



BASR

British Association for
the Study of Religions

Bulletin

Number 122
May 2013

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ABOUT THE BASR

The British Association for the Study of Religions, formerly the British Association for the History of Religions (founded in 1954), is affiliated to the European Association for the Study of Religions (EASR) and to the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR) Its object is the promotion of the academic study of religions through international interdisciplinary collaboration. The BASR pursues these aims within the United Kingdom through the arrangement of conferences and symposia, the publication of a Bulletin and an Annual General Meeting. Membership of the BASR is open to scholars whose work has a bearing on the academic study of religions. Membership of the BASR confers membership of the IAHR and the EASR.

The BASR Committee

President and Chair

Dr Graham Harvey
Graham.Harvey@open.ac.uk

Secretary

Dr Bettina Schmidt
b.schmidt@bangor.ac.uk

Treasurer

Dr Stephen Gregg
greggs@hope.ac.uk

Coordinating Editor for Diskus,

Dr Suzanne Owen
suzowen@gmail.com

Bulletin Co-editors

Dr Dominic Corrywright
dcorrywright@brookes.ac.uk

Dr David Wilson
dgmw63@gmail.com

Membership enquiries and general correspondence should be sent to:

Dr Bettina Schmidt
University of Wales Trinity Saint David
Lampeter Campus
Ceredigion
SA48 7ED

BASR website address: www.basr.ac.uk

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Printed at Oxford Brookes University.

The deadline for contributions to the November 2013 edition is 15 October 2013

British Association for the Study of Religions
Registered Charity Number 801567
(Affiliated to the IAHR and EASR)

Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting

held at 12.00—15.30 on Monday 25 February 2013 at Liverpool Hope University

Attendance: Graham Harvey (President, GH), Bettina Schmidt (Secretary, BS), Stephen Gregg (Treasurer, SG), Ron Geaves (conference organiser, RG), Elizabeth Harris from 1 p.m. (conference organiser, EH), and Sara Fretheim from 2 p.m. (conference administrator, SF)

1. Welcome. GH welcomed everyone and opened the meeting. BS asked to include an extra item about the BASR conferences 2014 and 2015 on the Agenda -> revised Agenda approved.

2. Apologies: Dominic Corrywright (DC, Bulletin co-editor), David Wilson (DW, Bulletin co-editor) and Suzanne Owen (SO, DISKUS coordinator)

3. Approval of Minutes

Minutes of the meeting on 5 September 2012 declared as accurate and approved

4. Matters Arising (unless covered by Agenda Items):

Action Point under 11 – no letter was written by DD and it was agreed that GH will take on this task
Action Point: GH to write letter to the VC of Liverpool Hope to thank him for the support of the EASR conference

5. President's Business:

GH reported that he represented the BASR at a meeting organised by the British Academy about open access. It became evident that Open Access will become very important in the future. It is under discussion, for instance, to allow only open access publications to be submitted to the next round of REF. At the meeting representatives of subject association expressed concern about it, in particular the publication of monograph as open access but also of journal articles as the financial side of open access is still unclear. As another outcome of this discussion the BASR signed an open letter published in the Observer highlighting the concern against this governmental decision.

Another outcome of this discussion is the interest of now two publishers (Continuum and Routledge) for DISKUS. However, it would mean that DISKUS is no longer a free journal.

6. Secretary's Business:

BS informed that the BASR has eleven new members since September 2012. On the list are currently 228 members though several non-paying members have to be still deleted. The list of members is now available on a closed Google cloud site, accessed by SG as treasurer, DC as Bulletin co-ordinator and BS as secretary.

The BASR has become member of the RE Council with DC as BASR delegate.

After the September meeting a member of the Social Media group asked whether it is possible that a member of the Social Media group joins the Executive Committee. It was decided that a representative of the Social Media group will be asked to come to the September meeting but not to the other meetings where, for instance, bursaries to PG students will be discussed as the Social Media group consists mainly of PG students.

Action Point: BS to inform Social Media group

Response to the consultations (A level and Research Concordat) were submitted

In response to the REF consultation about impact assessors three people were nominated

The MA benchmark exercise has developed now into an official QAA working group. At the first meeting in December it was decided to continue with the Mapping Exercise for taught M level provision. BS reported that while BASR was well represented at the meeting, other subject associations and disciplines were under represented so far.

AUDTRS is now re-named as TRS-UK and wants to include subject associations as affiliated members in addition to institutional members. In order to present the new group widely, Jolyon Mitchell (president of TRS-UK/ old AUDTRS) wants to hold the AGM this year at the BASR/EASR conference in Liverpool Hope. It was approved. However, it was decided to postpone the discussion about membership until we have further information (e.g. about fee).

Action Point: BS to inform Jolyon Mitchell about the AGM

BS reported that the first term of the treasurer will come to an end in September and expressed her hope that SG is willing to be re-elected.

Action Point: BS to send election slip to DC for inclusion into the next Bulletin

7. Treasurer's Business:

SG reported that the accounts are similar to the September ones. The annual fees for the EASR and IAHR are due now and will be paid in the next days. But he is still waiting to the final bill for the last BASR conference but does not expect a large amount. The largest bill in the last weeks was for the website which was paid as part of the T&L development. The non-paying members will be deleted soon from the list of members.

ACTION POINT: SG to highlight non-paying members on Google cloud list for BS, DC and GH to check before deleting them.

8. DISKUS Business:

GH reported that the volume with papers of the 2011 conference is published. He then handed work over to SO.

SO reported (in writing) that invitations were sent out to Stephen Gregg, Graham Harvey, Sandra Rios, Paul-Francois Tremlett and Nour Farra Haddad. They have all agreed to send in their papers, though Paul will send us something similar because the paper he gave was already committed. SO gave a deadline of end of March, but a couple of them have asked for April or May deadlines, which she has allowed. SO needs to remind Douglas Davies and Douglas Pratt about their papers. In addition to the conference volume we will have a T&L issue, organised by DC and SG.

9. Bulletin Business:

DC reported (in writing) that edition 121 was sent out in time and that the e-copy is on website. Editors have received some papers for the next edition (mid April deadline) but limited in quantity so far. Next edition needs to focus on application details for conference and bursaries. Editors need to be sent poster, application forms and perhaps a short piece on study of religions at Liverpool Hope

Action Point: RG to send poster, application details and short article about the conference to DC

DC also mentioned that it would be good to have a report from a colleague at UW TSD, or erstwhile of said HEI, on the future of TRS there. However, BS and SG reported that they felt unable to write something at the moment.

DC also reported interest in a paper about e-Religion as well as a report by Jolyon about the renewed AUDTRS and Hugh Pyper on HEA-prs. DC also asked to have a short piece on REF and asked all members of the exec to consider writing pieces for the Bulletin and encourage colleagues, and post grads to contribute.

It was suggested to ask Hugh Goddard (at Edinburgh) to write a piece about BAIS

GH offered to write an article about the EASR 2012 conference in Stockholm

10. T&L Business:

DC reported (in writing) that he will continue the section on T and L within the Bulletin. The T and L panel at last year's conference was appreciated by those who came and presented. He is currently organising a panel for this year's conference and seek participants through his network.

DC reported further that the first special edition of Diskus on T and L was promoted at last year's conference, advertised through e-channels and in the Bulletin. We have had some offers and expressions of interest.

SG thanked DC for covering for him during the last weeks and ensured that he will continue working for T&L soon.

11. Web-Business

GH reported that the Open University is considering at the moment to withdraw hosting subject associations on their website. If the BASR needs to be relocated to another website, we might lose the "ac.uk" ending.

12. (new Agenda item) BASR Conference Business:

BS and GH reported that they discussed the possibility to host a BASR at the University of Kent in Canterbury with Abby Day at the last conference. After discussing it with her department she reported back that the department would like to offer to host the 2015 BASR conference. However, as the IAHR congress takes place in 2015, the BASR conference is usually only a one-day meeting. After a

discussion it was decided to discontinue with this tradition and to allow the University of Kent to organise a full BASR conference in 2015 as not many members attend the IAHR congress.

Action Point: BS to inform Abby Day and consult about dates so that the BASR conference does not clash with the IAHR congress.

GH offers to host the 2014 BASR conference at the Open University in Milton Keynes. It was approved.

Action Point: GH to consult with OU about dates and prepare information for the AGM in September.

13. (old Agenda item 12) EASR Conference Business:

Minutes of the meeting on 14 December 2012 declared as accurate

Following Action Points of the December meeting are ongoing and not resolved yet:

Conference email (RG and SF)

RG to approach religious communities to sponsor lunch / reception

GH to approach subject associations as possible sponsor of panels

RG and GH to approach TRS department as possible sponsor for panels

RG to approach Liverpool Museum as sponsor for reception / finger buffet

RG and GH to approach publishers about sponsoring reception

GH to check with EASR and IAHR committee about Eden rooms

RG and SF to sort out booking procedure with conference office and to put it on the website

Following Action points of the last meeting were resolved:

BS reported that information about bursaries were circulated via mailing lists and web site. In addition of the BASR the EASR is also offering bursaries.

Action Point: BS to circulate information of the EASR bursaries when available (end of March). RG to include information about BASR and EASR bursaries on conference website

RG reported that Janet Joyce has agreed to publish Abstract book for the EASR conference.

Action Point: RG to send Janet abstract book of last EASR conference and discuss with her the book (deadline for the submission of the abstracts, BASR/EASR and IAHR logos on cover, room location map and conference programme inside the book)

RG reported that the university has a new conference booking system that will be used for the EASR conference.

Action Point: RG to inform conference office about fee, registration and so on so that the system can be on-line Mid March

RG reported that the VC would prefer sponsoring the reception instead of entertainment for dinner

Action Point: RG to find other sponsors for reception

GH noticed that the CfP is not on the conference website.

Action Point: RG to put CfP on the conference website

Other information that need to be linked to the website: information about public transport, about additional accommodation (before or after the conference), about the campus,

Action Point: SF and RG to liaise with conference office and to make sure that the information is on the website

It was agreed to review the submitted abstract on June 4th and June 10th

Action Point: SF and RG to put abstract on a shared cloud site (Google or Dropbox) so that committee members can review them

It was agreed to ask BASR and EASR committee members to chair panels

14. Any Other Business:

Date & Venue of the Next Meeting: in May call meeting about bursaries and next committee meeting on 3rd of September at Liverpool Hope

European Association for the Study of Religions Annual Conference,
Liverpool Hope University 3-6 September 2013

CALL FOR PANELS AND PAPERS

The 12th EASR Annual Conference will be hosted by the British Association for the Study of Religions (BASR) at Liverpool Hope University. This will also be a Special Conference of the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR).

The conference theme will be RELIGION, MIGRATION, MUTATION.

The conference invites papers and panels that examine what happens to religious beliefs and practices when they are displaced, and what occurs to religions when new cultural practices interact with them. The focus on transformation is not only to be taken in connection with movements of people but panels and papers are invited that deal with the issue of mutation in the broadest sense. We invite scholars from different disciplines to participate in the conference. RELIGION, MIGRATION, MUTATION is the 12th annual conference of the EASR and the second to be organised in collaboration with the BASR.

Panels will be 2 hours long and consist of 4 speakers (papers should be no more than 25 minutes long, allowing a 20 minute discussion period). Proposals should include Panel/Papers information: title, abstract for the panel and the individual papers (150 words), any unusual IT required, list of chair, panellists, and abstracts for both the panel and the individual papers.

Individual papers are welcomed. Submission deadline: **1st June 2013**
Proposed Papers and Panels should be sent to the Conference Administrator
(Sara Fretheim): frethes@hope.ac.uk

**ELECTION OF BASR TREASURER
FOR THE PERIOD 2013-2016**

BRITISH ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS
NOMINATION FORM

I

proposefor election as
Treasurer of the British Association for the Study of Religions to serve from 2013-2016.

Signed Dated

I
second the above nomination

Signed Dated

I
agree to be nominated

Signed Dated

Please send the completed form by 1 August 2013 to Dr Bettina Schmidt, Hon. Secretary, BASR,
School of Theology, Religious Studies and Islamic Studies, University of Wales Trinity Saint David,
Lampeter, Ceredigion SA48 7ED.

Important Update regarding EASR/BASR 2013

Liverpool Hope Conference 3-6 September

The 2013 EASR/IAHR Conference to be held in Liverpool Hope University is announcing a re-launch for the conference. Prof. Ron Geaves, the conference organiser to date, has stepped down, so there is now a new conference team structure in place, and we are using this as an opportunity to re-launch the conference and to provide key information updates:

1. Secure online registration is now LIVE
Please go to www.hope.ac.uk/religionmigrationmutation for details of full residential conference packages, day rates (for those not requiring on-campus accommodation) and useful travel information.
2. The **deadline for submission** of panels and papers has been **extended to June 15th**. We are delighted with the quality of panels and papers submitted so far, and welcome further submissions.
3. Please use the dedicated e-mail address for any queries: easrconference@hope.ac.uk
4. A detailed timetable will be released after the deadline for panel/paper submissions, but for those making travel plans, the conference will start with registration from 10.00 am to 4.00 pm on Tuesday 3rd September and will end after lunch on Friday 6th September.
5. In addition to panels, papers and meetings, the full conference package will include a Gala Dinner with accompanying live band playing 1960s Beatles/'Merseybeat' music for which the city is so famous, and there will be a cultural tour of Liverpool's UNESCO World Heritage Site Docks and Museums quarter.

We look forward to welcoming you to Liverpool Hope University, and the City of Liverpool, for what will be a stimulating and enjoyable conference for all BASR/EASR/IAHR friends and colleagues.

Dr Stephen Gregg, Conference Organiser & BASR Hon. Treasurer
Study of Religion, Liverpool Hope University

Dr Bettina E. Schmidt, BASR Hon. Secretary, School of Theology, Religious Studies and Islamic Studies, University of Wales Trinity St David

easrconference@hope.ac.uk

In this section, Stephen Gregg and Elizabeth Harris tell us a little about what to expect when we head to Liverpool later this year...

Liverpool - the European Capital of Culture in 2008 - is a very exciting city with UNESCO World Heritage Status for its iconic Docks area. With more Georgian buildings than any other city in Britain, other than Bath, Liverpool boasts a world-renowned Philharmonic Orchestra, the Walker Art Gallery, the new multi-million pound waterside Museum of Liverpool, one of only two Tate Art Galleries outside of London, two of the most famous football teams in Europe, and the largest cathedral in Britain. Home to the Beatles, and many other successful 'Merseybeat' bands of the 1960s, the city re-

tains a proud tradition of music and the performing arts and is home to Sir Paul McCartney's Liverpool Institute for the Performing Arts.

Liverpool Hope University, the host of the 2013 conference, has two beautiful campuses in the city - Hope Park Campus, with its architecture and landscaped grounds which date from the mid-nineteenth century, and the Creative Campus with its ultra-modern multi-award winning design in the heart of the city. Hope Park Campus, which will be the base for the conference, is the home of Arts & Humanities within the University, including the Department of Theology, Philosophy and Religious Studies, which is one of the most research

active and privileged departments in the university. The university is proud of its ecumenical Christian heritage. The awards offered reflect the three arms of the department. There are two BA single honours degrees: Philosophy, Ethics and Religion, and Christian Theology. Religious Studies forms one third of the former. We then offer several majors (half a degree that can be combined with another major), including one in World Religions. Students can do a double major in Christian Theology and World Religions, which is similar to the BA Theology and Religious Studies we used to offer.

We also have a strong postgraduate emphasis. The curriculum is being revised so that there will be a suite of MAs, including one Religion and contemporary Society and another in Jewish Studies. The team at Liverpool Hope includes Prof. Ron Geaves (Islam), Prof. Daniel Jeyaraj (Christianity and Hinduism in India), Prof. Bernard Jackson (Judaism and Jewish Law), Associate Prof. Elizabeth Harris (Buddhism) and our Head of Department, Associate Prof. Peter McGrail (African Traditions & Christianity).

Dr Stephen Gregg
Dr Elizabeth Harris

The Story of Story in Early South Asia: Character and Genre across Hindu, Buddhist and Jain Narrative Traditions - Naomi Appleton, University of Edinburgh

In this new project, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and running from January 2013 until the end of 2015, James Hegarty (Cardiff University) and myself will be exploring what we can learn from the intersections between the narrative traditions of the three main religions of South Asian origin: Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism. Focusing on first-millennium textual sources, we will be looking at characters, roles, lineages and genres that are shared between two or more traditions, and asking what these can tell us about how religious groups in early South Asia used story to explore their religious beliefs, identity and history.

My own initial research is into the characters of some gods that are shared by all three traditions but portrayed in somewhat different ways. I am particularly interested in how Buddhists and Jains reinterpreted existing myths or adapted the character traits of these gods to new purposes. Thus Indra is worried about losing his position as king of the gods in the *Mahābhārata* as well as in Buddhist *jātaka* stories, but his fear is prompted by – and prompts – different circumstances in each context. Brahmā, the grandfather of the gods and esteemed Brahmanical divinity, is often shown submitting to the superior wisdom and powers of the Buddha and Jina, though he maintains certain character traits and associations in his new role. Exploring the ways in which these deities are portrayed in the three traditions is already proving very fruitful, and some of my initial thoughts can be found on our project blog (see below). James has begun his research by looking at another key area of commonality, the great Indian epic stories of the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*, both of which are present in some form in all three traditions.

Our aim is not simply to highlight links between early Indian traditions, but to explore what varying presentations of shared characters can tell us about the preoccupations of different communities. The three-year project will culminate in story-telling events in Cardiff and Edinburgh, a new book based on the project's findings and various articles and papers to be shared among the academic community globally. We will also be convening a panel at a major international conference in order to raise awareness and critical discussion of our research theme amongst other scholars. (If you are interested in participating please contact us.) There are also plans for a television documentary that will explore the role of religious story in South Asia.

In the meantime we are also trying out a new way of communicating our progress and encouraging dialogue. Our project blog already contains a number of short responses to readings and summaries of sources, as well as more reflective pieces. We welcome comments on the postings and also plan to include guest bloggers on themes related to the project in due course. As well as providing what we hope is a useful and stimulating resource for other scholars and interested parties, the blog is helping us to assess our research progress on a more immediate basis. In this way, we are forced to ask, "What interesting thing did I learn this week?" That is a surprisingly challenging – and rewarding – question to pose.

Naomi Appleton – naomi.appleton@ed.ac.uk

James Hegarty – hegartyj@cf.ac.uk

Project blog: <http://storyofstoryinsouthasia.wordpress.com>

TEACHING MATTERS

RECOGNISED EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

In her 2004 address to the BASR, published as occasional paper 27 'Cherished Memories, Fractured Identities and New Subjectivities: Celebrating Fifty Years of Scholarship in Religious Studies' Ursula King concludes with the upbeat assertion:

We are not only looking at an expanding field, but at whole new landscapes, new and old, with many figures sadly gone and many new, younger ones, who will continue tilling a rich soil and are now seeding another harvest for the next fifty years.

I confess I am something of a pedagogical horticulturalist. That is to say my metaphors and modes of expression when referring to teaching and learning are imbued with organic themes of growth. Perhaps this is not surprising when much of my free time and my personal hinterland is populated by gardening and plants. Indeed my first PhD proposal in 1995 was to examine the popular non-religious discourse of gardening as an implicitly religious activity. This notion was exemplified by the splendid Geoff Hamilton, a horticultural pedagogue, whose last book and BBC TV series was entitled *Paradise Gardens* (1997) influenced by Islamic and Babylonian designs. In a reflexive use of terminology the BBC news defined him in 2000 as 'top of the garden gurus'.

As a simile for learning and teaching the gardening paradigm contains tropes that easily translate into effective pedagogy. For good learning and growing to occur the conditions must be maximised with careful preparation - the seed beds tilled, fed and watered; the seeds healthy; the nurturer/gardener/teacher careful in propagation of plants; excellent growing conditions maintained. But the simile includes seasonal change, that things grow and die back. In 1967, when Ninian Smart established the first department of Religious Studies at Lancaster University he foresaw a rich seedbed for research, learning and teaching. Growing conditions have been good. Departments have developed across the UK and the study of religions has flourished. Did he foresee decline also? Did he perhaps recognise that the 'rich soil' may become less fertile or the external conditions hostile to growth?

In other places – please see the forthcoming (summer 2013) special Teaching and

Learning edition of *Diskus* - I and others present strong new directions in the study of Religions, especially in pedagogy. But here I want to emphasise a darker set of conditions. These include: government cuts in funding for RE PGCEs; the sidelining of the subject outside the EBacc at GCSE level; the use of non-specialist teachers of RE at primary and secondary schools; local authorities removing funding from local SACREs; UCAS applying students being informed (or indeed *uninformed*) by the notion of 'facilitating subjects' of which RE/RS A level is not included; and instrumental fee-reduced vision which, anecdotally, labels Religion and Theology as a degree with low employability.

The RE Council prompted by these negative conditions has undertaken significant lobbying. In response to REC pressures a systematic review of the data related to RE teaching and its' status has been undertaken. This resulted in a devastating critique produced by the All Party Parliamentary Group for Religious Education entitled, *RE: the Truth Unmasked*, which was launched at Westminster on 25 March 2013.

There is a pervasive view that the subject area is not worthy among politicians and senior colleagues at HEIs. The reasons for this are multiple and we should actively challenge them wherever we find them. One source for the view is the Russell Group definition of 'facilitating subjects' – those that are defined as being most useful for applicants and recognised by such universities. RE is not included as one of these subjects.

See *Informed Choices*:

(<http://russellgroup.ac.uk/informed-choices/>),

It is indeed an age of austerity for study of religions departments in UK HEIs. The landscape is looking very bleak for the study of Religion and Theology, and the conditions for growth cold and inhospitable. The practical consequences of our feeder streams being undermined, and a key route to employment being removed will result in reduced applicant numbers and quality, and further course closures.

Dr Dominic Corrywright
Oxford Brookes University

BSA SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION CONFERENCE 2013

Durham University 9-11 April

This is a conference I had no intention of attending until Chris Cotter and David Robertson of the Religious Studies Project contacted me to find out if I might like to take part in a recorded round-table discussion on Religion and the News (Ashgate 2012 - see review later in this Bulletin). Being hungry for fame, I of course agreed, only to find myself spending three very pleasant nights in the keep of Durham Castle. More generally, I was reminded how good a venue Durham is - this conference held its sessions in the Chemistry Department, a short walk from Palace Green, with modern, well-lit lecture halls and up-to-date audio-visual equipment.

The theme of the conference was 'Material Religion', indicating a focus on the insights to be gained from maintaining attention on the material manifestations of religious traditions. As is usual, contributors were given considerable latitude in interpreting this theme, although I perhaps took that to an extreme in arguing for the need to attend to religion as an expression of consciousness and the human body as the relevant 'sacred' space.

The conference attracted enough contributions to require a combination of plenary and parallel sessions - too many to list in a brief report such as this. Broadly, there were papers covering the relationship of religious traditions to modern consumer culture (including the virtual world of contemporary electronic media), to the natural world, to purpose-made physical items (including representational art), to doctrines of the immaterial, to architecture and public space, to social space characterised by secular/agnostic/atheistic perspectives, moral landscapes, the list went on. Certainly there was no shortage of tempting panels, with a number of presenters taking the opportunity to give PhD work in progress reports, and in some cases, to speak publicly for the first time.

The conference papers ranged widely across traditions, historical eras and geographical locations, with many non-mainstream traditions being examined. There was little justification made for studying 'small-scale' traditions, no agonising over the hold of the notion of 'world religions', and it struck me that a sociologist's focus upon one particular methodology might be one way of defanging that particular paradigm - if one's work represents good sociology, it matters less if the tradition studied is in some way 'minor'.

That methodological focus has pros and cons. From the perspective of religious studies scholars, used to choosing among or combining a range of methodologies, the habit of giving primacy (or even exclusivity) to sociological approaches, can seem inappropriately to limit the ways in which religious traditions can be understood. Looking at only one facet of a diamond is not likely to give a good impression of the whole. My own impression was that a number of the papers were more descriptive than analytical, although that can happen simply because of the brief nature of conference presentations. That said, it was a little disappointing in a few cases to hear insider perspectives simply repeated rather than challenged or reflected upon.

The contrasting perspective is that of the sociologist, who can perhaps be forgiven for feeling that the religious studies scholar's willingness to pick and choose among different ways of exploring and comprehending religious traditions can come uncomfortably close to selective (and preferential) presentation of the evidence. Perhaps it is this concern that leads sociologists of religion, steeped in the scepticism that characterises the history of their discipline, to regard those of us who are more methodologically flirtatious as unduly sympathetic to the traditions we study.

I saw a number of faces familiar to me from the world of religious studies, including (in no particular order) Marion Bowman, James Beckford, Titus Hjelm, Douglas Davies, Eileen Barker, and Amy Whitehead, as well as the Religious Studies Project road crew. The obvious potential for greater cross-fertilization between SOCREL and BASR is, I think, something to be borne in mind, for all that such efforts can take significant time and energy. If there are contrasting perspectives that lead us, in effect, to have the same criticism of each other, there is a clear opportunity (if not need) for a more engaged conversation.

I would like to thank Tim Hutchings and his colleagues for a very well organised conference, which gave every appearance of being much enjoyed by those attending. It certainly was by me.

Dr David Wilson
University of Edinburgh

BOOK REVIEWS

Ireland's New Religious Movements

Olivia Cosgrove, Laurence Cox, Carmen Kuhling and Peter Mulholland (Eds.)

Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011

The dominance of Catholicism in Ireland has meant that the study of religion has remained largely focussed on the study of Christian traditions and theology. The study of other traditions and religion-as-practised has been left to sociologists in many Catholic cultures, so it is no surprise that the editors of this volume work or studied in departments of Sociology (in Limerick and Maynooth). Emerging out of a conference in Maynooth in 2009, this wide-ranging volume includes studies of religions 'new' to Ireland, such as Buddhist and Islamic traditions, as well as groups or movements categorised as 'new age', and interactions between these and Irish Catholic culture. Above all, this volume brings to scholarly attention the largely unacknowledged diversity of religious interests and traditions within Ireland.

After the introductory section, which includes Malcolm Macourt's useful overview of Irish census results on religion, the chapters are divided into two parts, one on changes in the religious landscape of Ireland, with sections on historical and contemporary developments followed by one with a psychological-experiential focus, including Peter Mulholland's chapter offering an analysis of Marion apparitions and "moving statues". The contemporary traditions include studies on Irish Travellers, Irish neo-Paganism, evangelical Christianity and Irish engagements with *A Course in Miracles*.

Part two brings together chapters that touch on global aspects, beginning with those that focus on "new age" themes, including Carmen Kuhling's chapter on "New Age re-enchantment", one of the few chapters to have a strong theoretical approach, drawing on Max Weber's notion of "disenchantment", and ending with migrant religions. In between is a section I enjoyed reading on "Ireland as Global Homeland", which includes Carole Cusack's chapter on "Celticity" in Australia (though what role if any does Celtic fantasy fiction play, such

as the novels by Australian Caiseal Mór?) and Bożena Gierek's interesting chapter discussing the category "Celtic Spirituality" in the Irish context.

The introduction could discuss in more depth the terms and categories employed. For example, it is implied that the term 'alternative' is used in relation to discourse rather than practice and that the category 'New Religious Movements' is employed for the sake of convenience (6), although there is some analysis of 'Irish discourses on new religious movements' later in the introduction (12-14).

An area of further study in Ireland not directly addressed in this volume is indicated in Macourt chapter on the census: according to figures from 2006, there are nearly an equal number of people in the Republic stating they "belong" to other religions as with no religion, with another significant number not stating any (30, 37). However, this volume has come at a crucial time. Along with the recently established BA in Religious Studies in Cork and the launch of the Irish Society for the Academic Study of Religions, *Ireland's New Religious Movements* opens way for more critical and empirical studies of religion in Ireland.

Dr Suzanne Owen
Leeds Trinity University

Religion and the News

Jolyon Mitchell and Owen Gower (Eds.)

Ashgate, 2012, pp. xiv + 250

Review prepared for round-table discussion at the SOCREL Conference in Durham, March 2013. A recording of the discussion is available online through the Religious Studies Project. The full version of this review appears in the *Journal of Religion, Media & Digital Culture*.

Religion and the News is an edited collection of eighteen essays contributed by journalists, religious practitioners and scholars of religion. The collection is framed by an introduction and conclusion by the editors. The book is organised in four parts, the first three examining the ways in which religion is understood, covered

and represented by various news media; the final part considers the ways in which the space given to religion in the news remains contested.

This is a very British book, English even: although three of the contributions provide input using Jewish, Muslim and Sikh perspectives, the contributions to this book are generally indicative of engagement with what in England is familiar as traditional Christianity, principally the Anglican and Anglo-Catholic churches. This gives the book a particular focus, and therefore a particular usefulness: the different contributors to the book corroborate each other very consistently, and although the editors of this volume have used their editorial ink sparingly, the overall effect is to provide a deeper analysis than the style and format might suggest.

As an academic, religious practitioner and radio interviewee, I have a choice of perspectives from which to respond to this edited collection of essays. At various points in this paper, I will make use of each of these, but regardless of perspective, the first contribution (by Jolyon Mitchell) brings home the point that this is fundamentally a book about relationship, specifically the relationship (or networks of relationships) between religious practitioners and journalists. The main difficulty perceived is that the two parties involved belong to distinct (and quite different) discourses. The relationship with religious practitioners is not the most important one in most journalists' working lives, and vice-versa. Further, Mitchell is among a number of contributors to highlight conflict as a recurrent journalistic trope, whereas most religious practitioners will, I suspect, (whatever their actual practice) make at least some attempt to adhere to a more positive rhetoric.

The next three chapters reach some interesting conclusions on the basis of statistical contributions that appear to highlight differences between media. Taira, Poole & Knott detect a BBC bias in favour of historically familiar religious traditions (including folk traditions), and against common religion (a category that appears similar to Martin Stringer's 'basic form' of religion – a practical engagement with the non-empirical, such as fortune-telling, use of psychics, unexplained phenomena etc.): the BBC exhibits a socially conservative bias, in other words. The categorization of my own tradition, Spiritualism, catches my eye here. Taira, Poole & Knott include it in their 'common religion' category, yet this is a religion with churches and the familiar panoply of officials including Ministers who conduct weddings & funerals, in the context of forms of service that are recognisably Protestant Christian in derivation. To be

fair, Spiritualism can be a challenging customer: some Spiritualists bristle at the suggestion that they are Christian, while others bristle at the suggestion they might not be. Journalists are not the only ones who can find the process of categorization a little tricky.

This may seem picky, but I make this point in part because the contributors of Chapters 2 and 3 (Gill) have contrasting conclusions to offer, even although their conclusions are drawn principally upon the basis of quantitative data apparently gathered in similar fashion. Part of the reason for this may lie in their use of different categories (i.e. different definitions) in order to interpret the data..

Taira, Poole & Knott make the point that religion tends to appear in the news when it has political significance; discernible in their analysis is a BBC (or establishment) bias in favour of traditional forms of Christianity, as against more secular attitudes in other media organisations that tend to have a more liberal leaning. This raises the possibility that religious traditions having (like Spiritualism) historic affiliations with radical social causes simply fall between two horses, as it were. If the political 'left' doesn't 'do' religion, and the political 'right' only recognizes certain traditions as 'religion', there is every likelihood that much of what people actually do may simply go overlooked. Categorization matters; our definitions bound what we are aware of, excluding as well as including.

I tend to exhibit a personal preference for interpretive research, which leads me to welcome the contributions which make up Part 2 (Chapter 5-9), comprising some very valuable self-reflexive contributions by journalists (some working for religious publications). Woolley takes us back to the opening point that religious practitioners and journalists inhabit different perceptual worlds, different discourses: he acknowledges that there is a widespread lack of religious literacy among journalists. My own thought is that, in part, this may reflect the liberal arts backgrounds of many journalists, whose education derives from scholarly traditions that are (in some degree) the product of past struggles to be free of religious control. It is perhaps no surprise that a number of contributors to this volume note a higher degree of secularity (or lack of religious affiliation) among journalists as compared with the British population at large. There is a fair bit of relationship-building and learning to be done, particularly if (as Christopher Landau puts it) religious practitioners are to become skilled and confident enough to play the media at their own game.

Ruth Gledhill's mellifluous prose gently, meanderingly guides the reader to an, if not

enthusiastic, at least amused acceptance of the robust messiness of the journalistic arena; despite her appropriately ecclesiastical, civilized tone, we are reminded that it takes discipline, training, commitment and good old-fashioned guts to take part in this contest, let alone score points. And herein lies a fundamental difficulty: religious practitioners very naturally put their time and energy into practising their religion, and many may regard that private example as their most effective way of being publicly evangelical. All relationships take time and effort, and relationships lived with other real individuals can seem much more attractive and productive than media(ted) relationships that may or may not happen through achieving more nuanced journalistic representations of one's tradition. Further, as Gledhill and Beckett point out, if I as a religious practitioner have the time and energy to articulate my tradition for the benefit of outsiders, I can now do it directly, through facebook pages, twitter accounts and wordpress blogs (which I for one do). Why put my time and energy into helping journalists do their job better, especially when they get paid for it and I, quite possibly, do not? At least two responses are possible here. First, as Gledhill points out, retreat from the hurly-burly of life, in whatever context, often seems tempting but is rarely productive. Secondly, if the contributions by Gledhill, Beckett, Pepinster and Brown are anything to go by, at least some journalists (some of whom are themselves religious practitioners) are keen to see closer engagement.

This is something that as scholars we should seek to encourage. When it comes to recording and interpreting patterns of religious activity in Britain, and western society more widely, scholars have often been badly misled by simply noting declining church attendances and failing to maintain scholarly attention on what people actually do when not in church. There are practical reasons for this (and awareness of them is leading to more balanced perspectives) but a stronger media-religion discourse could do much to enhance the resources available to scholars of contemporary religion, as well as scholars interested in mapping other discourses (e.g. secularism, atheism) that have developed with reference to religious activity.

The media do not report lived reality; instead they report newsworthy bits (or bites), which generally means disputes, schisms, or outright conflict. As Charlie Beckett and Catherine Pepinster remind us, journalists are, first and foremost, storytellers competing for the attention of their audiences, whose craft requires them to present narratives with a beginning, middle and end, with interesting charac-

ters, unexpected turns of events and dramatic plots aplenty. We have here two quite different experiences of life.

The contributions in Part 3 of the book reflect a similar variety of experience. Journalists have long worked with familiar tropes, phrases in their products; much of what they do is not the telling of new news but the retelling of gnarled narratives that have their origins not in religion but in more widespread cultural stereotypes. We are all familiar with the Muslim terrorist, the self-deprecating Rabbi, the ineffective vicar we acknowledge but don't actually listen to, the ferocious Sikh no fool would cross. It is telling that the book we are discussing enables intelligent, humane responses to lazy prejudices such as these but that the news, by and large, does not.

The stumbling block is that the number of people who will read and reflect upon the contributions to this book is tiny as compared with the number who will be reinforced in their subscription to these stereotypes by consuming newspapers or news broadcasts. Most of the contributors acknowledge this mismatch, and detail its varied consequences, while agreeing there is no easy solution. This is why (to revert to my opening point) this is a book about the importance of relationship. The only common suggestion as to dealing with the mismatch I highlight is the possibility of improved relationships between religious practitioners and those who represent them, enabling a process of learning and education about each other. Yet good relationships take time, which is why a single life does not have room for an infinite number of them. My worry is that the lack of boundaries characteristic of the internet (including as to speed of comment and response) will prove even more inimical to this goal than printed newspapers ever were. This is an excellent book, full of detailed insight born of rich experience, which I have enjoyed reading and reflecting upon, but it is not news.

This is the difficulty taken up in the final part of the book, although the contributors appear to be agreed that there is no easy way forward. A point made by many of the contributors is that the news media themselves are attempting to survive during a period of considerable flux, and are often struggling to find appropriate responses. Speed of change has itself become a constant feature of the journalistic arena, arguably increasing the distance between journalists and religious practitioners: the former are increasingly running to keep up, whereas the latter are more often seeking to apply the brakes so as to adhere to what they regard as authoritative within their tradition. The contributions to this volume make it clear

that there is a need for a new journalism if religion and the news are to have a more mutually beneficial relationship in the future: journalists need to slow down a little so as to be better informed as to the traditions they are reporting upon, and religious practitioners need to become a little fitter, in the correct Darwinian

sense of being suited to the journalistic environment. What is less clear is who is going to take up that challenge.

Dr David Wilson
University of Edinburgh

Studying Judaism: The Critical Issues

Melanie Wright

London: Continuum. 2012. pp. xxv +216. pbk ISBN: 978-0-8264-9719-2.

It is hard to praise this book, or its author, highly enough. Melanie Wright's *Studying Judaism* is the best introduction to studying Judaism now available. It provides an admirable introduction to Judaism as a lived religion as well as an invaluable guide to academic study of critical issues involved in studying Jews and Judaism. It engages with both Jewish and scholarly categories and issues in a way that is rarely matched in introductory or advanced textbooks. Like Jacob Neusner's *Judaism: An Introduction* (Penguin, 2002) Melanie Wright's book deserves to be the main text for all undergraduate courses about Jews and Judaism. Indeed, a study of Wright and Neusner's books together would make a fine learning and teaching experience. Although the series title ("Studying World Religions") suggests a retrograde step, Wright's book does not pursue or promote the "world religions" agenda. This is not a Christian approach to Judaism, nor a theological one. It is a cutting edge engagement with lived reality with a clear focus on critical issues. There is much that is recognisable about the book's contents page and this makes it all the more useful for adoption as the core of a course. There are eleven chapters including an introduction. These tackle the question, "What is Judaism?", and discuss authority, worship, festivals and mysticism, beliefs, gender, politics, culture, memory, Jews and Others. The final chapter addresses the future possibilities for studying critical issues within and with reference to Judaism. If these are (by and large) traditional topics for an introduction to Judaism, Melanie's handling of them is always enviable and often innovative. I've said this isn't theology, what I should say is that it utilises and engages the rich resources, skills, perspectives

and issues of a scholar admirably equipped by cultural studies and the study of religions. The skilled reference to examples and illustrations drawn from all periods and locations of Jewish life are remarkable — from Talmudic controversies to i-phone apps.

Nothing here is showy or merely trendy. Every bit of it is insightful and thought-provoking. Students will learn facts about, for instance, Jewish calendar feasts and, in doing so, they will be introduced expertly to critical issues about family life, political and military matters, inherited liturgy and contemporary diversity. These and other issues will be touched or elaborated upon in other chapters so that progress through the book entails a continuous enrichment of understanding. More than this, however, is the fact that this really is a textbook that meets the ambition we all might share to invite students to yet more study. Melanie's untimely death in 2011 has robbed us of a greatly valued colleague and friend. We can be grateful, however, that her book (completed by Hannah Holtschneider) provides a fine memorial of a brilliant mind, inspiring teacher, and exceptional researcher. Melanie's introduction to the critical issues involved in studying Judaism ought to serve as a model for all future textbooks about religions.

Dr Graham Harvey
Open University

Philosophical Explorations of New and Alternative Religious Movements, by Morgan Luck

Farnham: Ashgate. 2012. pp. x +177. hbk ISBN: 978-1-4094-0653-2.

Despite the burden of so many labels (“new”, “alternative”, “religious”, “movements” are added to within the chapters) the phenomena discussed here have rarely received sustained philosophical exploration. As the title epithets suggest, sociological explorations are more common. This is of a piece with the decidedly theological treatment of “world religions” and the anthropological treatment of “indigenous religions”. Luck and his contributors, however, present us with explorations not only of selected “religious movements” but also of ways of doing philosophy. We are also further enabled or required to consider what “religious” might mean in relation to key themes (perhaps ones derived from Christian theological philosophy). Questions about the existence and/or nature of deities, and about cosmology, identity, truth and coherence) predominate in the ten chapters that follow Luck’s introduction. Luck’s claim that criticising a group or idea is “positive”, i.e. a taking seriously, provides convincing evidence that this is indeed a philosophical project (i.e. this does seem to be what philosophers do). Luck also notes that not all chapters (negatively) criticise the movements that interest them, some “attempt to establish [their] coherence”.

The introduction is followed by George Chrystides expert (as always) review of the ways in which “new”, “religious” and “movements” constellate together in labels that indicate interesting things about scholarly and other approaches to that which they putatively label. He says little about philosophy and, indeed, writes more about theology, psychology and sociology. Nonetheless, he provides a useful foundation for moving on – in and beyond this book. Similarly introductory of the phenomenon, but more philosophical in approach and focus, Beverley Clack and Dan O’Brien ask whether “religion” requires “the supernatural”. Their discussion of “naturalism” invites further re-thinking of our concepts as well as challenging some supposed opponents of “religion as supernaturalism”. The topic of atheism runs through more than a few of the chapters that follow, either because some groups promote religion without deity, or religion without supernatural, or because some atheist movements might look like religious movements. John

Bishop’s chapter asks whether the New Atheism is a NRM. He suggests a converge of the obsessions of self-identified “New Atheists” with common topics debated by naturalistic philosophers who reject theism but not necessarily religion. A discussion of the Word of Faith movement allows Andrew Fisher to apply some classic theistic and philosophical questions to a distinctive Christian movement originating in the nineteenth century. (The “newness” is evidently problematic in reference to many of the things offered by scholars as “NRMs” and should perhaps be dropped.) Fisher’s interest is in the coherence or, more accurately, “systematic ambiguity” of the ideas of the group he discusses. His introduction to philosophising in relation to them and others invites a sustained conceptual analysis of key terms. Michaelis Michael and John Healy intervene in discussions of “conversion”. They propose that philosophical approaches to conversion have largely focussed on cognitive issues and found non-cognitive matters more difficult to understand. They propose that there is a “proper” sense in which an adherent or convert is someone who adopts a “worldview” but they are fully cognisant of the fact that people “join” by joining in and in other non-cognitive ways, especially in early phases. They offer their suspicions about what further study would show. It seems possible that a non-cognitivist starting point might strengthen understanding of non-cognitivist conversion processes. We should try.

Scientology brings the focus of the book back to questions about deity and brings in more about cosmology and religious anthropology. As in other chapter in the book, Brian Smith’s offers summaries of a group’s teachings and defined practices. Once more, this chapter criticises the theological and philosophical coherence of the movement of interest. In Morgan Luck’s chapter the existence of deity is picked up again, this time in relation to Raelianism. In concluding that Raelian arguments about the non-existence of God (defined in a particular way) are not convincing, Luck tests the value of rationality. Wylie Breckenridge’s short chapter follows with an examination of Francis Beckwith’s argument that the Mormon view is philosophically problematic. Breckenridge disagrees that the argument is made. Eric Steinhart’s chapter is about digital theology and resurrection. Here, certainly, we are presented with novelty. We are also shown an alternative to other ideas about resurrection. The processes employed by the author again test the logic of religious (theological) discourse. A final chapter by Andrew Dell’Olio is also about logic but engages with a holism and non-dualism

rather than with theism and its discontents.

There is much that should interest colleagues here, including those less interested that the authors in either philosophy or “NRMs” by whatever name. It is, finally, an exploration of the value of doing philosophy in relation to a wider range of religions, religious ideas or reli-

The Starry Rubric: Seventeenth-century English Astrology and Magic, by Alexander Cummins

Hadean Press, France pp.166

Alexander Cummins is a new name in the field of historical research, but you will hear more of him in the future, I hope. Both (some) academics and lay readers might ask ‘Astrology? A load of old nonsense isn’t it?’ Maybe, but it still has a power to influence behaviour and beliefs in the 21st century (for example, I bet you can tell me your star sign, without even pausing) when we are all supposed to be rational scientific thinkers. Imagine the added power, then, of a system that was so all-encompassing, some four centuries ago, before the advent of mass literacy, TV and the internet.

While not delving deeply into whether the systems in use ever worked, this book concentrates more on the history and social function of how believing that it did work affected how people acted, what they did and believed, and what they thought, and said, and wrote. That is definitely fertile ground for the researcher, and this book plants many seeds in that ground. The harvest is exceptionally interesting, with chapters covering both prophetic and propaganda uses of astrology, and the personal, the societal, the political and the practical implications for those who consulted astrologers in those times (and, indeed by implication, those who do so now).

Astrology was, as Cummins impresses on the reader many times, a belief system that linked everything to everything else, (an early example of a unified field theory, as he so delightfully speculates) and it was a system that governed very much of our behaviour, both individually and as various communities. This was not so long ago, either - the farmer who sowed his seeds at an astrologically auspicious time, the traveller wary of the dangers of a long journey, the doctor making a diagnosis ... it is all joined. An alternative title to this book might

religious people than has been commonplace. Given the incoherence of the grouping of “new and alternative religious movements” perhaps what this exploration really needs is a more sustained philosophy engaging with lived religion.

Dr Graham Harvey
Open University

indeed have been “what made people tick in the C17th”.

By showing the effective and efficient links between all spheres of activity and belief, the social, the magical, the political, and the medical, the author has made a major contribution to how we understand our forebears, and, in doing so, how we also understand ourselves today. The 17th century is only “yesterday” in terms of human generations since our species emerged, and we still carry much of that century in us today, albeit veiled.

Perhaps the main achievement (of several) in this work is the re-linking of astrology and magic. Often academics divorce one from the other for purposes of study, but as Cummins repeatedly shows, the two are intrinsically linked, and to study one without the other is akin to working on the French language without ever consulting a native speaker (my clumsy metaphor, not his).

While at the outset this work appears to be a book of history, it is also a book of philosophy, psychology, and a narrative of self-analysis. It also tells us a lot about how we acquire knowledge, and how we make meaning from it afterwards. To that end it is recommended to anyone who likes a great story, anyone interested in history, magic, politics, any of the ‘-ologies’, religion, society and much more.

Despite the national focus implied in the title, the areas examined do not limit this fine study to readers interested in England. I hope the lay reader, undergraduate, postgraduate and experienced academic will each gain something from this. An extensive bibliography of primary and secondary sources adds considerable value to this work. Written in an engaging, entertaining and accessible style this book deserves to be widely read.

Dr Dave Evans
Independent Scholar

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