

AASR Up-date

Letter From America – April 1989

Dear AASR Colleagues:

Penny McKibbin asked me if I would send a Letter from America: if I might "Cook" something up for us so to speak. I am in the States in Richmond, VA. working on a book titled, *Reading the Book of Isaiah*. There is not a lot of exciting news to report after 4 months of being holed up with a computer on the fifth floor of a library. I'm not sure I'll have anything important to say until I return.

Return! There is some excitement in that, especially given the fact that Linda and I purchased special "See America" tickets on United flight 811. No one told us about cargo doors that are not firmly affixed. I flinch everytime I walk past an office door here and someone asks me to drop in.

Speaking about airplanes disintegrating in flight does remind me of what has become a favorite pastime of the American government: deregulation. The key activity for a political leader is deregulation. In addition to allowing the airlines to run themselves, the government has accepted the oil companies' argument that they can regulate the clean up of their own oil spills, the phone companies' argument (when you can get an operator) that deregulation makes phoning more efficient, and the savings and loan companies' argument that everyone's money is where it will make the most, the quickest: junk bonds.

When driving in Richmond, one sees a sign at almost every intersection, or so it seems, that says "no left turn." This is ironic: such a regulation would appear to run counter to deregulation. But to offer such an explanation is to simplify the complex American psyche. Deregulation means never having to turn left.

When you do turn right, however, you may encounter a number of people, especially from the religious right, passing you at great rates of speed. They are running "like the devil" from the devil. The devil, of course, is the major reason that many of the evangelists in the electronic ministry have given for their deregulated morality. Jimmy Swaggart and the Bakkers have both defended themselves by saying, "The Devil made me do that." That used to be a joke of the Afro-American comedian Flip Wilson when he played the role of the inner city minister of the Church of What's Happening Now. But no one is laughing. In fact, these days you can tune in Jimmy Swaggart almost every Sunday morning and watch him cry. Crying seems to be quite common among evangelists. Up until this point I thought it worked only for Australian Prime Ministers. Jimmy and his cohorts also cry because the audience for most television ministries is down 40-60%. They claim the press is "gunning" for them.

That could be true because guns are everywhere here. We're back to the issue of deregulation again. Not to have a gun

is not to be free. One has the right to bear arms. I figure that it would be a lot safer here if the framers of the constitution in attempting to ensure the right to "bear arms" had spelled out instead the right to "bare arms," especially given the green house effect (1988 has had the highest temperature of the earth ever recorded and the winter has been warm here). To many (especially those who never heard of a state militia) the right to bear arms means the right to buy and use guns. People actually debate the pros and cons of the right to purchase assault rifles. Some of these are semi-automatic. That means that they will fire only as fast as you can move your index finger. Others are automatic. That means they fire repeatedly as long as you keep your index finger flexed. In the big cities people are being shot in numbers that are rising like the temperature. These are mostly young black men who find the selling of "crack" the only way of making money. There is a good market for "crack" - the yuppies who live in the suburbs and cruise into

the cities on one of the many freeways that ring them.

Six months ago I was tearing my hair out to complete forms for the Australian government enabling it to more effectively regulate tertiary education. I figure that the dose of deregulation here should just about cancel out my frustration with Dawkins. In fact I'm looking forward to being normal for at least a month before things get out of balance again.

Let me close by seriously wishing all of you a continued good year of teaching and research, in spite of any frustrations you might have, whether they be of the regulated or deregulated kind. I plan to be back in Australia in May and will catch up on details of AASR activity. I will write again in the next issue concerning some matters which we will want to consider at our Annual General Meeting for the 1989 AASR conference. I look forward to meeting many of you in Perth.

Sincerely

Ed Conrad, President, AASR

From the Secretary

There are still many subscriptions due, and forms outstanding for the Members Directory. We can't produce a new one with only half the members!

Another form is enclosed in case you have lost the last one....

Please note that I shall be in England for the second half of June, and all of July. Dr Rod Bucknell has kindly offered to

handle all urgent secretarial tasks in my absence. Could you therefore hold back or redirect your enquiries and other business over this period?

Thank you.

Here endeth the lesson.

— Scott Cowdell
Secretary, AASR

AASR FOURTEENTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

**University of Western Australia
September 27 - 30, 1989**

Papers and panel proposals are invited for this first AASR conference to be held in WA - Sections are:

Anthropology/Sociology of Religion
East Asian Religions
Hinduism and Buddhism
Islam
Judaism and Christianity
Philosophy and Methodology of Religion
Primal Religions
Psychology of Religion
Religion and the Arts
Religion and Education
Women and Religion

One-page abstracts (500 word maximum) are due June 30, 1989.

Highlights of the Conference include...

A Forum on Spirituality in Contemporary Western Australia

Two Charles Strong Lectures

Visit to the Spanish Benedictine Monastery, New Norcia

Visits to the Theravada Sangha at Serpentine, the Buddhist

International Meditation Centre at Mahogany Creek, and the Vietnamese Temple in Northbridge in Perth's inner city.

For further information, contact:

Dr Iain Gardner
Department of Religious Studies
Claremont Campus, WA College of
Advanced Education
PO Box 224
Claremont WA 6010
Telephone: (09) 383 0333

AASR members are invited to participate in overlapping conferences in Perth:

THE AUSTRALIAN
ANTHROPOLOGICAL SOCIETY

THE ANZ ASSOCIATION OF
THEOLOGICAL SCHOOLS

THE ANZ SOCIETY FOR
THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

Enquiries and registration forms, please contact:

Dr Iain Gardner
(ANZATS AND ANZSTS)
address above,

or John Gordon (AAS)
Department of Anthropology,
University of Western Australia,
Telephone: (09) 380 2850.

Announcing the
FOURTEENTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

**THE AUSTRALIAN
ASSOCIATION FOR THE
STUDY OF RELIGIONS**

**Wednesday September 27
to Saturday September 30, 1989
at
St Thomas More College
University of Western Australia**

(In conjunction with the 12th Joint Annual Conferences of—

The Australian and New Zealand Association of Theological Schools and;

The Australian and New Zealand Society for Theological Studies;

AND

The Australian Anthropological Society National Conference)