

# British Association for the Study of Religions Annual Conference

## ***"Narratives of Religion"***

4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> September 2017



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Department of Theology  
and Religious Studies



University of  
Chester

# BASR 2017 Timetable

## Monday 4th September

12.00-13.15	Registration & Buffet lunch – Binks CBK013
13.15-14.00	Welcome – Binks CBK107
<b>14.00-15.30</b>	<b>Session 1</b>
15.30-16.00	Tea & Coffee
<b>16.00-17.30</b>	<b>Session 2</b>
<b>17.40-18.40</b>	<b>Intersections of religion and fiction:</b> a conversation with Francesca Haig ( <i>The Fire Sermon</i> trilogy) and Zen Cho ( <i>Sorcerer to the Crown</i> ). Chair: Dr Alana Vincent Binks CBK107
19.00-20.00	Evening Meal – White’s Dining Room.
19.45	Free Social Time – Student Union Bar
20.00	Religious Studies Project <i>Christmas Special 2017: Scrape my Barrel!</i> – Student Union Bar

## Tuesday 5th September

8.00-9.00	Breakfast
<b>9.00-10.30</b>	<b>Session 3</b>
10.30-11.00	Tea & Coffee
<b>11.00-12.30</b>	<b>Session 4</b>
12.30-13.30	Buffet Lunch
13.30-15.00	BASR AGM Binks CBK107
<b>15.00-16.30</b>	<b>Session 5</b>
16.30-17.00	Tea & Coffee
<b>17.00-18.30</b>	<b>Keynote – Narratives of Pagan Religion – Prof Ronald Hutton</b> Chair: Dr Steven Sutcliffe. Binks CBK107
19.00	Conference Dinner - White’s Dining Room (followed by social time – Student Union Bar)

## Wednesday 6th September

8.00-9.00	Breakfast
<b>9.00-10.30</b>	<b>Session 6</b>
10.30-11.00	Tea & Coffee
<b>11.00-13.00</b>	<b>Session 7</b>
13.00-14.00	Buffet Lunch, then depart, or:
14.00-16.00	Optional Tour of Chester Cathedral/City Walls (on foot).

***For information on travel to the University of Chester see end of brochure.***

## **Session 1: Monday 14.00-15.30**

### **PANEL 1 Edward Tylor, Religion and Culture: Re-examining Narratives of Tylor for the Centenary of his Death**

**Room: CBK107**

Chair: *Graham Harvey*

Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917) in many respects has a fixed place in the academic memory of religious studies and cultural anthropology yet acknowledgement of his role is often purely historical, as a key ancestor of little direct relevance to contemporary discussions. This has left us with a limited narrative about the man and his work; a particular received or canonical Tylor defined by his introduction of the concept of animism, his intellectualist approach to religion, his armchair research and staunch social evolutionism. The year of his centenary is an opportunity to begin the task of critically examining the legacy left by Tylor's work on religion and culture, how much the received Tylor matches his body of work, whether other Tylors can be extracted from these texts which undermine such a limited perspective on a long and eventful career and whether contemporary scholars can find anything of ongoing relevance in the work of such a historically distant figure. We hope that this panel will help to initiate this conversation alongside the forthcoming volume *Edward Tylor, Religion and Culture* which will be launched at the panel.

□

#### **Tylor and Debates about the Definition of Religion, Then and Now**

*Liam T. Sutherland*

Tylor's definition of religion as belief in spiritual beings is certainly much discussed in introductory courses and text books but what continuing relevance, if any does it have within debates about the definition of 'religion' as a scholarly concept? In early anthropological circles Tylor's approach to religion was at the centre of such discussions and indeed it was a specific disavowal of Tylor's approach to definition which drove Émile Durkheim to his own approach, giving rise to the substantive/functional split which continues to shape these debates. I will argue that Tylor's approach is of particular relevance though, because it demonstrates that there was an early approach to these questions which avoids Tim Fitzgerald's characterisation of definitions of religion as ultimately theological or as overly expansive to the point of redundancy. Tylor's approach to definition had more in common with contemporary approaches than might at first be apparent, his 'minimal' approach was specifically constructed to act as a cross-cultural analytical tool which should be limited enough to pick out relevant data while attempting to jettison the culturally specific baggage with which the concept had been loaded. In short, Tylor's approach was more reflexive and path-breaking than its apparent common-sense simplicity would seem to suggest to modern eyes.

#### **Deconstructing Tylor: Memes, Dreams and Bricolage**

*Paul-François Tremlett*

The standard account of Tylor's oeuvre situates the survival as a key element of a comparative anthropology saturated with evolutionist, rationalist and utilitarian assumptions about progress, reason and human nature. The influence of this canonical Tylor on contemporary currents in the anthropology of religion has tended to gravitate rather narrowly to the recapitulation of classical debates around the origins and definition of religion but with the caveat that Tylor framed his work in terms of an historical anthropology that today lacks any theoretical or empirical credibility, and in terms of an epistemology saturated by the presuppositions of gendered, white, Protestant colonialism. Yet some of his ideas prefigure in important respects assumptions shared by contemporary anthropologists, evolutionary psychologists and cognitive theorists. As such, the first part of this paper will explore the standard account of Tylor's survival with a

particular interest in his theory of diffusion to open out the extent of its anticipation of Sperber's mobilization of the concept of 'epidemiology' and Dawkins' theory of memetics, theories that seek to explain the transmission and distribution of individual units of culture and religion. The second part will be concerned with the de-stabilization of the canonical Tylor. Tylor's work reflects the uneasy intellectual currents of the late nineteenth century and its discontents. The survival is an organizing element of Tylor's theoretical system but by unsettling it, an alternative Tylor or perhaps an altered Tylor—can be glimpsed. This alter-Tylor's imaginative account of animist cognition evokes Lévy-Bruhl and Lévi-Strauss, while the centrality of the dream to the origins of religion suggests the survival represents less an element of a rational, linear sequence that leads backwards in time to a putative moment of origin than a mode of irrational production perhaps best described as bricolage.

## **Why evolutionary and cognitive scientists of religion (should) read Tylor**

*Jonathan Jong*

In the past 30 years, evolutionary theorists and cognitive scientists have turned their attention to religion as a viable and promising object of empirical investigation. The aim of the "cognitive science of religion" has been to explain the ubiquity of human religiosity and the diversity (or lack thereof) therein. This project has, largely tacitly, inherited much from Enlightenment and Victorian efforts to provide a "natural history" (à la Hume) or "genealogy" (à la Nietzsche) of religion. This paper rationally reconstructs E. B. Tylor's work on religion as expressed in his magnum opus *Primitive Culture*. It considers the enduring value of Tylor's "minimum definition" of religion as "belief in Spiritual Beings", compares his evolutionism with contemporary evolutionary approaches in the human science, and extracts testable hypotheses that may be more inchoate in the text. This paper thus re-reads Tylor to cast the evolutionary and cognitive science of religion in a neo-Tylorian mould.

## **E. B. Tylor's Mexican Ethnography**

*Miguel Astor-Aguilera*

In 1861, Edward Burnett Tylor published *Anahuac: Mexico and the Mexicans, Ancient and Modern*. Tylor's *Anahuac* resulted from his 1856 three-month long trip throughout Central Mexico. What Tylor previously read about Mexico and its peoples he took note of and then on the ground compared and elaborated his impressions within *Anahuac*. His more famous books—*Researches into the Early History of Mankind and the Development of Civilization* as well as *Primitive Culture*—were written after *Anahuac*. Can we learn anything, two hundred years after Tylor's passing concerning currently accepted academic methods and theories, considering that his Mexican documentation is often ignored in favor of questioning his later work? Though *Anahuac* is often dismissed as a travelogue describing his over dramatized travels in arduous and dangerous circumstances, there is much that demands attention in terms of ethnographic detail. Tylor describes his growing love of Mexican geography, flora and fauna, its people, food and drink, customs, and is readily conflicted over Catholic and indigenous religious life. Tylor was a complicated person and *Anahuac* demonstrates his perplexing personality while engaging what constituted peoples' humanness in religious practice leading to his later assumed objective analysis of the so-called primitive.

## **The Place of E.B. Tylor in the Primitive Monotheism Debate**

*James L. Cox*

The notion that primitive peoples around the world originally possessed a belief in one God, but had over time degenerated into forms of polytheism and animism, was advanced at the end of the nineteenth century by the Scottish independent thinker, Andrew Lang, and supported by intensive ethnographic research during the early part of the twentieth century by the Austrian Roman Catholic ethnologist, Wilhelm



Schmidt. Part of the support for this theory was obtained in Australia where a belief in a High God called Baiame was discovered very early after colonial contact. E.B. Tylor dismissed such ideas as impossible since beliefs in one God clearly either had resulted from Christian influences or were the inventions of Christians, such as Schmidt, who modelled their theories of human religious development on biblical assumptions. This chapter examines Tylor's own theory about the origin of religion in the context of his involvement in the primitive monotheism debate. It asks if Tylor's rejection of the universal idea of a High God was based on empirical evidence, in part obtained from the field work among the central desert peoples of Australia conducted towards the end of the nineteenth century by Baldwin Spencer and F.J. Gillen, or was more likely a conclusion derived primarily from his own pre-determined theories.

## **PAPERS A: Autoethnography**

**Room: CBK106/1**

**Chair: Christopher Cotter**

### **Auto-ethnography as confessional narrative?**

*Daniel Nield*

Geertz (1998) suggests the role of ethnography is to communicate the essence of 'being there' in the field. This is especially true of auto-ethnography where the field is not only a space observed by the ethnographer but a body and psyche inhabiting that space. The ethnographer becomes a field in and of themselves. Whilst this arguably reduces auto-ethnographic writing to a form of selective autobiography, I will use my own auto-ethnographic writing on HIV testing to propose that critical reflection on the self as auto-ethnographer can reveal queer phenomenological orientations of value beyond the merely auto-biographical.

Coleman (2013) points to ethnographic recall as "...constructed through plays of social relationships..." across actors and spaces. For theologically oriented auto-ethnographic work these social relationships include interactions between the self and the ultimate 'other'. As a self-identifying Christian gay man, this has forced me to confront the influence of shame on auto-ethnographic recall, forgetting and representation. Reflexive writing here highlights motivational bias on the part of the author towards confession and reconciliation, the exploration of which suggests that contrary to Ellis' (2004) dislike of "confession" as a term, for the theological auto-ethnographer, "confessional" auto-ethnography can play a key role in the reflexive process.

### **More Tales of the Field – writing reflexively in the study of religion**

*Lynne Scholefield*

The title of the paper refers to John Van Maanen's classic work, *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography* (2011 2nd edit.). I explore what Van Maanen argued about the Realist, Confessional and Impressionist tale to introduce some of the major issues about writing up fieldwork with which ethnographers have been concerned. Reflexivity is important throughout the research process, making explicit how we are involved in generating knowledge. In this paper I focus on writing, and particularly story telling as a way of knowing, hence the focus on tales of the field – the tales told by those we study and those we tell to make meaning of what we have learned, both academically and personally. Using a number of tales, including one about lunchtime prayers in a Jewish school and another about a visit to Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome to see Bernini's sculpture of St Teresa in Ecstasy I discuss the importance of 'creative non-fiction' in writing up fieldwork in the study of religion. Reflexive writing involves moving between lives and stories, in Robert Orsi's words, 'work(ing) through the recognition of difference and a revisioning of one's own story through the lens of the other openly engaged.'

## **Crafting Narratives: Knitting, Storytelling and Autoethnography**

*Anna Fisk*

This paper will discuss critical issues in the use of autoethnography and self-narratives in the study of religion and theology, based on my current research in contemporary fibre/craft practice\* as implicit religion.

In my book *Sex, Sin, and Our Selves*, I developed the methodological approach of placing my autobiographical narratives alongside feminist theological readings of women's fiction. This was framed as 'reading their stories beside my own', with an emphasis on the constructed and intentional nature of my self-narratives. I bring this auto(ethno)graphic approach to literature into my recent qualitative research with knitters, plying together:

- narrative descriptions of the encounter/s with participants;
- consideration of participants' self-narration, and the role of knitting within that;
- knitting as storytelling/autobiography as aspects of its implicit religiousness;
- my own life-writing, or autoethnography, as a knitter myself.

In this paper, I negotiate the ethical and scholarly implications of 'reading their stories beside my own' when 'their stories' are those of research participants rather than fictional texts. I ask how my own stories may have shaped the form of 'their stories', not only in my interpretation of them but also in how the participants told them to me. While these are standard methodological and ethical questions in the practice of qualitative interviewing, I consider whether these critical issues are heightened or merely made more obvious by the presence of the researcher's crafted self-narratives.

\*Encompassing crafts such as knitting, crochet, spinning, felting and weaving; hereafter termed 'knitting' as shorthand.

## **PAPERS B: *Ritual***

**Room: CBK106/2**

**Chair: Liam Metcalf-White**

### **Jalaram Katha: Performance, Telling and Interpretation of Vernacular Narrative and the Ritual Role of Epic Narrative in a Contemporary Hindu Tradition.**

*Martin Wood*

Over a period of three evenings in January this year some fifteen hundred devotees of the Gujarati Hindu saint Jalaram Bapa gathered in a community function hall in north west London to partake in a katha or re-telling of the narrative of the life of saint and his wife Virbai Ma.

Key episodes in the narrative, the saint's his previous lives, their marriage and the miracles that he performed were narrated by the community's priest and re-enacted throughout by a number of devotees. Furthermore, whilst the event focused solely upon the above themes at the same time a highly venerated and ritually installed copy of the Ramayana was placed in the centre of the stage which had to all intents and purposes been transformed in to a shrine.

This paper hopes to unpack the role of the katha in the community and the importance of the telling and retelling of the Jalaram narrative, but also of the deeper religious significance of such performances and their importance in the continuity of the tradition. Furthermore, I hope to comment upon the role that the

Ramayana, in its material form, played when it came to various related rituals undertaken by the priest prior to and during the performance.

### **The construction of inclusive congregational community through Eucharistic ritual**

*James Skinner*

Drawing on data from a qualitative case study of a 'dinner church' in Brooklyn, New York, this paper examines the relationship between the formation of religious community and narratives of inclusion and hospitality within the culture of the congregation.

The creation of a strong religious community is of course a primary goal of most churches and religious institutions. This paper explores how St. Lydia's, an innovative 'dinner church', tackles the challenge of creating a strong community through the central practice of a communal meal around which its worship takes place. Using data from in-depth-interviews with clergy and congregants at the church, as well as participant observation within the church, I explore the various narratives around food and the communal meal within the culture of the congregation, and meanings of the meal for the congregation beyond its explicit Eucharistic meaning. The findings suggest food and the communal dinner at the church have a variety of different meanings for the congregants and the congregation as a whole, and the meal functions as an important source of social capital for many. The sharing of food within the culture of the congregation is also closely tied to theologies of acceptance and hospitality.

## Session 2: Monday 16.00-17.30

### **PANEL - Tylor roundtable – Religious Studies Project Recording**

**Room: CBK107**

**Graham Harvey, Liam Sutherland, Paul-François Tremlett, Miguel Astor-Aguilera, Jonathan Jong, James Cox**

### **PAPERS A: Teachers, Gurus and Authoritative Speech**

**Room: CBK106/1**

**Chair: Suzanne Owen**

#### **Remembering and Reforming: Interactions with the ‘God-realized’ Guru**

*Tushar Shah*

This paper discusses the intersection of theology and devotees’ narratives of material interaction with the guru in BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, a transnational religious organisation originating in Gujarat, India. Scholars such as Hanna Kim and Raymond Williams have considered the role of the guru in BAPS and this paper builds on their work by focusing specifically onto the experiential and purported transformative aspect of devotees’ interactions with the guru. In particular, I reflect on how exactly their momentary interactions (through, *darshan* (seeing) and *samagam* (association)) with the guru lead to remembrance (*smruti*) through repeating narratives of the experience, both verbally and mentally. Through careful analysis of interviews with devotees, and observation of interactions and their subsequent narrations, I study how theological understandings of the guru come together with the various narratives offered to—and by—devotees. I seek to understand how these narratives, retold and reproduced in the tradition through publications, *kathas* (discourses), and *goshtis* (discussions), in combination with the theological positioning of the guru, become practically and spiritually transformative for devotees.

#### **Spiritual marriage of East and West or western hegemony?: the use of narratives in the writings of Idries Shah on Sufism and of D.T. Suzuki on Zen**

*Saeko Yazaki*

This paper analyses the central role which narratives play in the works of Idries Shah and D.T. Suzuki. Shah and Suzuki were instrumental in spreading interest in Sufism and Zen respectively to western audiences. In his work, Shah presents the stories of Mulla Nasrudin as a medium to achieve “a transmutation of consciousness”. In Zen Suzuki describes Koan as a key method to attain enlightenment, unfolding the meanings of seemingly incomprehensible puzzles in the Koan exercise. Although historically Sufism and Zen developed in different areas, when introduced to the West, these narratives primarily attracted the educated middle-class disillusioned with religious institutions. This paper goes on to discuss the way in which Shah and Suzuki introduced Sufism/Zen to the West and how both authors often used Western references, emphasising the universality of their respective traditions. By juxtaposing how Shah and Suzuki promoted the comparability of Sufism/Zen to Western thought (as if there were a need to do so), the paper questions to what extent attraction to Eastern esoteric teachings in the twentieth century can be considered as the lofty unity of East and West, or the relationship should be understood as subject to the forces of political and cultural hegemony.



## **Thus spoke Śiva. The limits of medical and ritual science in times of plague and epidemics.**

*Fabrizio Ferrari*

Indian physicians have tried for centuries to cope with the devastation caused by epidemics of smallpox. Medical compendia, ritual manuals and mythological narratives give a vivid account of the powerlessness of medical and ritual specialists, and insist on the dread caused by a disease known for high mortality and for maiming survivors. A unique narrative appears in this landscape. During a conversation with his son Skanda, Lord Śiva composes the *Śitalāṣṭakastotra*, the eight-parted hymn in honour of the goddess Śitalā ([She who is] Cold). After a discussion on the earliest attestation of this hymn and its origins, the message of Śiva will be contextually examined. Since there are no remedies against the virulence of contagion, humans should demonstrate sincere devotion (*bhakti*-) and faith (*śraddhā*-) in the goddess. Despite its shortness, the dialogue between Śiva and Skanda offers a unique perspective to discuss the importance of devotional practices in relation to critical events. On the one hand, one appreciates the position of Indian science (medical and ritual) towards life-threatening diseases. On the other, Śiva's authoritative speech permits to further analyse the representation of fear in religious narratives and the subversion of human and divine hierarchies as a response to that.

## **PAPERS B: Biography**

**Room: CBK106/2**

**Chair: Stephen Gregg**

### **‘Unravelling biographies of Margaret Noble/Sister Nivedita’**

*Gwilym Beckerlegge*

There is a particular reason for revisiting the life of Margaret Noble in 2017. This year is the 150th anniversary of her birth, which is being marked in India by the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, the Hindu movement with which she became associated under the name Sister Nivedita (The Dedicated). Noble/Nivedita, however, has attracted far wider interest. Her services to India prompted the Indian government in 1968 to release a postage stamp in her memory. Her life has been the subject of studies, not just by scholars of religion, but also by historians of the Indian independence movement, scholars of postcolonial studies, and art historians.

Yet, full biographies of Margaret Noble, largely produced by admirers, present the reader with certain problems, which are commonly found in other biographies produced, or heavily influenced, by Hindu movements originating in the last two centuries. After discussing some of these difficulties, this paper will explore two problems relating specifically to accounts of Noble's early life in Ireland and England. It will be argued that there are grounds for treating certain elements in accounts of Noble's education in England as falling within a genre of literary fiction. Noble's commitment both to her guru and to the Indian nationalist cause have invariably been attributed to her 'Irishness' in popular biographies. It will be argued that it is only by first unravelling her biographers' accounts of her time in England that it then becomes possible to achieve a more informed understanding of these commitments.

### **Post-charismatic Narratives within Unificationism: How followers of the Reverend Sun Myung Moon select and create opposing understandings of his legacy.**

*Eileen Barker*

When the Reverend Sun Mung Moon died in 2012, the religion that he had founded in 1954 was already showing signs of being on shaky ground. There had been schisms, but somehow Moon's charismatic

presence had managed to hold the movement pretty well together. Even before his funeral, however, different members of the 'Holy Family' had started to claim and battle over their rights to inherit the succession. Moon's widow, Hak Ja Han, presides over the Family Federation, the largest of the groups; the eldest surviving son, Hyun Jin Moon, runs the Global Peace Foundation and the youngest son, Hyung Jin Moon leads the Sanctuary Church.

The paper will compare the narratives that these three splinter groups have developed over the years since Moon's death, each drawing out certain aspects of the teaching and rejecting others, while adding their own unique embellishments.

## **PAPERS C: Religion: Perception and Identity**

**Room: CBK010**

**Chair: Wendy Dossett**

### **The narrative of ethnocentric Buddhist identity**

*Paul Fuller*

Buddhism is not usually associated with national and ethnic identity. This paper will challenge that assumption by describing how Buddhist groups under the broad heading of 'Ma Ba Tha', the 'Organisation for the Protection of Race and Religion' are using the narrative of ethnic Buddhist identity.

Led by the Mandalay based monk Ashin Wirathu this Buddhist group can be explained as following a form of Buddhism which can be described as 'ethnocentric Buddhism'. This form of Buddhism has several different factors. It proposes that Buddhism is under threat from other religions and ethnic groups. It utilises the idea that a pure form of Buddhism needs to be preserved and that this can only happen by protecting Burmese Buddhist identity. It also is also very sensitive to the sacredness of Buddhist images and therefore has a narrative of blasphemy which is central to its Buddhist identity.

This paper will describe several Buddhist social and religious narratives and suggest that these have potentially always been part of Buddhist history.

### **The problem of difference: Havdalah ritual among contemporary British Jews**

*Katarzyna Kowalska*

The Havdalah ritual in Orthodox Judaism has been held as an important part of Jewish liturgy, perceived as building and sustaining Jewish identity and Jewish boundaries. The founders of the Progressive movements firstly perceived Havdalah prayers as too particularistic and therefore omitted them in various British Progressive prayer books until 1950s. Based on interviews and participant observation, this paper examines modern attitudes toward the Havdalah ritual and its understanding mainly by the members Progressive Movements in the United Kingdom. My research engages with the ritual performance, and reasons given for its performance, within the British Orthodox and Progressive movements in private, communal and school contexts. Data from the interviews and fieldwork conducted over the period of eight months shows that traditional home and synagogue setting for Havdalah ritual has not radically shifted within the Orthodox Movement. However preliminary data from interviews with Orthodox Jews shows that in contact with non-Jews as well as in Interfaith settings Havdalah might present a challenge and cause anxiety, even for those for whom this ritual is unchangeable and part of Jewish heritage. Within Masorti, Reform and Liberal

Judaism some changes have taken place. This paper will examine those changes, their contexts and the ideology underlying the revival of this ritual.

### **There and back again. The theory-fieldwork dynamic in anthropological research.**

*Angela Puca*

The circular process that a researcher encounters, starting from a theoretical proposal based on literature to the actuality of fieldwork and then back to subsume those findings into a newly enriched theory, is challenging for the development of a research narrative. Based on participant observation, guided conversations and interviews conducted in Italy, the present study seeks to analyse specific elements that may influence or affect the representation of what is observed on the field, namely, the insider-outsider perspective, the rationale for the data selection and the perception of academic credibility on filtering the research experience.

Initial findings, derived from data collected in April and May 2017 as part of a project on autochthonous and trans-cultural Shamanism, suggest that there is a tension between what is experienced and what can be reported to fit a certain standard pertaining what is objective and acceptable within the scientific community. The academic approach indicates a dichotomy between the rationality of the researcher and the irrationality of the researched (Bowie, 2013) and when the scholar gets involved in developing a deep understanding using an emic lens there is a risk of being considered unobjective and to have 'gone native' (Turner, 1994). This paper argues that the only way to obtain meaningful results would be through an empathetic engagement, entering into relationship, than a passive observation.

## Session 3: Tuesday 09.00-10.30

### **PANEL: Shapeshifting and shadow-selves: indigenous narratives and western culture**

**Room: CBK107**

**Chair: Suzanne Owen**

#### **Shapeshifting in human-animal relations in Canadian First Nations' stories**

*Suzanne Owen*

In many cultures' stories, animals can appear as human beings, get married to humans, while humans can appear as animals. Anthropologist Irving Hallowell says this ability to change form, metamorphosis, is a characteristic of persons (2002[1960]: 34) in Ojibwe culture. He coined the phrase 'other than human persons' to describe animals and other beings that interact with humans. In this sense, 'person' is a relational category, signifying a relationship of equals between **human and** other than human persons. In both Ojibwe and Mi'kmaq stories, there is social interaction between human and other-than-human persons, but I've observed that this often involves a metamorphosis of either the human or other-than-human person into the other's form. These stories are deceptively complex with different layers of meaning and can be understood as observations of both animal and human social worlds.

#### **Tricksters, Shadows and Skinwalkers: Animism and Evil in *Twin Peaks*, Indigenous Religions and Native American Films**

*Louise Child*

The television series *Twin Peaks* appears to have motifs that echo findings of scholars studying indigenous religions. The FBI Agent Cooper is able to communicate with a range of beings in dreams and visions, including the murder victim, Laura Palmer, and like an anthropologist 'gone native' he joins the town's secret society formed to monitor the mysteries of the woods. Moreover the Log Lady's relationship with her log resembles engagements with personhood studied by contemporary animists. However, the animist analogy breaks down with an evil entity called BOB who possesses various members in the town in order to commit crimes, because BOB is not a person in his own right who enters into relations with others. I will therefore argue that the animism in *Twin Peaks* is not attributable to a sustained engagement with indigenous religions and that Jung's work on 'the shadow' is a more apt vehicle through which to study the mythology of evil in *Twin Peaks*. This interpretation raises further questions about the extent to which ideas about a shadow self might be relevant to the depiction of evil in indigenous stories and films.

#### **Mediumship, Shamanism and Bodily Transformation**

*Jack Hunter*

This paper will present an approach to the interpretation of contemporary western trance and physical mediumship constructed around notions of bodily transformation in Amerindian shamanistic ontologies. It is suggested that reinterpreting trance and physical mediumship through the lens of an alternate ontology will shed new light on a practice that is widely regarded as 'fraudulent,' and which is often ignored by religious studies and anthropology.

#### **Respondent: comments and counterpoints: Graham Harvey**

### **PAPERS A: Narratives of Conspiracy, Apocalypse and Secret Knowledge**

**Room: CBK106/1**

**Chair: Steve Knowles**

### **A Hydra of “Flat Earth” Conspiracy Theory: Counter-narratives within Situational Context**

*Nick Toseland,*

During my doctoral fieldwork into a truth-seeking (or “conspiracy theorising”) social network in contemporary Britain, few theories were as contentious as the “Flat Earth Theory”. This paper proceeds from participant observation across Britain from 2014-15 at three different meeting-groups that discuss “alternative” knowledges at fortnightly meetings. Over the course of three separate evenings, the same overall theory was met with ridicule, indifference, and/or assent. This paper explores the nature of such “conspiracy theories” as deployed in practice, alongside reasons why each instance met acceptance – or dismissal – within a situated, physical group. Counter-narratives are not understood as inert cognitive constructs; rather, the Flat Earth Theory should be understood as a counter-narrative that revolves primarily around subverting existing official narratives. I argue that the efficiency of such counter-narratives depends largely upon social context, pertaining both to the teller and audience. In so doing, this paper engages critically with Colin Campbell’s notion of a ‘cultic milieu’ as a sympathetic and tolerant communicative arena for counter-cultural ideas.

### **Elite Knowledge: Competing Narratives of Gnosticism**

*David G. Robertson*

In 1945, a cache of thirteen papyrus codices was discovered in the Egyptian desert near Nag Hammadi. These contained many previously unknown sectarian texts in Greek from the 2-4th centuries CE. Before this, scholars knew about the Gnostics only from 2nd Century heresiologists, who described them as mystical, anticosmic, ascetic heretics. These new texts profoundly transformed our understanding of the period, however, but before they could be fully published, the 1964 Congress of the IAHR in Messina set out to define “Gnosticism”, “Gnostic” and “Gnosis”. Drawing from continental phenomenology, Jungian psychology and post-Holocaust theology, Gnosticism was constructed as a perennial religious current based on special knowledge of the divine in a corrupt world, rather than historically and culturally situated. The data emerging from Nag Hammadi was all but ignored; nevertheless, this interpretation continues to dominate the academic field, and has been the primary inspiration for a number of contemporary Gnostic groups. This paper examines this moment of competing narratives, to consider the complex relationship between primary sources, academics and practitioners in category formation, and how zombie categories can lumber on even when not supported by the data. Yet unpacking why this particular narrative remains so influential tells us a good deal about contemporary discourse on religion.

### **Managing the Apocalyptic Narrative: The Baha'i Interpretation of Eschatology**

*Moojan Momen*

The expectations of Christianity and Islam regarding the End Time or the Day of Judgement have many similar elements including: astronomical phenomena, violent convulsions on earth, the appearance of a messianic figure, a battle between the forces of good and evil, the resurrection of the dead and a judgement with some sent to heaven and some to hell. Thus when the co-founders of the Baha'i Faith, the Bab and Baha'u'llah, claimed that the End Time had arrived and claimed to be the expected messianic figures prophesied not just in Islam but in all of the world's scriptures, they needed to explain why this apocalyptic narrative did not appear to have occurred. The Baha'i leaders managed the apocalyptic narrative in two main ways. First, by asserting that scripture has always been focussed on spiritual truths and has explained these truths using metaphor and metonymy. In this way, the fact that the apocalyptic narrative did not appear to

have occurred outwardly is explained by giving the elements in the narrative inward, spiritual explanations. The second way the Baha'i leaders managed End-Time expectations was, using Catherine Wessinger's terminology, to move their followers from a catastrophic millennialist style of thinking to a progressive millennialism.

## **PAPERS B: Narratives of Pedagogy**

**Room: CBK106/2**

**Chair: Wendy Dossett**

### **The British Nativity Play: an initiation into the cultural ideology behind the familiar tea towel**

*Lucinda Murphy*

Year upon year the scene is set for what has, for many in Britain, become a strikingly and tangibly familiar image of Christmas, and ultimately of childhood. Shepherds fiddle distractedly with their tea-towels. Angels preen their sparkly foil wings and hoist up their white woolen tights. Proudly bejeweled Kings fight over makeshift cardboard crowns. The school nativity play has become an ingrained part of British middle class culture, and perhaps even something of a rite of passage. Despite the continuing prevalence and popularity of this ritualized narrative in British schools, this phenomenon has not, until now, attracted any sustained academic study.

This paper discusses four qualitative interviews I conducted last year with parents whose children had recently performed in a nativity play at a multicultural state primary school in London. Examining how these parents interpreted their experiences, understandings, and memories of this dramatized narrative, I consider how the religious/cultural narrative is retold and reinterpreted through and in relation to personal life narratives. I draw upon anthropological and psychological theories of meaning seeking, memory making, and identity construction to explore how personal participation in, connection to, and narration of cultural/religious narratives might impact the type of value attributed to their contents.

### **Narratives of Peace**

*Erin Kavanagh*

On Wednesday 27th November, 2002, sheltering from a torrential downpour worthy of Gilgamesh, the Temple of Peace in Cardiff held an unusual gathering. This gathering was the opening ceremony for what became an international, multi award winning, charity for global citizenship. It was a statement of faith, of inter faith, where contesting religious narratives laid down their differences and stood side by side. This paper presents the teaching methodology which has resulted from that day, offering an auto-ethnographical account (Ellis et al, 2010) of what it has been like building rainbows across the ontological turn. To be one small part of both the process, and the product. In so doing, it travels in the light of Paulo Freire's work on democracy and hope (1994), presenting a framework for encouraging social evolution through the simple symbol of a mala.

In these times of increasing unrest, the need to pick up Paulo Freire's challenge to seek democracy through education (1973), has never been greater. Elucidating constructions of religion has become a demanding role for many people who would not ordinarily consider themselves to be spiritually informed, whether in or outside of the classroom. From tackling alternative facts in social media to dodging bombs as we wait for our children at a pop concert, "the voices of intolerance are all around us – the voice of tolerance needs to be louder" (Pam Evans, [www.peacemala.org](http://www.peacemala.org)).



## **Metanarratives of Classroom Religious Education**

*Mark Plater*

In the UK, religious education (RE) is a statutory subject of study for all pupils in state-sponsored schools. However, whereas other subjects follow a national curriculum (NC) the curriculum for RE is determined by the local authority (LA), or, in the case of faith schools, by their governors and the appropriate religious authorities. As a result, there are many RE syllabuses, as opposed to the one national syllabus for say, English or Maths or History.

One of the problems with the above structure is that different syllabuses identify different aims for the subject, and this has been identified by OFSTED and others as a cause of confusion for teachers and a contributor to low standards in the subject.

In 2015-16 I carried out a survey of 500+ SACRE members (members of Standing Advisory Councils for RE, the bodies responsible for RE in each LA) asking what they considered to be the purpose of classroom RE. A similar survey was then carried out with 200+ classroom RE teachers in order to see how their views compared with the perspectives of syllabus designers. A third study is presently in progress to see what secondary school pupils consider to be the aims of the subject.

This paper will present the results of the first two surveys and some initial findings of the third. It will explore questions about what school religious education classes are for: what is their intention or purpose? What does the subject seek to achieve for today's largely secular youth?

## **PAPERS C: *Travel Narratives***

**Room: CBK104**

**Chair: Chris Cotter**

### **Ḥajj: A Narrative of Life and Resurrection**

*Abdulla Galadari*

Every religion uses different forms of narratives conveying messages. This paper discusses the case of the Ḥajj in Islam to illustrate how the rituals of the Ḥajj are used to portray a theatrical form of a narrative. Each part of the ritual has certain names. The intertwining of the names used for the rituals and the theatrical display in the rituals themselves are used to express a narrative of the concept of death and resurrection, according to the Qur'an. The beginning of the Ḥajj through the miqāt, the circumambulation around the Ka'bah, the traversing between the hills of Ṣafa and Marwah, etc provide symbolic significance of the message being portrayed. For example, the Ḥajj includes the wearing of the ihram, a funeral shroud, signifying death. Prior to removing the funeral shroud, signifying resurrection, require that the pilgrims shave or cut their hair (sha'r) short. This theatrical display is an expression of Qur'an 16:21 stating that people are dead and that they would not perceive (yash'urūn) when they will be resurrected. The Arabic terms for hair and perception share the same root. This along with other examples are given to portray the Ḥajj as a theatrical narrative of death and resurrection.

### **Narrativizing spirituality in autobiographical writing: strategies of 'spiritualization' in the early works of Deepak Chopra**

### *Maya Warriier*

A central element of modern (unchurched) spiritual seeking is the seeker's personal journey to, and quest for, a spiritual goal or destination, variously defined in terms of 'personal authenticity', 'true selfhood', or self-realization. Using the analogy of pilgrimage, this paper will explore narrative strategies of 'spiritualization' (drawing upon Catherine Bell's work on 'ritualization') to analyse how spiritual journeys, destinations, and arrivals, are conceptualized in popular writing on the subject. Focusing on the early writings of the vastly popular US-based spiritual guru and healer, Deepak Chopra, this paper will examine the narrative strategies of differentiation, traditionalisation, repetition, and symbolic mapping deployed to construct a spiritualized subject (the narrator himself as well as others deemed to be spiritually-realized). By means of these narrative strategies, the narrator seeks to structure the reader's experience of the world and to mould dispositions appropriate to spiritual seeking and experience. This paper argues that spiritualisation by means of these narrative strategies evokes a consensus on values, symbols and behavior. The narrative serves to socialise individuals into accepting, and adopting, this consensus. The world and the experience thus created also serve the interests of narrators like Chopra in their role as spiritual masters, empowering them not just in spiritual, but also in material terms.

### **Old tool for new times: the rediscovery of ancient holy site in modern India**

#### *Daniela Bevilacqua*

It is not unusual in the history of India religious orders the discovery or better re-discovery of mythical places by ascetics due to their spiritual merits. These discoveries were to support the foundation of new religious centres, because their narrations were presented as miraculous events, able to give authority and legitimacy to a place, so to attract pilgrims.

Few decades ago, Jogi Brahmananda, a Hindu ascetic who spent about 20 years in a jungly area close to Santiniketan (West Bengal, India), claimed that through the power he got meditating in a huge tamarind tree, he realized that the area in which he was practicing was the ancient holy site of Gardhdham where Raja Surath performed the first Durgā Navarātrī, a story narrated in the epic of the Mahabharata. Following that story, the ascetic said to have spotted several holy historical sites, and slowly he built up small shrines and temples there. Once the rediscovery was spread, many pilgrims began to come and further helped the development of the area. Today the history of the place is described in detail on a website, as well as in boards present in the area.

By means of this contemporary example, this paper aims to show how through the rediscovery of holy places, stories and mythologies can be reintroduced and retold leading to the creation of new religious centres, giving new force to old believes.

## Session 4: Tuesday 11-12.30

### **PANEL: (Historical) Narratives of Religious Studies: Case Studies from the UK**

**Room: CBK107**

**Chair: Chris Cotter**

#### **The Political Values of Religious Studies: from Liberalism to a 'Rebel Alliance'**

*Steven Sutcliffe*

This paper discusses three types, derived from positional publications by UK-based or –related scholars, which illustrate the spectrum of political values which have informed post-1960s Religious Studies programmes. I provisionally identify these types as liberalism, (scientific) naturalism, and culturalism. Taken together they map a broad disciplinary curve since the late 1960s from (Ninian) Smartian liberalism to a 'rebel alliance' in Majella Franzmann's phrase. These are mixed types which combine both epistemic and political positions. I argue that their agonistic traces in teaching and research raise important questions about the extent to which the political implications of the production of knowledge of 'religion/s' are (or should be) identified and represented in RS work. I also raise the question of how (if at all) these 'internal' representations of political values relate to wider societal and governmental organisation of knowledge about 'religion/s', including reflecting or resisting normative models of religion-state relationship.

#### **Religious studies and the biological imagination: "Darwinism makes it possible"**

*Paul-François Tremlett*

Marrett's memorable phrase "Darwinism makes it possible" was interpreted as indicating a shift in the conception of religion. According to Eric Sharpe, where once religion had been understood as "revealed truth", it became a "developing organism" (1986, 48) with all that implied for religion as something living, growing and changing according to the same evolutionary laws of development and knowable according to the same kinds of natural scientific methodologies developed by Darwin in *On the Origin of Species* (1859). Certainly Darwin's discoveries opened out a completely new way for understanding the world, yet Durkheim, Frazer, Spencer and Tylor—names commonly associated with evolutionism in the study of religions—held views about change and development that were hardly Darwinian at all. Durkheim, Frazer, Spencer and Tylor saw themselves as evolution's heirs, charged with the task of bringing its insights to the study of religions and as such, they did not regard their appeals to biology as merely literary or metaphorical. In this paper, I describe some of the ways this 'biological imagination' developed in the writings of Durkheim, Frazer, Spencer and Tylor before briefly moving on to reflect on a resurgence of the biological imagination in cognitive and new atheist theories.

#### **A History of the BASR: Some Preliminary Findings**

*Christopher R. Cotter*

The British Association for the Study of Religions (BASR) was founded in 1954 and is a member association of the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR) and of the European Association for the Study of Religions (EASR). The BASR has published a regular Bulletin for over 60 years and its members and office bearers have included leading scholars in the national and international study of religions. In addition, the BASR has hosted one IAHR conference (1975) and two EASR conferences (2001, 2013). In this paper, I present the preliminary results of the research I have been conducting on behalf of the BASR towards developing a pilot history of the association in the context of Religious Studies in the UK. This includes oral

history interviews with senior figures within the UK religious studies community and further afield, as well as an examination of the BASR Bulletin, Journal, and Occasional Papers, as well as related publications.

## **PAPERS A: *Developing and Disrupting Narratives***

**Room: CBK106/1**

**Chair: Paul Middleton**

### **The Narratives of Moses in the Hebrew Bible and the Qu'ran: Revival and Repurposing**

*Kate Tinson*

Moses is primarily thought of as the central Biblical character of the Jewish people and through his relationship with God and his role as the giver of Jewish law it is indeed difficult to separate him from this Jewish identity. However, at the time of the composition of the Qur'an a new narrative arises in which Moses, now Musa, achieves great prominence, his stories being the most repeated from the Bible in the Qur'an. Yet, the depictions of Moses are not entirely the same between the Bible and the Qur'an and within the Qur'an itself as the Qur'an chooses to represent some stories over others, elaborating, editing and repeating. Relatively little work has been done in discovering the Qur'anic Moses, comparing him to the Biblical Moses and seeking why he experiences this revival of popularity within a new tradition. I will use Biblical, Qur'anic and Midrashic sources focusing on the encounter between Moses, Pharaoh and the Magicians in Exodus 7 and suras 7,20,26,27 and 28. The presentation will focus on how characters and events are changed in the Qur'an, the effect this has on the overall narrative and why this may have occurred.

### **Contesting narratives of the birth, death, and rebirth of state blasphemy law**

*David Tollerton,*

State legislation to curtail offence to Christian communities has existed for many centuries in W. Europe, but there is an established narrative that increasingly liberal attitudes toward freedom of expression have in recent times led to the demise of such laws (through either active removal or practical irrelevance). The abolition of the English and Welsh common law crime of blasphemy in 2008 is a key example in this regard. However, in late 2016 Paul Cliteur and Tom Herrenberg published *The Fall and Rise of Blasphemy Law*, arguing that de facto blasphemy laws are returning, a view also expressed by Andrew Copson (Chief Executive of the British Humanist Society) in a sequence of public lectures. In this paper I will critically examine this new narrative of blasphemy law's rebirth, suggesting that the argument is ultimately unconvincing. But more than this, I will question whether narratives of the birth, death, and rebirth of state blasphemy law ultimately distract us from the more subtle and unavoidable ways in which sacrality and the threat of desecration are recurrent phenomena for societies and governance.

### **Narratives on Religious Conversion in Singapore**

*Leon Moosavi*

Singapore is well known for being a cosmopolitan city state in a region of great racial and religious diversity. Despite being officially secular, it is perhaps the most religious society amongst developed nations owing to the prominence of religion in the everyday lives of many Singaporeans. The postcolonial context of Singapore suggests that the society can be understood as comprising of three main races: Chinese, Malays and Indians. These races are often conflated with specific religions which creates a context in which racial and religious classification is essentialised as almost predetermined at birth. However, there are numerous people in Singapore who defy this common-sense understanding of race and religion by engaging in religious conversion (also referred to as religious switching). In this paper, I shall explore some of the

narratives that surround religious conversion in Singapore and explain how it is often understood by those who change their religion but also by those who surround the converts and witness such changes (i.e. their relatives). It will become apparent that in many cases, the narratives produced by both groups are strikingly different.

## **PAPERS B: Narrating Identity**

**Room: CBK106/2**

**Chair: Shona Hayes**

### **Re-telling the self in personal practice**

*Theo Wildcroft*

Within the study of yoga and associated contemplative and religious practices, much attention has been paid to the reconstruction of guru identities via published and oral hagiography. Less attention has turned on the construction of identity by everyday practitioners as a fundamental aspect of their lived religious practice. Mindful and deliberate ritual physical practices in particular can be the site of intra-personal identity construction through the domestication of otherwise self-disruptive somatic experiences via mechanisms of embodied narrativising. This paper will explore material from my forthcoming thesis specific to the mechanisms of intent and purpose that shape post-lineage, non-orthopraxic yoga practices. It will describe the narratives of heroism, self-reconciliation, and moral parable that are used to domesticate life experiences of grief, injury and loss. It will speculate on the ways in which these narratives are both constructed and reinforced by physical practice, in order to restore ontological security in the never-ending process of religioneering.

### **“Disabled people have their own stories to tell”: Lived disability theology and the question of self-determination**

*Naomi Lawson Jacobs*

Discussion on Christianity and disability in the UK has largely been limited to the context of theology, with little focus on the lived experiences of disabled Christians. This presentation will centre the lived theology of ordinary disabled Christians, considering multiple questions raised by their stories. This will include the question of who has the power to create 'authoritative' biblical interpretation and theology, and whether the movement towards decentring biblical interpretation and theology (Schüssler Fiorenza 1988) is having any significant effect on academic and ecclesiastical disability theology.

The author's doctoral research with thirty disabled Christians has revealed very different theological concerns among 'ordinary' disabled readers of the Bible, from those presented by academic disability theology. While some participants reflected the concerns of 'official' church and academic theology, forming narratives of the causes of disability in the world and the possibility of healing in heaven, many were more focused on stories of disability and the churches today, as this relates to access, social justice and self-determined liberatory theologies. This raises significant questions about the power of academic disability theology to shape a narrative about disability when disabled people have little direct input into that conversation. Some of the barriers to the entrance of disabled Christians into the conversation will be considered.

### **Religioneering and narratives of Identity: “That knowledge of knowing who you are - BDSM is part of that.”**

*Alison Robertson*

By understanding religion as an active process of religioning the role of practices not generally placed within the category of religion can be recognised. This means that the contributions made by many differing strands of personal narrative to the construction of religiosity and identity can be explored, together with the ways these strands combine and interact. Such strands may include marked and named religious practices and affiliations, but if it is accepted that the religious exists beyond these contexts then many other elements can become relevant to an individual narrative of identity. The boundaries between different narratives – of what is religious or not religious, sub-cultural or mainstream, normal or deviant – are not impermeable, but porous. Even experiences ostensibly and intentionally bounded within a particular sphere may bleed through that boundary to infuse a new element into the totality of an individual's identity narratives. This paper uses qualitative research into spiritual BDSM to explore how personalised practices contribute to the religioning processes of meaning- and story- and world-making by reflecting on the porosity of kink and non-kink, religious and non-religious identities as they are constructed, maintained and/or disrupted through the embodied practices of BDSM.



## Session 5: Tuesday 15.00-16.30

### PAPERS A: *Narratives of Wellbeing and Recovery*

Room: CBK106/1

Chair: Wendy Dossett

#### **Participating in a 'Public Narrative': An Ethnography of 'Contemporary Spirituality' and 'Narrative' among the Visible Recovery Movement**

*Liam Metcalf-White*

The emergence of privatised 'spirituality' and growth of the 'spiritual but not religious' is subject to criticism for perpetuating passivity and superficiality, and for being hyper-individualistic. However, persons identifying with 'spirituality,' and 'in recovery' from addiction, are demonstrably empowered from previous states of disempowerment. Their 'spirituality' is evidently functional and cannot therefore, I argue, be subject to critiques levelled at other manifestations of 'SBNR'. This paper examines narrative, and the language of 'spirituality', as vital and intersecting sources of personal and political empowerment for those within the phenomenon known as the Visible Recovery Movement (VRM). On the one hand, individual narratives encourage meaning-making, creative agency, and the development of a resilient 'recovery identity'. On the other hand, Visible Recovery advocates engage in crafting a powerful social and cultural narrative. Coupled with 'spiritual' principles inherited from Twelve Step fellowships including Alcoholics Anonymous, the VRM cultivates a collective social identity. During celebrations such as the Recovery Walks, personal narratives that speak of 'recovery' as a positive lived-reality, are performatively embodied by activists. Their visibility and public engagement contributes to storying the movement as centred on the endeavour for social and political change.

#### **Violence of Mind, Body, and Spirit: Narratives of Faith in the Rehabilitation and Recovery of Genocidal Rape Survivors**

*Breann Fallon*

Sexual violence has long been employed as a weapon of war. In the Twentieth Century, programs of genocide have led to some of the most extreme cases of widespread rape and other sexual assault. The sexual violence that arrives with genocide leaves clear physical and mental scars on survivors. However, an understudied area is the effect this violence has on the survivor's understanding of their faith, and how narratives of faith impact on the survivor's short and long term rehabilitation. To investigate this, a sociological approach is employed in this paper in which an in-depth investigation of primary survivor accounts from several cases of genocide are analysed. In particular survivor accounts from the Rwandan Genocide (1994), the Bosnian War (1993-1995), and the Conflict in Darfur (2003 – ) will be considered. Here numerous narratives of faith are uncovered in relation to genocidal sexual violence: the loss of faith, the affirmation of faith, faith as a tool of comprehension, and faith as a means of recovery and rehabilitation. Critically, the testimonies considered suggest that those who hold onto their faith narrative undergo a more positive and long-lasting recovery from the immense trauma experienced.

#### **Narratives of Spirituality and Wellbeing**

*Bettina E. Schmidt*

The paper presents insight into a new research on the place of spirituality in therapy. During the first stage of the project different groups of people were asked about their understanding of the place of spirituality in therapeutic, medical context in Brazil and the UK. The first survey went to people working in the wider

medical field (e.g., therapists, psychologists, counsellors) and the second (revised) survey went to people who consider themselves religious or spiritual and are active in a religious or spiritual community (of various kinds). Brazil is usually portrayed with the greater acceptance of alternative spirituality and healing. However, so far the research has shown little difference in the acceptance of spirituality within the medical context though perhaps a greater awareness of the importance of spirituality for wellbeing. While the outcome is not representative for both countries, it shows nonetheless interesting tendencies to reflect about the lack of awareness of spirituality within the medical and therapeutic context. In this paper I will present some of the narratives about spirituality and wellbeing. The focus will be on results from the second survey that asked people to offer their definitions of spirituality and wellbeing. By presenting some of their answers the paper will highlight similarities as well as differences between the UK and Brazil.

## **PAPERS B: Narratives of Ownership**

**Room: CBK106/2**

**Chair: David Robertson**

### **“This is My Story, Not Yours: Constructing Millenarian Narrative in Sedona, Arizona, USA”**

*Susannah Crockford*

On the 21st December 2012, Peter Gersten ascended a 479ft rock in Sedona, AZ, and waited for a portal to open. He claimed he would step through the portal and reach the centre of the galaxy where he would find the source code and alter it to save the world. Peter came down that same night after the portal did not open, and after a period of short depression, came up with a new date when the portal would open, 21st December 2018. Based on 22 months ethnographic fieldwork in Northern Arizona, this paper explains how Peter created what he called “his story” of living in a simulated reality and his special mission to save this reality from destruction. Peter’s story is analysed as a millenarian script, using the work of Michael Barkun (1994). This story was constructed through finding clues in the events of Peter’s life, popular media particularly science fiction movies and TV shows, and the wider eschatology of new age spirituality. Having a story guided Peter’s decisions and interpretations of events, in particular it gave him a way through what Festinger et al (1956) called “cognitive dissonance” following a millenarian disappointment. Narrative provides a powerful framing device for individual religious elaboration.

### **Who is the culprit? Why, the audience of course! A Quaker narrative of authority, agency and blame**

*Penelope Cummins*

Early in the present century, the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) sold the lease of a central London property, which had up to that point housed a clutch of small Quaker organisations.

Friends’ protests about the sale, and about the decision-making process associated with it, were so vehement that an inquiry was instituted. The investigators’ report found that the committees which had initiated and managed the sale had acted in good faith. The report found that there had certainly been miscommunication and upset; but it squarely blamed the two hundred members of the standing committee to which the decision-makers reported, for not making their voices heard, and for failing to ensure that vague phrasing was clarified.

In any other organisation that conclusion - blaming the audience - might be baffling. Among Quakers, however, it is entirely consonant with their central narrative that meetings at which practical matters are considered are also ‘Meetings for Worship’, at which individuals should seek to make any God-given insights available to their fellows.

This case study provides a frame to explore narratives of accountability, authority and agency among Quakers; and how these are changing in response to secular demands such as those of the Charity Commission.

### **Politics before God: How America's political divisiveness is trumping religious identity.**

*Kit Kirkland*

Throughout last year's campaign and since his inauguration, Donald Trump has employed a form of priestly rhetoric towards his base, "believe me... believe me, that's why I'm going to be elected folks!" Trump's faith-based overtures are nothing new; Republican leaders typically employ Christian 'narrowcasting' as part of a 'God strategy' to court America's evangelical Christians, a faithful base that can swing elections, as they did for Bush Jr. in 2000 and 2004. Nevertheless, during the Primaries there was considerable division between the Christian right leadership and base over whether to support Trump for his conservative-Christian inclinations were unknown. He lacked the faith-salvation story, he vacillated on LGBT-rights and abortion, and they were unsure whether this reality-TV star known for his numerous wives, hotels and casinos had their interests at heart, especially when he failed to recollect his favourite Bible verse. Nevertheless many within the Christian right base were drawn to Trump's narrative to 'make America great again', and his entreaties to protect (their) Christianity.

This paper will subsequently explore Trump's Christian rhetoric. Secondly it will look at how the reinstatement of the global gag-rule, evangelical cabinet hires, and proposed repeal of the Johnson Amendment and FADA are developing the Christian right's legislative agenda. Lastly it will study how the narrative of American civil religion is changing, from Tocqueville's 'quiet sway' of (plural) religion, towards a form of Christian particularism influenced by white-Christian nationalism, threatening the First Amendment.

### **PAPERS C: Fiction and New Media**

**Room: CBK107**

**Chair: Alana Vincent**

### **Playing Mythology: Video Games as Contemporary Myth**

*Vivian Asimos*

Storytelling is a fundamentally human endeavour, and while advances in technology has led to a shift in the medium through which the story is told, the human element has not changed. Myth still exists in contemporary pop culture narratives such as video games. However, the video game is not a straightforward textual narrative for the mythographer to study – video games are not simply scripted narratives, as interaction is key to what makes a video game. This paper aims to provide a theoretical background to the approach of video games as myth. To help us approach the issue of interaction with video games, we will be revisiting Lévi-Strauss's concepts of implicit and explicit myth. We will be revising the hierarchical nature he proposes to make the two forms of myth as equal. In video games specifically, these two forms of myth are working simultaneously through both the scripted narrative of the game and the gameplay. Using this model as base for the approach, we will be able to analyse video games properly for what they are: a form of contemporary myth.

### **Fifty years of Owl Service reception**

*Graham Harvey*

Alan Garner's *Owl Service* was first published in September 1967. One source of inspiration for the book is the Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi, a collection of medieval Welsh myths which may have some much earlier

roots. Many contemporary Pagans and others find inspiration both in the Mabinogi tales and in Garner's books. These generate bardic performances, ritual creativity and landscape exploration / pilgrimage. This presentation begins by noting a current exhibition celebrating the 50th anniversary ("Petals and Claws") and then considers the reception of Garner's work among Pagans.

### **Exploring Science and Religion through Speculative Fiction: 'God is a Cluster of Neurons' and Other Failed Propositions by the Scientist Crake**

*Jaime Wright*

In a 2006 interview on faith and reason, Bill Moyers asked speculative fiction author Margaret Atwood the following question: 'If you were asked to design a new human being as an improvement on the current model, would you eliminate the hunger for God?' Atwood responded with her own question: '[C]ould you eliminate such a thing?' Atwood thinks that such an improvement is impossible. However, in her 2003 novel, *Oryx and Crake*, the scientist Crake believes that he has successfully eliminated the 'cluster of neurons' that is God in his bio-engineered, human-like creatures, the Children of Crake (or Crakers). *Oryx and Crake* is the first instalment in Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy, which tells the multi-vocal story of an apocalyptic event caused by a virus that wipes out most of humanity. The Crakers are Crake's improved replacement species for humankind. This paper will discuss the religion/spirituality developed by the Crakers, as portrayed in the trilogy. Atwood has acknowledged and insisted upon the extensive research, both scientific and otherwise, behind her speculative trilogy. This paper argues that the blending of science and religion in Atwood's trilogy expresses the successful co-dwelling of the two discourses within the narrative-bound constitution of humanity and human language.

## Session 6: Wednesday 09.00-10.30

### **PANEL: Counter-Narratives in the Study of Religion: Scholarly Methodology and Religious Identities in Contested Frameworks**

**Room: CBK107**

**Chairs: Stephen E. Gregg & George D. Chryssides**

Panel Abstract: This panel addresses narratives of identity within minority, muted, discordant, or controversial (purposefully or otherwise) religious communities and worldviews. Within the wider theme of the conference, the intention is to examine how these communities (and the individuals in them) construct and enact narratives of religious identity, history, discourse or performance in their daily lives that may be discordant or counter-to competing narratives of identity. The communities in question include smaller movements within larger groups, and minority groups themselves. The panel includes a variety of topics, methodologies and approaches, but all the chosen communities / case studies are approached within a 'lived religion' paradigm (widely interpreted – focusing on people, not texts, and actions, not beliefs). The panel includes methodological reflections on new or emerging methodologies which offer new insights into our subjects of study, but which face challenges, or run counter to, established public narratives on 'religion' or 'religious actors'.

#### **Changing Your Story: Assessing Ex-Member Narratives**

*George D. Chryssides*

The presentation explores the role of ex-member narratives, with special reference to new religious movements (NRMs). Ex-member testimony tends to receive privileged treatment in anticult literature, while academics (for example James Beckford and Bryan Wilson) are prone to be sceptical, even suggesting it is worthless. My discussion adopts a medial position, acknowledging that, while ex-members may adapt their narratives of past experiences, they can nevertheless bring to light data relating to NRMs that is not otherwise available. The discussion explores the various forms of ex-member testimony, which include autobiographical and biographical writing, semi-fiction, and fiction, as well as material that appears on social media. It is argued that the role of fiction should not be dismissed as material that makes no claims to truth, since good fiction has to be based on a background of fact. The discussion focuses on a range of authors who have written particularly about Jehovah's Witnesses, who are used as a specific case study.

#### **A Weekend at Hubbard's: The Conflicting Narratives of the Life and Death of L. Ron Hubbard in Various Scientologies**

*Aled. J. Ll. Thomas*

The Church of Scientology (CoS) announced the death of founder L. Ron Hubbard in January 1986, yet several aspects of his death remain shrouded in mystery, and have become a cause of much debate amongst the Free Zone (a variety of groups that practice Scientology independently), resulting in several conflicting beliefs surrounding the circumstances of Hubbard's death. Hubbard's withdrawal from public life in the early 1980s has prompted wide speculation in the Free Zone that the CoS had concealed his death. Several of these narratives begin to reside in what could be regarded as conspiracy theories, including beliefs that the CoS had been infiltrated by government agents to gain control of the tech. The contested legitimacy of certain Hubbard publications causes debate on authenticity amongst Freezoners regarding what constitutes as 'Standard Tech', causing divisions between groups laying claim to the 'true' teaching and application of Hubbard's tech, and becomes an integral part of self-identity in the Free Zone. This paper draws from my doctoral fieldwork with the Free Zone community, analysing data I have gathered regarding

the differing narratives of the death of Hubbard, and will argue that these varying narratives are of paramount importance to not only the practice of Scientology in the Free Zone, but to the notion of Free Zone Scientologist identity.

### **Religious Studies as a Muted Voice: Purposefully Rocking the Boat in Interdisciplinary Approaches to Religion**

*Stephen E. Gregg*

This paper seeks to answer a seemingly simple question – how do emergent methodologies in Religious Studies affect public and interdisciplinary discourses on ‘religion’. It suggests a depressing answer in the form of; ‘not very much’. From the clear dissonances of politically-motivate platitudes that insist that people who revert to violence as a religious act are ‘not real Muslims, Christians or Buddhists’ or the binary walls built up around Tim Farron’s stance on gay sex being brushed away as ‘a private matter’, to the more subtle approaches taken in museum curation, which reinforce textbook World Religions Paradigm (mis)understandings of religious communities, it is clear Religious Studies and public discourse are often talking about very different understandings of ‘what religion is’. Associated commentaries on religious belief and custom from archaeology, Ancient History and associated disciplines, also shine a light on large divergences on ‘what religion is’ and how religion is understood between emerging methodologies at the cutting edge of Religious Studies and other public discourses on ‘religion’. Indeed, the Archbishop of Canterbury’s recent call for ‘greater religious literacy’ in the aftermath of the UK terror attacks, focuses precisely on this issue – for, as laudable as such a community-cohesive approach may be – in which understanding of ‘religion’ should we become literate; his, or the academic scholar of Religious Studies? The paper aims to not only highlight these crucial points of divergence in the treatment of ‘religion’ in public academic discourse, but also suggest a way forwards for a greater voice for Religious Studies – a voice which risks becoming muted; stifled under the noise of outdated approaches to ‘religion’ which have found traction in contemporary public discourse to the detriment to a wider public understanding of how people enact and perform religion in their everyday lives

### **PAPERS A: Ancestors**

**Room: CBK106/1**

**Chair: Suzanne Owen**

#### **Narratives of Totemic Ancestors in Central Australia**

*James L. Cox*

This paper focuses primarily on myths of the totemic ancestors as recounted in the ground breaking research among the Arrernte peoples of Central Australia conducted between 1932 and 1960 by T.G.H. Strehlow. After considering the misapplication of the term ‘Dreaming’ or ‘Dreamtime’, first advanced in the late nineteenth century by Spencer and Gillen as a translation of the word ‘altjira’ and carried forward in popular understandings to this day, Strehlow’s detailed accounts, including an analysis of what he called the ‘eternity motif’, are presented as a means of correcting misunderstandings of Australian indigenous narratives of creation. This paper also explains how the stories of the totemic ancestors are closely connected to Arrernte traditional social structures, which were documented in Strehlow’s extensive genealogical records and which are being used today to re-connect current generations of Arrernte groups to their mythic past.

#### **‘And Raise me up a Golden Barrow’ :Narratives of Ancestry and Continuity in Contemporary British Druidry and Beyond.**

*Jennifer Uzzell*



The stories we tell ourselves about our beginnings are a vital part of our sense of identity and belonging. For Druids living in the UK those stories tend to be deeply rooted in a sense of connectedness with the landscape and with the 'Ancestors', usually situated in an imagined and often idealized pre-Christian past. Since the time of William Stuckeley, himself associated with the Druid Revival of the Eighteenth Century; the Druids have been associated in the popular romantic imagination with the ancient burial mounds that proliferate in the landscape. The fact that this association is not historically correct has done little to weaken its power.

This paper will focus on the construction, in recent years, of a number of barrows, mimicking the Neolithic monuments, and designed to take human cremated remains in niches built into the construction. The fact that this initiative has proved hugely popular with Druids, but also with many others testifies to the power that the barrows hold over the imagination. Why is this? What stories are being told about the barrows, and what they can teach about connections to deep time, to the land, to each other, to community and to spirit and to the future.

[1] From 'Barrow Song' by Andy Letcher, *Telling the Bees- 'Untie the Wind'* 2008. Used with permission.

### **Devotional bodies, working shrines: ritual dynamics and power-making narratives in a Marian shrine and Goddess Temple**

*Amy Whitehead*

Religious shrines and temples are functional, 'marked off', dynamic spaces that play deeply significant, central and versatile roles in the lived realities of religious communities all over the world. Although academic focus has been placed on altar/shrine 'aesthetics' as well as how displayed arrangements work 'like a language' (Turner, 1997, Hall, 2003), the active, power creating dynamics that occur when devotees ritually work with/utilize the material cultures on display in shrines/temples have been somewhat overlooked in academic debates. More than shaping modalities of devotion, ontological and ritual transformations become viable possibilities inside shrine and temple spaces. But what happens when we include the architectural structures of shrines and temples themselves? Through the use of two ethnographic accounts, a Spanish Marian Shrine dedicated to the Virgin of Alcala in Andalusia, Spain, and the Glastonbury Goddess Temple in England, this paper will argue that both the shrine and temple, as well as that which is found and displayed within, are subjective, interactive participants in ritual and other potent, creative devotional and power-making dynamics. Further, the shrine and temple serve their local communities in a variety of ways, e.g. they are educational hubs whereby religious narratives, rituals, traditions, and stories are taught and therefore maintained. The paper will further bring this research into conversation with those of a Maori meeting house who is not only a person, but a female ancestor-person who 'works' with and for her kin/community in a variety of comparable ways. Employing relational discourses, this paper will test the idea that a shrine and/or temple can be read/understood not only as corporeal 'beings', or 'persons', but 'female' ancestral beings who, with their community positions, devotional contents, and relational capacities, are capable not only of reciprocally nurturing, relating with, inspiring, and protecting devotees, but of maintaining religious narratives and traditions.

## **PAPERS B: *Narrating Gender and Sexuality***

**Room: CBK106/2**

**Chair: Dawn Llewellyn**

### **'We are Christians': Narrative Constructions of Kenya YWCA's Identity**

*Eleanor Tiplady Higgs*

Sexualities---and especially women's and LGBTQI sexual lives---are a site where postcolonial, nationalist, religious, and feminist interests converge. In light of this, my recently-completed PhD thesis examines the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) programmes of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) in Kenya, wherein narratives of group Christian identity serve as a way of expressing and developing a sexual ethics. In this paper I present a brief overview of chapter five of my thesis, illustrating how three co-constitutive YWCA identity narratives respond to 'controversial' aspects of sexuality by emphasising the Christian dimension of the organisation's identity. The tensions introduced into the YWCA's work by these 'controversies' (condoms, abortion, and the inclusion/exclusion of LGBTQI women) are resolved through retelling the aforementioned institutional stories. Thereby Christianity makes the necessary connection between the YWCA's identity and activities, and legitimises the YWCA's programmes in a context suspicious of feminism. I argue that these narratives speak to a deeply-seated connection between identity and ethics, because they provide a foundation for ethics by way of a circular logic: 'we are Christians because we do these things' and 'we do these things because we are Christians'.

### **Women's Spiritual Reading Practices and the Search for Community**

*Dawn Llewellyn*

In contemporary forms of women's spirituality the practice of using literature and the accompanying activity of reading is a deliberate, key strategy for meaning-making and enriching spiritual identities. Drawing on qualitative interviews with British post-Christian women, this paper highlights how participants use reading to create supportive alternatives to their existing spiritual communities, or to provide community when and where one is felt to be lacking in two main ways. First, the women communicate their individual reading experiences to others via acts of recommendation and discussion to form a community. This process is cyclical, as recommendation and discussion are the mechanisms participants employ to share and forward their selected 'spiritual' texts and their experiences directly into the community, and are the devices through which participants often discover the literature that shapes and transforms their spiritual journeys. Second, women are creating intimate communities fostered in the personal connections - friendships - participants make with the text and the author; and are forming imagined communities (Anderson, 1991 [1983]) with characters, authors and other readers to support their religious and spiritual lives. The activity of reading is a practices through which participants communicate, actualize and imagine gathering places for companionship, conversation, community and spirituality.

### **The Morrigan as a 'Dark Goddess': The Operation of a Metanarrative Through Self-narration of Women on Social Media**

*Áine Warren*

This paper will examine the contemporary cult of worship of an Irish folkloric figure, the Morrigan, as expressed in the online Pagan community, and in the context of the wider concept of the Dark Goddess. The development of a metanarrative of the 'Dark Goddess', and its operation on self-narratives online, represents one element of re-invention in the continually transforming, multivalent movement of contemporary Paganism. Narratives of a 'dark' Goddess appear in contemporary Paganism as influenced by second-wave

feminism of the 1970s/80s. Since the 1990s, this term has been used to describe a specific, therapeutic archetype, associated with women's healing and empowerment. As the Morrigan is portrayed in the Pagan e-community as a 'dark goddess' or an iteration of the 'Dark Goddess', this folkloric figure is transformed by this metanarrative to create a unique reinterpretation. This reinterpretation arises through self-narration of Morrigan devotees, a process through which the therapeutic metanarrative of the Dark Goddess operates to re-contextualise and provide new meaning to past and current autobiographical experiences. The Morrigan is reconfigured by devotees as a force which has brought about, assisted them through, and healed them from personal struggles. Thus, this metanarrative allows practitioners—predominantly women—to reconfigure personal narratives of struggle as transformational trials or rites of passage.

## Session 7: Wednesday 11.00-13.00

### **PANEL: Seekership and Theories of the Subject**

**Room: CBK107**

**Chair: Claire Wanless**

#### **"Life is a Journey": Towards a General Theory of Seekership**

*Steven Sutcliffe*

'Seekership' has a history of use in relation to new religions and the 'cultic milieu', but it remains under-developed as a wider model of behaviour: that is, not only to explain the movement of individuals in and out of 'religion/s', but across different societal fields including education and employment. In this paper I sketch a general theory of seekership aimed at explaining not only 'conversion careers' (Richardson 1978) within new religions, but a mode of behaviour adapted to accumulating symbolic capital in overlapping fields structured by multiple authorities (Wood 2007). Beginning from Campbell's (1972) remodelling of 'individualistic' seeking as a social institution of 'seekership', I will argue that thinking and acting as a 'seeker' constitutes a late modern 'logic of practice' in Bourdieu's terms which is only partly conscious and deliberate. My overall aim will be to sketch a general theory of seekership in light of classic sociological questions about the relationship between agency and structure.

#### **Theories of the Subject and Seekership Journeys**

*Claire Wanless*

Individualized forms of religion and spirituality, in which subjectivity is prioritised and authority is explicitly located at the level of the individual, have been identified as of increasing interest to scholars of religion. Understanding of these forms of religion depends on a clear understanding of the nature and interactions of the subject. This paper draws on ethnological research conducted on socially constructed seekership in West Yorkshire to survey and critique the theories of subject underlying a range of prominent theoretical frameworks, specifically in terms of their suitability for study of this kind of association. The paper will suggest lines of enquiry toward the construction of a revised theory of subject that provides a more suitable framework for understanding seekers and their socially constructed seekership journeys. Potential ramifications of such a theory of the subject for study of other forms of association will also be briefly considered.

### **PANEL FOLLOWED BY PAPERS C: Narratives of US Politics**

**Room: as above**

**Chair: Steve Knowles**

#### **Enlightened Evangelicals: the subversive architects of progressive religious and civil liberties**

*Andrew Bunnell*

In revolutionary Virginia, dissenting Baptists, led by John Leland, aligned with powerful Enlightenment influenced politicians, led by Thomas Jefferson, around a unique providentialism that was a synthesis of Enlightenment principles and Baptist evangelicalism. Their political movement won an exceptional version of both religious and civil liberty. Leland's instrumental role in this struggle has been mostly isolated or forgotten.

Thomas Jefferson's most famous statement comes from the Declaration of Independence. 'All men are created equal, and they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.' John Leland would make an even more extraordinary statement of his own. 'Man has a civil right to believe that which is erroneous, and do that which is morally wrong.'

The ideas behind the Leland-Jefferson alliance presented in this paper are more than just a fresh way to frame the historiographical picture of American religious liberty. As a global philosophy, this ideological alliance has had a profound role in shaping contemporary concepts of religion, state, and society. Building on the work of Ragosta and others, it is time for the Leland-Jefferson alliance to be fully understood and acknowledged.

## **PAPERS A: Narrating "Religion" – Categories, Paradigms and Constructions**

**Room: CBK106/1**

**Chair: Christopher Cotter**

### **Effervescence and Implosion in the Sacred Sociologies of Emile Durkheim and Jean Baudrillard: Towards a Sociology of Religion at the End of the Social**

*Paul-François Tremlett*

Jean Baudrillard's sociology entered the sociology of religion through the important work of Adam Possamai (Possamai 2005). Possamai defined new religions such as Discordianism, Matrixism and Jediism as hyper-real simulacrum of religion, "created out of, or in symbiosis with, commodified popular culture" providing "inspiration at a metaphorical level" and/or "beliefs for everyday life" (2012: 20). Despite the originality of Possamai's engagement with Baudrillard's work, he has nevertheless avoided many of Baudrillard's most provocative ideas, including the linked concepts of implosion and the end of the social. Arguably these are strange omissions, given the implication of Possamai's project in the sociology of religion's dominant discourse the secularization thesis, and modernity's imaginaries of time and progress more generally. Baudrillard's experimentation with tropes and metaphors of implosion, dissipation and exhaustion in which modernity is envisaged not as limitless growth or expansion but as collapsing in on itself like a black hole, surely provides the basis for an important provocation against the evolutionist, productivist and positivist sensibilities that have shaped the classical sociology of religion and which continue to haunt contemporary sociological theory and research on religion.

In this paper I accomplish two tasks: first, I bring Baudrillard's work into an alternative relationship with the sociology of religion through juxtaposition with the writings of Emile Durkheim (see Gane 1991: 9; Riley 2005: 293-295). Durkheim and Baudrillard share a common link to the figure of Georges Bataille, the founder of the short-lived Collège de Sociologie (1937-39). Like Durkheim, Bataille believed that ritual was constitutive of the social. But, in contrast to Durkheim's focus on totemic ritual, the "electricity" (Durkheim 1915: 215) it generates and the "perpetual sustenance" (1915: 211) this pure sacred provides for 'primitive' society, Bataille's focus was on the potlatch, the impure sacred, waste and non-utilitarian expenditure (Jenks 2003: 100-107; Richman 2003). Baudrillard's interest in implosion accentuates and deepens Bataille's break from Durkheim's productivist conception of ritual and its sacred energies: whereas Durkheim presupposed a virtuous circle between ritual, energy and the formation of a rational social entity available to the gaze of the sociologist, Baudrillard envisions the increasing opacity of the social, "an opaque nebula whose growing density absorbs all surrounding energy", that finally brings to an end "all those schemas of production, radiation and expansion according to which our imaginary functions" (Baudrillard 2007: 36-37). Second, then, I turn to Claude Lévi-Strauss' work on information, entropy and cybernetics (Tremlett 2008: 92 and

2011: 363) to reflect upon the different imaginaries of energy articulated by Durkheim and Baudrillard as a prelude to a sociology of religion at the end of the social.

### **Reframing the study of Islam: beyond religion**

*William Barylo*

With rules such as ‘smiling is an act of worship’, young Muslim charity volunteers in France, Poland and the UK challenge conventional approaches to Islam as a sociological subject. Beyond rituals, their social work and behaviour in daily life are part of their spiritual practice, thus blurring the lines between the categories of mundane and sacred. As the result of seven years of research among European grassroots Muslim charities, this paper attempts at filling gaps in the sociology of Islam and Muslims due to the limitations of the concept of religion as a Western category. With the help of sociological phenomenology, this paper compares native concepts and analyses possible alternatives from the French sociological tradition, particularly with Edgar Morin’s concept of complex systems applied to cultures, identities and religions, and Alain Caillé’s Anti-Utilitarian Theory for Action.

### **Beyond the buffered self: a critique of disenchantment in Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age* (2007)**

*Marek Sullivan*

Published in 2007 to widespread critical acclaim, Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age* has transformed our understanding of the secular, deepened our engagement with Western intellectual history, and virtually defined the emerging field of ‘secular studies’. The book offers a penetrating diagnosis and genealogy of our secular age articulated through the dramatic language of affective loss and post-corporeal alienation—a true ‘narrative of the secular’—developed through two interrelated plot lines: the disenchantment of the world (explained as a shift from ubiquitous transcendence to the ‘immanent frame’), and a gradual distancing of the mind from the body and emotions, encapsulated especially in the concept of the ‘buffered self’.

While the richness of ASA has done much to challenge a facile distinction between ‘religion’ and ‘the secular’, I argue Taylor’s rationalistic narrative of the secular ironically reinscribes this distinction by perpetuating a ‘secular’ double-binary tying religion to the body and emotions, and secularity to the mind and reason. By surveying a number of approaches to ‘the passions’ and ‘habits’ in the eighteenth-century French Enlightenment, I show that the history of our ‘secular age’ is both more ‘embodied’ than Taylor’s ‘Kantian’ narrative suggests, and imbricated in a lesser-known Enlightenment project to construct the modern nation-state on emotional, embodied foundations. This last point has important implications for contemporary secular-nationalist appeals to a ‘New’ or ‘Islamic’ Enlightenment based on a rejection of historical ‘culture’ for rational ‘principles’. As my paper suggests, the Enlightenment is a deceitful partner in this game, for it had already—by the eighteenth century—come to terms with the inadequacy of an anti-emotional or anti-corporeal politics, and to that extent deconstructed itself.

### **Unity in Diversity: Interfaith Scotland, the World Religions Paradigm and the Representation of Religious Minorities**

*Liam Sutherland*

Scotland’s national interfaith association – Interfaith Scotland, represent a substantial number of religious bodies in Scotland. The representation of non-Christian religious minorities is fundamental to the interfaith movement in a country in which religious minorities make up a tiny fraction of the population in comparison with England and other European countries, and yet in which narratives of diversity have become more

prominent in the public sphere. Interfaith Scotland has depended on the world religions paradigm to promote its version of religious pluralism as embodied in its structure and represented in its literature, reinforcing the equivalency and paramount importance of the 'major traditions', with groups which do not fit neatly into one of these traditions having no representation on the organisation's governing board. On the other hand, the world religions approach means that religious groups like the Scottish Pagan Federation are re-made according to that mould in the literature, with stress on an overarching intellectualised tradition constructed from disparate sources. This closely parallels the processes out of which the world religions paradigm arose in the 19th century with the construction of 'Hinduism', 'Buddhism' and other world religions as discrete intellectualised traditions.

## Lightning Talks

**Room: CBK106/2**

**Chair: Dawn Llewellyn**

### **How do young evangelical Christian women interpret the gender roles in the Bible?**

*Shona Hayes: MA Religious Studies student, University of Chester*

Drawing on semi-structured interviews with young evangelical Christian women, this study aims to understand the lived experiences of participants through discussion of four Bible passages. I will use the theme of modesty to argue that reader response theory creates a basis for an understanding of an imaginary fourth reader, men.

### **How are peaceful relations fostered by interfaith charity Three Faiths Forum (3FF)?**

*Lucy Peacock: PhD student, Coventry University*

By establishing the role and impact of 3FF's Faith School Linking Programme, the research aims to provide original insight into the complexity of religious identity and relationship building among young people in London's faith schools.

### **Mormons & Miners: A Minority Religious Narrative in Industrialized Historic County Durham.**

*Ken Adkins (recently completed BA Philosophy at Brigham Young University)*

Beginning in the mid 19th century Latter-day Saint congregations withered as British converts emigrated to the United States en masse. However, Durham County was the one notable exception. This paper draws on recently collected data from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints membership records from 1853-1913 and recently transcribed unpublished journals to create a fuller picture of how County Durham became a notable outlier aside from more obvious variables such as general population growth and general religious tumult. Behind the growth of Mormonism in County Durham lies untold stories of dedication and commitment of local Mormon congregants and Mormon missionaries who worked side-by-side to spread the message of their founding faith. Some discussion of specific characters of the period will be discussed in establishing the general introduction of County Durham to Mormonism and its reception and discussion in local newspapers, tracts, sermons, lectures and books. This paper is to be presented using research collected by the author and the work of Dr. Ronald E. Bartholomew, PhD. This research has been done in preparation for a book which is currently being written. The majority of our research has been conducted with funding from BYU Studies, Provo, Utah in the United States.

## **The Emergence of Non-religious Buddhism**

*Jack Graham MSt. Oxford.*

This paper argues that typologies of 'Buddhist modernism' ignore trends developed in tandem with the growth of non-religious populations. I argue for the concept of a 'non-religious Buddhism'. This better reflects contemporary Buddhist narratives only partially captured by work on Buddhism and science and the emerging study of 'secular Buddhism'.

## **Judas Superstar?: An examination of the relationship between Jesus and Judas in Jesus Christ Superstar.**

*Stephanie Roberts- Theology MA student, University of Exeter*

This paper considers how Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice's Jesus Christ Superstar explores and subverts the passion narrative through the characters of Jesus and Judas. This will be addressed through three songs; 'Heaven On Their Minds', 'Last Supper' and 'Superstar', all of which present tension and animosity in Jesus and Judas' relationship. Each song has been analysed against three themes; namely, how tradition history and the Gospels have been used as a foundation; how the songs interrogate traditional accounts of the Gospels; and finally, how the scenes and characters reflect the politics and culture of the 1970s.

Ultimately, the analysis aims to demonstrate that Rice and Webber's musical is not subversive merely for the sake of being controversial. Rather, through the close examination of the texts and the musical's anachronistic edge, the 'official' biblical narrative is interrogated in a way that poses important questions to the Christian faith. By examining the musical through a theological lens, we are in a better position to understand the hermeneutical cycle of films and how our contemporary context plays back in to biblical interpretations, just as much as the bible influences film.

## **The relationship between religion and feminism**

*Bex Gerrard Ph.D. student University of Chester*

Starting with the tendency to view religion and feminism as dichotomous, this paper identifies four traditional responses to this narrative; complementarianism, scriptural reform feminism, ritual reform feminism and radical feminism. I suggest the binary is misleading, and examine the accuracy of this claim within the setting of lived religion.



## Keynote Lecture: Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> September: CBK107



### ***Narratives of Pagan Religion*** **Professor Ronald Hutton**

This is a conference designed to challenge disciplinary boundaries, and to explore, among much else, the competition between official and popular narratives in the field of religion. This address is intended to fit that brief exactly, in that I am a historian speaking to an event concerned essentially with religious studies, thereby straddling the two disciplines; and that the history of modern Paganism has been one of increasingly competing narratives. Most of the claims on which it based its original identity have been proved wrong by academic experts; but the twist in the story is that those claims were based firmly on historical orthodoxies developed by earlier generations of academic experts. All of the main divisions of Paganism originally depended on ideas and suggestions provided by mainstream scholarship, but of them all it has been Pagan witchcraft which has done so most completely on historians, and therefore subsequently been most vulnerable to them. This address will accordingly focus on it, which is appropriate also in that it has been the largest and most influential tradition of modern Paganism.

The address begins by tracing the long and distinguished roots of the scholarship which underpinned the initial claims of Pagan witchcraft, and much of the modern Paganism which that has generated. It shows why the picture built up by that scholarship had a great impact on the twentieth-century radical imagination, offering as it did a freedom from traditional religious, moral and gender stereotypes. It chronicles the way in which that picture collapsed among professional scholars, and suggests that, despite its virtues, it had contained features which are positively dangerous in the context of the modern world. It discusses the profundity of the implications of historical revisionism for Paganism itself, and looks at the practical consequences, making in the process some candid remarks about my personal experience of writing Pagan history in this altering context. It concludes by summing up the relationship between currently orthodox history and Pagans at the present day.

Prof. Ronald Hutton is Professor of History at the University of Bristol and a leading authority on the early modern history of the British Isles and the ancient and medieval history of paganism, folklore, magic and witchcraft in Britain. His major publications on Paganism include *Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford, 1999), *Blood and Mistletoe: The History of the Druids in Britain* (Yale, 2009), *Pagan Britain* (Yale, 2013) and, published this year, *The Witch: A History of Fear from Ancient Times to the Present* (Yale, 2017).

## Author Conversation: *Intersections between religion and fiction*

A conversation with speculative fiction authors Francesca Haig (*The Fire Sermon* trilogy) and Zen Cho (*Sorcerer to the Crown*) about the intersections—obvious or otherwise—between religion and fiction.



**Zen Cho** was born and raised in Malaysia. She is the author of Crawford Award-winning short story collection *Spirits Abroad* and editor of anthology *Cyberpunk: Malaysia*. She has been nominated for the Campbell Award for Best New Writer and honour-listed for the Carl Brandon Society Awards for her short fiction. Her debut novel *Sorcerer to the Crown* (Ace/Macmillan), about magic, intrigue and politics in Regency London, won a British Fantasy Award for Best Newcomer and was a Locus Awards finalist for Best First Novel. She lives in London.



**Francesca Haig** grew up in Tasmania, gained her PhD from the University of Melbourne, and was a senior lecturer at the University of Chester. Her poetry has been published in literary journals and anthologies in both Australia and England, and her first collection of poetry, *Bodies of Water*, was published in 2006. In 2010 she was awarded a Hawthornden Fellowship. She lives in London. Francesca's post-apocalyptic Fire Sermon trilogy is published in more than 20 languages. The first novel, *The Fire Sermon*, was published in 2015, followed by *The Map of Bones* in 2016. The series concludes with *The Forever Ship* (June 2017).

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## Travel to the Conference Venue

The conference is based in the **Binks Building**, Parkgate Road, Chester, CH1 4BJ. Maps are available at: <http://www.chester.ac.uk/find-us>

Parking is available on campus. Please report to registration upon arrival to collect a parking permit.

Directions by road: Travelling on the A5116 from the Wirral, pass the Countess of Chester hospital on your right hand side. Go right, third exit on at the large roundabout, then after the pub on the left turn left at the roundabout keeping the Mercedes garage on the left and the Petrol station on the right. Continue straight ahead until you get to a pedestrian crossing, immediately on your right after this, is the Parkgate Road Entrance of the Chester Campus.

Travelling on the A540 from the Wirral, cross the Shropshire Union canal bridge before entering the 30 mile speed limit. Go straight over at the large roundabout with the Mercedes garage on your left hand side and a petrol station on the right, continue straight ahead until you get to a pedestrian crossing, immediately on your right after this, is the Parkgate Road Entrance of the Chester Campus.

Travelling from Chester City Centre, leave the Fountains roundabout following signs to Ellesmere Port A5116, pass the Northgate Church on your left hand side. Continue straight ahead keeping The George pub on your right hand side and through a set of lights onto Parkgate Road. Then at the next set of lights continue straight ahead for 100-150 m. The Parkgate Road Entrance of the Chester Campus is on your left, just before a pedestrian crossing.

Travelling from Manchester on the M56, join the M53 signed Chester & Wrexham. Take the first exit marked Chester. At the roundabout take the last exit marked Chester (A56). Go straight over the next roundabout into Hoole Road. Continue over the railway bridge and at the roundabout turn right onto the dual carriageway (marked ring road Wrexham) to the Fountains roundabout. Then follow directions above.

Travelling from Liverpool via the Mersey Tunnels, join the M53 and leave at the first exit marked Chester & follow e instructions above. Travelling from Liverpool via Runcorn Bridge & the M56, follow directions from Manchester.

Arriving by Train: There is no public bus from the station to the Parkgate Road Campus, Parkgate Rd. Chester Campus, Parkgate Rd, is a 15-20 walk from Chester Train Station. A free bus service runs at regular intervals between the Railway Station and Frodsham Street, Chester City Centre. Please see the following link for directions: <http://g.co/maps/eg6zg> There is a taxi rank at the station and the fare is approximately £6.00.

### Taxi Numbers

Chester Cab Co - 01244 312222

Chester Radio Taxis - 01244 372372

Chester Taxicall - 01244 458458 or 01244 458999 (credit card)

King Cabs 01244 343434

For off-campus accommodation: <http://www.visitchester.com/accommodation>



Conference Venue:  
**Binks Building**  
Parkgate Road  
Campus



# Parkgate Road Campus



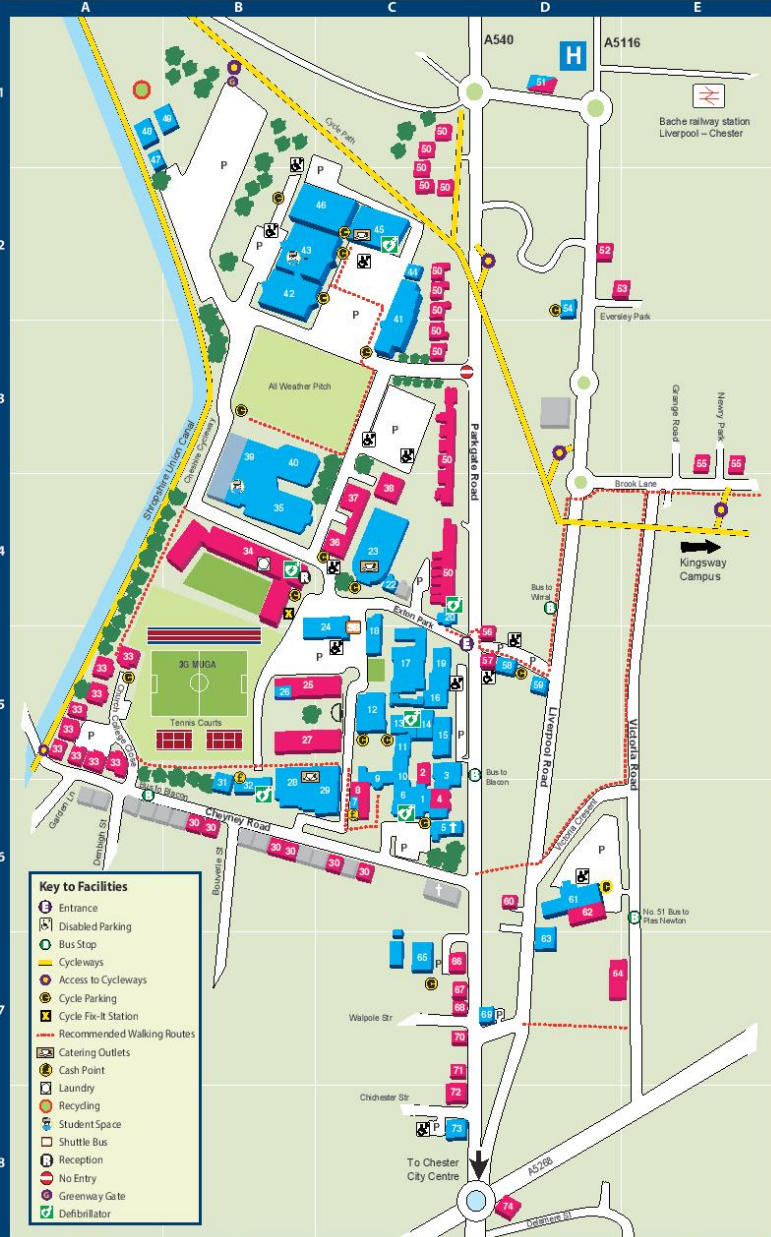
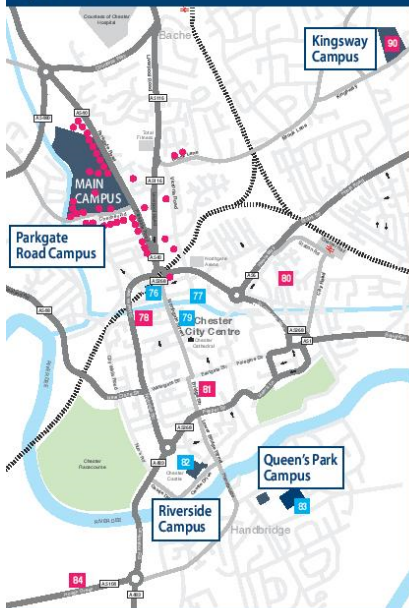
## Department/Faculty

Arts and Media	CH 90	Learning and Information Services (LIS)/Library	B4 35
Biological Sciences	CS 12	Marketing, Recruitment and Admissions (MRA)	CH 82
Business/Chester Business School	CH 83	Marketing, Tourism, Events Management and HRM	C2 45
Careers and Employability	CS 18	Modern Languages	C4 23
Centre for Work Related Studies	CH 84	North West Food Research Development Centre	C2 41
Chaplaincy	C4 22	Nursery	CH 90
Clinical Sciences and Nutrition	CS 14	Performing Arts	CH 90
Conference Office	CS 10	Print Unit	B5 26
Corporate Business and Enterprise	CH 83	Postgraduate Space	C2 43
Education and Children's Services	CH 82	Professional Development	CH 84
English	C7 65	Psychology	B2 43
Facilities Department	A1 10	Registry Services	C6 1
Finance Office	Q8 73	Social and Political Science	C2 45
Geography and International Development	B2 42	Sport and Exercise Science	CS 14
Health and Social Care	CH 82	Student Support and Guidance	C4 23
History and Archaeology	C4 23	Theology and Religious Studies	D5 58
International Centre	CH 77	Work Based Learning	CH 84
Journalism	B2 43		
Law	D2 54		

## Building Name

Bache Hall	D1 51	Maintenance Office	B1 49
Best Building	B2 42	Maintenance Stores	A1 48
Beswick Building	CS 17	Molloy Hall	B3 40
Binks Building	C4 23	NoFood Centre	C2 41
Careers and Employability Centre	CS 18	Old College	C6 1
CH1 (Student Bar)	B6 28	Prairie	CS 3
Chapel	C6 5	Parry Squash Courts	B6 31
Changing Rooms	CS 16	Price Tower	C5 14
Chichester House	Q8 73	Porters' Lodge	C4 20
Chritchley Building	B2 43	Rigg Building	D6 61
Cloisters	CS 11	Riverside Building	CH 82
Downes Sports Hall	C2 46	Rockmount	D7 69
Fitness Suite	CS 13	Santander	C6 7
Gateway House	CH 79	Senate House	C6 6
Grounds and Gardens	A1 47	Seaborne Building	B4 35
Gymnasium	CS 15	Small Hall	C4 24
Grosvenor House	B4 34	Students' Union and Shop	B6 32
Hollybank	D5 58	Swimming Pool	CS 19
Hollybank Lodge	D5 59	Temperance Hall	CH 77
John Smith's Bookshop	C6 7	Thomas Building	CS 12
Longfield House (Chaplaincy Centre)	C4 22	Vicarage	C7 65
24 Liverpool Road	D7 63	Westminster	C2 45
67 Liverpool Road	D2 54	Whites Dining Room	C6 29

## City Centre (Grid Reference CH)



## Accommodation

Brook Lane Houses	E3 55	De Bunsen Hall	CH 84	Margaret House & Flat	C4 36
Alexandra House	C4 37	Eversley House	D2 53	Old College	C6 4
Asbury House	B5 25	Fisher House	B5 27	Parkgate Road Houses	C1-450
Arden Court	D7 64	Gladstone House	C6 8	1-7 Parkgate Road	C7 71
Bache Hall	D1 51	Grosvenor House	B4 34	35 Parkgate Road	C7 67
Bridge Street Row	CH 81	Hayes Park	D5 56	Powys Court	CH 78
Brook Lane Houses	E3 55	Hollybank Court	D5 57	Scotia House	C7 70
Catherine House	C4 38	John Douglas Court	C7 6	St Oswald's Mount	C7 68
Cheyney Road Houses	B/C6 30	John Milton Hall	D6 62	Summer House	D8 74
Chichester House	C8 72	Kingsley Lodge	D2 52	Tramways	
Church College Close	A5 33	37 Liverpool Road	C7 60	(Partnership Accommodation)	CH 80





## Department of Theology and Religious Studies

University of Chester,  
Parkgate Road, Chester, CH1 4BJ  
Web: [www.chester.ac.uk/trs](http://www.chester.ac.uk/trs)  
Email: [trs@chester.ac.uk](mailto:trs@chester.ac.uk)  
Twitter: @TRSChester

- **Benefit from a large team of academic staff** teaching and researching across the disciplines of religious studies, theology, and biblical studies.
- **You'll be able to choose from an exciting range of modules** that make the most of our specialisms, with many of the modules engaging religion and theology with contemporary issues and debates.
- **The Department has research-active staff** who have national and international reputations for their work.
- **Students value our courses.** In a recent National Student Survey, the Department obtained 100% for student satisfaction. *National Student Survey 2015*.
- **We value our students.** Our environment is warm, friendly and supportive. You can expect staff to care about your learning, to push you to achieve your potential and to provide the highest quality of academic support. Staff and students come to know each other very quickly.
- **Graduate prospects:** 95% of Chester TRS students go on to work or further study after they graduate. *Unistats May 2016*.
- **The Department is housed in a wonderful Victorian building of its own** with excellent teaching facilities. The building has its own **computer room** and **student social space** contributing to sense of belonging and community.
- **Chester is a great city to live in**, it has a rich history, good shopping and a fun night life.

