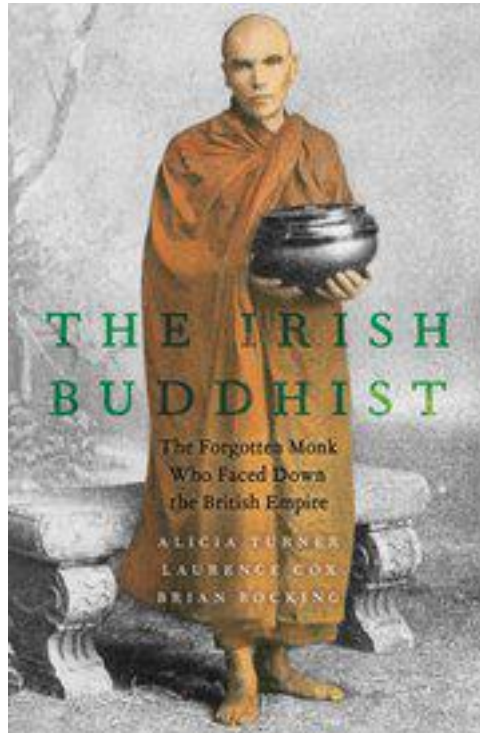
The academic study of religion, especially from a historical standpoint, resembles nothing so much as a crime scene investigation, a police procedural in which the smallest pieces of evidence can build a case to identify a perpetrator. I first heard about U Dhammaloka at the new religious movements conference organised by Laurence Cox in late 2009, and this book is the wonderful culmination of a long journey in which Cox, Alicia Turner, and Brian Bocking reconstructed the life of this extraordinary Irishman in the

context of British Colonial Burma. There are several names that the Irish monk used; for example, William Colvin, Laurence O'Rourke and Laurence Carroll. The authors found most evidence for Carroll, and tentatively track his life in Dublin, as an itinerant worker in the United States, as a sailor to Japan, with a period of time in Ceylon, and finally Burma, where he lived in Rangoon, worked as a tally-clerk, and studied Buddhism prior to being ordained in 1900. After 1900 his story is on firmer footing. He advocated temperance, he had ceased "to draw on Irishness, whiteness, or Christianity as a primary source for solidarity, support and work opportunities" (p. 47).

Dhammaloka was a popular preacher and presented Burmese Buddhism as a threatened religion, due to his opposition to missionary Christianity. His religious name is usually said to mean "light (aloka) of the Buddhist law" (p. 62). He toured constantly, arguing that Burma should be Buddhist and that converts to Christianity should revert to their natal religion, and on 2 March 1901 at the Shwedagon Pagoda demanded a police officer take off his shoes to enter holy ground. This led to months of conflict with colonial administrators. Dhammaloka insisted that the issue of shoe removal was part of the defence of Buddhism, while British bureaucrats insisted that it "was not a religious issue" (p. 82). In 1902 he travelled to Japan, where he may have visited as a sailor in c. 1880. Dhammaloka spoke at the launch of the "International Young Men's Buddhist Association" (p. 89), and from 1903 to 1905 travelled to Singapore, Bangkok, and Penang on missions, where he became President of the newly founded Siam National Buddhist Association. He returned to Burma in 1905, and from there travelled to India. He planned "to found ... missions staffed with his own ordained European Buddhist monks" (p. 122), though he was deeply concerned for the welfare of poor Asian Buddhists, and was engaged in a cosmopolitan project that was distinctly plebeian (p. 126).

Turner, Cox and Bocking unpack the fascinating phenomenon of "beachcomber bhikkhus," poor white men who became Buddhist monks (p. 134), and discuss the prestige attached to being (possibly) the first European ordained monk.

There are three contenders: Bhikkhu Asoka (Gordon Douglas) ordained in 1899 and died in 1901; Dhammaloka, ordained in 1900; and Ananda Metteya (Allan Bennett [MacGregor]), ordained in 1902. Dhammaloka was captured in print by journalists and travel writers, the most entertaining of which was by American Harry Alverson Franck, titled *A Vagabond Journey Around the World: A Narrative of Personal Experience (1910)*. In 1907 Dhammaloka founded the Buddhist Tract Society, which published his writings, and the works of European freethinkers and atheists. In 1909 he toured Sri Lanka at the invitation of Anagarika Dharmapala, founder of the Maha Bodhi Society. Dharmapala was also concerned to protect Buddhism from the Christian missionary threat. There were tensions on this tour, as some of Dharmapala's associates were hostile to Dhammaloka, and on 5 November he pulled out, earlier than expected, and returned to Burma.



recommended.

In January 1911 Dhammaloka was appealing against a conviction and bond to keep the

peace, due to “complaints brought by two missionaries, one Anglican and the other American Baptist” (p. 224) in Moulmein. His appeal in Rangoon failed, with Judge Daniel Twomey upholding the original decision, despite popular support for Dhammaloka. In 1912 he travelled to Singapore then on to Australia, and a report of his death (likely fabricated by Dhammaloka himself) was published in March of that year in a Calcutta newspaper, possibly because he was on the run from the police. Evidence for Dhammaloka's life ends in October 1913, and Turner, Cox, and Bocking end their fascinating, charming, detective story arguing that Dhammaloka's efforts might be considered failures, but that he showed remarkable energy and political acumen, and in reconstructing his life they have made contributions to the history of Western Buddhism, colonialism in Asian, and working-class cosmopolitanism. This book is a great read and it is highly

Carole M. Cusack,  
University of Sydney

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# Members' Recent Publications

## George D. Chryssides

- 2023 with Dan Cohn-Sherbok (eds) (2023). *The Covid Pandemic and the World's Religions*. London: Bloomsbury. ISBN 978-1-3503-4965-0.
- "Engaged Research in the Study of Religions". *Journal of the British Association for the Study of Religions*. JBASR 24 (2023). pp. 71-85.
- with Thomas, Aled, Edward Graham-Hyde, Sarah Harvey, Suzanne Newcombe, and Donald Westbrook "Perspectives on 'Cult' Rhetoric (And Its Future)". *Journal of the British Association for the Study of Religions*. JBASR 24 (2023). pp. 42-51.
- "Jehovah's Witnesses"; in Stausberg, Michael, Alexander Van Der Haven and Erica Baffelli *Religious Minorities Online*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter. Entries on: Negative Theology IV.E; Nest IV.B; New Age Movement; New Heaven and New Earth III.D; New Jerusalem IV.D; Nimrod III.C; Noah's Ark IV.E; Notovitch, Nicolas; Nudism; Numbers, Numerology IV.D; Oaths and Vows V.E; Obedience, Disobedience IV.E. Vol.21: 21-23; 168; 270-271; 296-297; 499-501; 569-560; 884; 918; 979-980; 1066-1067; 1126-1128.

## James L. Cox

- 2023 with Steven J. Sutcliffe, Suzanne Owen, Bjørn Ola Tafjord, Bettina E. Schmidt. 'A Discussion of James L. Cox's A Phenomenology of Indigenous Religions'. *Indigenous Religious Traditions* 1(1). pp. 90-127.
- 'Researching Religious Communities in the Twenty-First Century: The Phenomenology of Religion, Local Agency and the Joint Ownership of Knowledge'. In M. Freudenberg, F. Elwert, T. Karis, M. Radermacher and J. Schlamelcher (eds). *Stepping Back and Looking Ahead: Twelve Years of Studying Religious Contact at Käte Hamburger Kolleg Bochum*. Leiden and Boston: Brill (Dynamics in the History of Religions, vol. 13). pp. 97-123.
- 2022 *A Phenomenology of Indigenous Religions: Theory and Practice*. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- 'Delimiting Religion: From Religious Experience to Relational Research'. *CR: The New Centennial Review* 22 (2). pp. 41-77.
- 2021 'Indigenous Religions of Oceania: Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific Islands'. In G. N. Devy and Geoffrey V. Davis (eds). *Environment and Belief Systems: Key Concepts in Indigenous Studies*, Vol. 1. London and New York: Routledge. pp. 91-114.

## **Jennifer Philippa Eggert**

- 2023 with Seb Rumsby. Religious Positionalities and Political Science Research in ‘the Field’ and Beyond: Insights from Vietnam, Lebanon and the UK. In: **Qualitative Research**. pp. 1-23.
- 2022 with Philipp Öhlmann, Olufunke Adebeye, Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, Nadine Bowers-Du Toit, Marie-Louise Frost, Wilhelm Gräb, Juliane Stork, Ignatius Swart, Tanja Van Wyk, Olivia Wilkinson. Inaugural Editorial. A New Journal for a New Space: Introducing Religion & Development. In: **Religion & Development**, Volume 1, Issue 1. pp. 1-30.
- with Maryam Kanwer, and Jaffer Mirza. **Responsiveness to Religious Inequalities in Contexts of Displacement: Evidence from Providers of Humanitarian Assistance to Shia Hazara Refugees from Afghanistan in Pakistan**. Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development (CREID) and Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLI) Working Paper. Brighton and Washington, DC: Institute of Development Studies.

## **Alex Fry**

- 2023 **Gender Inequality in the Ordained Ministry of the Church of England: Examining Conservative Male Clergy Responses to Women Priests and Bishops**. London: Routledge.
- Religiosity and Wellbeing in Areas of Socio-economic Deprivation: The Role of Social Capital and Spiritual Capital in Enabling Resources for Subjective Wellbeing. **Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health**.

## **Eleanor Nesbitt**

- 2023 **Open to New Light: Quakers and Other Faiths**, London: Collective Ink Books.
- ‘Codes of Conduct and Way of Life’ and ‘Sikhism in Mainland Europe’ in Pashaura Singh and Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair (eds) **The Sikh World**, London: Routledge. pp. 83-93 and 160-170.
- ‘Guru Granth Sahib in the Writings of Western Women’ in Doris Jakobsh and Opinderjit Takhar (eds) **Global Sikhs: Histories, Practices and Identities**, London: Routledge. pp. 93-110.
- with Arweck, E. ‘Discovery, construction, disclosure: some factors in children’s developing religious identity’, **Review of Social and Scientific Study of Religion**, 33. pp. 338-359.
- with D’Costa, G. Pryce, M. and Shelton, R. ‘Nicola Slee as Poet-theologian: In a Company of Voices’ in Ashley Cox, Rachel Starr and Stephen Burns (eds) **From the Shores of Silence: Conversations in Feminist Practical Theology**, London: SCM Press. pp. 24-43.

## **David Robertson**

- 2023 “Each religion has an authentic, unchanging core”, in Craig Martin and Brad Stoddart (eds.), **Stereotyping Religion, Vol. 2**. Sheffield: Equinox. 71-81.

- 2022 "Analytic categories, decolonisation and claims of special knowledge." *Religion and Society: Advances in Research* 13. pp. 140–150.
- "Crippled Epistemologies: Religion, Conspiracy Theories and Knowledge." *Social Research* 89:3. pp. 651-677.
- "Religious Literacy as Religion Literacy: A Response from the UK." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 34, 475–483.

### **Aled Thomas**

- 2023 with Graham-Hyde, E., Chryssides, G. D., Harvey, S., Newcombe, S. and Westbrook, D. A. (2023), 'Perspectives on "Cult" Rhetoric (And Its Future)', *Journal of the British Association for the Study of Religions*, 25. pp. 42-51.
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- 2021 'Toward a Study of Scientologies', *Implicit Religion*, 23 (2). pp. 140-147.
- Free Zone Scientology: Contesting the Boundaries of a New Religion*, London: Bloomsbury.
- 2020 'Engaging with the Church of Scientology and the Free Zone in the Field: Challenges, Barriers, and Methods', *International Journal for the Study of New Religions*, 10 (2). pp. 121-137.

### **Paul Weller**

- 2022 *Hizmet in Transitions: European Developments of a Turkish Muslim-Inspired Movement*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.
- Fethullah Gülen's Teaching and Practice: Inheritance, Context and Interactive Development*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.
- "The Problems of the White Ethnic Majority' Revisited: A Personal, Theological and Political Review", *Practical Theology*, February.
- "The 'Non-Religious' in Religion and Worldviews Education and in the Light of Human Rights Law," in Md Jahid Hossain Bhuiyan and Ann Black (eds.), *Religious Freedom in Secular States: A 21st Century Perspective*, Brill, Leiden. pp. 95–124.
- "Historical Dissenting Christian Academies and Contemporary Muslim Educational Institutions: Contexts, Comparisons, Resonances and Contrasts", in R. Hood and S. Cheruvallil-Contractor (eds.), *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion: Lesser Heard Voices in Studies of Religion*. Volume 32. pp. 125-146.

2021 with Alam, A. Earl, M. Demir, M. Gill, S. Hedges, P. Shener, O. Sleep. F. and Steinberg, S. guest co-editors, *Special Issue of Journal of Dialogue Studies: Dialogue with and among the Existing, Transforming and Emerging Communities*, Volume 9.

### **Amy Whitehead**

2023 with Letcher, A. "We'll all dance each springtime with Jack-in-the-Green: the 'Green Man Complex' in contemporary British culture" in *The Journal of Nature, Religion and Culture*, 17(2). pp. 228-252.

"Materiality and the Study of Indigenous Religions" for *The Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Religion*. Oxford University Press.

### **Michael T. Miller-Wierzbicki**

2023 *Ben Ammi Ben Israel: Black Theology, Theodicy and Judaism in the Thought of the African Hebrew Israelite Messiah* (Bloomsbury: Black Religions and Cultures).

"Bishop Allan Wilson Cook (Rabbi Haling Hank Lenht), Queen Malinda Morris, and the Independent Church of God: A Missing Piece in the History of Hebrew Israelite Black Judaism" *Black Theology* 21.3.

"Layers of Liminality and Marginality in the African Hebrew Israelite Community" in *Betwixt and Between Liminality and Marginality: Mind the Gap*, ed. Zohar Hadromi-Allouche & Michael Hubbard Mackay. Lexington. pp.15-36.

"African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem" in *World Religions and Spiritualities Project* ed. David G. Bromley.



"Bizarre beliefs have broken into the open before. Indeed, new orthodoxies can emerge out of just such ideological undergrowth, sometimes with devastating effects."

**(Michael Barkun, 2013. *A Culture of Conspiracy : Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America* p250)**