

Editorial

Is there a peculiarly *Australian* way of doing law and religion? Over the past few years, an interesting conversation has taken place in conference hallways, podcasts, and (increasingly) print about whether there is an ‘Australian School’ of law and religion: a concentration of scholars who approach legal questions from an explicitly theological orientation. Many Australian law and religion scholars are proud to wear the mantle, as reflected in the title of an important new edited collection *Jurisprudence and Theology: The Australian School*.¹ Although the term was coined by a foreigner,² could it be that, like Tocqueville’s voyage to America, an outsider’s perspective can reveal valuable truths unnoticed by those on the inside?

This issue of the *Australian Journal of Law and Religion* participates in the ongoing conversation. It contains examples that seem to fit the premise, such as a discussion by Oscar Kawamata and Matt Watson on whether Buddhism and natural law are compatible, William MacNeil’s close reading of a Hollywood blockbuster movie for its treatment of Christianity and paganism, and a review by Myriam Hunter-Henin of a recent monograph written by one of us (Alex Deagon) on Christian conceptions of natural law and their relationship to religious freedom. Aligned with the Australian School’s approach, even if not written by an Australian, is Shaun de Freitas’ plea for Christian legal scholars to form stronger communities — both personally and professionally. On the other hand, the issue contains examples of work where a theological orientation to scholarship is clearly (though quietly) set to the side, such as in Andrew Hemming’s critique of the verdicts in a criminal case involving a small religious group called The Saints, a review by Tom White of a new edited collection on adopting comparative approaches in law and religion scholarship, and Miles Pattenden’s discussion of academic freedom at Catholic law schools. Another one of us (Jeremy Patrick) makes a provocative frontal attack on the Australian School, recognising its existence but calling for it to change direction.

The health of any scholarly sub-discipline depends not just on existing participants, but the addition of new ones. The *AJLR* is proud to encourage emerging law and religion scholars, and a promising development will certainly make that work easier. In 2025, the University of Southern Queensland launched the country’s first student essay prize in law and religion. The competition, open to any student enrolled in an Australian undergraduate law program, offered cash prizes for the best essay on a topic drawn from a short list of suggestions (or of the student’s own devising). Winning entrants are also offered publication of their work, and this issue contains Jacob Carson’s first place winning essay and Ruairi Grant’s third place entry.

In sum, this issue of the *AJLR* — and the broader debate about the Australian School — reveal the vitality of the scholarly field of law and religion in the country.

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Co-Editors

¹ See Jonathan Crowe, Constance Youngwon Lee, and Joshua Neah (eds), *Jurisprudence and Theology: The Australian School* (Routledge, 2025).

² Marc DeGirolami, ‘The Australia School’, *Law and Religion Forum* (Forum Post, 27 March 2022) <<https://lawandreligionforum.org/2022/03/27/the-australia-school/>>.