

EDITOR'S PREFACE

Religious Studies...and...Theology

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Our first item of business with this issue of *Religious Studies and Theology* is to officially give a very warm welcome to our new book review editor, Professor Steven Muir. Dr. Muir hails from the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at the Concordia University College of Alberta. We are most pleased to have him join us; his conscientiousness and interest in *Religious Studies and Theology* is reflected in the rich selection of texts reviewed herein.

The description on our website (<http://www.equinoxpub.com/journals/index.php/RST>) indicates that *Religious Studies and Theology* is a peer-reviewed journal that publishes thoughtful original research of an interdisciplinary nature with significance to the various fields of Religious Studies and Theology. Our readers who work and study in one or, sometimes, both of these fields will be well aware of the tensions that exist between the older field of theology that dates back to the medieval period in Europe and the newer discipline of Religious Studies that emerged in the 1950s in North America. It is in the spirit of the interdisciplinarity that has marked academic discourse in this part of the globe over the past decade that our journal has sought to acknowledge the value of the various perspectives that each of the sadly siloed areas of Theology and Religious Studies bring to the table in order to better understand ourselves and our world, particularly the role religions play in it. We would like to advance this initiative even further by creating a space for dialogue through requesting Letters to the Editor responding to the material presented in each issue. A selection of these letters will be published in subsequent issues, also allowing for a response by the author to the letter(s). So please—we ask that you not only read the contents of *Religious Studies and Theology*, but engage with them!

Consistent with our description, international contributors from many disciplines explore understandings of the workings of religion and spirituality in the contemporary world in this current issue. Contributors Davood

Mohammadyani and Seyed Majid Abdellahi present interdisciplinary work at Payamnoor University, Iran. The first author is located in the Faculty of Theology and Islamic Studies, Department of Islamic Studies and the second in the Faculty of Human Sciences, Department of Educational Sciences And Psychology. Their shared interest, across faculties, is the Islamic encounter with Greek thought during the medieval period. They explore ways in which Qur'anic teachings influenced Muslim thinkers, particularly Mulla Sadra, Kindi, Suhrawardi, and Avicenna. David Kim from Australia National University discusses the controversial translation of the word *tahime* in a fragment of Coptic papyrus in a private collection, placing it within the historical context of the emerging Christianities and related controversies of the second century. Chandler Rogers of Biola University in Southern California considers the relationship between fictional narrator and author in *Fear and Trembling*, noting that the approach one takes in the analysis of that relationship could influence how Christian readers in particular understand the meaning of the text. John Hiemstra from The King's University in Alberta glosses the contemporary context in many countries shaping the debate on religion, politics and society, bringing it into discussion with the neo-Calvinism of Abraham Kuyper and Groen Van Prinsterer; it is a significant piece given that this tradition of thought has been very influential in the United States of America as well as the Netherlands. Specific to similar debates in Canada, Jérôme Melançon, a native Quebecois currently working at the University of Alberta, explores the Charter of Values promulgated in Québec from 2012 to 2015 in the context of tensions between the political church and laity in that province over the past seventy or so years. He suggests what a new model of democracy might offer in terms of collective self-determination for a plural and pluralist society that at the same time safeguards French culture in Québec. He draws on the work of Marcel Gauchet, Yvan Lamonde, and the report of the Bouchard-Taylor Commission to make his arguments. This section of the journal ends with a Review Article by Nazila Isgandarova from Emmanuel College of Victoria University in Toronto. She outlines medieval Islamic classical works by Kindi, Ya'qub, Razi, Farabi, Sina, and Seydi, with particular focus on the importance of the role of music in the care of the soul. She concentrates on the use of music therapy during the medieval period and suggests that there is contemporary value in this modality.

The description on our website further notes that we also give special attention to studies on religion and religious communities in Canada with regard to the place of this nation in our interconnected global community. This is particularly relevant, given the clearly significant role religion is playing, or is purported to be playing, in the dynamics of our global world. As always, the capacity of deep and thoughtful intellectual reflection and debate has the

potential to contribute to informing public discourse. It can do so by putting forward the work of anthropologists, literary scholars, sociologists, psychologists and others who hazard the journey out of the stacks to listen to those who live in the complex and polysemic worlds encoded on the two dimensional pages of monographs and anthologies. Some, faced with lived realities, become advocates and sometimes even paladins for communities; however, many others seek to bring the power of research and reflective thought to bear to clarify and deepen understanding regarding the conundrums, contradictions, complexities and confusions of lived experience that involves (or purports to involve) religions.

It is for this reason that, as we claim in our description, *Religious Studies and Theology* welcomes traditional scholarly commentary in critical essay format that engages a wider reading public. However, in addition to the traditional academic essays included in this issue as mentioned above, we have introduced a new section with the working title *Reflections from the Field*. Both Religious Studies and Theology are multicentric and thus have a very wide range. The sensitivities around each are challenging. Religion or the perception of it as a factor and politics is a volatile topic. People get emotionally engaged. Tempers rise. Anger flares. An important consideration, as the value of the humanities is widely questioned by the tax-paying public, is the demonstration of the capacity of the humanities and social sciences to mitigate rigid positioning (and to articulate why doing so is significant). Our intention is to open all that the intellectual life offers to those who fund it, both publically and privately, through disseminating hours (years!) of painstaking labour, often in isolation, to international colleagues as well as interested educated audiences.

Venturing into actually disseminating research—beyond the narrow cadre of like-minded colleagues—takes tremendous courage and this new section, *Reflections from the Field*, provides a forum for intellectuals to examine how they approach their research work in these sensitive and therefore fraught contexts. Natasha Zaretsky offers our first *Reflection*, pondering on the demanding task of exposing research in contentious and sensitive areas. She provides a thoughtful reflection stimulated by the response of some of our Jewish colleagues, many of whom lost family in friends in the 1994 AIMA bombing, when she brought research data to bear on the recent assassination of the Argentinian Judge Alberto Nisman earlier this year.

We further, and finally, contend in our description that beyond these themes [of original research of an interdisciplinary nature; significance to the various fields of Religious Studies and Theology; religion and spirituality in the contemporary world], the journal continues to disseminate scholarly insight that reflects and contributes to positive, fruitful action in the

world. To that end, we hope that you enjoy this issue of *Religious Studies and Theology* and look forward to receiving your feedback.