



## Newsletter Fall 2018

### From the chair:

Greetings to everyone in our Department of Comparative Religion and Humanities community!

During the first department meeting of the semester, we went around the room and everyone said something about what they did last summer. It turned out that many of us had traveled to exotic destinations, for work, pleasure, or a combination of the two. I hope you enjoy reading about our journeys.

This Fall we welcomed our very first cohort of students in our new B.A. in Religious Studies Online Degree Completion Program. After many years in the making, we are excited about the launch of the new program and look forward to greeting another group of transfer students who have just been admitted for Spring 2019. The B.A. in Religious Studies Online Degree Completion Program allows students to finish their B.A. from wherever they are, attending class whenever they can, either in real-time or asynchronously. They benefit from the flexibility of an online program without losing the experience of being in a classroom.

We added one new faculty member to the department this Fall: philosopher-poet Troy Jollimore, a professor in the Department of Philosophy who has published a number of critically acclaimed books of poetry and philosophy, including *Thom Thomson in Purgatory*, which won the National Book Critics Circle Award for Poetry in 2006. Troy is teaching the popular HUMN 281 "Food and Film" course.

We wish you a wonderful holiday season and our best wishes go out to all of those in our community who are dealing with the effects of the devastating fires of November. This is a time for us all to pull together and remember that helping those in need is a key teaching of all the world's religions.

Sarah

Dr. Sarah M. Pike

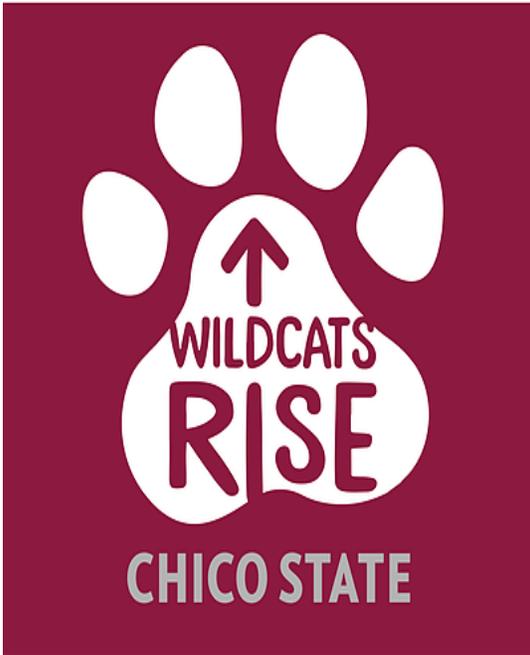
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### SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST

- Donate to Camp Fire victims
- "I know what you did last summer..."
- Jan. 24-26 Conference on Religion and Science



## On the Camp Fire and Religion

### Greg Cootsona

I used to think that religion was about doctrines and individual spiritual practice. And later, when I became a leader of a religious (namely Protestant) community, I realized my congregation really cared about narrative and ritual and community. And if we as human beings are marked by religion or spirituality, if we are *homo religiosus* as the scholars would say, then it's no surprise that during the November 2018 Camp Fire in Paradise-Chico, our religious drives were present everywhere.

The bestselling author and scholar Stephen Prothero lists *four Cs* that define *religion*: creed, cultus (or worship), code, and community. Here I will focus on community. Why? Because the Camp Fire has brought out our human drive to be with others—whether it's at B Street or Secret Trail Brewery for a beer, more traditional religious settings like Congregation Beth Israel and St. John the Baptist Catholic Church in Chico, or even the Walmart impromptu village, I simply got the sense that people wanted to be together. And that is the basis of religion.

As a scholar of religion and science, I can't help but think about what has created this drive for community in our evolutionary history. Fighting against other animals and the elements—like horrific firestorms—means that we do better when we band together. This is one of the surprises of evolution in the past two to three decades: the realization that we do better—and literally survive—when we collaborate. We feel “warm, and safe, and dry” as I've heard in so many songs and poems. We also stay alive. And staying alive is the core of our religious

instinct. Even more, religion or spirituality (I'm willing to use them interchangeably here) is about becoming fully alive and flourishing as human beings.

Something that marks contemporary religious life, especially among 18-30 year olds, is a somewhat countervailing trend: what Princeton sociologist Robert Wuthnow has noted as individual religious “bricolage” or tinkering (as I've written elsewhere <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/zygo.12270>). In fact, the vernacular “I'm spiritual, not religious” slogan often means, among other things, that I create what I do for my soul. But this religious drive toward community needs commonality. A natural human response to trauma is to look for those who are like me because I need literal safety. And that's why I sense the need for something closer to traditional religious life and the community it provides.

This emerging adult tinkering is a beautiful and indelible contribution to American religious life. And, at times like this tragedy, of course we need to respect our individual experience. We also need our shared humanity. It's not just the glory of our uniqueness, but also our communal humanity, that we need to celebrate.



*“I simply got the sense that people wanted to be together. And that is the basis of religion.”*

#### Donation information:

Text [WildcatsRise to 71777](https://app.mobilecause.com/public/peer-fundraisers/46075/5/)

<https://app.mobilecause.com/public/peer-fundraisers/46075/5/>

**INTERNATIONAL DONORS:** Please use our [main giving form](#) and select “Wildcat Rise Fire Recovery Fund.”



## Out of the Ashes by Sarah Gagnebin

I got an email from a student's phone at 3:30 pm on Thursday. "Professor, my house is on fire. Can I please have an extension on my paper?"

Since Thursday morning, November 8, the Camp Fire has been on the forefront of our collective minds as a campus and a community. Media reports have been a mix of worst-case-scenario stories and accounts of unquestioning support or humanitarian aid. Our Wildcats Rise Facebook page jumped between missing person reports and strangers offering money, housing, and food. Many of us have been glued to our mobile devices looking at the news and social media posts that detailed the fire's wreckage.

In the days following the outbreak of the fire, our department has been reaching out to students, alumni, and each other. Some of us lost everything. A student who graduated last year said that just before her service went down, she got out one text of 'I love you' to her daughter. Now, in a place of safety, she noted being overwhelmed by the support offered by the campus community, friends, and complete strangers.

Another community member who had lived in Paradise and often spoke on panels hosted by CORH said that she had to run for her life, and stay strong for her kids, but knowing that she could land with her community in Chico was part of how she managed. When I visited with her five days after the initial evacuation, the room she was in was filled with Amazon Boxes. "I can't believe how quickly people had things shipped to us. It's overwhelming." We were interrupted when her phone buzzed. "My neighbor has been checking on my property and sending me pictures. My insurance needs them, and I won't be able to go back for weeks." She showed me pictures of her destroyed home and farm.

Students rarely offer to show me their phone, but visiting one of them recently she insisted. She showed me her text history and her GoFundMe campaign. Professors like to say that students over use texts and social media. Perhaps we imagine it makes them less engaged, disconnected, or apathetic toward each other and academic gains. The texts I read showed the opposite.

We say that a disaster brings out the best parts of humanity, that it's our altruism that shines when people are in danger. I am evidently not the first professor to check up on her, she was stunned at all of the emails from supporters on campus.

### OUT OF ASHES CONT.

Another student has already made room for her in an apartment in Chico. In the midst of our conversation she wanted to know if she could borrow the assigned books from class (hers burned of course), and indeed get that extension, so that her grade wouldn't suffer.

Our students, and this community, are a clever and kind bunch. These past two weeks I have noted just how dedicated our students are to each other, to their academics, and to their phones! The phones whose presence in my classrooms often annoys me provided for the quick spread of important info during the evacuation and after. The texting ability of our students highlights their compassion and strong connections to one another. The aftermath was mitigated by relief efforts organized mainly through social media. I saw many in our community, especially our students, using their respective devices to spread the scope of their altruism and show something indelibly optimistic about humanity, even in the face of disaster.

I'm sad for the loss that our campus and community has suffered, but I am just as proud to witness the intelligence, strength and kindness that our students and staff have shown. Looking around at our communities now that the fire is out, I can say the rebuilding process is certainly in good hands.

## Eco-Safariing in Botswana

### Sarah M. Pike

My 80-year old aunt had always wanted to go on safari and that was the occasion for my trip to Botswana. At the beginning of Summer 2018, I left Washington D.C. for Johannesburg, South Africa, in the company of my aunt and cousin, two linguists who specialize in endangered languages. Shortly after arriving in Johannesburg, we visited Nelson Mandela’s houses. One house, from his earlier life, was in the famous township of Soweto, where poverty and unemployment still run high, while the other was in a heavily patrolled and leafy neighborhood in the city. Outside Mandela’s large, walled house where he lived in his later years up to his death, we noticed piles of stones with messages written on them, mostly to Mandela, and were told by our guide that this is a common practice—bringing or leaving stones with messages either written on them or wished on them (without writing). These messages are often directed to the ancestors, Mandela being a notable one for many black South Africans.



From Johannesburg we took the first of many small planes, landing briefly in Botswana’s capital, Maun, to board a smaller plane to the Okavango Delta. The Okavango, a vast inland river delta and UNESCO World Heritage Site, would become our home base for the next eight days. Botswana is a well-run and stable country that has heavily invested in the sustainable tourist industry. Young people are trained as interpreters of the nonhuman living world as well as the indigenous human cultures of the country, such as the San (“Bushmen”). Our guides were incredibly knowledgeable about all kinds of animals, including birds, reptiles, and insects, as well as the usual charismatic megafauna (leopards, lions, elephants, rhinos, water buffalos, all of which we saw). Our guides, many of whom grew up in traditional villages, also had a wealth of knowledge about medicinal and edible plants and the lore surrounding them.

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*“outside Mandela’s house we witnessed a common practice—bringing or leaving stones with messages either written on them or wished on them”*

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If you want to learn a little more about Botswana, I recommend the *No. 7 Ladies’ Detective Agency* series by Alexander McCall Smith. Everyone we asked about the books thought they

were a pretty accurate portrayal of life in Botswana. One of our guides had even taken a class from Smith, who taught for years at the University of Botswana.



## ...AND RESEARCH DURING THE OFF-SEASON”

### Eco-Safariing in Botswana cont.

Along with seeing hundreds of animals and learning to identify some of the colorful birds of the Delta, we also tested the local liquor, made from the fruit of the *marula* tree, and rode in traditional canoes called *mo-koros*, from which we got some great close-up views (but not too close) of monitor lizards and crocodiles. We learned about Botswana’s aggressive anti-poaching efforts (poachers can be shot on sight) as well as the country’s white and black rhino re-introduction programs. On our last day, on the way to the airstrip, we finally saw a white rhino. It was a rare sight and one of the many wonderful gifts we received from the friendly people of Botswana. Yet we also glimpsed some of the tensions beneath the surface. In order to set aside land for the conservation of species, human movement has to be curtailed. Tribes and their herds of livestock are carefully controlled and sometimes removed from their ancestral lands. Conflicts between the needs of humans and the preservation of other species are serious and complex and tourists like us are always implicated in them.

### A Week in Nuremberg

#### Bruce Grelle

This past summer I travelled to Nuremberg, Germany for the 21<sup>st</sup> biennial meeting of the International Seminar on Religious Education and Values (ISREV). It was held July 29-August 3 at the Friedrich Alexander Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg. The ISREV is an association of some 260 scholars from 36 countries and includes individuals from various religious traditions as well as secular specialists in religious studies and education. The organization’s goal is to improve the quality of religion education in schools worldwide through scholarship and research. I have participated in previous ISREV meetings held in Driebergen, Netherlands; Ankara, Turkey; Turku, Finland; York, England; and in Chicago.

Two years ago, I gave a plenary presentation on “Worldviews, Ethics, and Ecology: ‘Sustainability’ as a Context for Religion Education.” This year I presented a paper titled “Religious Studies Perspectives on the ‘Religion of the Market.’” I also chaired a plenary session titled “Religious Education Pedagogy and Curriculum in Plural Context: A Muslim Perspective” featuring presentations by Mualla Selcuk (Ankara University, Turkey) and respondent, Abdulkader Tayob (University of Cape Town, South Africa), and I served as respondent to three papers as part of panel on “Interreligious Dialogue with a Focus on Religious Education.”

My paper on the “Religion of the Market” observed that multiple worldviews are vying for influence in shaping the imaginations and lifestyles of young people as the 21<sup>st</sup> century unfolds. Alongside traditional world religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism, there are a variety of secular outlooks on the meaning and purpose of life. Foremost among these is what has been described as the “religion of the market”

or “economic religion.”

Like traditional religious worldviews, the “religion of the market” consists of ideas and taken-for-granted assumptions about human nature (self and society), time or history, God, and the natural world. With its faith in economic growth and technological progress, its ethic of individual freedom, and its celebration of consumerism, the religion of the market has arguably become the most influential worldview in this age of globalization.

A major aim of religion education in public schools is to examine the content and consequences of people’s worldviews. With growing numbers of students indicating that they are not “religious” in any traditional sense, it becomes especially important to include attention to worldviews that have often fallen outside the scope of religion education. My paper explored some of the psychological, social, and environmental consequences of “economic” religion and proposed ways that education about religions in public schools might contribute to students’ own efforts to create more humane and sustainable forms of life.

While in Nuremberg I was able to tour the beautiful old city, including several of its spectacular churches – St. Lorenz, St. Sebald, and Frauenkirche – as well as the house of Germany’s most famous artist, Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528).

<https://museums.nuernberg.de/albrecht-duerer-house/>

I also spent several hours touring the museum and grounds of the Documentation Center at the Nazi Party Rally Grounds, a chilling and sad reminder of the city’s history during the Hitler era.

<https://museums.nuernberg.de/documentation-center/>





## Two Philosophers, Me, and a Pastor in Oxford this June

Greg Cootsona

Two philosophers, a pastor, and a member of Chico State’s CORH walked into a pub in Oxford and the bartender asked, “What’s the meaning of life?”

Sounds I’m setting up a joke, right? It’s actually not far from what happened last June when I was invited to St. Peter’s College of Oxford University to discuss the

meaning of life with two philosophers, Stewart Goetz (Ursinus College) and Tim Mawson (of Oxford), along with a pastor in Glencoe, Illinois, David Wood.

Though that might signal a joke, my time in Oxford was glorious. Stewart and Tim have both written books on the topic of the meaning/purpose of life, and so we discussed their ideas while strolling around beautiful medieval streets or meeting over tea and coffee in Tim’s book-lined office or various pubs.

The particulars of the conversation were about planning a grant to determine whether it’s possible to bring a somewhat arcane topic (which seems like it

*should* really interest us) to the wider public. Since David and I were co-project leaders of a three-year project designed to bring science and religion to Christian congregations, we were asked by the John Templeton Foundation to offer insights. We met with television producers, creators of religious curriculum that has been distributed worldwide (the Alpha Course), as well as public intellectuals.

The upshot? In brief, we figured that human beings care about the meaning of life because life’s meaning is about human happiness. As the 17<sup>th</sup> century philosopher and scientist Blaise Pascal wrote in *Pensées*, “All people seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end.” Making that topic resonate with the public, however, presents the primary challenge.

One last reflection: With the Camp Fire still a very present reality, this event now makes me think that perhaps the meaning of life is to be with other people in community. Last June in Oxford was that kind of community. To paraphrase John Lennon, maybe life, and its meaning, happened to us last June “while were busy making plans.”

## Teaching Great Books and Ideas in London

Laura Nice

I had a fabulous experience teaching *Humanities 966: Great Books and Ideas* in London in June/July 2018. I led a group of seven CSU, Chico students who focused on British arts and ideas from Shakespeare to the present through readings and visits to such varied sites as Middle Temple Hall (where *Twelfth Night* was first performed), the Globe Theatre to catch a performance of *Hamlet*, St. Paul’s and Greenwich’s Royal Observatory and Old Naval College. Students explored developments in art at the Tate Britain, National Gallery, Tate Modern and Turner Contemporary Gallery, and focused on the impact of WWI and WWII through readings of the Bloomsbury circle and a visit to the Imperial War Museum. The students also took *History 979: Early Modern Europe* from Jason Nice, where the group made trips to Salisbury Cathedral, Hatfield House and significant locations in Yorkshire such as Rievaulx Abbey.

As one of the students reflected, “I loved every minute of this adventure and will remember this trip for the rest of my life. This trip has stoked my desire for a possible second study abroad trip. I learned so much on this trip! Everywhere we went, I was intrigued and captivated. I loved the lectures and group discussions of the readings on site because it brought history to life.” Another student echoed the benefits of the immersive learning experience, explaining that when “you learn about the history and arts of the world around you, you truly feel immersed in the experiences that generations of British women and men have lived before you. I don’t think I have ever felt more absolutely myself than when I walked the streets of York and London for myself. Every place we went had a new and brighter highlight than the last. Going to Rievaulx Abbey with the hike through the countryside was the most unique day trip, and seeing the ruins after making the journey on foot put the location and mindset of the monks in perspective. Connecting with professors and peers with a common passion for European history made my trip all the more memorable. I couldn’t be more grateful for all the hard work and planning that went into this study abroad trip.” I hope to offer the London faculty-led study abroad opportunity again in Summer 2020.



## A Summer Program in Thailand with Students

Joel Zimbelman

I had the pleasure of teaching a course in “Religion and culture in contemporary Thailand” this past summer. My eleven students were from various colleges and universities across the US (three from Chico State). The USAC program in Reno, Nevada sponsors about fifty such overseas classes each summer in thirty countries. If you’ve not yet undertaken study abroad, it’s well worth the time. Beyond the course that I taught, I enrolled in a Thai language class; a Thai cooking class; and a “hill tribes” seminar that gave us a chance to visit local Hmong and Aka villages.

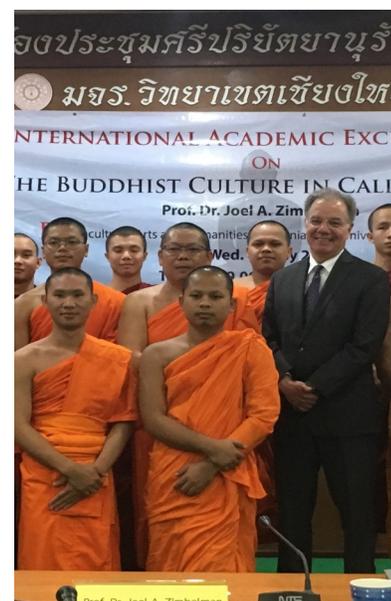
Three of the most meaningful and exciting activities my students and I engaged in, however, were visits to a local Buddhist temple--monastery--university complex that was located just about a mile from where we lived. Chulalongkorn University was started about 100 years ago in Bangkok, and now has a large outpost at Wat Suan Dok (Flower Garden Temple) in Chiang Mai. Several hundred young men in their late teens and early twenties are enrolled in the three-five year curriculum of the University. Though they all take vows as monks and engage in the full range of related practices (celibacy, vegetarianism, no alcohol, no sex, as well as regular meditation, work, and worship practices), most of these students won’t remain monks for their whole lives. The college degree will push them in other directions when they graduate, and many will return to their home countries such as Myanmar, Vietnam, and Laos to marry, work, and live the lives of lay Buddhists.

Our visits to the Wat consisted of a wonderful afternoon in conversation with the student monks (most speak some English, and many quite well) where we were able to share information about our families, activities, religious beliefs, and views of society and culture. Many of these monks are away from their families for the first time; but most stay in touch with family and friends through email, text messaging, and Facebook (the monastery has challenges with the use of “worldly” electronics, but allows second year students to have cell phones). My students were surprised by how similar the concerns and questions were that these students expressed compared to what American students also faced. The novelty for my students of actually getting to talk to real monks was balanced by the excitement on the part of the monks at being able to talk openly and without any oversight to a dozen young American women. It was quite a scene, and we could have stayed all day.

The following morning we were invited to a “merit-making” ceremony at the crack of dawn at a sister temple, where my students were able to ritually provide food and other sundry items to a group of monks. This everyday occurrence of lay people giving money, foodstuffs, and gifts to wandering monks is part of the fabric of many Southeast Asian cultures. It’s a reciprocal ritual. Monks gain merit and a way to feed themselves by undertaking vows and then accepting the gifts that are placed in their almsbowl; and the givers (whether from LA or Bangkok) acquire merit in the cosmic order by supporting the monastic vocation. Ritualized chanting, bowing, and communication are part of a very short but powerful ceremony.

Following the merit-making ceremony, we joined a number of monks back at the University for my public lecture on “The Buddhist Culture in California.” Most of these students have not travelled out of their own countries or Southeast Asia, and so an overview of both the structure, various schools, development of Buddhist immigrant communities, and religious practice in the States was new to them. They were very interested to learn that even though perhaps only 2% of Americans profess Buddhism, the ideas and insights of this ancient Indian and Asian religious tradition suffuses the thinking and discussion of many non-Buddhist Americans on issues of war and nonviolence, environmental activity, diet and vegetarianism, mindfulness and meditation, and capital punishment. I was peppered with questions and many of the students wanted to carry the debate into our lunch time together.

What a treat to work with both American and Southeast Asian students in a new and beautiful setting. It’s a summer I won’t soon forget, and I hope that all of you have a chance in the near future to visit this beautiful country.



## A Sisyphian\* Summer

### Jason Clower

I spent part of the summer working on the usual scholarship about Confucian and Buddhist philosophy, but I also found a new hobby. Having started camping and backpacking for the first time as an adult, I came to like walking hills with a heavy rucksack. I began to wonder whether there might be races for such things and ended up finding more than I bargained for.

It was an event called the “GORUCK Tough Challenge.” Rather than racing against each other, participants team together and carry weighted rucksacks and some very heavy sandbags all night under the direction of off-duty Special Forces soldiers, who play a role that is part mentor and part good-natured sadist.

We began the night with the infamous “surf torture,” and it was neat to find out why it is so awful. The answer is that after the waves smack you in the back, they recede and pull the sand out from beneath you. Everyone starts tumbling and getting sucked out of line, so when the next wave hits, it’s not hitting a solid wall of linked arms but scattered human flotsam and you go under.

This was exciting for a short while but it turns out that exposure to cold is terrible and demoralizing. One moment I was charging along, feeling “strong like bull,” wet and tired but still smiling, but then in the next moment I fell apart into a shivering wreck. After that, I couldn’t be far enough from the water for my liking. I think the precise word for what I felt is “horror,” a bristling, shrinking fear and aversion that mewls “NOOOOOOOOOOO!” But after that, we got very warm indeed. We spent the rest of the night carrying packs, hauling sandbags up hills, and enduring a couple very nasty bouts of calisthenics. (If a Marine ever asks if you’d like to “play a card game,” say no! And run away, just to be sure.)

\*“The word *Sisyphian* comes from the character Sisyphus in Greek mythology, who was sentenced for his wrongdoing to push a boulder up a hill and watch it roll back down, again and again, forever.”



*Clower experiencing “surf torture”*

## Around the World in (about) 80 Days

### Daniel Veidlinger

In the Spring of 2018 I was on sabbatical working on a computerized analysis of word usage patterns in the Pali Buddhist texts. During this period, I had the opportunity over a course of about three months to travel to Spain, France, Portugal, Morocco, and Japan. It was a wonderful trip and I learned so much about myself, religion and the world. One of the things that struck me most about Morocco was its seamless integration of the traditional with the modern. There were surprisingly fashionable nightclubs just outside the old city walls which have stood for centuries, and old courtyards in traditional *riad*s or mansions, were updated in the latest styles. The highlight of that trip was the old Jewish Cemetery in Marrakech. It stretched as far as the eye can see and was a seemingly haphazard array of unmarked graves all whitewashed against the striking pink background of the cemetery wall. Some of the more famous rabbis did have marked graves, and there were often candles and other offerings left by the grave in honor of the great men. The cemetery was in the Jewish area of town, and would have had several hundred thousand Jewish inhabitants during the height of Jewish settlement there in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many of the curio stores had Jewish items such as old Torahs, mezuzahs and menorahs. The Islamic architecture was also very beautiful and reminded me that these two religions had lived for many centuries in relative harmony in this part of the world.

In Japan, I had the opportunity to experience the magnificent way that the Japanese have integrated nature into their lives, and also the way that both Buddhism and Shinto are practiced together in different ways. The Shinto temples are built in beautiful natural surroundings, and boast magnificent gateways or *torii*s that demarcate the sacred landscape from the profane world. I was struck by their similarity, however, to Buddhist *torana* that were gateways in India demarcating the sacred space of a *stupa*, or reliquary, and have wondered if perhaps the design and idea might have actually come with Buddhism to Japan.

## ...AND RESEARCH DURING THE OFF-SEASON”(CONT.)

### Around the World in (about) 80 Days Cont.

It seems that others have asked that question but the jury is still out. The people will often make wishes at the shrines and tie wish-bearing cards to trees within the enclosure, hoping that the Kami will answer their entreaties. They will then ring a bell or clap to get the attention of the Kami or spirits that reside at the shrine.

The Buddhist temples were breathtakingly beautiful, especially the ones at Kyoto, the pre-modern capital of Japan, and Nara, the capital before that. One of the highlights was the Todai-ji (ji means temple) at Nara which is the largest wooden structure in the world, housing a Vairocana Buddha which is an esoteric deity associated with the cosmic body of the universal Buddha. The temple towers over the countryside and as someone with a great interest in woodworking, for it is my hobby, I was amazed that the skillfully carved joints and the finely filigreed work that was done in this awe inspiring temple to one of my favorite Buddhas as well.



*“The cemetery stretched as far as the eye can see with a haphazard array of unmarked graves”*

The Zen temples at Kyoto were amazing, including the Kodai Ji Rinzaï Zen Temple from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, where I saw a breathtaking Zen Garden or *karesansui*. The temple also housed a modern art display in the main meditation hall, and the juxtaposition was striking. In general, however, the modern lines of many of the Zen temples remind one of how influential the Zen aesthetic has been. Whether it just happens to co-ordinate with the modern world’s search for simplicity after the baroque designs of the past, or whether it actually had a direct influence through engagement with

Japan during World War II is hard to say, but certainly the end result is a remarkably similar look. I also saw a lot of Hindu influence, and even some Hindu temples that were venerated not by Indians living in Japan, but by the Japanese themselves, who of course have adopted Buddhism which is an Indian religion. Some of the other Indian accoutrements would have come to Japan along with Buddhism. I would certainly like to return to Japan for a longer period to discover more about its rich and vibrant culture and the particular ways it has adopted Buddhism.





## Appraising Christmas and Dickens: What I Did with my Summer

**Donald Heinz**

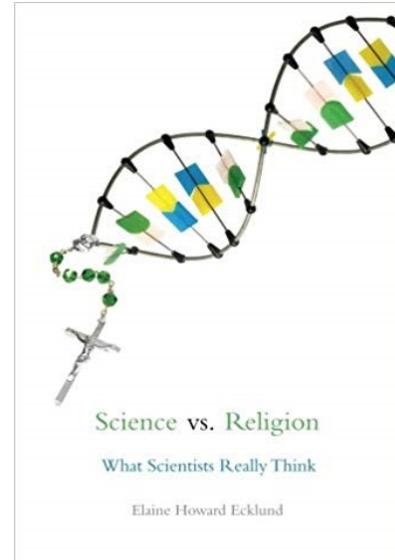
In mid-summer the editor of Radix, a Christian review of faith and culture, asked if I would write about Charles Dickens, whom some today think is all goose and no Christmas. What turned out to be a 5000 word article became an appraisal of Dickens and of Christmas. *Appraise* makes me think of Antiques Road Show, where people bring something old in and ask, Is there anything to see here? Any historic value?

Quite a bit if you look carefully. Though as critical of Victorian Christianity as a modern millennial might be, Dickens raised his children "in the tradition" and passed on to each a kind of children's Bible he wrote, "The Life of Our Lord." He saw Jesus as "so good, so kind, so gentle, and so sorry for all people who did wrong, or were in anyway ill or miserable, as he was."

Dickens wanted to instill empathy in Victorian Christianity. He loved Deuteronomy 15.7: "If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor." A google search turns up a Rabbi's appeal: "Would you believe Jews might love Dickens as well?"

No small Christmas gift is the conversion and moral renewal of the apparently irredeemable Scrooge. We eventually see him greeting people with sympathy, conversing with beggars, looking into kitchens and watching with great empathy people at table. Scrooge learns "how to keep Christmas well." Tiny Tim concludes, "God bless us, every one." Dickens looked too for the conversion of his audiences, as authors sometimes do.

But does this bear the weight of New Testament Christology, of the real Christmas? I appraised Christmas as well as Dickens and concluded that Incarnation plays on three stages. On the stage of Biblical texts, on the stage of liturgy and preaching in the Church as Festival House, and on the world stage where everything plays, including market forces and goose dinners. Dickens' contribution to that third stage, as Bruno Bettelheim would say, is to riff on the "uses of enchantment."



**Coming Soon:**

***January in Chico***

**Leading Sociologist of  
Religion Elaine Howard  
Ecklund**

Elaine Howard Ecklund, a leading sociologist of religion at Rice University (<http://www.elainehowardecklund.com>) will be coming to Chico :

**January 24-26, 2019 to speak on  
"What Religious people think  
about Scientists and what Scien-  
tists Think about Religious Peo-  
ple."**

The current schedule has Dr. Ecklund, and Herbert S. Autry who is Chair in Social Sciences at Rice, giving a **public lecture Thursday evening (1/24), 7pm Zingg Hall** and an **interchange with other scholars Friday afternoon (1/25), 4pm PAC 113.**

On **Saturday morning (1/26), 8:30am ARTS 111, there will be a second lecture by Dr. Ecklund** in dialogue with Greg Cootsona on the nature of bringing science and religion to religious communities.

*More details to come after Winter Break.*

## EVENTS

### Sikh Parade Experience

**Kailey Land** (CRHSS, President)

On the morning of Sunday November 4, I met up with some of my fellow classmates and my professor and then I drove them to the Sikh Parade in Yuba City. Once in the parking area, we joined lots of men, women, and children waiting in line to get on a shuttle bus that took us to the festival. As soon as we got there, we went and ate food; I have not tried much Indian food before and I really enjoyed it. My favorite foods served there were chickpeas in a curry sauce and some very delicious spicy noodles. Serving food to the public is an important part of the Sikh idea of *seva*, or service in honor of God. Afterwards we headed to the Temple that Sikhs call a Gurdwara, and on our way we stopped by the little stands to look at some interesting and informative pamphlets. When we reached the Temple, we were required to take off our shoes (there was a shoe check-in service by the entrance), wash our hands, and cover our hair with a scarf, as cleanliness and modesty are very important in Sikhism. The outside of it was very pretty, but I really liked the inside of the building. They separated the boys from the girls and when we reached the front



of the line inside the temple, we were encouraged to donate to the Temple and pray. The display at the front was covered in intricate blue detailing on the walls and included swords as well.

After the temple we watched the parade for a while and saw colorful floats with images of the Sikh temple in India as well as their holy book the Guru Granth Sahib. We then proceeded to the little flea market where they were selling a lot of beautiful jewelry and clothing. Overall, my favorite thing was the Sikh Temple for sure. Other religions are so fascinating to me and I am forever grateful I got to experience going to the Sikh Parade in Yuba City this year.

### Kamal the Bhakti yogi

**Jason Clower**

This October we were visited by Kamal Tyagi Maharaj, a UC Santa Cruz alum who went on to become a renunciate in the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition of Hinduism.

He spends most of the year on the road, speaking to interested groups on bhakti yoga and sharing *kirtan* or songs of devotion. He also publishes an extraordinary volume of translated Vaishnava scripture and commentary in praise of the god Krishna, especially for someone who lives out of a suitcase!

Jason and Snoot got to play host to Maharaj and his traveling companions for several nights in their home. It was sublime. The yogis kept the kitchen warm with the cozy smell of cooked cauliflower and turmeric and throughout the house one encountered people silently chanting, playing ragas, drying dhotis, and marking their foreheads with the *tilak*.

During the week they spoke to several classes and ended their visit with a rousing *kirtan* hosted by the Comparative Religion and Humanities Student Society (CRHSS).



## FACULTY ACHIEVEMENTS

### Heather Altfeld:

I published a number of poems in *The Georgia Review* (two Fall 2018, one Spring 2019)

Poem, ZYZZYVA, Winter 2018: "903"

Essay, ZYZZYVA, Spring 2019: "The Inhospitable World"

Short Story, *Nostos Magazine*, any minute now ("Disneyland Dad")

Poem, "Magnetic" debut Oct 29 on *Journal of Compressed Creative Arts*

"The Business: A Ferret's Guide to the Lab Life" in *Living with Animals* (Cornell University Press, Sept 2018)

### Bruce Grelle:

I presented "Religious Studies Perspectives on the 'Religion of the Market'" at the 21<sup>st</sup> biannual meeting of the International Seminar on Religious Education and Values, Friedrich Alexander University Erlangen – Nuremberg, Germany, July 30, 2018. I also chaired a plenary session titled "Religious Education Pedagogy and Curriculum in Plural Context: A Muslim Perspective" with presenter Mualla Selcuk (Ankara University, Turkey) and respondent, Abdulkader Tayob (University of Cape Town, South Africa) August 3, 2018. In addition, I served as respondent to three papers as part of panel on "Interreligious Dialogue with Focus on Religious Education," August 3, 2018.

### Troy Jollimore:

I published a poem on *Plume*: "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind." <https://plumepoetry.com/2018/09/eternal-sunshine/>

### Kate McCarthy:

My essay "(Inter)Religious Studies: Making a Home in the Secular Academy" was just published in Eboo Patel, Jennifer Howe Peace, and Noah J. Silverman, eds., *Interreligious/Interfaith Studies: Defining a New Field* (Beacon Press 2018).

### Sarah Pike:

I published two articles: "Rewilding Hearts and Habits in the Ancestral Skills Movement," *Religions* 2018, 9 (10), <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/9/10/300> and "The Flint Knapper Who Cried 'Snake,'" *Counterpoint: Navigating Knowledge* blog, <https://www.counterpointknowledge.org/the-flint-knapper-who-cried-snake/>, 3 October 2018.

### Jed Wyrick:

I delivered a paper: "The Persecution of Virtue in Greco-Judaean Texts," International Society of Biblical Literature Conference (Helsinki, Finland, July 2018).

### Joel Zimbelman:

I gave some talks "The Present State of Buddhism in California, USA," Invited presentation to the faculty and senior students of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Wat Suan Dok, Chiang Mai, Thailand, Summer 2018 and "Ethical Issues and Challenges Facing Pharmacists in the Context of Current U.S. Health Care Policy," presentation to PHA 723 Ethics in Healthcare Practice (3d year) Pharm. D. Program, South Dakota State University, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, February 2018. Dr. Brian Kaatz, Instructor.

## FACULTY ACHIEVEMENTS cont.

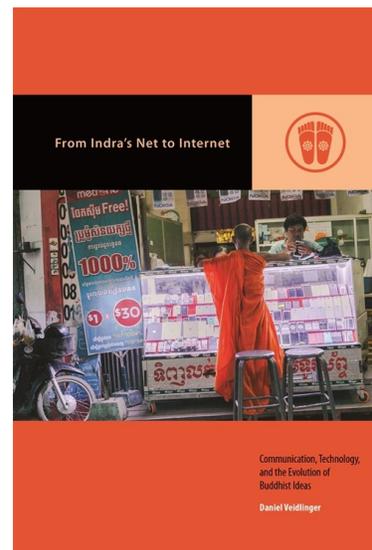
### Meet Vanessa Avery:

I am a relatively new lecturer in the department and in March of 2018, I became the Director of the Sharing Sacred Spaces program for Sacred Space International (SSI). SSI is an arm of the Parliament of the World's Religions-- a global interfaith organization-- based in Chicago. In August, I began implementing SSI's signature interfaith community-building program in New Haven, CT, with the partnership of Yale Divinity School. The unique program brings 8 different congregations together in a year-long process of dialogue training, reflections on sacred space, and visits to one another's houses of worship. The core foundation of each gathering is hospitality. On November 3rd, I presented on the progress of the New Haven initiative at the Parliament's conference in Toronto. More information can be found at [www.sacredspace.world](http://www.sacredspace.world).



### Daniel Veidlinger:

I published a book called *From Indra's Net to Internet: Communication, Technology and the Evolution of Buddhist Ideas* with University of Hawaii Press. The book looks at how Buddhism spread rapidly along the transportation and trading nodes of Ancient India as well as the Silk Road, and examines the role that different kinds of communication technologies might have played in the success of the religion. The book compares early phases of Buddhism with contemporary developments in which rapid changes in patterns of social interaction were brought about by large-scale urbanization and growth in communication and transportation. These changes supported the expansive consciousness needed to allow Buddhism to germinate. The final part of the book looks at how Buddhism has become a very popular religion in the age of the Internet, and suggests that the media environment provided by this technology is an important factor in the spread of the ideas associated with Buddhism, such as compassion, universalism, impermanence, non-self and a criticism of ritualism.



## Happy Holidays from CORH

### DEPARTMENT OF COMPARATIVE RELIGION AND HU- MANITIES

We are currently updating our web-sites and welcome your input.

[http://  
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corh/](http://www.csuchico.edu/corh/)

Please email suggestions to:

[corh@csuchico.edu](mailto:corh@csuchico.edu)



HANUKKAH, DEC. 2–10, 2018

Hanukkah, the 8-day Jewish festival of lights, commemorates the rededication of the Temple at Jerusalem and is celebrated by lighting the menorah, eating latkes, and playing dreidel.



WINTER SOLSTICE, DEC. 21, 2018

Winter Solstice, the shortest day of the year, marks the annual turning from darkness to light, and is an important Pagan holiday.



CHRISTMAS, DEC. 25, 2018

Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ, bringing many customs together such as giving gifts, decorating the home, and attending church services.



KWANZAA, DEC. 26, 2018–JAN. 1, 2019

Kwanzaa is a week-long celebration of African cultural values and principles, which contribute to building and strengthening community.



NEW YEAR'S DAY, JAN. 1, 2019

A celebration of the first day of the year and an opportunity for new beginnings.



CHINESE NEW YEAR, FEB. 5, 2019

The Chinese New Year is the most important of the traditional Chinese holidays, falling on a different date each year. The colors displayed are gold, which brings wealth, and deep red, for luck.

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