



## Editor's Note

Joseph Gelfer

It is with great pleasure that I introduce to you the inaugural issue of *Journal of Men, Masculinities and Spirituality* (JMMS). When I first speak to people about my research, a common question I'm asked is, "the whole history of religion and spirituality has been about and by men, so why does it need a separate treatment?" I can sympathize with this question, as history has indeed been a sad story of masculine domination; but to critique this one needs to engage with the study of men and masculinities. And of course, there are those manifestations of masculinity that do not conspire with domination.

I think some people worry that the study of men and masculinities, especially within a religious context, is somehow code for "reasserting masculine domination," aligning it with unsavory manifestations of "the men's movement" or "men's rights" activists. The reality is quite different. The vast majority of those who study men and masculinities, far from engaging in a backlash against feminisms, are themselves feminist. Nearly all theory employed in the study of men and masculinities is feminist and/or queer. Exactly how the study of men and masculinities intersects with other disciplines such as women's studies is a complex issue, but suffice to say over the past 20 years its study has gained significant momentum, complementing women's studies in a fully-fledged gender studies, and allowing for hitherto unknown criticisms and celebrations of men's lives.

The study of men and masculinities is divided by some scholars into two approaches: "critical studies of men" and "men's studies." The general perception is that the former is explicitly feminist, while the latter is rather politically ambiguous. I use these distinctions myself, and my natural tendency is towards critical studies of men, but I am not wholly convinced the two are mutually exclusive and feel there are lessons to be learnt from both approaches. JMMS welcomes all researchers and readers who seek a better understanding of men and masculinities.

Other than JMMS, two international journals currently serve the discipline: *Men and Masculinities* and *Journal of Men's Studies*. Both are excellent in providing a general venue, but their generality make it difficult to fully explore any one area of specialty. There are many thousands of academic journals in the world, but not one that explores two of the most significant variables on the planet: men and religion. Hence the need for and birth of JMMS.

JMMS seeks to be as inclusive as possible in its area of enquiry. Papers address the full spectrum of masculinities and sexualities, particularly those which are seldom heard. Similarly, JMMS addresses not only monotheistic religions and spiritualities but also Eastern, indigenous, new religious movements and other spiritualities which resist

categorization. JMMS papers address historical and contemporary phenomena as well as speculative essays about future spiritualities.

This diversity is suggested by the contents of this first issue. Yvonne Maria Werner and Anna Prestjan introduce a large research project focused on constructions of Christian manliness in Northern Europe between 1850 and 1940. Frank A. Salamone shows how the Hausa people of Nigeria define ideal masculinity. Roland Boer employs Freud and Lacan to chart the intersection of God, circumcision and the built male body. David Shneer argues that queer Jews are at the forefront of Jewish Culture. Juan M. Marin discusses how a medieval Jesuit mystic's melancholia was perceived as "feminine." Rini Bhattacharya Mehta identifies the role of masculinity and spirituality in the early life of Sri Aurobindo. An equally diverse range of papers is being gathered for the second issue, and a further special edition focused on youth masculinities and spirituality is being prepared. These papers establish what I hope will be a long and fruitful journey, enabling both new scholarly insights and perhaps even (at the risk of grandiosity) contributing towards more peaceful ways of being.

The creation of JMMS has only been possible with the help of numerous people. Chiefly I want to thank the editorial board for responding so positively to my requests for help in launching JMMS. In particular, Philip Culbertson has been repeatedly available with advice: his wise counsel is most appreciated. Thanks to Björn Krondorfer for taking on the book review section. Thanks to John Banister for donating the JMMS URL, web-space and many hours of website development. Thanks to the various people who have acted as anonymous peer reviewers, and also those who have assisted with editorial support. Thanks to Red James for providing the JMMS logo, the meaning of which has been the source of numerous interesting conversations.

Joseph Gelfer, Department of Religious Studies  
Victoria University of Wellington/NEW ZEALAND  
e: joseph@gelfer.net