

Prenotandum: This apology was published in *AASR Bulletin* 24 (November 2005): 54-55

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Apologies Again!

In *AASR Bulletin* 23 (May 2005), on p. 64, I apologised for not having replied, due to pressure of other work, to Graham Harvey's response to my remark in *AASR Bulletin* 21 (May 2004), p. 51, that Harvey 'has a partisan interest in indigenous religions' and 'pushes the "new primitivist" approaches which Armin Geertz criticised'. I regret greatly that I must apologise again now for having failed to draft my reply, for exactly the same reason, or actually for two time-consuming reasons. One is that since October 2004 I am a member of a national Dutch accreditation assessment committee, which has since paid three-day visits to all thirteen Dutch academic institutions teaching theology and religious studies funded by the Dutch government. That job is drawing to a close. The report will be published in two or three months' time. The second reason is that the AASR Executive appointed me AASR Web Master and commissioned me to have the AASR internet site developed. It also implied that I had to teach myself, and be taught, the basics of HTML and XHTML-internet languages for managing and further developing that site.

I do, however, trust that I will be able to reply to Graham Harvey's response in *AASR Bulletin* 25. That I do not do so now in a half a page or so is because I feel that the 'dispute' between Harvey and me deserves a thorough investigation and a well-balanced response. All I can do now is to report on the few e-mail exchanges

we had on this matter in November 2004. In one of these, on 15 November 2004, I wrote:

‘I am sorry that my concluding ‘reservation’ in my review of the four recent books on ‘indigenous religions’ (*AASR Bulletin* 21: 52) has apparently stung you. It was certainly not meant to be ‘insulting’. Nor do I think it is ‘damaging’ to your work in view of the fact that if my allegation of your ‘partisan interest in indigenous religions and modern neo-paganism’ is correct, then you are one of quite a large number of colleagues, certainly in the AASR, who have more sympathy for your position than for my ‘reservation’ against it. I am only worried whether my allegation is indeed correct. This review had to be written in quite a hurry, and in ending it on the usual critical note I may have gone more by a ‘distinct impression’ than by solid textual evidence. So, I will have to review that, and perhaps also read your other publications to test my ‘distinct impression’. Which means that I will either try to substantiate my ‘reservation’ and continue our debate, as you suggest, or publish an apology. But I fear that I may not be able to do that in *AASR-Bulletin* 22 in view of my present schedule of what I have to attend to’.

To which Harvey replied on 16 November:

‘I’m less concerned with being called ‘partisan’ than with the word ‘primitivist’. I’ve been called worse – ‘theologian’ for example! - and I really do contest that one. My recent article in *Numen* makes it clear that I think we need to find various more ethical and decolonialising research methods and positions. I’m happy to argue that modernity’s science is as deeply entangled in polemics as any other ‘tribal’ view. It’s only worse than other worldviews because it claims to be universally true and useful when in fact it is dangerously partisan. So, my version of being partisan is less worrying - except that the implication that might be read into your review [is] that because I’ve written a book on Pagans I might be doing something dubious in engaging with indigenous people and religions. My book on Paganism (and a more recent edited book about Researching Paganisms) are more careful to avoid being a theologian. I.e. I do not construct the religion as I would like it to be, I do not talk about my own practice except as a researcher... etc.

When I failed to trace Harvey's article in *Numen*, he graciously sent me an electronic copy of it on 25 November 2004 as well as his list of publications to date. At that point, however, the treadmill of the visitation process overtook me. Now that I am about to be released from it, I look forward to examine Harvey's publications and test whether his approach to the academic study of religions may, or should not in my opinion be viewed as 'primitivist'. I will report on that in *AASR Bulletin* 25.