

AASR Occasional Publication Series

**ESSAYS FROM THE AASR CONFERENCE
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Introduction

We are very pleased to present the following papers from the 2008 AASR conference, held at the University of Auckland in conjunction with the Society for Biblical Literature (SBL) in July 2008.

Papers were read in five thematic sections:

- Religion and Gender
- Cross Cultural Investigations
- Emerging forms of change in modern churches
- Identity and gender in contemporary Islam
- Psychological insights into spiritual practices

Happily, the sections are all represented in the papers that follow. Each paper has been peer reviewed, and authors come from a cross section of scholarly disciplines including history, cultural studies, anthropology, religious studies, gender studies, Islamic studies and psychology.

We hope you enjoy reading the work of these scholars and we look forward to any comments you may have on the launch of on-line conference papers. Many thanks to the authors for their patience and hard work. And special thanks to Alex Norman at the University of Sydney for his skills in editing and formatting.

Jay Johnston and Kathleen McPhillips,
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List of Contributors

Ibrahim Abraham is a research assistant in the Centre for Studies in Religion and Theology at Monash University, Melbourne, where he received degrees in religion studies, law and sociology. He has published articles in journals including the *Australian Religion Studies Review* and *Topia: Canadian Cultural Studies Review* as well as chapters in books including *The Politics of Recognition*.

Catherine Laudine is an anthropologist from the University of Newcastle in Australia who is interested in religion, the environment and the creative and performing arts. Her master's thesis on Australian Aboriginal environmental knowledge is soon to be published as a book by Ashgate Publishing in the UK as *Rational Reverence – Aboriginal Environmental Knowledge*. This book looks at ways that highly valued environmental information is carried and reinforced by ritual and art. Her doctoral work looks at contemporary practitioners of nature rituals in Australia. A case study approach was taken which allowed the examination of various nature arts and rituals which have been inspired by different faith traditions.

Stephen Hunt is a Reader in the Sociology of Religion in the Department of Sociology and Criminology at the University of the West of England, the UK. His specialist area is contemporary Christianity, especially the Pentecostal and charismatic movement. Publications include the volumes *Religion in Everyday Life* (Routledge, 2005); *The Alpha Enterprise: Evangelism in the Post-Christian Era* (Ashgate, 2004); *Alternative Religion: A Sociological Introduction* (Ashgate, 2003) *Religion in the West: A Sociological Perspective* (British Sociological Association: MacMillan, 2001) and *The Charismatic Movement in the United States and Britain: A Comparative Reader* (Edwin Mellor, forthcoming).

Glenys Eddy completed her Doctoral thesis entitled, "Western Buddhist Experience: The Journey from Encounter to Commitment in Two Forms of Western Buddhism" in 2007. Her research interests include religious conversion, contemplative practices, contemporary Western Spirituality, and Esoteric Religion.

Maureen Miner (M.Clin. Psych., PhD) is Chair of the University of Western Sydney Psychology and Spirituality Society. A Senior Lecturer in Psychology at UWS, Maureen both teaches and researches in the field of the Psychology of Religion/Spirituality, and supervises student theses in this area. She consults as a clinical psychologist with clients having a religious worldview. Current collaborative research projects include the antecedents of burnout and job satisfaction in church leaders; impact of attachment to God on psychological health; and the development of measures of Islamic attachment to God and spirituality.

Martin Dowson is currently Director of Studies and Higher Education at the Australian College of Ministries. Professor Dowson also holds adjunct/visiting professorships at several highly ranked international universities including the Australian National University, the Universities of Sydney and Michigan, and the Free University of Berlin. Professor Dowson's research encompasses several key areas in the field of psychology including educational psychology, psychological measurement, and the psychology of religion. Professor Dowson is author of over 140

peer refereed publications including articles appearing in *Review of Educational Research*, *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, *Review of Religious Research*, and the *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*. In addition to his other research work, Professor Dowson is currently editing Volume 6 of *International Advances in Education: Religion and Spirituality*. Professor Dowson has won numerous research grants (totaling more than 1.5 million dollars), and has received academic awards from institutions including the American Educational Research Association, the Australian Association of Special Education, Macquarie University, and the Universities of Texas and Western Sydney.

Matthew Dillon is Associate Professor and Convenor of Ancient History in the School of Humanities at the University of New England, Armidale, Australia. He has published several articles and books in the area of Greek religion and Greek history. His main interest lies in the religious activities of ancient Greek women, especially in the Archaic and Classical periods (800-323 BC). He is currently working on a book concerning ancient Greek divination, with a special emphasis on women's interest in foretelling their own futures.