

Introduction to Special Issue on Religion and Violence

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In December 2019 the Australian Association for the Study of Religion held a highly successful annual conference at the University of Newcastle with the theme of *religion and violence*. Such a thematic has been the subject of the study of religion across disciplines for much of the last fifty years and has produced some memorable texts including *The Myth of Religious Violence* (William Cavanaugh, 2009), *Fields of Blood: Religion and the History of Violence* (Karen Armstrong, 2015) and *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Mark Juergensmeyer, 2017). Theories of religion and violence have considered a multitude of contexts such as secularism and modernity, terrorism and war, post-colonialism, gender-based violence, new religious movements and faith-based violence. The 2019 conference reflected most of these themes and considered some newer accounts of violence including the work of the keynote speakers Prof. Naomi Goldenberg (Ottawa University) addressing her new theoretical approach to religion as forms of vestigial states, and Prof. Morny Joy (Calgary University) delivering the 20th Penny Magee lecture, addressing approaches to the problem of violence in the feminist philosophy of religion. The counter discourse of peace and

1. Kathleen McPhillips is a senior lecturer in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Newcastle, Australia. Her main areas of research are gender, violence and religion and she employs feminist, psychoanalytic and sociological frameworks to issues around gender and religion particularly around institutional child sexual abuse in religious organisations. Kathleen has extensive experience in attending, reporting on and analysing the Catholic Church at the Royal Commission into Institutional Child Sexual Abuse and holds numerous research grants. Her most recent publications are in *Child Abuse and Neglect*, *Feminist Theology*, *Journal of Australian Studies*, *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* and *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion*.

non-violence also featured in numerous papers including the Charles Strong Lecture given by Norman Habel. (Details of the conference can be found here: <https://www.aasr.org.au/2019-conference1>)

The articles published in this special volume sit across two issues of *JASR* (33.3 and 34.1) and reflect some of the significant thematic debates at the conference.

In this issue Erin Sessions links the biblical text of Song of Songs in the Hebrew Bible to the current high levels of gender-based violence experienced by Australian women. Using the text as a hermeneutic tool and resource allows the reader to explore gendered violence in a nuanced and sympathetic manner and ultimately to use the text as a model for intervention in the primary prevention of domestic violence. Kathleen McPhillips examines the contribution that survivor-based support groups make to the illumination of institutional child sexual abuse in faith-based groups. Located as a social movement, McPhillips explores how over the last 30 years, sophisticated organisational processes have developed that have made a substantial contribution to lessening violence against children in religious organisations while also ensuring transitional justice to victims.

The final three research articles in this issue, and the book reviews, demonstrate the journal's ongoing commitment to the diversity of scholarship on religion, from across the disciplines and across the seas.