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<b>Title</b>	Editorial [vol. 1]
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<b>Publication date</b>	2014
<b>Original citation</b>	KAPALÓ, J. & SHANNEIK, Y. 2014. Editorial. Journal of the Irish Society for the Academic Study of Religions, 1(1), 2-4.
<b>Type of publication</b>	Article (peer-reviewed)
<b>Link to publisher's version</b>	<a href="http://jisasr.org/">http://jisasr.org/</a> Access to the full text of the published version may require a subscription.
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Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

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## Editorial

It is with enormous pleasure that we present the inaugural edition of the *Journal of the Irish Society for the Academic Study of Religions* (JISASR). By way of an opening in this first Editorial of the journal we would like to reflect on the significance of the launch of the journal and say some words about its scholarly mission before introducing the contributions to our first edition.

The academic study of religions is a diverse 'umbrella' discipline that grew out of theological, philological, philosophical, historical and anthropological traditions and approaches to studying religions, yet nevertheless occupies a distinct 'space' within the academic tradition across Europe and the wider world and has its own range of methodologies and approaches. With this heritage in mind, JISASR brings together the voices of academics from a broad spectrum of disciplines; in this first edition alone, alongside scholars with a study of religions background, we find the work of scholars with disciplinary training in geography, sociology, history and anthropology. We sincerely hope that the journal will become the 'Irish home' for the publication of critical, analytical and cross-cultural studies of religions in much the same way that over the past three years ISASR has succeeded becoming an important forum for scholars from a whole range of disciplines and backgrounds studying religions in the Irish context and in the wider world.

Another important aspect of the Journal's mission relates to its 'Irishness'. The journal strongly encourages submissions from scholars based on the island of Ireland and papers concerned with religions, in all their diversity, in Ireland and globally, thus offering for the first time a forum for critical reflection on religion in contemporary Ireland and indeed on the study of religions in the Irish academy.

As President of the Society, Patrick Claffey, outlined at ISASR's inaugural conference in 2012 "heretofore the study of religion in Ireland has been done largely through a theological prism and latterly perhaps from a sociological perspective." Historically there was a very limited number of ways of speaking authoritatively in the academy about religions and a limited range of themes or questions that were considered legitimate and worthy of study. The editorial team of JISASR, therefore, seeks to celebrate the differences in approach to studying religions that can now be found across the academic landscape in Ireland and to explore fully the diversity of religious practices, ideas, beliefs and lives found in our globalizing world. We aim to achieve this breadth of approaches and topics whilst maintaining the highest international academic standards. As the Mission of JISASR states "[t]he journal is strictly non-confessional in approach," that is to say, it is not a forum for apologetical, confessional, interfaith or other similar concerns; approaches that enjoy a wide range of alternative forums and publications.

This inaugural edition of JISASR consists of papers specially selected from the second annual conference of the society, which was held at the Clinton Institute, University College Dublin 10-12<sup>th</sup> May 2013 and entitled *Ireland, America and Transnationalism: Studying Religions in a Globalized World*. Some of the papers presented here inevitably reflect this theme, however, it was the aim of this inaugural edition to represent, as far as possible, the full scope of JISASR and the society that has given birth to it, showcasing scholarship by both Ireland-based and international scholars concerned with both Irish and non-Irish themes.

The first two articles in this edition are keynote lectures from the conference with the remainder being some of the excellent papers presented over the three days of the conference. The editorial committee of the journal has chosen a range of papers in order to reflect the diversity of approaches and topics that characterize the community of scholars working in the field of the academic study of religions in Ireland. On the one hand, papers represent a range of academic disciplinary approaches from sociology (Ganiel & Marti), geography (O'Mahony), historical studies (McNamara) and anthropology (Scheid). The keynote papers too diverge in approach, Alicia Turner's paper introduces the 'post-colonial turn' in the study (and teaching) of religions that has become influential in recent years, whilst Crawford Gribben's paper, taking the established history of ideas approach, gives a new insight into the remarkable globalization of an 'Irish' religious idea.

This heterogeneity of approaches is mirrored by the diversity of topics, which range from the mapping of parish boundaries (O'Mahony) to sacred geographies in the Himalayas (Scheid), and from US inspired post-evangelical Christianity in Northern Ireland (Ganiel & Marti) to the Glastonbury-inspired Celticism of Wellesley Tudor Pole (McNamara).

The editorial committee thanks these pioneer authors for publishing with us in our first edition, confident that these articles represent the first of many that will appear in JISASR in the coming years and decades.