

Afterword

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The papers in this volume are written by friends, colleagues and former students of Professor Garry W Trompf. Each of the contributors has, in some capacity, placed themselves in the sphere of his thought. And what a large sphere it is. The table of contents alone suggests that what the contributors have in common is little more than a broad interest in the study of religion as a cultural phenomenon. From that juncture, the paths start to diverge. Thinking about the diversity of these papers, I am struck by one of those little anomalies that seem to crop up when we try to characterise something as firmly planted in our contemporary situation. (The postmoderns are rather inclined to describe these as paradoxes, but positing a contradiction would not allow us to make sense of this.) The anomaly is this: Professor Trompf is someone whom you might feel inclined to describe in rather old-fashioned terms, as the nearest thing to a polymath that you might come across these days, whose interests span the length and depth of the history and philosophy and psychology and sociology of religions – and of the cultures wherein they arise. He is a man who justly earns himself such a curious title as ‘Professor of the History of Ideas’. And yet how thoroughly contemporary is this fascination for diversity, this ability to see cultural phenomena in their inexhaustible complexity and elusiveness. This is what makes *Studies of Religion* a natural home for such as Garry, since it is one of the very few fields in the modern academy where a diversity of disciplinary perspectives is not considered a hindrance, but a precondition for research. Had such a home not existed, Garry would have had to create it.

The breadth of research of these papers is not, then, mere coincidence, but reflects a particular intellectual and academic style which his friends, students and colleagues appreciate in Garry: an approach to his discipline which is radically inclusive, non-dogmatic and endlessly curious. Such a style shows, to my way of thinking, that it is possible to combine the best of the received academic

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imperatives with the best of the contemporary academic mode, without sacrifice to either. One can maintain the methodological and analytic rigour of a mannered academic inheritance, without giving in to the dogmatism and prejudice that has so often accompanied it. One can maintain the levity, the eclecticism and the endlessly interrogative style of the contemporary mode, without giving in to the cynicism and skepticism that so often accompanies it of late. It is an approach that can be allowed to take responsibility for its outcomes in society. It is an approach that assumes that it is important to do so. There is a single feature of this style that I can speak of in my own experience of being supervised by Garry and it is, it seems to me, an effect of this recognition of diversity that I find so characteristic of him. It is an apparently unshakable faith in the ability of his students to succeed, if allowed the intellectual space to pursue their own path among the many that he clearly shows to be available. This volume, I believe, stands as evidence of the value of that faith.