

INTRODUCTION

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Here is a volume of scholarly conversation for everyone caught up in or concerned with issues of identity and religion in a pluralistic, changing world.

That such a volume of international scholarship in the History of Religions should emerge out of Australia was, until but yesterday, highly improbable. But it happened! For the first time in its 85-year history, the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR) ventured into the Southern Hemisphere. It held its 15th Congress at the University of Sydney, Australia, from August 18 through 23, 1985. Participants numbered 439 and came from 29 countries. Their theme: Religion and Identity.

Of 281 papers delivered at the Congress, perhaps one quarter were "theme-related". With the invaluable assistance of eighteen Sectional Co-ordinators, 65 of these were selected and considered for publication. All were "of scholarly merit" and most were within the "suggested 6,000 word length-limitation". Responsibility for the final choice of 27 papers (10% of the total) belongs to the editor who has tried to give shape to this anthology while representing fairly the diversity of concerns, academic disciplines, religious traditions, and even world geographic areas, involved in our discussions.

PART A

Perhaps fortunately, most papers do not linger long over definitions of "religion" and "identity". It is enough that a few familiar definitions of "religion" appear as heuristic devices, e.g., "religion is the relationship to the Ultimate, the source of everything" (**Mantovani**), or "religion is any means towards ultimate transformation" (**Tsui's** use of *Streng*), or "religion is the sacralisation of identity" (**Mol**). Most papers accept Western conventions about which traditions and which phenomena are "religious" but a few (e.g. those by **Rule, Bradley, Tsui, Mantovani**) critique the dominance of Western categories as distorting or irrelevant when applied to Eastern or primal traditions.

Nor do authors linger long over definitions of "identity". The word may suggest something static, but in these papers identity is associated with dynamic temporal process. Authors speak of it as being lost, sought, found and maintained; as being stripped away, re-established, reconstructed and transformed. Identities are said to compete, help, threaten, jostle and reinforce one another; they collide, adapt, intersect and become entangled. The boundaries of religions are porous enough, or understood flexibly enough, to make possible much traffic between religions and between religions and the world. In all this the key notion may be not so much identity-sameness as discerned continuity.

The theme "Religion and Identity" may thus appear continuous, if not identical, with the 1980 Winnipeg Congress theme: "Traditions in Contact and Change". Under either rubric most of the important questions can be subsumed (cf. Ninian Smart below). In this volume 27 papers are gathered into seven sections.

I

Papers in the first group focus on what gives identity to a religion or a morality. They raise basic and seemingly straightforward questions: Wherein lies the identity of a religion? (**Hubert Seiwert**) How is it that different religions appear to share common moral ground? (**Peter Donovan**) Why do religions persist in their separateness? (**David Bradley**) All three papers are concerned with “boundaries” and “authority” and the basic identity-conferring functions of myth and tradition.

II

A second group of papers focuses variously on personal identity issues in diverse traditions. **Karl Werner** explores Vedic, Upanisadic and early Buddhist concepts of personal identity, and finds no essential difference between them for, he argues, each holds that the phenomenal personality is a structural unity of constituents held together and/or inwardly controlled by a force which does not itself provide any distinctive marks of one’s personal identity. This force is *aja* (“the Unborn”) in the Vedas; or *atman* (neither this nor that) in the Upanisads; or *atta*, the transcendent force which early antimetaphysical Buddhism referred to only negatively by denying that *khandhas*, individually or collectively, comprise it. Werner holds that with some exceptions subsequent Hindu and Buddhist systems can be shown to be variations and elaborations of this pattern. (It is not the case, therefore, that “Hinduism” believes in an indestructible, individual, transmigrating soul while “Buddhism” denies it.)

Turning to an Eastern Christian tradition, **Luther Martin** first reminds us that the Delphic maxim, “Know thyself”, was understood by the Greeks from Plato on as the obligation to take care of oneself, the main principle of Greek ethics and a guide to the art of life. However, in the Eastern non-canonical Thomas tradition — which contrasts with the Western tradition of a “doubting Thomas” and which presents the apostle as possessing salvific knowledge, the nature of which is self-knowledge — “taking care of oneself” appears not as an obligation but as an interdiction! Martin explores the implications of this antithesis for an Eastern Christian view of the self.

Noel King then directs our attention to three classic pilgrimage accounts from as many great traditions. The *peregrinatio* as a genre cannot be tightly defined, says King, but the search for and the finding of identity may be one of its important features. King concludes that pilgrimage through the centuries has been, among other things, a means of transmitting spiritual and religious genes and that the *peregrinatio* preserves the encoding. As those who know Noel King know, these are not merely armchair speculations. The adventurous risk-filled questings of King and his pilgrims seem far from the pastoral “comfortings” of **Kenneth Dempsey’s** Australian rural minister who seems forced to seek a sense of meaning and personal worth in non-church community affairs! Yet, while moving in radically different directions, both pilgrim and pastor are “religious” figures questing in their different ways for personal identity.

In a further contrast, **James Home** presents John Henry Newman as one whose commitment to the social morality of his religious community was combined with responsible social criticism and self-realization. In Newman’s concept of conscience — given by God through Newman’s personal experience and his church’s scriptures and traditions — a strong sense of individual identity is significantly influenced by social morality. Home considers this synthesis in terms of “moral luck” (Thomas

Nagel, Bernard Williams) and “destiny” (Paul Tillich, Langdon Gilkey) in order to conclude that “identity achieved without social morality would have a deficient sense of destiny”.

III

The third and central section begins with the opening address given to the Congress by **Hans Mol**. Mol suggests that in everyday life the meaning of identity has moved away from abstract idea to the much more concrete notion of “bounded system” or “unit of social organization”, such as self, tribe, community, family, ethnic group, class, nation, etc. These “systems” or “identities” attempt to maintain unity, sameness, continuity, or structure within, but do so in the face of many factors frustrating their boundaries. Mol sees them as a jostling configuration of cooperating but also contending units of social organizations displaying the same kind of differentiation-integration or fragmentation-wholeness dialectic that is present in age-old religious traditions.

This dialectic between identity and change is, for Mol, part and parcel of the very being of any surviving religion. Religion, he says, reinforces the various units of social organization (“identities”) through transcendental ordering (objectification), emotional anchoring (commitment, faith) and sameness enacting (ritual). It also reconciles the tension between them or redresses imbalances in accordance with its transcendental blueprint. Yet by doing so, it introduces de-sacralizing elements through relativization of existing standards, de-commitment from undesired beliefs and values, and the stripping away of old identities.

It seemed appropriate to present Mol’s theoretical considerations — and **Ninian Smart’s** response to them — just prior to our fourth and fifth group of papers; and to place this sociological perspective in a position where it could itself contend with the many other perspectives represented by the papers from fifteen other Congress sections. But not only that. We have also placed here **Ursula King’s** paper in order to insist on the centrality of an issue which cuts through all traditions and academic disciplines: the recognition of women in their full humanity and dignity, the welcoming of the distinctive, enriching feminist perspective and experience into the study of religion. Dr King’s paper will not permit any of us, men or women, to indulge some traditional androcentric perspective (whether conscious or unconscious) without challenge, as she argues for a major “paradigm shift” in studies in the history of religions.

IV

In the fourth section, several papers recount the efforts made by specific traditions to re-establish or maintain identity in changing contexts. **Alan Williams**, sees Zoroastrians in deep crisis as to their present identity. Today there are but 130,000 members of this, “the world’s oldest revealed religion”, and they are geographically fragmented across the world. William’s study suggests that a religious identity survives when a community values its own theological distinctiveness. The Sikhs, too, as **W.H. McLeod** reports, have been deeply concerned to resolve the identity issue, and this has involved them in a lengthy quest for the definitive “*rahit-nama*”, that is, a manual which would effectively define normative Sikh belief and behavior, modes of personal devotion, corporate ceremonies, etc. McLeod surveys this quest and assesses the success of the 1950 *Sikh Rahit Maryada* in stabilising Sikh religious identity. **M.H. Klaiman’s** paper takes us back to 16th Century Bengal to show how Brahmins used

the (pre-existing) popular Krishna cult, Gaudiya Vaishnavism, to re-stabilise a threatened Hindu community and re-establish identity. This is followed by the paper by **Azim Nanji** with its focus on recent issues of tradition, revitalization and identity in the case of Nizari Ismaili Muslims. In illustrating both the unity and diversity of Muslim responses to modernization, Nanji underscores the transformative potential within the religious consciousness.

The two papers which conclude this section are in a different key. They raise the issue of self-definition (or auto-interpretation) vis-a-vis definition by others and in doing so point up the possible limitations of Western approaches to Eastern faiths. Taoism, says **Bartholomew Tsui**, is not to be equated with the order of Nature (Needham is a leading culprit here, he claims), for Taoism is "a way of ultimate transformation", hence a "religion"; and the biographies of Taoist immortals serve as exemplars for the Taoist, providing the latter with religious identity. **Paul Rule**, in his turn, argues that Neo-Confucianism is a "religion". If its true identity cannot be caught by our common Western categories, then these categories need a thoroughgoing reevaluation!

V

The fifth section constitutes a recognition of the fact that in our generation, especially in the last fifteen years or so, the religious scene in many countries has been transformed by a new religious pluralism. Australia is a good example of this, but the countries reported on here are Canada (Quebec), Nigeria and Great Britain. These and other countries have experienced an invasion of new religious movements, some drawing inspiration from the West and some from the East.

Roland Chagnon reports an estimated 250 new religious movements in Quebec. He scans the religious and social history of Quebec in an attempt to show that after long having been in search of a collective identity, first in a religious sense and then in a secular sense, Quebecers are now seeking group and personal identity among these new movements. There is a kind of triumph of individualism here, says the author, and the new cultural mode has made its impact on the established churches. In Nigeria, as **Rosalind Hackett** tells us, there has been, since 1970, an influx and indigenous growth of "the spiritual sciences" — groups specializing in metaphysics, mysticism and occultism, mostly from the U.S.A., Britain or India. There has been an accompanying growth market in magical objects and imported popular literature on magic, astrology, Kabbalism, parapsychology, secret biblical texts, etc. All this has generated new forms of religiosity (as well as some indigenous institutions) which Hackett calls "spiritual technology". It is characterized by a quest for spiritual knowledge, power and development and a direct experience and manipulation of the sacred. The author explores reasons for the popularity of this new, privatized and "self-sufficient" religiosity and considers its consequences for religious behavior and identity.

In Britain, as **Kim Knott** reports, the range of ethnic minority religions has been greatly widened by the recent influx of Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Parsees and West Indian and African religious communities. These transplantations of religions from one place to another raise many practical issues associated with the dynamics of identity-maintenance. What happens to the content of the transplanted faith? What happens to collective ritual-practice? to folkways? to the education of children? How does the religion now relate to culture, language, caste, business activity, and to the search for social and political identity? Knott observes, incidentally, that for some groups religious and ethnic identity are co-extensive (e.g., the Punjabi Sikhs), but

that more often ethnic enclaves share a common religious identity. **Penelope Johnstone's** paper considers the specific case of Muslims who, from varied backgrounds, have settled in Britain and now search to make explicit a common Islamic identity. Johnstone asks: Is the preservation of Islam compatible with British nationality? What are the distinctive features of being Muslim in a Western society? Is the concept of Umma relevant?

VI

The sixth section comprises three papers which self-consciously relate religion and culture in the examination of identity. **Richard Pilgrim** considers religio-aesthetic values and cultural identity in Japan by exploring the arts of MA. Ma (aida) indicates any interval or space within the continuity of either things or time — the empty space which is a room, a rest in music, a pause, the state of being “in-between” anything. More deeply, the term takes on philosophic, religious, and aesthetic significance especially as used in the traditional arts of Japan. Pilgrim is able to point to an underlying pan-Japanese religio-aesthetic value system which helps provide and support one form of cultural identity and consistency within the diversity of Japanese history, culture, art and religion. **Ennio Mantovani**, from Papua New Guinea, analyses the Simbu Pig Festival — which he has observed over the past twenty years — in order to arrive at an understanding of the meaning, the substance, of Simbu culture and the roots of Simbu identity. Missionaries, says Mantovani, have hitherto interpreted this festival from the wrong symbolic system, i.e., from a theistic rather than a bio-cosmic point of view. This has prevented them from seeing it as an impressive and authentic religious celebration which creates, expresses and strengthens Simbu identity. In the third paper, **James Tulip** discusses the question of Australian identity in terms of its poetry, religion and culture. Tulip's paper charts some half-dozen positions in modern Australian poetry for the insight they give into how Australians are seeing themselves imaginatively and, arguably, religiously. Differing responses to nature, aboriginal perceptions of reality and their white adaptations, urban parables, feminist criticism and artistic imagination are all represented.

VII

In the seventh and concluding section, three papers examine loyalties or identities of great generality. These are referred to as generational, ecumenical or world identities.

In the first paper, **Dale Bengtson** suggests that personal and cultural identities coalesce in the notion of generational identity. A generation, says Bengtson, is the primary agent of social change, and this generational process is identifiable as a ritual process (with pre-liminal, liminal and post-liminal phases). In terms of this model, the author interprets the religious changes wrought in America by the generation born following the close of the Second World War — a generation which brought about protean transformations in all aspects of American life. **Walter Principe** then directs our attention to the notion of “catholicity”, one of the self-identifying traits of the Christian Church, and shows how various historical interpretations of the concept have affected cultural and national identity. Understood as uniformity, this “mark” of the true Church has often threatened national, cultural or personal identities, says the author. On the other hand, immigrant groups, as well as peoples or nations under pressure or persecution, have sometimes had their identities reinforced by the sense of belonging to a “catholic” church extending beyond their immediate situation.

This relationship or tension between universalist teaching and local identity-creating forms is a focus of much interest in the study of religious traditions. **Michael Pye**, in our last paper, describes an unusual and positive instance of this relationship in the modern Japanese religious movement known as *Byakkō Shinkōkai* (White Light Association). Here a liturgy for world peace dramatically emphasizes the search for a world (even cosmic) identity. Dr Pye, incoming Secretary-General of IAHR, reflects on the significance of this Japanese religious celebration for the overall theme of this Fifteenth Congress.

PART B

All Congress members received a 106 page *Congress Program Book* and a 184 page *Book of Abstracts*. These provided invaluable orientation and a guide to the six days of Congress activities.

The Proceedings incorporated into this volume as Part B do not repeat the material in these two pre-Congress books, with the important exception that the Academic Program *is* re-presented so as to incorporate all cancellations, additions and changes, checked item for item with Section Co-Ordinators. Part B opens with a contextualizing essay by **Eric Sharpe** who places this 15th Congress in the sequence of congresses beginning with Paris 1900 and describes its unique Australian setting. Sharpe's essay is followed by a record of Formal (and some informal) Events, a listing of the 281 papers which made up the Academic Program, a roll-call of the 440 Congress members (with their addresses), and information on IAHR and AASR.

For the record the following statistics are offered. Of the 281 papers given at the Congress, three were presented in Plenary Sessions, six at the Panel session, thirteen at the two Symposia, and 259 at the many sessions convened by the eighteen Sections. With the exception of the Sections on "Judaism" and "Indonesia and Southeast Asia", *all* Sections have at least one paper in this anthology. Some have more, thus: Islam 2, Methodology and Hermeneutics 2, Indian Religions 2, Comparative and Phenomenological Studies 2, East Asian Religions 3, and Anthropology and Sociology 4 (plus the Opening Address and Response). Christianity, the largest Section with 27 papers, has only one paper in this volume. The Congress Theme was suggested by a sociologist. Although the concept of identity has been around for a long time, it has been increasingly prominent in the more recent social science literature.

The authors come from eight countries: England 7, USA 7, Australia 4, Canada 4, New Zealand 2, Papua New Guinea 1, Hong Kong 1 and West Germany 1. Five of the authors are women. Of the 440 registered Congress members, 200 have Australian addresses (and almost half of these are members of AASR which has some 350 members). My best estimate (since gender cannot be read into initials) is that 123 women were members of the Congress and that some two dozen were featured on the Program.

Finally, it might be noted that the 13th Congress, Lancaster 1975, produced a volume of Abstracts and Proceedings but no papers. The 14th Congress, Winnipeg 1980, had 650 persons attending and 440 papers offered, and printed 43 papers (10%) but without a record of other Proceedings. The editor of the present volume, instructed by the experienced editors of these past two volumes has attempted to combine in the following pages both a record of Proceedings and a useful record of contemporary scholarship in the History of Religions.