Sydney Studies in Religion 4

THE END OF RELIGIONS?

Religion in an Age of Globalisation

Edited by Carole M. Cusack and Peter Oldmeadow

Department of Studies in Religion
The University of Sydney

SYDNEY STUDIES IN RELIGION

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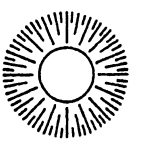

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Acknowledgements

The papers in this volume were given at the 1999 conference of the Australian Association for the Study of Religion (AASR). The conference theme was 'The End of Religions? Religion in an Age of Globalisation'. Four excellent public lectures, Morny Joy's 'Beyond a God's-Eye View: Alternative Perspectives in Religious Studies' (Inaugural Penny Magee Memorial Lecture); Doug Pratt's 'Identity and Interaction: Islam and the Challenge of Interreligious Dialogue' (Senior Charles Strong Memorial Lecture); Susan Aykut's 'Hairy Politics: Hair Rituals in an Islamic Ottoman Context' (Junior Charles Strong Memorial Lecture); and Trevor Jordan's 'The Role of Religion in Globalising Civil Society' (AASR Presidential Address) set the scene and a challenging and wide-ranging array of papers, of which this selection is but a few, were presented.

The conference was organised by Carole Cusack, with assistance from Alice Dwyer, Frances di Lauro, Katy Nebhan, Christopher Hartney, Paris Mawby, and Dan Bray. Sancta Sophia College provided the perfect venue and the staff of the Department of Studies in Religion facilitated the conference atmosphere, both intellectual and social.

This volume has been refereed in accordance with Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) requirements, and thanks are due to the referees. Special thanks to Wendy Oldmeadow for editorial assistance and proofreading and to Don Barrett for proofreading.

Preface

The relationship between global and local has become increasingly vexed with the advent of the new millennium. This is paralleled by debates within Studies in Religion over the progress of the secularisation process and the triumph of science, and the seemingly contradictory proliferation of new religious movements and 'New Age' spiritualities.

The title of the 1999 Australian Association for the Study of Religion (AASR) conference, 'The End of Religions? Religion in an Age of Globalisation', focused on the effect these issues have on one area of human activity, religion. The tension between the globalisation of certain religious ideas and the desire of local cultures to preserve their particularity in the face of this imperialism creates poignant vignettes the world over.

The contributors to this volume traverse vast geographical and cultural territory. The first section, 'Global and Local: Some Theoretical Considerations', contains Patrick F. Gesch's remarkable account of his participation in Sepik initiation, a thoroughgoing reversal of the dictum that nobody abandons the global for the local, 'nobody converts to a primal religion'. This challenging beginning leads to considerations of globalisation and its relationship to millenarianism and apocalypticism, traditionalism and perennial philosophy, and the possibility of a 'global ethic'.

The second section, 'Global Transformations, Local Manifestations: Judaism and Christianity', explores the ebb and flow of two 'traditional' religions at the start of the third millennium. Gary D. Bouma and also Michael Mason and Denis Fennessy explore aspects of Christian organisations, the former from a largely 'global' and the latter from a largely 'local' perspective. Major world faiths have experienced a decline in numbers in terms both of attendance and of identification. However, they have also developed new forms, such as Pentecostal Christianity, which are often successful in gaining new converts.

The third section, 'Religious Themes in Global Popular Culture', contains two papers which reflect on the way in which global popular culture, which includes film, television and popular music, both employs the symbolism of, and makes a contribution to, contemporary religious forms. Paris Mawby's 'The Kingdom is Within: Religious Themes and Postmodernity in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*' investigates the ways in which gnostic and philosophical ideas permeate a popular science-fiction film, and Madeleine Rigby's 'Graceland: A Sacred Place in a Secular World'

demonstrates that the world of 'stars' and 'celebrities' may unintentionally give rise to new forms of devotion and create new pilgrimage destinations.

Section four, 'Religion, Technology, and the New Age', contains two polemics: Adam Possamai's 'A Revisionist Perspective on Secularisation: Alternative Spiritualities, Globalised Consumer Culture, and Public Spheres', a careful refutation of the classical secularisation thesis; and David Pecotic's meditation on the emerging nexus between religion, technology and esoteric traditions, 'Virtual Technologies and the Ancient Roots of Modernism: Mark C. Taylor's alchemical operations upon the terminal body of New Age religion'.

Finally, 'Globalisation and Syncretism in Asian Religions', considers the effects on the Buddhist tradition of the encounter with Western culture , both in South America and in relation to new forms of Tibetan Buddhism that are emerging. The positive outcomes of the encounter of cultures are found in the Vietnamese syncretic new religion, Caodaism, in Chris Hartney's 'Syncretism and the End of Religion(s)'.

This volume is an exciting contribution to a area of study which is changing and evolving even as we read, and which will be a important element of any future the 'globalised' world achieves.

Carole M. Cusack
Peter Oldmeadow

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List of Contributors

Margie Beck is a lecturer at the Australian Catholic University at Strathfield in Sydney. She studied at New York University in 1997 and began research into the religious identity of American Jewry at the end of the twentieth century. Her paper in this volume compares the American and Australian contexts. She is currently working on a paper for NYU on the religious history of America and Australia.

Gary D. Bouma is Professor of Sociology at Monash University; Associate Dean of Arts (Research); Associate Priest in the Anglican Parish of St Martin's in Hawksburn in the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne, and Chair of the Christian Research Association. His current research includes a major study of religious plurality in multicultural Australia making strategic comparisons with other societies; research into gender and the management of religious diversity; and continuing work on Post-Modernity as a context for doing theology. Recent and forthcoming books include, *Many Religions, All Australian,* Melbourne: CRA; *Managing Religious Diversity,* AASR; a Fourth Edition of *The Research Process,* Oxford University Press and with Harry Ballis, *Religion in an Age of Change,* Melbourne, CRA.

Carole M. Cusack is a Lecturer in Studies in Religion at the University of Sydney. She is the author of *Conversion Among the Germanic Peoples* (Cassell 1998). Her research interests include new religious movements, medieval Christianity, and European mythology.

Justine Digance lectures in tourism at the School of Tourism and Hotel Management, Griffith University on Queensland's Gold Coast. Her research interests are in tourism management and she has just been awarded her doctorate on modern secular pilgrimage in Studies in Religion at the University of Sydney.

Alice Dwyer is an postgraduate in the University of Sydney's Department of Studies in Religion. Interested in all things theological, Alice's main interests include philosophy of religion, Death of God theology, postmodernism and its discontents, interreligious dialogue, religion and politics and religion, art and architecture. Alice is also a keen admirer of Dionysus, but she's not sure she would go into the forest alone with him.

Dennis Fennessy, who developed the earliest version of the Structural Equation Model used to analyse the Catholic Church Life Survey, and wrote part of the explanation of the Model in the Mason and Fennessy paper, was a Research Associate at the Institute for the Advancement of Research, Australian Catholic University Melbourne in 1999. He is an independent researcher who works in the field of education.

Patrick Gesch gained his doctorate from the University of Sydney with a thesis on cargo cults against the background of traditional village religion. He is from Townsville; was ordained a priest in Chicago; and started missionary work in Papua New Guinea in 1973. He is currently Vice-president Academic at Divine Word University, Madang PNG

Chris Hartney is a doctoral student and tutor at the University of Sydney. His research interests include New Religious Movements and the religious, philosophical and poetical life of the Confucian world, particularly Vietnam. Chris also conducts tours of the various religious communities around Sydney, and is fascinated by the continually changing face of the city's suburbs. He believes that comparative religion education should be mandatory in all schools and is very excited that the subject is studied by nearly ten thousand High School Certificate students in New South Wales - more than Modern History or Economics!

Janet Kahl completed her Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Studies in Religion, University of Sydney in 1998. She has since completed a Graduate Diploma in Museum Studies.

Timothy Lee completed his Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Studies in Religion, University of Sydney in 1999. His interests include acting, reviewing films, and the interface between literature and religion.

Michael Mason, a sociologist specialising in the sociology of religion, is a Senior Researcher in the Institute for Advanced Research at the Australian Catholic University in Melbourne, and Director of the Catholic Church Life Survey. He is a Catholic priest, a member of the Redemptorist order. He is interested in research on the Catholic Church in Australia, Christian communities, and religious experience

Paris Mawby is a postgraduate in Studies in Religion, University of Sydney. Despite his vision of a giant cartoon rabbit in 1989, he has developed no formal religious convictions. However, his research interests do include religious symbolism in both traditional and secular contexts, esotericism, aesthetics, and mysticism.

Harry Oldmeadow is a Senior Lecturer in Philosophy and Religious Studies at La Trobe University Bendigo, and is the author of the recently published *Traditionalism: Religion in the light of the Perennial Philosophy*. He is currently researching East-West religious encounters in the twentieth century.

Peter Oldmeadow is a Lecturer in Sanskrit and Classical Indian Thought and Buddhism in Studies in Religion and Indian Studies at the University of Sydney.

David Pecotic is a postgraduate and tutor in Studies in Religion at the University of Sydney. He is currently undertaking his PhD dissertation, examining a typology of religious experience in western esotericism through a study of autobiographical texts

Adam Possamai is a Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Western Sydney. He has published in the field of New Religious Movements and Alternative Spiritualities, and currently works on migration and New Religious Movements, on the implications of consumer culture and popular culture on religion, and on the social ramifications of Information Technologies.

Madeleine Rigby graduated with Honours in Studies in Religion at the University of Sydney in 1999 and while not studying at present maintains a keen interest in the study of religious issues. She also has a keen interest in popular culture with a particular focus on the religiosity to be found therein. She has, of course, been to Graceland.

Cristina Rocha is a PhD candidate at the University of Western Sydney, Australia. Her writings include 'The Appropriation of Zen Buddhism in Brazil', *Japan Studies Review*, vol. 4, 2000, pp. 33-52; and 'Zen Buddhism in Brazil: Japanese or Brazilian?', *Journal of Global Buddhism*, 2000, http://jgb.la.psu.edu. She was the recipient of the Urasenke Foundation Scholarship (Japan, 1992-1993) and the Japan Foundation Fellowship (Japan, 2000).