

# Religion: Memory and Innovation

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The current issue of *Approaching Religion* is based on a summer school and conference arranged in Åbo/Turku, Finland, in June 2023, on the theme of “Religion: Memory and Innovation”. The event was organized jointly by the Polin Institute for Theological Research (Åbo Akademi University), the Centre for the Study of Christian Cultures (University of Turku) and the Donner Institute for Research in Religion and Culture. The aim was to bring together doctoral candidates and researchers from various academic fields that engage with the study of religion, such as theology, religious studies, history, philosophy, the arts, social and political sciences, and so forth. At this seminar, papers were presented that engaged with the theme of religion, memory and innovation from both historical and contemporary perspectives, looking also to the future where possible. In the current issue, therefore, we understand memory and innovation both as dramatic breaking points in history and as slowly evolving transformations, and we address past, present and emerging trends and trajectories within culture, society and the scholarly community. The societal relevance and impact of research in this field have also arisen as central themes in the presentations.

THIS COMPLEX AND INCLUSIVE approach is also visible in the current special issue, presenting articles that have been developed on the basis of presentations given at this summer school and conference. We are pleased to note that the issue includes articles both by emerging scholars – doctoral students publishing their first research art-

icles – and established senior scholars and professors. Aided by the anonymous but constructive comments by peer-reviewers, as well as feedback from peers and supervisors, the articles have developed into innovative and noteworthy contributions to the field.

The issue opens with an article in which **Ossi Korpi** introduces a Finnish Theosophist influencer, an “esoteric patriot” of the 1930s, Wilho Angervo. He was inspired by the Finnish national epic, the *Kalevala*, as well as the European nationalistic ideas of that era. Korpi uses the method of dialogical narrative analysis in order to follow the sources for Angervo’s thinking. The next article, by **Ilona Raunola**, deals with a phenomenon of refusing food as a spiritual practice. The case study is based on interview material, and, on the basis of actor-network theory, discusses the varieties of processuality in the period of “living on light” in the life of the woman interviewed. The following article is focused on the transformative and therapeutic potential of colours in Rudolf Steiner’s thinking, and on the practice of art as an important part of Anthroposophy: **Sari Kuuva** looks at Steiner’s ideas on how colours work as tools by which to experience the spiritual world and communicate with it.

The next two articles discuss the materiality of religion from theological points of view. **Heidi Jokinen**'s article deals with altar flowers in Lutheran churches in Finland. It contributes to the creation of a theology of these flowers, which can simultaneously be seen as liturgical elements and as decorations conveying meanings even to those less familiar with Christian traditions. **Jakob Dahlbacka**, likewise, analyses liturgically meaningful aspects of materials, which, however, when no longer needed, turn into sacred waste. He approaches the topic through the fate of the altar cross of the Luther Church in Helsinki, which turned into a nightclub and was subsequently returned to its original religious use along with reinstallation of the old altar cross.

The following two articles relate to the New Testament. **Kari Syreeni** analyses the Johannine Gospel narrative about the death of Jesus from the point of view of social memory. In Syreeni's analysis, John the Evangelist appears as a theological innovator. **Carl Johan Berglund**, for his part, focuses on the person of Simon Peter as a wonder-worker. The miraculous powers of Simon grow greater from the Gospel according to Mark to later Christian texts.

We hope that readers enjoy the timely and engaging topics discussed in the articles in this issue of *Approaching Religion*. We are also pleased to announce that a follow-up to this successful summer school is planned for the summer of 2025, under the topic "Religion: Concealed and Revealed". ■

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