

Editorial

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Between 25 and 27 June 2014, fifty or so delegates gathered at Weetwood Hall Hotel, Leeds (former country mansion, then university hall of residence, and now an elegant conference centre) to celebrate the fiftieth year of this journal's existence. The conference was simply named '*Religious Studies at 50*', and the company was both distinguished and international – and happily included three former editors of the journal. The following articles represent a selection of the papers delivered at the conference, beginning with a look back over the last fifty years by my predecessors in the Editor's chair (together with some challenges), and ending with visions of philosophy of religion over the next fifty (or more).

The first issue of *Religious Studies* appeared in October 1965, so this issue very nearly coincides with the fiftieth anniversary. In his 'Editorial Note', the founding editor, Professor H. D. Lewis, noted the recent 'marked renewal of interest in religious problems'. In part, this had arisen as a response to the attempts to debunk religious discourse by empiricist-verificationist philosophers. The Editor identified a number of different responses to this assault: the relatively traditionalist approach of defending the transcendent nature of the subject matter; removing religion from the sphere where ordinary standards of truth and falsity apply (while not abandoning all standards of truth); and the revisionary construction of religion as a fiction, engagement in which enables us to define our moral outlook. All these approaches are represented in the discipline today. What he did not, perhaps, anticipate was the *Risorgimento* of realist metaphysics in the succeeding decades and its application to religious concerns. But he also noted the increased interest in religion from other disciplinary perspectives: scientific, historical, linguistic, sociological, and comparative. It was to give a single outlet for all these disciplinary approaches that the journal was established. As my successors note in their addresses, this multi-disciplinary approach did not continue, and the journal became what it is today, an international journal for the philosophy of religion – while still sensitive, as philosophy is, to the challenges from those other disciplines. The cognitive science of religion, for example, forces reflection on the effect of neurobiology on the epistemology of religion, and it is wholly appropriate that this issue be discussed, as indeed it recently has been, in the pages of this journal.

I hope Hywel Lewis would have agreed that the articles in this volume are testament to the continued vigour of philosophical writing on religious matters, and the enforced brevity and focus of them provides a welcome example of how much, in academic writing as in other walks of life, can be achieved in a small space.

The Founding Editor sounded an appropriately optimistic note in his opening statement, reporting the view (and perhaps also expressing the hope) that advances in philosophy in general might come through the revival of interest in religious questions. As we could alternatively put it, taking religious discourse and practice as case studies may lead us to insights which are more generally applicable. Quite how much this has been appreciated outside philosophy of religion is uncertain, but it remains our hope, and one of the journal's aims is to provide ready access to those insights for those who are prepared to accept them from this particular quarter. But the potential gains are not just intellectual. Although this is plainly not the intention of many papers in the discipline, there is no reason why a discussion in the philosophy of religion could not itself be a contribution to the spiritual life: that, suitably constructed, an analysis of religion could be of direct religious value. And again, we would hope to offer an outlet for such papers.

Professor Lewis also noted the increased provision of philosophy of religion teaching in the universities. In the UK at least, that has not extended to the present day – in fact, one can discern the reverse trend. But what was true of universities then is true of schools today, where philosophy of religion has entered the curriculum in a very significant way. Perhaps we can express another optimistic hope: that this will provide us with a new generation of philosophers willing to take religion as their chosen object of intellectual reflection.

Finally, I would like to thank Cambridge University Press for their generous sponsorship of the conference and for their encouragement and support throughout my time as Editor. *Religious Studies* was from the beginning a Cambridge journal, and I hope it will ever remain so.