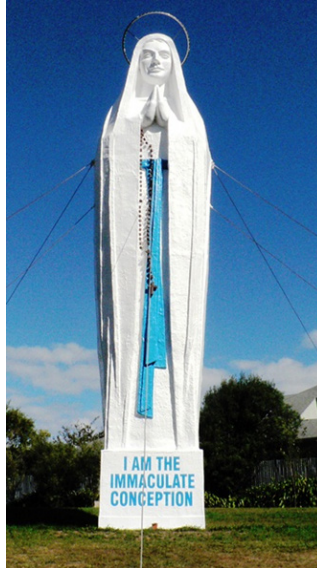




N Z A S R

New Zealand Association for the Study of Religions



BIENNIAL CONFERENCE OF THE NEW ZEALAND ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS

9-10 DECEMBER 2013

MASSEY UNIVERSITY, WELLINGTON CAMPUS



**MASSEY
UNIVERSITY**
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND

Cover image:

This prominent statue of Our Lady of Lourdes in Paraparaumu commemorates the Blessed Virgin's apparition to Bernadette Soubirous at Lourdes, southern France, in 1858. Commissioned by Father J.J. Dunn, it was made by Martin Roestenberg and blessed by Archbishop Peter McKeefry in October 1958. At 14-metres in height, it was constructed out of wood and plaster covered by fibreglass. (Photo © CvdK)

WELCOME

Welcome to the 2013 conference of the New Zealand Association for the Study of Religion being held for the first time at Massey University's Wellington campus. The NZASR is a member of the International Association for the History of Religions, and its main purpose is to promote the academic study of religion in this country. It does this mostly by maintaining a website (<http://www.nzasr.ac.nz/>) and organizing biennial conferences, which usually alternate between the South Island and the North Island.

It is especially pleasing to have a very wide range of papers presented by experienced academics and postgraduate students at this year's conference. I hope you will find the programme enjoyable and stimulating.

For their invaluable assistance in organizing this conference, I would like especially to thank Douglas Osto (Massey University), Katje Strehle (Victoria University of Wellington), Jayne Whyte (Massey Events Management, Wellington), and Tina Sheehan (Academic Programme Administrator, Massey University School of Humanities).

Christopher van der Krogt
NZASR President and Conference Convenor

Venue

Executive Seminar Suite, Block 5 (5B14), Massey University, Wellington campus. Use entrance A in Wallace Street.

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

Monday 9 December	
9:50 am	Welcome
10:00 am	Negar Partow, Divine sovereignty and state authority in Israel and Iran Douglas Pratt, Reactive co-radicalization: the contemporary challenge of religious extremism
11:00 am	Morning Tea
11:30 am	Linda Zampol D'Ortia, "Our way of proceeding": Francisco Cabral, Alessandro Valignano, and the Jesuit mission in Japan (1570–1582) Rick Weiss, The modernity of Hindu charity in India
12:30 pm	Lunch
1:30 pm	G. John Turbott, Anthroposophy in the Antipodes Steven Cooney and Graham Hassall, The origins of the New Zealand Bahá'í community William Hoverd, Religious diversity and the public management of religion: fieldwork in Ontario and Quebec
3:00 pm	Afternoon Tea
3:30–5:30 pm	Naomi Hilton, Reactions to the destruction of the Jewish temple in 70CE: 3 Baruch and the Paralipomena of Jeremiah in conversation Masoumeh Rahmani, Goenka the gatekeeper to <i>dhamma</i> : an analysis of S.N. Goenka's secularisation of Vipassana meditation Danilo Giambra, Taniguchi Masanobu: presenting and representing the religious charismatic leader over the social networks Seth Tweneboah, <i>Fama Nyame</i> Morality, justice delivery and spiritual vigilantism in Ghana: a religious human rights challenge

NZASR Conference, Wellington, December 2013

Tuesday 10 December	
9:00 am	Keziah Wallis, To go see what they say: the role of fieldwork in the study of religion Peter Donovan, Music as an aid to philosophizing about religion Andrea McDougall, Can the Christian notion of humility be salvaged? Revisiting feminist critiques
10:30 am	Morning Tea
11:00 am	Geoffrey Troughton, God and grog: changing Presbyterian practice Christopher van der Krogt, Governance and inclusion in multifaith New Zealand
12:00 noon	Lunch
1:00 pm	Taneli Kukkonen, Belief in moderation: al-Ghazālī's early concept of religion Mortaza Shams, Islam: diversity in unity Khalida Tasneem, Religious aspects of the Pakistani diaspora in New Zealand
2:30 pm	Afternoon Tea
3:00–4:00 pm	Katja Strehle, Membership of atheist groups in New Zealand and Germany Marshall Lewis, The atheistic religious naturalism of Goodenough, Crosby and Rue

ABSTRACTS

Steven Cooney, independent scholar (steve@softwaremage.co.nz) and Graham Hassall, Victoria University (Graham.Hassall@vuw.ac.nz)

The origins of the New Zealand Bahá'í community

In the process of observing its 100th year in New Zealand, the Bahá'í Community reviewed its understanding of how the new religion was introduced to this country, by whom, in what year, and with what results. Digital access to New Zealand newspapers has provided new information which corrects some aspects of the community's established oral history. It remains agreed that Margaret Stevenson, of Auckland, is the first New Zealand adherent, but from 1913 rather than 1912, but the active promotion of the Bahá'í message by feminist and peace activist Wilhelmina Bain, amongst others, points to the significant role of non-member advocates. As occurred in other countries, the New Zealand Bahá'í community evolved through an initial period of informality to more organized form, leading to the election of a governing body for the Bahá'ís of Australia and New Zealand in 1934. Although the New Zealand Bahá'ís formed an independent national body in 1957, the present paper focuses on its composition and activities to 1934.

Peter Donovan, Massey University (j-pdonovan@xtra.co.nz)

Music as an aid to philosophizing about religion

Religion and music have been intertwined and mutually supportive throughout their long history. In this paper I shall consider whether attending to the discourse of music can help us in developing a more effective philosophical approach to the study of religion.

Danilo Giambra, University of Otago (danilo.giambra@otago.ac.nz)

Taniguchi Masanobu: presenting and representing the religious charismatic leader over the social networks

Religion and the Internet is a growing topic of interest in Religious Studies, and the case of Japan is no exception to this trend. In particular, Japanese New Religions have shown themselves to be very sensitive both to new social trends and to the new communication technology modes; some of these groups have established a strong presence online, building webpages and religious portals, personal blogs, online counselling virtual rooms, and even virtual pilgrimages and religious Social Networks of their own. In this presentation, I will introduce the person of Taniguchi Masanobu, religious leader and president of Seichō no Ie International (SNI), and I will analyse how the image of the charismatic religious leader is presented and represented in the Social Media, with particular reference to his use of the Facebook platform. Mr Taniguchi is very active online and has elaborated a complex religious persona. Although this case is by no means representative of all charismatic leaders in Japan, the example of Mr Taniguchi is of great importance to understand possible contemporary developments of some prominent religious figures in the Japanese panorama, who have decided to build up strong personal online profiles.

Naomi Hilton, Victoria University (Naomi.Hilton@vuw.ac.nz)

Reactions to the destruction of the Jewish temple in 70CE: 3 Baruch and the Paralipomena of Jeremiah in conversation

Connections between texts that deal with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70CE are topics of ongoing scholarly interest. They indicate the breadth and depth of Jewish and Christian reactions to this catastrophic event. However, within this body of literature, the relationship between *3 Baruch* and the *Paralipomena of Jeremiah* (*4 Baruch*) has not been fully examined, despite the similar narrative setting of each work. This paper addresses that relationship by examining the message and supposed context of each narrative. It argues that *3 Baruch* fills the narrative lacuna, in which Baruch's angelic revelation is mentioned but not described, in the *Paralipomena of Jeremiah* (Par. Jer. 4.11-12; cf. *3 Bar.* Prologue 2). In doing so it presents a rival response to the destruction. The *Paralipomena of Jeremiah* in turn frames *3 Baruch*, thereby providing clarification for unclear elements in that text, such as the nature of Baruch's revelation. The relationship identified in this paper suggests a complex and contested set of Jewish-Christian responses to the Temple's destruction, linked to the Biblical figure of Baruch.

William Hoverd, Massey University, (W.Hoverd@massey.ac.nz)

Religious diversity and the public management of religion: fieldwork in Ontario and Quebec

This talk outlines the findings that arose out of my Post-Doctoral research for a Religion and Diversity Project funded research initiative into Canada's public management of religion. The investigation was conceived and directed by Prof Solange Lefebvre, as a first step toward a broader comparative analysis of Canada's diverse provinces. In 2011 and 2012, we focused upon how Quebec and Ontario address religious diversity within their respective health sectors, education systems and public discussions of women's rights. This is the first systematic investigation comparing the public management of religion between these two very different provinces. French-speaking Quebec approaches its public management of religion from an intercultural perspective in combination with an emphasis on *laïcité*. In contrast, English-speaking Ontario uses Canada's multi-cultural policy and has a far more ad hoc secular public sphere. I describe the challenges faced by the ground-up development of our methodology and how this approach was necessarily crafted to be specific to Quebec's and Ontario's unique differences and histories. The talk also highlights certain key differences and similarities we discovered within the public management policies. Particular attention is paid to discussing chaplaincy services, religious education and women's rights policies.

Taneli Kukkonen, University of Otago (taneli.kukkonen@otago.ac.nz)

Belief in moderation: al-Ghazālī's early concept of religion

In a widely accepted commonplace, al-Ghazālī's understanding of Islam is supposed to have undergone serious revision following the events of 488/1095, with a legalistic and external defence of the dominant religious tradition giving way to a more internalized understanding of Islamic faith and practice. Aside from a few typically valuable remarks by Richard Frank, however, it is striking just how little research has gone into establishing what al-Ghazālī actually says about the empirical formation of religious belief and the verification of its presence. Here, I propose to examine al-Ghazālī's early theological manual *Moderation in Belief* (*al-Iqtisād fī l-i'tiqād*) with an eye particularly on the notion of religious belief contained therein and the question of whether a rupture can be detected between this treatise and later works such as the *Revival of the Religious Sciences*.

Marshall Lewis, University of Otago (marshall_lewis_nz@hotmail.com)

The atheistic religious naturalism of Goodenough, Crosby and Rue

Atheistic religious naturalism is a religio-cultural perspective whose core narrative is the *epic of evolution*. Within this perspective, nature is all there is, i.e., the universe, reality. Primary concerns include life and all that sustains life, and therefore, global environmental challenges. Arguably, such challenges require cultural means of reinforcing *how things are* and *which things matter*, and this is what religion does through narrative, myth and various strategies, e.g., intellectual, aesthetic, ritual, experiential, institutional, etc. However, for Loyal Rue (a proponent of religious naturalism), the traditional religions do not work as fit-for-purpose strategies for addressing global challenges. They may indeed foster personal wholeness and social coherence (at a group level), but they do not tell *everybody's* story, and their supernaturalism is untenable to many modern minds. According to Rue, we therefore need a new axial age, a new wisdom tradition and new stories – and religious naturalism fits this need. In this presentation, I discuss lessons learned from my investigation of religious naturalism, and how this perspective could play a pivotal role in the design of religious studies and religious education programmes.

Andrea McDougall, University of Otago (andrea.mcdougall@gmail.com)

Can the Christian notion of humility be salvaged? Revisiting feminist critiques

Though historically valued in Christian thought, the concept of humility has long been contentious for feminist theologians. This re-visioning stems from Valerie Saiving's groundbreaking critique of Reinhold Niebuhr's hamartiology, a critique which led to the view that advocating humility acts as a corrective for the masculine sin of pride, but is belittling and oppressive for women as it militates against developing an adequate sense of self. Yet some feminist theologians, reluctant to discard the concept of humility, have begun to re-examine humility within a feminist framework. This paper seeks to further this discussion. I argue that in part humility has fallen into disrepute because it is often poorly defined, using negative definitions that are inadequate for speaking of the humility of Christ and thus inadequate for defining Christian humility. The understanding of humility that is found in Karl Barth's commentary on Philippians is examined as a possible useful contribution. This notion of humility involves actively regarding the neighbour as the bearer and representative of God's grace, but does not call for self-deprecation. While the resultant call to serve others could be misused by differentially applying it to women, this positive understanding of humility can be empowering rather than belittling.

Negar Partow, Massey University (N.Partow@massey.ac.nz)

Divine sovereignty and state authority in Israel and Iran

This paper investigates the relationship between religion and politics in Israel and Iran through examining the development of Revolutionary Messianism as the founding philosophy of these contemporary states. These states differ in their political history and structure. In both cases, however, Messianism has been the core religious ideology in their understanding of revolution and their religio-political identity in the contemporary Middle East. Revolutionary Messianism negates the existence of apolitical and apocalyptic messianic theologies and gives rise to the emergence of new state actors: theological politicians and political theologians. This paper examines the transformation of messianic ideology in the context of Israel's and Iran's security politics, their political structures, their legal systems, and their social environment. In doing so, it demonstrates the lasting impact of the messianic ideas on religion and politics in these states. It argues that the transformation of messianism has resulted in political elitism, the rise of new forms of fundamentalism, and the de-sacralisation of theology. This paper offers a new analytical model for studying the relationship between religion and politics in Israel and Iran by identifying three phases: Revolutionary Messianism, State Building Messianism and State Maintenance Messianism. This model allows us to not only analyse the development of Revolutionary Messianism during the Revolutionary Phase but it crystallises the relationship between religion and politics after the establishment of the post-revolutionary states. In addition, it explains how these states define secularism, secularity, and secularization.

Douglas Pratt, Waikato University (dpratt@waikato.ac.nz)

Reactive co-radicalization: the contemporary challenge of religious extremism

Extreme behaviours, including violent acts of terrorism, are born of many factors. In the case of religious or religiously motivated actors one factor is that of the religious ideology that embeds – that is, doctrinally or intellectually undergirds – the justifying narrative. In the post-9/11 world a new form of religious extremism has arguably emerged, one which paradoxically portrays itself as being a counter to another perceived extremism which is posited as a real and imminent threat. For example, in Southeast Asia there is evidence of reactionary Buddhist extremism emerging in response to a perception of the danger posed by Islam and Muslims.

In this paper I will focus on two European cases – the Swiss ban on the building of minarets and the Norwegian massacre – as examples of what I call 'reactive co-radicalization'. A key question to ponder is to what extent reactive co-radicalization is an emerging phenomenon that now deserves attention in its own right. Do counter-radicalization and counter-terrorism techniques and processes, heretofore targeting Muslim communities, need also to be applied to the ideological host communities whence arise Christian (and other) forms of reactive co-radicalization?

Masoumeh Rahmani, University of Otago (rahmani.masoumeh85@gmail.com)

Goenka the gatekeeper to *dhamma*: an analysis of S.N. Goenka's secularisation of Vipassana meditation

Vipassana is one of the oldest forms of Buddhist meditation developed within the Theravada tradition. This paper aims to explore the 'repackaging' of vipassana as a secular technique, arguably divorced from its traditional Theravada foundations.

This presumption is due to Goenka and his network's propagation against viewing vipassana meditation as a 'religious' practice. However, this propagation is juxtaposed to the orthodox practices that take place at Goenka's vipassana courses. For example, taking refuge in the three jewels (*Buddha, Dhamma* and *Sangha*); the extensive hours of meditation coupled with occasional chanting in Pali; the strict code of discipline; and the 'Noble Silence' – all of which are clearly reminiscent of orthodox Buddhist practice and therefore far from being secular.

This ultimately raises questions as to Goenka's motivations and the legitimacy of teaching a quintessentially Buddhist technique as a 'secular' path to self-development. Thus, this paper builds upon an evaluation of original data (gathered through an online survey and in-depth interviews) set against a close analysis of a ten day vipassana course as taught by Goenka, in order to contextualise the central issues of this topic.

Mortaza Shams, Waikato University (mshams@waikato.ac.nz)

Islam: diversity in unity

According to Islamic teachings everyone who believes in the oneness of God (Tawhid), the prophethood of Muhammad (Nabowwat), and the Day of Judgment (Moad) is a Muslim and therefore the differences of doctrine among Muslims are not great if any at all. Despite this fact there is no monolithic understanding of Islam and its doctrinal principles among Muslims. Different categorizations have been suggested to explain differences among Muslims. Currently in the media, political, sociological and international relations perspectives are more popular for this purpose. These perspectives, which, for example, divide Muslims into Traditionalist, Modernist, and Fundamentalist or Missionary, Political, Radical and so on, explain many of outward features of the current Muslim world. But from an intra-Islamic perspective these categorizations are not based on genuine differences. I have tried to provide a multi-dimensional categorization which shows how Muslims themselves have defined their internal differences throughout history.

Depending on which aspects of Islamic teaching lie at the centre of attention or what kind of expectation of the religion is held, there are three main approaches among Muslims towards their religion: theological, mystical, and jurisprudential. These approaches are not merely matters of intellectual debate, but also play important and actual roles in the way that believers see their religion and behave religiously. By each of these approaches the central tenets of religion are determined by followers of the tradition. Because of their importance and influence, I prefer to call each of these approaches a different understanding of Islam and believe that each approach influences the worldview, epistemology, and conduct of Muslims in real life.

Katja Strehle, Victoria University (Katja.Strehle@vuw.ac.nz)

Membership of atheist groups in New Zealand and Germany

My research examines the motivations of people to become and be members of atheist/humanist groups in New Zealand and Germany. The outcomes will help to better understand the objectives and development of different organised atheist communities and the position of non-believing in respective countries.

Despite the popular belief that religion and religious groups are on the rise, studies show that the numbers of people identifying themselves as affiliated with religion in the western world is decreasing. Empirical data suggest that people's self-conception as non-religious is rising within western society and should not be underestimated. As their audience enlarges, atheist/humanist groups might have a realistic opportunity to increase their influence on society. Hence it is important to gain more insight on the incentives of the movement itself so as to understand its aims and objectives. One way to accomplish this is by looking at the motives of members for joining atheist/humanist groups.

Preliminary findings suggest that levels of atheist activism in New Zealand and Germany differ because the relationships between organised religion and the state vary.

Khalida Tasneem, Massey University (k.tasneem@massey.ac.nz)

Religious aspects of the Pakistani diaspora in New Zealand

Generally in diasporic studies the Pakistani diaspora is grouped and researched with the other Muslim communities or with the South Asians. It appears the diasporas usually move with 'double consciousness.' For the Pakistani diaspora, religious identity is more important than national identity ('Pakistani' or New Zealander), and the diaspora moves with 'triple consciousness. The Pakistani community is relatively insignificant in New Zealand; as a result the community, which is over-whelmingly Muslim, identifies with a broader group as a part of the Muslim *Ummah*.

Living in a Western society apparently seems to be an uphill task but the Pakistani diaspora seems to have adjusted well in the host society. Performing religious/cultural rituals with relative ease and religious zeal proves that the diaspora has managed to negotiate its identity in a peaceful environment. The presence of Pakistani organisations and their close co-ordination with the other religious/Muslim organisations indicates that the diaspora while blending itself has maintained its identity.

A descriptive and qualitative research methodology is adopted. The documentary sources are supplemented by interviews of the members of the Pakistani community. Different questionnaires have been distributed among Pakistani women, students and New Zealand-born Pakistanis. Interviews covered topics such as generational differences, religious and cultural identity, patterns of association within the Pakistani community, links to family overseas, and making a place in the New Zealand society.

G. John Turbott (s-j.turbott@xtra.co.nz)

Anthroposophy in the Antipodes

Anthroposophy is the spiritual philosophy and pathway taught by Rudolf Steiner from 1902 until his death in 1925. It has become established as a worldwide movement and has a small but significant following in New Zealand. This began in 1902 and in 1933 led to the establishment of the Anthroposophical Society in New Zealand, linked to the parent body the General Anthroposophical Society in Dornach, Switzerland.

This paper traces the growth Anthroposophy in this country from 1902 until the 1960s. It examines the development of the Anthroposophical Society in New Zealand and also of the daughter movements, Steiner childhood education, biodynamic gardening and farming, and anthroposophical medicine. Together these comprise the broad anthroposophical movement.

Many of the early New Zealand Anthroposophists were Anglican, mostly middle-class and well-educated. Although small in number, the anthroposophical movement has been a significant influence in the arts, education, agriculture, and the practice of complementary medicine in New Zealand. This adds weight to the argument that European New Zealand society was not exclusively as materialist and secular as was alleged in much historiography of the second half of the twentieth century.

Geoffrey Troughton, Victoria University (Geoff.Troughton@vuw.ac.nz)

God and grog: changing Presbyterian practice

From the nineteenth century, New Zealand Presbyterians established a reputation as teetotal advocates and anti-alcohol activists. The growth of this sentiment was remarkable, though it was also somewhat contested. In the second half of the century, advocacy and activism diminished to the point where it has now largely dissipated. This paper examines changing attitudes and practices within the Church, especially in relation to the post-World War Two era. It highlights evidence of an inversion of practice within the denomination's evangelical wing, and reflects on the significance of changing approaches to alcohol in terms of the Church's situation.

Christopher van der Krogt, Massey University (C.J.vanderKrogt@massey.ac.nz)

Governance and inclusion in multifaith New Zealand

Over the past few decades, the religious profile of New Zealand has changed quite rapidly. While the larger Protestant denominations have suffered numerical decline, the Catholic Church has held its own. In part this is because declining adherence among the New Zealand-born has been compensated by recent immigration from more religious societies such as Samoa and the Philippines. At the same time, changes in immigration law have encouraged the numbers of Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs to rise sharply, albeit from a small base. While nearly a third of New Zealanders claim to have no religion, and recent law-changes have reflected increasingly liberal personal ethics, there is also an outspoken conservative religious lobby.

These changes, not least the growth of the Islamic community, have encouraged religious groups and successive governments to seek ways of promoting harmony among potentially conflicting religious communities. Prominent among these endeavours are the annual Interfaith Forum and the New Zealand Diversity Action Programme, which produced a widely endorsed Statement on Religious Diversity.

Seth Tweneboah, Victoria University (Seth.Tweneboah@vuw.ac.nz)

***Fama Nyame* Morality, justice delivery and spiritual vigilantism in Ghana: a religious human rights challenge**

Using Ghana as a case study, this paper argues that the inability of post-colonial political elites in Africa to effectively address issues of social, economic, political and legal dysfunction has led to an increased lack of public confidence in the judiciary. *Fama Nyame* (leave it to God), an ethno-religious concept of justice delivery seems to be gaining dominance. This paper seeks to establish three main interrelated concepts: 1) lack of confidence in the judiciary leads to spiritual vigilantism, 2) aside from its significant spiritual resources, *Fama Nyame* enhances positive intrapersonal relations between the victim and the offender, and 3) when not properly appropriated, *Fama Nyame*, a spiritual ontology that helps people let offenses and crime go, becomes an ambivalent international human rights issue. The paper, therefore, challenges and calls for a re-conceptualisation of the scholarly discourse on the post-colonial concept of marginalisation in African society.

Keziah Wallis, University of Otago (keziah.wallis@postgrad.otago.ac.nz)

To go see what they say: the role of fieldwork in the study of religion

Scholarly work on Burmese religion has predominately followed the path set by Melford Spiro, whose seminal research split Burmese religious practices into two separate and distinct religions: Theravāda Buddhism and Burmese Supernaturalism. This split has been challenged by more recent scholars working in the field of Burmese religion, most particularly Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière, who argues that the spirit cult is intertwined with Buddhist practice. This paper examines the importance of fieldwork for my doctoral research, and represents a preliminary foray into the development of a comprehensive methodological approach to the relationship between Buddhism and *nat* worship in contemporary religious practice in Myanmar. Given the relative lack of literary material in English on *nat* worship and the contradictory claims regarding the integration of the two practices, fieldwork is an essential component in fully understanding the actualities of everyday practice in Myanmar. The matter is further complicated by the status of *nat* worship as a form of folk superstition unsuitable for a modern Buddhist nation. It is through the actions of the practitioners and not doctrines that such relationships can be analysed. As the Chinese proverb says "Don't listen to what they say. Go see."

Rick Weiss, Victoria University (Rick.Weiss@vuw.ac.nz)

The modernity of Hindu charity in India

In India today, it is common for Hindu temples and monasteries to give food to the poor and hungry. Such charity is a modern phenomenon, since until recently, the hungry poor were usually not considered to be worthy recipients of food. Established ideologies of food-giving in India dictate that the giver and receiver of food share their purity and ritual statuses, and so food transactions have generally proceeded along the lines of caste. Contemporary ideals of charity and altruism run contrary to these traditional prescriptions. This paper will look at one early South Indian example of Hindu gifts of food to the poor in the 1860s. I will inquire into the influences that may have inspired this novel practice of charity, in order to criticise scholarly accounts that make Christianity the starting point of Hindu modernisation.

Linda Zampol D'Ortia, University of Otago (l.zampol.dortia@gmail.com)

“Our way of proceeding”: Francisco Cabral, Alessandro Valignano, and the Jesuit mission in Japan (1570-1582)

Over the last twenty years, an increasing number of studies have researched the Society of Jesus attempting the return of its members, actions, and ideas to their own cultural frames. While this re-contextualization has also been applied when considering the network created in Asia in the XVI-XVIIth centuries, many singular instances of this structure remain unanalysed. One example of these missing links is the government of the Superior of the Japanese mission Francisco Cabral (in power between 1570 and 1580), and particularly his clashing with Visitor Alessandro Valignano on missionary policy. My paper will consider the historiography available on the mission and in particular on Cabral, addressing a pattern of issues that have hindered a contextualized study of his figure and his approach to missionary activity. Contrary to a commonly assumed interpretation, Francisco Cabral's point of view represents a meaningful position in the mediated creation of a Jesuit “way of proceeding” for the Japanese mission, instead of a failed, personal stance in an otherwise “modern” programme of evangelization.