

BA
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bulletin

British Association for the Study of Religions



132: May 2018

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WWW.BASR.AC.UK

ABOUT THE BASR

The British Association for the Study of Religions (BASR) was founded in 1954. It is a member association of the International Association for the History of Religions (founded 1950) and of the European Association for the Study of Religions (founded 2001). The object of BASR is to promote the academic study of religion/s, understood as the historical, social, theoretical, critical and comparative study of religion/s through the interdisciplinary collaboration of all scholars whose research is defined in this way. BASR is not a forum for confessional, apologetic, or similar concerns. BASR pursues its aims principally through an annual conference and general meeting, a regular Bulletin, and a Journal of the British Association for the Study of Religions. Membership of BASR is open to all scholars normally resident in the United Kingdom.

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editorial

I write this in the wake of the largest ever strike in the HE sector. The primary reason for the strike was, of course, a restructuring of the USS pension scheme which would have seen many colleagues lose tens of thousands of pounds of their pensions. This restructuring, it further emerged, was based on certainly flawed and quite possibly fraudulent figures, and the process of approval appears to have been manipulated to get the desired result. It's somehow apropos that academics seemed to get mobilised as a result of flawed data, rather than the professional and personal stresses of the situation.

Because beneath the surface, the strike was also venting frustration over years of cuts to funding and jobs, to changes in the way that universities and HE are operated that have dramatically decreased stability for an entire generation of scholars. Between one third and one half of university teaching staff are now on temporary or hourly contracts - and of course, those will be made up disproportionately with early-career scholars. Such contracts save universities money. They also mean there are far fewer permanent jobs for early career scholars, they cannot buy homes, they earn less, they have no influence in the material being taught, and the research they are expected to publish in order to win non-existent tenure-track jobs must be self-supported. I myself am in this group, and as the parent of two young children, I can vouch for the

impact the stress of this situation has had on my mental health. This situation is damaging the university in ways that will have a long-lasting impact.

That said, it was inspiring to see colleagues at all levels acting together, and the vocal support from students and non-striking staff (and I am speaking now also about the recent events at the Open University). The irony is that it reminded me of the things I appreciate about working in academia. The calm, persistent and above all empirical campaign was a model in speaking truth unto neoliberal power, and the joy I felt when the revised offer came through was more to do with the fact that we forced the USS to back down than it was with my pension. The fight isn't over yet, though, and pensions are but one small facet of the problems with the sector. It's a start, though.

Talking of impact, this issue includes as a supplement a transcription of the panel "The Impact of Religious Studies", which was delivered by the BASR committee at the University of Edinburgh and recorded by the Religious Studies Project. It attempts to work out what we are doing right, without shying away from addressing what we still need to do.

David G. Robertson,
21/4/2018



www.facebook.com/groups/490163257661189/



twitter.com/TheBASR

news, etc

The the first set of appointments have been made to the REF main and sub-panels. The sub-panel members appointed for this stage of the exercise will help develop the main panel criteria over the course of 2018. The full announcement is online at www.ref.ac.uk/about/membership/.

The list of panel members appointed are: Chair - Gordon Lynch (Kent): Members - Rosie Dawson (BBC), Sophie Gilliat-Ray (Cardiff), Elaine Graham (Chester), David Horrell (Exeter), Karen Kilby (Durham), Bettina Schmidt (Trinity St David). Candidates nominated to be sub-panel members, but not yet appointed, will be considered as potential sub-panel members or assessors at the next round of appointments in 2020.

Vivian Asimos has accepted the position of Web Manager for the BASR, looking after the website and social media accounts. In keeping with recent moves to streamline the committee and ensure that it is in line with the constitution, this is a non-committee role. Vivian is a PhD candidate at Durham University and has already made a positive contribution to the profile of the BASR, and we are sure that the members join the committee in thanking her for her current and future work.

As of Monday 20th May, INFORM will be based at King's College, London, rather than at the London School of Economics. Their new telephone number will be 0207 848 1132, and the new postal address will be: INFORM, c/o Dept. of Theology and Religious Studies, Virginia Woolf Building, 22 Kingsway, London WC2B 6LE. The website will stay the same: www.inform.ac.

Marat Shterin, Head of King's Theology and Religious Studies and a long-time supporter of Inform, takes over as Chair of the Governors. Sarah Harvey is now

Senior Research Officer and Eileen Barker will serve as Honorary Director until a new appointment can be made. You may wish to make sure you receive notifications by dropping a line to Inform@KCL.ac.uk.

The Religious Studies Project have set up a Patreon campaign. They are aiming for 100 patrons (currently 21) to support their international team of volunteers, all of whom are postgraduates or early career scholars on precarious contracts. We hope that if you are using our many podcasts in your teaching, you will consider giving £1 a month to keep these resources free. Go to <https://www.religiousstudiesproject.com/donations/> for details of how to sign up for a regular subscription, leave a one-off donation, or help out by using their Amazon affiliate links.

Rosalind Hackett became a Distinguished Professor in the Humanities at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (2017-2020); was re-elected as Vice President of the International Council for Philosophy and the Human Sciences (CIPSH) (2017-2020); and was elected to the Board of Directors of the African Consortium of Law and Religion Studies (ACLARS) (2017), also serving on the Program Committee.

Professor John Hinnells passed away on 3 May, aged 76, as we were going to press. He is perhaps best known for his pioneering work on Zoroastrianism in the ancient and modern world, his work with the Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education, and his widely-used edited works *A New Handbook of Living Religions*, *Who's Who of World Religions* and the *Penguin Dictionary of Religions*. According to his sons, he died peacefully, retaining his inspiring and determined character to the last. He will be greatly missed. The November issue will include a full obituary.

Borders and Boundaries: 'Religion' on the Periphery

Joint Conference between the British Association for the Study of Religions and the Irish Society for the Academic Study of Religions

3–5 September 2018, Queen's University, Belfast

Held in Association with the Religious Studies Research Forum at the Institute of Theology and the School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics.

Keynote Speakers

Gladys Ganiel (Queen's University, Belfast)
Naomi Goldenberg (University of Ottawa)

Call for Papers

Borders and boundaries define limits and margins, centres and peripheries. They demarcate territories, and separate entities and bodies and, as such, they function to guard space, limit action and exclude. They are, however, also contact zones and places of exchange, the 'limen' or threshold, the in-between, and the places of temptation and transgression. In the current political context when Ireland and the UK are faced with the dilemmas, paradoxes and implications of Brexit, this special joint conference of the British Association for the Study of Religions (BASR) and the Irish Society for the Academic Study of Religions (ISASR) invites paper, research slam, panel and roundtable proposals on the theme of *Borders and Boundaries*. Scholars based outside the Republic of Ireland or the UK are invited to submit proposals related to this theme regardless of whether their work relates to these islands. Scholars who are based in the UK or the Republic of Ireland and are working on religion and related categories are welcome to submit proposals on any topic whether or not it relates to the conference theme.

Deadline for proposals for papers, panels and the research slam: **25 May 2018**

See <https://basr.ac.uk/> and/or <https://isasr.wordpress.com/>
for more information and updates.



**QUEEN'S
UNIVERSITY
BELFAST**



2018 BURSARY APPLICATION FORM FOR BASR-ISASR CONFERENCE, BELFAST
(covers conference fee and accommodation but not travel)

Please note that you **must be (or become) a member of BASR** to qualify for a Bursary, and that bursary holders are required to **co-author a report on the conference** for the BASR Bulletin, and to **attend the BASR AGM** during the Belfast conference

Name:

Institution:

Email:

Contact address:

Contact telephone:

Status:

- a) PhD student
- b) Early career researcher
- c) Other (please specify)

Research Topic:

When will you / did you complete your PhD or other degree?

Have you ever attended a BASR conference before?

Have you ever received a BASR Bursary?

Do you wish to present

- a) a Conference Paper? (app. 20 minutes)
- b) a Research Slam presentation
- c) Other (please specify)

TITLE AND BRIEF ABSTRACT OF PAPER

BASR Teaching and Learning Fellowship: Application form

You may expand the boxes below but please do not exceed 4 pages in total.
Please do not add any additional appendices.

Your name:

1. Current Position/Teaching Experience

Please provide details of your current position and an outline of any relevant employment history.

2. Affiliations and memberships.

Please list any affiliations, professional memberships, fellowships, awards or other details that indicate your standing in the higher education community and any membership of relevant committees or decision making bodies.

3. Publications and Papers on Teaching and Learning

Please list any relevant papers or publications related to pedagogy

4. Supporting statement

Please provide a supporting statement, explaining further how you meet the criteria as set out in the Fellowship specification. (If necessary, please refer to - but do not repeat - information already provided above.) Consider responding to these four themes: Influencing and inspiring students' learning; Influencing and inspiring colleagues' teaching; Innovation and development of practice; Personal reflection on practice

A Festschrift and Reception to Honour the Work of Professor Ursula King

On 23rd March 2018 a reception was held to honour the contributions of Professor Ursula King to the study of religions and celebrate the year of her 80th birthday at the Institute for Advanced Studies, University of Bristol. Colleagues and friends gathered at the event from across the globe to offer their congratulations, share stories and give Ursula their best wishes for her ongoing lively engagement with the study of religions and health and wellbeing.



In this celebration of Ursula we also celebrated the BASR as she has been a strong supporter of the BASR for many decades. She has contributed to the development of our association in various roles, for instance as Bulletin Editor (1977-81), Secretary (1981-87) and President (1991-1994). She is now a life member of the BASR in recognition of her past and ongoing support. One aspect that makes her so important for the BASR is her never ending support for new generations of scholars. Whenever Ursula attends a conference, her support and encouragement of PhD students as well as Early Career scholars is evident.

Equally, Ursula has made substantial contributions to the wider field of the study of religions, far beyond the scope of the BASR. She has been instrumental in opening the field of study to female scholars, whether it is in research (for example, her contribution to our understanding of women in religions and female religious experience is enormous) or academia. These aspects were also very visible in talks given at the reception as two of the speakers, (Professor Tina Beattie and Professor Kim Knott) are former PhD students of Ursula, have important university positions and are recognised as leading experts in their fields while the third speaker (Professor Morny Joy) is the chair of the Women's Network in the International Association for History of Religion.

Ursula, her husband, Tony King and some members of her family, along with friends and colleagues were officially welcomed by the organisers of the reception and festschrift, Dominic Corrywright and Bettina Schmidt. Three short talks were given to recognise and honour her work: Tina Beattie described Ursula as one of a line of great European scholars, multilingual with mastery of a range of disciplines, and wide-ranging areas of interest and impact; Kim Knott focused on the importance of her leadership in the field, with many scholars following in her trail; Morny Joy emphasised Ursula's key role in developing international research networks, and specifically support for women scholars. Only

a few of her many groundbreaking contributions to women in academia and the study of religions could be mentioned, though it was noteworthy, that in giving thanks for Ursula's engagement with the University of Bristol, Susan Jim (director of the Institute for Advanced Studies) remarked on the fact that she was only the fourth woman professor at Bristol when she arrived in the 1980s.

In organising this celebration of Professor Ursula King, Dominic Corrywright and Bettina Schmidt decided that a festschrift should be published in the year of her 80th birthday. It was decided to invite scholars who had personal knowledge of Ursula's work and would write on the full range of her contributions. Moreover, we concluded that the most appropriate output for the festschrift would be the recently renamed Journal of the British Association for the Study of Religions in a special edition. Contributors to the e-journal are themselves remarkable for their own distinctive contributions to the study of religions and included three previous Presidents of the BASR, as well as the incoming President. Yet, the editors recognised that despite the value of electronic resources and the open-access availability that leads to wider readership, Ursula would appreciate a hard copy, material incarnation, of the essays. So we set about gathering assistance for a limited edition print run of the text and requested support from members of the BASR, for which they would receive a copy and be included in a Tabula Gratulatoria printed in the hard copy text. Moreover, we requested that any contributors could send short statements of appreciation: these were collated and at the reception Ursula was presented with the collected statements as a unique memento of her many colleagues support and friendship. The hard copy text itself is a special version of the festschrift as we were able to design it with frontispieces for the cover and each chapter of paintings from the renowned Indian artist Jyoti Sahi (who generously allowed us to use these images) and we included within it a publications list of Ursula's work (to 2017 - which runs to 23 pages!)



The reception and production of the festschrift was sponsored by the Institute for Advanced Studies with support from British Association for the Study of Religions and private contributions from members and friends.

The e-journal JBASR edition of the Festschrift is available at:
<http://www.jbasr.com/ojs/index.php/jbasr/issue/view/2>

Dominic Corrywright and Bettina Schmidt

features

FOSTERING CREATIVITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: THE CASE FOR RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Stefanie Sinclair
The Open University

Creativity is in demand. As Gaspar and Mabic point out, “in the last decade creativity has become a mantra which is used by politicians, businessmen, employees, teachers, professors, students and others. Creativity is seen as a cure for a wide range of [social, economic and educational] problems” (2015, p. 598). It is valued as an important life skill, linked to increased levels of wellbeing and depth of learning. It can build resilience and help solve complex problems. Creativity has also been identified as an increasingly desirable graduate attribute that cannot easily be outsourced or replaced by machines in a labour market increasingly dominated by technology (Blessinger and Watts 2017, 3; Csikszentmihalyi 2006; Gauntlett 2011; Osmani et al. 2015; Rampersad and Patel 2014; Robinson 2011).

While there is wide-ranging agreement that higher education can play an important role in fostering creativity, there have been claims that it is not doing enough and there are “calls for a more rigorous approach to teaching creativity” in higher education (Rampersad and Patel 2014, 1). However, there are

many different views on what creativity actually is and how its development can be best supported. Studies have, for example, found that academic staff and students in higher education often have different understandings of the concept of creativity. When interviewing academic staff from a range of subject disciplines at Liverpool John Moores University and University College London (UCL), Edwards et al. (2006) found that the academics they interviewed tended to associate creativity with originality, with being imaginative, with exploring or ‘adventuring’ for the purpose of discovery, with synthesis and making sense of complexity and with communication. A parallel study of students’ perception of creativity, on the other hand, found that students tended to associate creativity with freedom from routine and from the need to justify oneself, with expression of imagination, with independence, risk and sometimes superficiality. Students also typically described creativity as something personal and infectious (Oliver et al. 2006). These differences highlight the elusive and complex nature of this concept (Kleinman 2008, 209). Notions of creativity

range from understanding it as an elite enterprise that is reserved for the talented and gifted few, to the increasingly influential understanding of creativity as a powerful collaborative process that can and should be harnessed in everyone (Rampersad and Patel 2014, 1; Robinson 2011). I find the latter particularly convincing.

However, in an environment determined by league tables, funding cuts, stifling levels of bureaucracy and the looming pressure of the REF and TEF, where students are increasingly encouraged to approach education as customers purchasing qualifications, it can be very challenging to inject creativity into the curriculum and adopt a greater focus on teaching and learning as a collaborative process of discovery and growth. So what can we do to address this? Csikszentmihalyi argues that “if one wishes to inject creativity in the educational system, the first step might be to help students find out what they truly love, and help them immerse themselves in the domain” (2006, xix). He contends that to support this process, it is important that teachers model the joy of learning and the passion for their subject discipline themselves. As Kleinman concludes, “academics need to be perceived and involved as agents in their own and their students creativity rather than as objects of, or more pertinently, deliverers of a particular ‘creativity agenda’” (2008, 216). As part of the Open University’s Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences teaching scholarship seminar series on ‘Creativity and criticality in online learning’, colleagues got together last summer to talk to each other about their passion for their respective subject areas - and some filmed each other talking about this on their smart phones. In the midst of stressful deadlines and piles of paperwork, many colleagues commented on how refreshing and energising they found it to remind themselves and each other of their deep passion for their subject areas and for teaching and research. In the context of the many pressures academics are facing, it is important not to lose sight of why we’re in ‘it’ in the first place, and it is important for our students to see this, too.

This scholarship seminar series built on topics explored in a volume on *Creativity and Criticality in Online Learning*, edited by Jacqueline Baxter, George Callaghan and Jean McAvoy. This is about to be published by Palgrave Macmillan in June 2018, with contributions from a range of colleagues working at The Open University, including myself, considering the

particular opportunities and challenges associated with teaching creativity in higher education in online settings. The chapter I contributed focuses on the link between creative and multisensory learning. It explores how digital technologies can be used to create opportunities for multisensory learning and assessment, particularly - though not exclusively - in distance learning environments (Sinclair, forthcoming). My chapter introduces and critically appraises three forms of assessment currently used in Religious Studies and Philosophy modules at The Open University, including the assessment of digital audio recordings of oral presentations, presentation slides and of a ‘Take a picture of religion’ activity. This activity encourages students to engage critically and creatively with different understandings of the concept ‘religion’ by asking them to take a photograph of an object or place representing an aspect of ‘religion’ in their locality. They then share and discuss this photograph on an online platform with a small group of other students, moderated by a tutor, followed by an assessed reflective activity. An important insight I have gained through the scholarship projects this chapter is based on, is the value of consulting colleagues and involving students in the critical evaluation of new forms of learning and assessment, and of sharing and developing resources across different modules. This very much ties into the understanding of creativity and of creative learning and teaching as collaborative processes, giving staff and students a sense of ownership.

It could be argued that Religious Studies is in a particularly strong position as a subject discipline to facilitate the development of creativity and of creative learning in higher education. There are a number of reasons for this. Many colleagues have talked and written about the fantastic opportunities fieldtrips, fieldwork or engagement with museum objects or artefacts can offer to engage students in collaborative, ‘hands-on’, multisensory and creative learning (see, for example Gregg and Scholefield 2015; Chatterjee et al. 2015). Religious Studies offers a particularly rich range of opportunities for this. While financial constraints, workload issues and health and safety regulations pose many tricky challenges to the organisation of international fieldtrips, it is important not to lose sight of more easily accessible opportunities for multisensory learning on a local, smaller scale (as illustrated by the ‘Take a picture of religion’ activity mentioned above). Another reason why Religious Studies is in a particularly good posi-

tion as a subject discipline to foster creativity in higher education is the fact that creative solutions for complex problems often “lie in the ‘liminal’ spaces, the boundaries or thresholds of different academic discipline domains” (Stefani 2017, 206). As an inherently multi- and interdisciplinary subject discipline, Religious Studies has plenty to offer in the exploration of these liminal spaces. As the Employability guide published by the Higher Education Academy’s Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies predicted in 2009: “in an increasingly global economy, the skills of vision, creativity and religious sensitivity, which are developed through the study of TRS, will be at a premium” (HEA 2009, 4; emphasis added). Let’s shout this from the roof tops.

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A HISTORY OF THE BASR: SOME PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Christopher R. Cotter
University of Edinburgh

Since May 2017 I've been conducting research to develop a pilot history of the BASR in the context of RS in the UK. This has involved a literature review of relevant publications, consulting the AGM minutes, Executive Committee minutes, correspondence, BASR and IAHR Bulletins held at the Bodleian in Oxford, and conducting seventeen oral history interviews. This preliminary report focuses on the institutional (rather than intellectual or social) history of the BASR. Work on the project continues, with plans for an internally facing publication, as well as a journal article or two.

Historical Sketch

As Sutcliffe has noted “the BASR is the sole autonomous professional academic association in the UK predicated upon the categories ‘religion’ and ‘religions’” (2004, xvii). Although founded in 1954, its history goes back further than that. Around the turn of the century there was some teaching of what might be described as ‘comparative religion’ at London, Oxford and Cambridge, and in 1904 we find the first chair of ‘comparative religion’ founded at Manchester with TW Rhys Davids (Gundry and Parrinder 1980). Internationally, although what we now know as the International Association for the History of Religions was not officially founded until a congress in Amsterdam 1950, its origins go back to six earlier European congresses from 1900, “of which the third was held in Oxford in 1908” (King 1994, 14).

So, our timeline begins with the official formation of the IASHR in 1950 (one wonders how much hand wringing could have been avoided if it was the H, rather than the S, which was quickly dropped in

1955!) The IASHR journal *NVMEN* was founded in 1953, and one year later a meeting occurred on 24 September at Exeter College, Oxford attended by “Dr Brandon, Miss Emmet, Mrs Ettlinger, Mr Gundry, Dr James, Mrs James, Mr Lewis, Dr Parrinder and Canon Ramsey”, with EO James being elected chairman, and Mr (Canon) Gundry acting as secretary. The minutes read as follows:

“The chairman outlined the history of the History of Religions Congresses and of the formation of the IASHR. He emphasised that it was important that a British section should exist, just as other national groups had been formed elsewhere. Attention was drawn to the new journal *NVMEN*, the first two numbers of which had already appeared, and to the Bibliography of the History of Religions scheduled to be published in 1954. Members were also urged to attend the History of Religions Congress to be held at Rome in April 1955. The secretary also read a list of members, and reported on the steps which had been taken to enrol scholars specially interested in this field.”

Thus was born the British branch of the IASHR. Writing in 1975, Gundry tells us:

“It may be of interest to members to know that before 1954 the late Professor E.O. James was invited by the IAHR itself to represent British scholars, but there was no official British branch. The late Professor R. Pettazzoni was very keen that there should be. Professor Bleeker felt so too. He discussed this with me early in 1954, and I went to see Professor Pettazzoni while I was in Rome in April of that year. Professor James was a scholar rather than an admin-

istrator! He asked me to take on the secretaryship of the incipient British section and get it into shape.” (1975, 3)

The regular meetings became ensconced in Passfield Hall, London, and remained in London until 1977, moving to Oxford in 1978. Due to IAHR Congresses, smaller meetings were held in London in 1980, 1985, and 1990, and it wasn't until 1992 that the current practice of moving around the UK began, with Winchester (1992), Newcastle (1993) and Bristol (1994). 2018 will mark the first ever BASR conference in Northern Ireland. Until the late 1980s these were single stream conferences or “meetings”, with initially only two papers being offered (increasing to three in 1974) to a relatively select group of (elderly, white) men.

Within one year the IASHR changed its name to the IAHR and the British group followed suit, becoming the British “Branch” or “Section” of the IAHR, or simply IAHR (Britain). For the next 15 years or so annual meetings for a couple of papers in London continued, with Andrew Walls telling me that many of the regular attendees at early meetings were based at universities in Africa and would meet in conjunction with the conference to strategize before heading off to their (post-)colonial posts. Membership increased steadily, from 22 in 1954, to 48 in 1958, 80 in 1968, and 100 in 1972.

EO James served as president/chair from the inception of the association and the 1971 AGM minutes note that “Prof James indicated his wish to retire owing to his age, but consented to accept re-election as President for the next year.” However, during the following year he tragically died in a car accident. At the 1972 AGM,

“Dr Sharpe and Prof Lewis gave appreciations of the life and work of Prof SGF Brandon [another founding member] and Prof EO James whose deaths during the year had been great blows to the Association.” (AGM minutes)

This double loss had two major impacts upon the association. First, Geoffrey Parrinder was elected to the role of President – vacating the role of Secretary, which was filled by Michael Pye, and kicking off a process of consideration about the democratic processes of the association. Secondly, the 1975 IAHR congress – to date still the only IAHR congress to

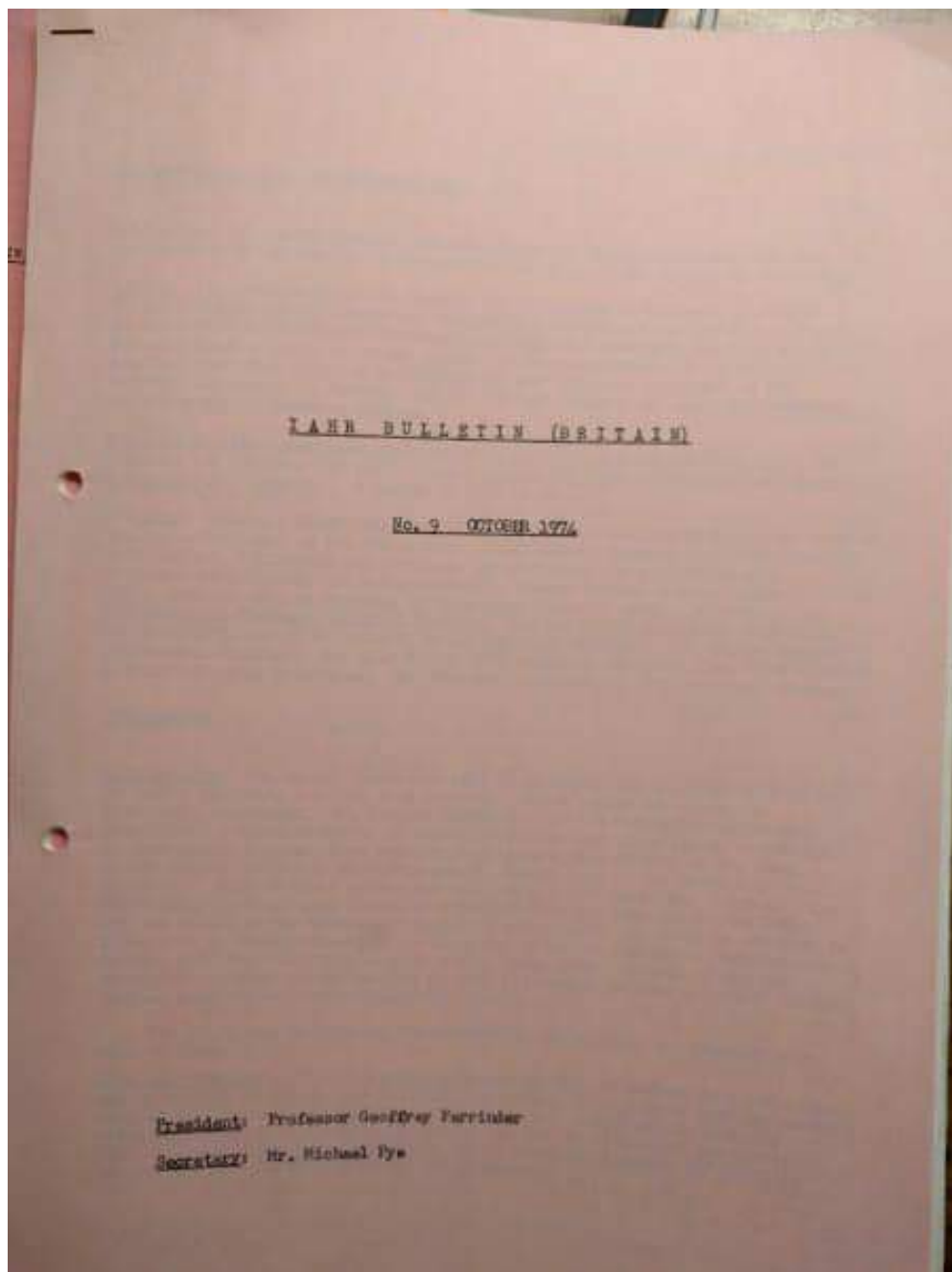
take place in the UK since its inception – had been due to take place with Prof. Brandon in Manchester but in 1972 this shifted to Lancaster, with preliminary arrangements to be made “by members of the Association from Lancaster: Professor Smart, Dr Sharpe, and Mr Pye.” Note the important international connections: Smart later moved to the University of California, Santa Barbara after establishing the first department of RS in the UK at Lancaster; Sharpe served as IAHR General Secretary before becoming the founding Professor of RS at the University of Sydney where he hosted another IAHR congress (1985); and Michael Pye became Professor of RS at Marburg University in 1982 and served the IAHR as General Secretary (1985–1995) and President (1995–2000).

Following a proposal at the 1972 September conference, Michael Pye instigated the first BASR Bulletin (initially four per year), and at the 1974 AGM, the subject of a constitution was raised by Prof HD Lewis, with the rejoinder that the association was “much more haphazard than other learned associations.” Although it was felt that affiliation to the IAHR meant that the association abided by the IAHR constitution, and that the cumulative minutes somewhat added up to that, Lewis and Sharpe were tasked to make an initial draft of constitution. At the 1975 IAHR congress, the AGM of the British Section formally adopted a constitution and became the BAHHR.

In 1981, 1984 and 1987 we find various mentions and position papers – largely from Dr Karel Werner – about changing the name to the BASR (sometimes singular R, sometimes plural), and at a “Special General Meeting” on 4 February 1989 the name was changed, with unanimous approval, to what we know today. In 1990 the association became a charity, the annual lecture began, and with the annual lecture came the first notion of having a themed conference. Also, we have a very intriguing mention of “sherry” at lunchtime – perhaps something that future organizers might think about reintroducing?

In 1996, a few years after becoming a “mobile” conference, discussion began about the setting up of a website, and thus we start to see a BASR that more closely resembles what we have today, with a vibrant website and email list, the Bulletin moving online, the development of DISKUS (now JBASR), the sponsorship of the Religious Studies Project, and so on.

The ninth issue of this hallowed publication, October 1974.



Membership, International Connections, and Area Studies

Now I wish to turn to three key points that have emerged from the project thus far. The first concerns the “rules” surrounding membership.

Many of the luminaries interviewed recall how the BASR used to resemble a kind of gentlemen’s club, with potential new members having to be proposed by existing members and so on. Looking at the minutes of AGMs throughout the years we see gradual changes in this area. In 1955, "It was resolved that, in future, applications for membership of

the British Section should be approved by the Annual Meeting, and that candidates for membership should not attend until such approval had been given." In 1974 the procedure was streamlined, whereby “new members should be sponsored by two existing members and approved by the President and Secretary.” By 1982, the “meeting also agreed that people with an interest in the academic study of religion may apply directly for membership,” and in 1990 – because now a charity – “the former method of approval of new membership could not be applied. The Association still had the right of excluding people from membership for good cause.” What these minutes don’t tell is the reason for the initial highly restricted

nature of the membership rule in 1955.

Writing in 1980, Geoffrey Parrinder claims:

“At Rome [1955] a so-called witch, Gerald Gardner from the Isle of Man, had presented himself along with the British delegation to the IAHR, to the scorn of continental representatives. Although the BAH, like Great Britain herself, had no written constitution at that time, it was agreed that members, and those invited to join in future, should hold university posts or be recognised as academic authorities. While this restriction may have kept numbers small, it was felt that it ensured the role of the BAH in British universities and enabled it to co-operate with similar branches of the IAHR.” (Gundry and Parrinder 1980, 9)

A second point concerns the BASR's international connections. It's already been mentioned that the BASR began as a “branch” of the IAHR, demonstrating that international connections have always been a part of what the association has done. However, the 1973 AGM minutes note that communications between national associations in Europe were considered inadequate, with four action points being agreed:

To invite other associations to the conference;

To add another paper to the BAH conference to make it more appealing to travellers;

To make a point of inviting Europeans from time to time to deliver a paper;

To invite Jacques Waardenburg of Utrecht for 1974.

Further, at the 1990 IAHR congress there was a “motion by the British Association requesting the Executive Committee to consider changing the name of the [IAHR] to the [IASR].” And the BASR was an important player in the setting up of the EASR. In 1995, a letter was sent to the BASR from Hans Kippenberg about a proposed EASR to which the BASR's then secretary Terry Thomas appended the note “At last – I may yet live to see one of my hopes realised.” The BASR responded enthusiastically, and delegates attended an initial gathering in Hildesheim in 1998, with Peggy Morgan, Brian Bocking and others putting in significant work on the development of a draft constitution. Following an unfortunate situation

where a splinter group attempted to form an alternative European Association, Kim Knott (then BASR President) wrote to Michael Pye (then IAHR President) stating that “BASR would like to propose that members of the EASR join members of BASR at their annual conference in 2001 to be held in Cambridge”, and thus the inaugural EASR conference took place.

Finally, on the topic of other subject associations, it is interesting to note that the British Sociological Association's Sociology of Religion Study Group (SOCREL) was founded in 1975, and in 1976 their annual meeting took place in the same venue as the BAH, immediately preceding it, indicating an encouraging level of early collaboration. Then in 1990, Kim Knott and Grace Davie began discussions about a joint conference, which took place in April 1992. Unfortunately, only 22 BASR members attended this conference, and BASR also held a one-day conference at usual BASR time. In the June 1992 Bulletin it was noted that “Some members had been surprised by the strong confessional nature of many of the papers presented” and that “Sociology of Religion members seemed to be more socialised into offering conference papers.” However, despite some perceived problems the experience was judged to have been worth attempting, but in future collaborations there should be “much closer liaison with the Sociology of Religion organizers and a more balanced range of papers presented.” In 1994, SOCREL wrote to propose a similar venture in April, and the BASR responded that they were keen, but that April wouldn't work: such is the way of tradition. That such collaboration took place in the past – and that former BASR President Douglas Davies has also served as the SOCREL chair – should be encouraging for future collaborations, but the fact that it has not been more frequent is perhaps indicative of a less encouraging fracturing of the study of religions into narrower area studies.

In October/November 1976, Michael Pye (then BASR Secretary) wrote somewhat prophetically in Bulletin #17 concerning streams on African and Indian Religions which had been added to the BASR annual meeting, and on Dr Karel Werner's involvement in setting up the (now) Spalding Symposium on Indian Religions:

“In the meantime it is not surprising that special interest groups have formed within the overall field where insufficient activity was taking place hitherto. [...] I feel that members ought to be grateful to Dr

Werner for indirectly prodding the association into more sustained activity, and perhaps the coexistence this year of an Indian and an African section followed by more general papers is a workable pattern for future years. [...] One thing which could be harmful, however, to our common if widely-ranging interests is the danger of institutional fragmentation. The BAHR is a relatively low-key organisation, and for many of us that is one of the nice things about it. At the same time, if it is to exist at all, its activities ought to offer a reasonable reflection of the interests of its members in the history of religions and related disciplines. [...] Frankly speaking, it would seem to be to be undesirable to set up a permanent separate institution to cater for the study of Indian religions, and for the sake of the coherence of our discipline I hope that this will not happen. [...] I hope therefore that this personal plea for the integration and coherence of our subject will be seen not as a rejection of other initiatives but as a welcome to share in a common endeavour. Not everybody is interested in organisations, and yet how things are organised can have a practical effect on the overall development of our subject, as can be seen from its chequered history in various countries. I believe this also to be important in an intellectual sense, for institutions tend to shape the understanding of subjects.”

Prophetic words indeed, which emphasise not only the importance of academic institutions, but of the institutional history of said organisations.

Conclusion

There is so much more that I could mention, including: the repeated interventions of the BASR regarding the place of RS scholars on, and the broader composition of, RAE/REF panels; the closure and threat to departments; the setting up of RS at the Open University; government cuts to higher education; cuts in teacher training; and policing the boundary between theology and RS in a variety of spheres. However, I want to finish with a very brief comment on the BASR as a collegial network.

This consistent refrain throughout my oral history interviews was expressed succinctly by former President Peggy Morgan in 2004, where she writes:

“I found as a young woman its senior scholars welcoming and affirming and that the atmosphere at

meetings involved critique but not destructive confrontation or academic arrogance. This seems to have continued, with young scholars being funded and encouraged at BASR conferences... It has retained its atmosphere of a professional community of friendship when education has lost much of its warmth in these pressured and insecure times.” (Morgan 2004, xv)

This welcoming, collegial atmosphere is something that seems to have remained consistent throughout the years, despite great changes in the higher education environment in the UK and in our area of study. Long may it continue in these still pressured and insecure times.

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FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT ... IN SWITZERLAND

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This short overview presents some key facts about the history and current situation of the discipline Religionswissenschaft/sciences des religions, as it is institutionalised in most Swiss universities today. However, the relationship between this discipline and whole range of research on religion carried out by sociologists, anthropologists, historians, philologists and other neighbouring disciplines cannot be treated here in detail, for practical reasons.

Only a few articles and chapters about the general history of the academic study of religion include information about the situation in Switzerland (e.g. Kohl 1988, Stausberg 2008, Tworuschka 2015). However, a concise overview of the history and current challenges in both the whole country and particular chairs is provided by a special *Bulletin Religionswissenschaft/Science des Religions*, published in French and German in 2010 and available at http://www.sgr-sss.ch/download/VSH-Bulletin_2010_04.pdf.

Lectures on the history of religions have formed part of different theological curricula at Swiss universities since the 1830s, and a chair for the academic study of religion, titled 'Histoire des religions et études des systèmes sociaux', was established in Geneva in 1873. Its location within the Department for Social Studies of the Philosophy Faculty visibly expressed the aim of the time to approach religion from a secular and empirical perspective (Borgeaud 2010). However, when the first holder, the philosopher Theophile Droz, left Geneva in 1880, debates about the orientation of this chair rose again, leading to a labyrinthine history of changing location within either the Humanities or the Faculty of Theology (cf. Uehlinger 2010,

Borgeaud 2010). A second chair dedicated to the comparative study of religion (Indigene Literaturgeschichte und vergleichende Religionswissenschaft) emerged in 1889 at Fribourg University, held by the Catholic theologian and Indologist, Edmund Hardy. However, Hardy left due to internal disputes only eight years later, and the chair was dissolved (Uehlinger 2010). For decades, Geneva remained the only place in Switzerland with a chair explicitly dedicated to the study of religion.

Nevertheless, the study of religions slowly entered the academic institutions. Newly-founded chairs focused on a variety of regional and topical focuses, including the Ancient Orient and Indian Religions, in Lausanne (since 1976, then occupied by Prof. Carl-Albert Keller); on ethnic groups in Tanzania, Taiwan and Africa, in Lucerne, strongly marked by mission theology (since 1973, occupied by Prof. Otto Bischofberger); and on intercultural encounter, interreligious dialogue and peace education at the Institut für Religionswissenschaft und Missiologie in Fribourg (since 1971, occupied by Prof. Richard Friedli). Yet no disciplinary coherence, whether through object of study, epistemological assumptions or theoretical and methodological approach, could be identified (Uehlinger 2010). That remained true in the 1980s and even 1990s, decades when Religionswissenschaft/sciences des religions was institutionalized with at least one professorship at most Swiss universities. The academic study of religions during these decades was greatly influenced by the following professors:

1. Fritz Stolz, who was appointed as professor for Allgemeine Religionsgeschichte und Religionswissenschaft at the Faculty of Theology in Zurich in

1980, and whose publications covered a broad range of systematic issues concerning the discipline Religionswissenschaft and its relationship with theology, as well as the history of ancient oriental religions and critical understanding of contemporary religion;

2. Jacques Waardenburg, Professor for Sciences des Religions in Lausanne from 1987-1995, whose research focused on various topics related to Islam and especially on Islamic-Christian relations, as well as on the defence of a neo-phenomenological approach to the academic study of religions;

3. Philippe Borgeaud, working as a professor for Histoire des religions antiques in Geneva from 1987 to 2011, whose academic activities focused the study of religions in ancient times, historiographical questions related to the history of religions as well as theoretical perspectives on comparison in the history of religions;

4. Richard Friedli, who built up the study programme Vergleichende Religionswissenschaft from 1993 to 2006 at the Faculty of Philosophy in Fribourg, where he continued to research on and teach the above-mentioned topics of intercultural and -religious dialogue, peace-building and put a strong focus on the practical implications of Religious Studies and its responsibility for the society as a whole.

Those profiles point to the great diversity of research interests, and methodological and theoretical perspectives on religions, as well as the different conceptions of the discipline itself at Swiss universities. However, the foundation of the Swiss Society for the Study of Religion (Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Religionswissenschaft/Société Suisse pour la Science des Religions) in 1977 expressed the increasing will to make the academic study of religion a discipline visibly distinct from theology. The SGR/SSSR was soon integrated into the International Association for the History of Religion and the Swiss Academy of Humanities and Social Sciences, demonstrating its independence from the Swiss Theological Society. This independence is visible on the new web portal of the Swiss Academy of Humanities and Social Sciences: on their site Cultures and Societies, the Swiss Society for the Study of Religion is present right next to the Swiss Theological Society today (<https://cultu-soc./ch/en/fach-portal.html>).

During the 1990s and 2000s, the institutional localization of the chairs of Religionswissenschaft/sciences des religions was renegotiated in several places. Whereas Religionswissenschaft continues to prosper within the Faculty of Theology in Zurich, it has for example been moved to the Humanities in Fribourg in 1992 (however, with a chair remaining within the Faculty of Theology), and in Lucerne in 1993. Moreover, two interfaculty institutes have been created—the Département interfacultaire d'Histoire et de sciences des religions (DIHSR) in 1990 in Lausanne, and the Interfakultäres Institut für allgemeine und vergleichende Religionsgeschichte in 1991 in Berne, the latter being moved to the Humanities in 2003. New departments and chairs for the study of religion continued to emerge, such as the section Science des religions at the Faculty of Theology in Lausanne in 2002 (renamed Faculté de théologie et de sciences des religions in 2006), and a chair of Religionswissenschaft at the university of Basel in 2006.

The so-called “cultural turn” (kulturwissenschaftliche Wende), which took place among scholars of religion in Germany during the 1980s and which led to a growing demarcation from theological and phenomenological approaches to religion, had some effect on the self-conception of the discipline in Switzerland as well, at least in its German-speaking part. The understanding of the academic study of religions as an empirical-based science whose epistemological and methodological premises clearly define it as a cultural, social or historical science, is consensus today. From this common ground, however, theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches continue to differ. These differences are even bigger if one includes the French-speaking part of Switzerland, already apparent in the different designations of the discipline: whereas the singular Religionswissenschaft is consensually used within the German-speaking part of Switzerland (pointing to the tradition of conceiving the academic study of religions as a coherent discipline), the plural Sciences des religions is often favoured in French. Accordingly, the name of the Swiss Society for the Study of Religion has recently been changed from Société Suisse pour la Science des Religions to Société Suisse de Sciences des Religions. Furthermore, at some places, especially in Geneva, the discipline is called Histoire des Religions, according to the specific disciplinary tradition there.

Besides conceptual differences, one can find many topical or regional focuses within the different departments, institutes and chairs in Switzerland. While all sites provide a wide range of topics both in research and teaching, some also offer specialisms such as religion in migrant and diaspora contexts (in Lucerne and Lausanne), Buddhism and religions of central Asia (Berne) and religions of the antiquity (Geneva). Some sites offer the possibility for doctoral students to participate in interfaculty programs and thus benefit from a wide range of training opportunities and activities: Basel and Zurich set up a doctoral program *Religionswissenschaft* for their students in 2013, and Ph.D. students from Fribourg, Lausanne and Geneva have had the opportunity to participate in a common training programme *Programme doctoral en histoire et sciences des religions (EDHSR)* since 2013.

Different sites are also involved in interdisciplinary research and exchange in various ways. The Zentrum für Religion, Wirtschaft und Politik, hosted by the universities of Basel, Luzern, Zurich, Fribourg and Lausanne, promotes an interdisciplinary perspective on religion and its interactions with politics and economics. Furthermore, there is the Centre for Global Studies in Berne, in which the Institut für Religionswissenschaft plays an important role.

To conclude, one can say that the academic study of religions is a still small but firmly institutionalized discipline in Swiss universities today. The different sites offer a rich variety of research and educational activities, which are dedicated to a broad spectrum of topics and issues related to the study of religion and religions in the past and present. A core challenge for the future, however, is the growing amount of academic research produced on the topic in neighbouring disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, history and others. Researchers in Middle Eastern or Asian Studies also provide a deep understanding on non-European religious traditions such as Islamic, Buddhist or Hindu groups, facilitated by their long-term specialization on specific regions and by linguistic skills that scholars of religion are often not provided with during their education in the same way. Thus, it is crucial for scholars of religion to confidently clarify and explain the specific contributions that they are able to make within the academic landscape.

Another challenge for the future might be to become more visible outside the academic landscape so that different societal and state actors perceive the specific expertise of scholars of religion and address them more directly as specialists who can complement the role of theologians with their perspectives on the topic of religion/s.

Last but not least, one should add that the multilingual context of Switzerland offers an exceptional chance for scholars of religion to expand their horizon in integrating the different perspectives and questions that scholars of German- and French-speaking traditions have to offer. It remains to be hoped, that the different academic sites for *Religionswissenschaft/Sciences/Histoire des Religions* continue or even expand activities which allow an exchange between these different traditions.

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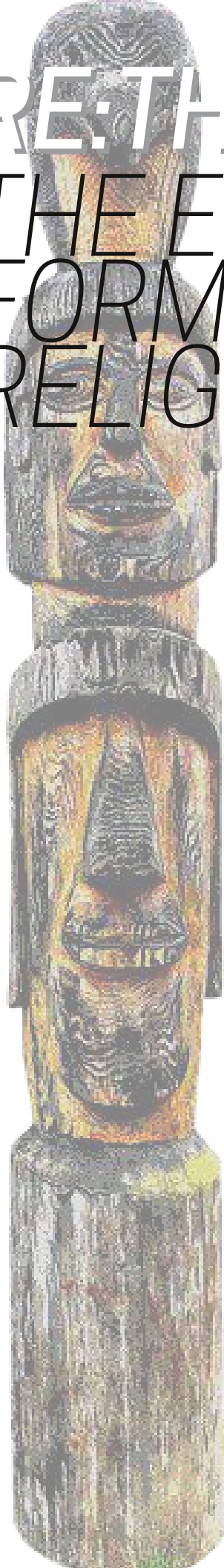
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RE:THINKING THE ELEMENTARY FORMS OF THE RELIGIOUS LIFE

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In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (hereinafter referred to as *The Elementary Forms*), published in 1912, French sociologist Emile Durkheim addresses... religious life. But not only. *The Elementary Forms* stands out for four core theses that speak to social life at large.

First, religious feelings are the transfiguration of feelings of social belonging, which the related rituals come to express and reinforce:

While religion seems to dwell entirely in the innermost self of the individual, the living spring that feeds it is still to be found in society. (Durkheim, 2001 [1912]: 320)

Second, religious life involves a fundamental separation between the sacred and the profane:

There is no other example in the history of human thought of two categories of things so profoundly differentiated or so radically opposed to one another. The traditional opposition between good and evil is nothing by comparison; good and evil are opposite species of the same genus, namely morality, just as health and sickness are merely two

different aspects of the same order of facts – life. By contrast, the sacred and the profane have always and everywhere been conceived by the human mind as separate genera, as two worlds that have nothing in common. The energies at play in one are not merely different in their degree of intensity; they are different in kind. This opposition is conceived differently in different religions. In some, localizing these two kinds of things in distinct regions of the physical universe seems sufficient to separate them; in others, sacred things are cast into an ideal and transcendent setting, while the material world is left entirely to others. But while the forms of the contrast vary, the fact is universal (Durkheim, 2001 [1912]: 38).

Third, religion is essentially collective. Durkheim provides a definition:

We have arrived, then, at the following definition: a religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and surrounded by prohibitions – beliefs and practices that unite its adherents in a single moral community called a church (Durkheim, 2001 [1912]: 46).

Fourth, far from being a source of error, religion is at the origin of scientific knowledge and cognitive classifications.

* * *

Now let us flip that around. What if Durkheim were still interested in offering theoretical contributions, but not through the lens of religion? What if he still investigated religion in primitive societies, but without theoretical ambitions, that is, for the sole sake of producing knowledge on religion in primitive societies?

In this think-piece, I envision to revisit the ethnographic material that undergirds *The Elementary Forms*, but with different empirical foci and theoretical objectives. I develop this project referring to *The Elementary Forms*, Durkheim's other works, and Durkheim scholarship. I discuss the rationales in revisiting *The Elementary Forms*, propose two ideas of revisits, and sketch an inventory of the sources to undertake them.

* * *

The Elementary Forms can be understood, criticized, and enjoyed on many different fronts. As outlined by Durkheim scholar Mark Cladis:

The book, then, can be and has been read in many ways: as a monograph on Australian totemism, a general theory of religion, an epistemology, a sociology of religion, a contribution to the hermeneutics of suspicion and interpretative theory, an account of social dynamics and solidarity. We show fidelity to the book by allowing it to speak to its different audiences; we dishonour it when, territorially, we surround it by rigid disciplinary boundaries. By putting *The Elementary Forms* to many uses we acknowledge that Durkheim did likewise with his Australian material. Its mark as a classic is its ability to speak in more than one voice and to more than one generation (Cladis, 2001: ix).

The multifold, flexible form of *The Elementary Forms* provides leeway for revisiting. So let us disentangle the many forms of *The Elementary Forms*. The first lies in the connection between empirical materials and theoretical objectives. Durkheim's ethnographic data consists of secondary sources: ethnologists' and anthropologists' field data in several primitive societies, especially the Australian Aboriginal and the Melanesian. This material is not restricted to religious life, but rather covers social life with an emphasis on religion. Several authors were indeed missionaries, for instance, German clergyman and anthropologist Carl Strehlow and his *Die Aranda und Loritja-Stämme in Zentral-Australien*. Yet, Durkheim privileges theory over this massive empirical material (Lévi-Strauss, 1983 [1960]). I may thus take advantage of this voluminous ethnographic data, but interpret it again, either without theoretical pretensions, or with other theoretical pretensions.

Second, within sociology, *The Elementary Forms* not only offers theoretical inputs for the sociology of religion, but also the sociology of knowledge, classifications, and morality. Further, two major fields in sociology, cultural sociology and microsociology, appraise *The Elementary Forms* as a founding classic. I may then twist *The Elementary Forms* so that it contributes to other topics and fields in sociology.

Third, within the social sciences, *The Elementary Forms* refutes two woes of anthropology: first, evolutionism, second, the thesis of a primitive mentality. In a similar vein, *Suicide* (1897) debunks

psychological explanations of suicide. For Durkheim, religion and suicide are mere topics to make the case for sociological analysis, rather than phenomena that would need to be documented. Durkheim may then have turned to other cases to pursue his grand endeavor to build sociology as a science. I may then seek in *The Elementary Forms* other intriguing cases for the sake of sociology.

Last but not least, Durkheim scholars have questioned the intellectual coherence in Durkheim's works. Notably, both 1912's *The Elementary Forms* and 1897's *Suicide* depart from several basic principles of 1895's *The Rules of Sociological Method*, in which Durkheim elaborates a scientific method for sociology (Dubet, 2013). Some scholars, as Jones (1986) explains, went as far as to argue that there were two Durkheim: the mature and fine Durkheim of *The Elementary Forms*, the unripe and hesitant Durkheim of *The Rules of Sociological Method*. I would say, if Durkheim himself was not Durkheimian, then I am entitled to do something Durkheimian while not being Durkheim.

The first revisit would be a theoretically understated, grounded ethnographic description of religious life in the primitive societies covered in *The Elementary Forms*. I would title this revisit "An Inquiry into Religious Life in Australian Aboriginal Societies", or "An Inquiry into Religious Life in Melanesian Societies".

The second revisit would have theoretical purposes, like *The Elementary Forms*. I would take other lenses to tackle the richness and variety of Durkheim's sources. If social life is to be divided between religious life and non-religious life, I would thus focus on the latter rather than the former, on the profane rather than the sacred. I would title this revisit "The Elementary Forms of Everyday Life".

This second revisit would be riskier, more unpredictable than the first. What kinds of theoretical contributions would that yield? Certainly not to knowledge, classifications, or morality, to the extent that *The Elementary Forms* compellingly demonstrates that they stem from religion. "The Elementary Forms of Everyday Life" would offer theoretical contributions to the substantive areas of human and social life that would originate in the

everyday, the profane, and the ordinary. In any case, I would stay true to Durkheim's lifetime endeavor: demonstrate that even the most intimate things are deeply bound to society, uncover the mechanisms through which society weighs on the individual, and make the case for sociology as a science.

To carry out this revisit project, I would rely on four kinds of sources. First, for sure, I would use *The Elementary Forms*. I would gather all editions ever published, and all prefaces and forewords ever written. Second, I would retrieve the secondary sources culled by Durkheim. Third, I would comb his correspondences, seeking hints on himself in the process of writing *The Elementary Forms*. Fourth, I would get additional insights by investigating how Durkheim's contemporaries appraised *The Elementary Forms*, especially the 74 reviews published between 1912 and 1917 curated by Stéphane Baciocchi and François Théron (2012) in a special issue of the *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions*.

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conferences

THE AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGION / NEW ZEALAND ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGION CONFERENCE, 7-8 DECEMBER 2017, UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME, AUSTRALIA (BROADWAY CAMPUS)

The joint 2017 AASR/ NZASR annual conference was organized by Dr Rosie Hancock (University of Notre Dame, Australia), and was hosted by UNDA's Institute for Ethics and Society. Prior to the start of the conference on Thursday morning there was an information session by the Australian Research Council regarding funding applications for Centres of Excellence, which was well-attended by staff and students from a number of universities around Australia. The opening session was the International Sociology Association Plenary Panel on the theme "Thinking Beyond the West: Exploring New Approaches to the Sociology of Religion". The four speakers drew upon many cultures and historical eras: Raewyn Connell's "Decolonising God" considered colonial relations between invaders and indigenous peoples; Jim Spickard discussed Navajo ideas of time; Adam Possamai moved from medieval Islamic Cordoba to the present; and Cristina Rocha discussed Brazilian faith-healer John of God. That evening, the Charles Strong Trust Lecture was delivered by Jim Spickard (Professor of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Redlands) on the topic: "Is Pluralism Enough? Reflections on the Management of Religious Diversity in a Time of Social Division."

AASR President Doug Ezzy (University of Tasmania)

gave a second plenary, "'Good' Grief: Rituals of World-Repairing", that was equal parts serious research, personal reflection, and gentle humour. The third keynote was the Penny Magee Annual Lecture, "Reconsidering Religion: On the Digital Social," which was delivered by Associate Professor Alpha Possamai-Inesedy (Western Sydney University), who analysed the interactions between online and offline lives and worlds, with reference to religion. The AGM of the AASR was held on Friday prior to the conference dinner. Several important decisions were made at this meeting, most significantly to revise and amend the Constitution of the Association, which was last amended in 2004. Cristina Rocha was elected President, Doug Ezzy continued as Editor of *Australian Religion Studies Review*, Carole Cusack was re-appointed as Publications Chair and Milad Milani as Information Officer, Daniel Peterson was confirmed in the role of Information Officer and Public Officer, Kath McPhillips continued as Vice-President, and Anna Halafoff was appointed Women's Caucus Representative. One topic of conversation was the International Association for the History of Religion Quinquennial Conference in 2020, which is to be hosted by the University of Otago. Will Sweetman attended the AASR meeting and discussed progress to date and opportunities to collaborate as preparations become more detailed.

The conference dinner was held at Hannibal on Glebe Point Road and was well-attended. Paper sessions were lively and varied with strong representation by postgraduate students. Particularly distinguished or topical contributions included; "It Felt Like We Won':

Registration of New Religions in Finland" (Essi Mäkelä, University of Helsinki), "The Millennialist Project: A Comparative Study of End Time Survivors and Survivalism in Western Modernity" (Geraldine Smith, Honours candidate, University of Sydney), "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Same Sex Issues and the Symbolic Mediation of Change" (Joshua Boland, University of Tasmania), "The End of Invention" (Will Sweetman, University of Otago), "The Celestial Canopy: Maori Religiosity and Public Culture in Aotearoa/ New Zealand" (Anne Hardy, University of Waikato) and "Fundamentalism and Asian Religions: Shinto in Postwar Japan" (Mark Mullins, University of Auckland). Rosie Hancock was warmly thanks for her excellent organization of what was a very successful conference.

Carole M. Cusack
University of Sydney

CONTEMPORARY RELIGION IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES: PUBLICS AND PERFORMANCES, MILTON KEYNES, FEBRUARY 19TH -21ST, 2018

The conference opened with a strong keynote by Professor Bettina Schmidt on the study of religious experience and the influence of some forgotten founding fathers of the field: Rudolf Otto, Andrew Lang and R.R. Marett. The paper tied together the themes of the conference rather nicely by relating the current concern with the study of 'lived religion' to some of the more overlooked strands within the history of the field, grounded in Schmidt's field research among Afro-Brazilian religious movements. Though I remain concerned that a focus on experience as primary and isolatable outside of broader frameworks of interpretation risks insiderism or essentialism, given my fascination with the legacy of E.B. Tylor I was deeply sympathetic to the desire to revisit the forgotten and often stereotyped legacies of our scholarly ancestors.

The first panel I attended was "Relocating NRM's in Diaspora." David G. Robertson introduced his current research project on neo-Gnostic groups in the UK. While his fieldwork has taken place in Edinburgh, the particular group originated from Colombia and can be placed in a complex web of South American and global neo-Gnostic movements, seemingly as complicated and contentious as their early Christian

Paul Tremlett opens the conference in Milton Keynes.





Bettina Schmidt gives her keynote.

counterparts (the historic validity of the category of 'Gnosticism' aside). One of the most fascinating elements of this research is the manner in which different neo-Gnostic groups present themselves very differently through the adoption of Christian, alternative religious or scientific tropes (i.e. one of the groups having adopted a full Catholic style Church hierarchy, vestments etc.). Hilde Capparella presented her paper on "Rastafarianism in Motion" which explored both the materiality of Rastafarianism, demonstrating that Rastafarian communities have much stronger relationship with material objects than is commonly understood (over and above the obvious aesthetics of the movement – dreadlocks, Reggae, Ethiopian symbolism etc.). The paper also provided a tantalising glimpse into her comparative research on diasporic Rastafarians in the UK and converts to Rastafarianism in Israel and Rome.

"Unbelief, Magic and Modernity" introduced the ongoing research of OU postdocs Richard Irvine and Theodoros Kyriakides on unbelief and magical think-

ing on the Orkney island of Rousay and Cyprus respectively. Both of these papers demonstrated some of the ways in which sceptical attitudes often coexisted with folk practices and beliefs which can be deemed 'magical', such as use of the evil eye in Cyprus and the use of dowsing in Rousay. The final paper in the panel was given by Jonathan Wooley, on "Practical Magic: British Paganism from Religious Affiliation Towards Popular Enchantment" which examined some of the tensions in the Paganism between conforming to established discourses of 'religion' and the more counter-cultural elements within Paganism.

Later I attended the panel "Pilgrimage in the Contemporary West" beginning with Avril Maddrell and Richard Scriven's paper on Celtic pilgrimages in Ireland and the Isle of Man. The paper explored the changing ways in which pilgrims engaged in embodied practices with differing relations to the established religious traditions surrounding the sites. Vivian Asimos discussed the UK gathering of the

fans of American youtube star Jesse Cox (collectively known as "Space Butterflies"), stressing the shared sense of community and emotional significance of the event for its participants. While I am not particularly enamoured with the Implicit Religion approach, I must admit that this certainly provides an interesting case of pilgrimage which would not be conventionally understood as such.

While I normally prefer to avoid the stress of ducking between panels, I was quite determined to catch as much of the panel on information and religion as I could. Luckily, I caught Hizer Mir's paper "There is no God but Kek and Pepe is his Prophet: The Alt Right, Kekistan and the Utilization of the Islamicate." I am unfortunately all too familiar with the online presence of the 'alt right' movement, albeit through journalists and other non-academic critics. I have long maintained that this movement and its reliance on coded language and memes to bring far-right concepts into the mainstream has been particularly ripe for analysis from a religious studies perspective. As Mir explained, their use of memes such as Pepe the Frog identified with the God 'Kek' and the oppressed nation of 'Kekistan' fits into the study of parody religion but also provides data on how discourses surrounding established religions and other imagined communities such as ethnicities and nations, are used or at times subverted. Syed Mustafa Ali followed this with a rich overview of informational religions such as transhumanist movements, and their relationship with race. As opposed to the more overt (though often presented as ironic) racism of the alt right, these movements instead promote a kind of 'colour-blind' universalism which nonetheless has tended to reinforce their overwhelming whiteness.

In "Religion and the Public Sphere", Anna Blackburn spoke about her fieldwork with the London Catholic Worker Community an avowedly pacifist anarchist movement. Though the audience was provided with a very clear understanding of the activities and worldview of the movement, I think that some of the possibilities for tension with the church hierarchy are ripe for exploration. Nick Toseland discussed the manner in which the symbolism of the royal wedding has been interpreted within conspiracist circles, especially in the work of David Icke. Avril Maddrell, Katie McClymont, Yasminah Beebejan, Danny McNally and Brenda Matthijssen presented the results of their project on death, burial and mortuary rites in the UK among minority communities. This paper showed the

manner in which adhering to burial or other mortuary conventions was a negotiated process with the authorities and local institutions with varying levels of frustration and success. It should be mentioned that it was good to see such a genuinely interdisciplinary paper incorporating scholars from fields such as urban planning. Hopefully religious studies conferences can continue and increase our appeal to the wider academic community in the future.

The second day of the conference was closed by a keynote from BASR President Steven Sutcliffe examining the economy of new spiritualities using the conceptual tools provided by Pierre Bourdieu such as 'field', 'cultural capital' and 'habitus'. The paper particularly focused on the practices of spiritual seekership as it developed throughout the 20th century and argued convincingly that this practice should not be viewed as a kind of 'vacuum' but rather a socially embedded practice, though one would certainly hope that the study of seekership and alternative spirituality is no longer controversial within the academy.

Another 'religious' social formation though which I would contend is crying out for critical analysis and de-mystification is the 'interfaith' scene and I was glad to contribute to a panel on interfaith at the end of the conference. Fiona Bowie opened the panel with a paper on the Focalare movement, a group founded in Italy which has worked extensively in sub-Saharan Africa and which has a strong interfaith and intercultural component. Katie McClymont discussed the manner in which community spaces can be sites of 'secular faith' or attain a 'sacred' character despite, or perhaps because, of significant demographic change and diversification. My own paper discussed the organisation Interfaith Scotland and the manner in which their representation of religious diversity in modern Scotland demonstrated an underlying commitment to the world religions paradigm and a board kind of civic and cultural nationalism. The conference was closed by a final keynote given by Philip Williamson on the surprisingly fraught, complex and dynamic history of Remembrance Day and other commemorations of the war dead since 1914. The paper was careful to address the different perspectives of British churches, rather than simply focusing on the established churches. [Ed. - All three keynotes may be viewed at <http://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/religious-studies/?cat=105>].

Drawing on the significant strengths of the Open University with new media, attendees were also given the opportunity to receive training in social media after the end of the conference. It was exciting to see how much live tweeting was incorporated into the proceedings of the conference through a conference hashtag and the use of dedicated screens with the RS department's social media feeds. Overall this conference was a resounding success which offered a diverse and stimulating range of papers which could compete with any of the major annual conferences and which demonstrates the important place which the OU has within British religious studies.

Liam Sutherland
University of Edinburgh

THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF SUN MYUNG MOON AND THE UNIFICATION MOVEMENTS IN SCHOLARLY PERSPECTIVE. 29-30 MAY 2017. FACULTY OF COMPARATIVE STUDY OF RELIGION AND HUMANISM (FVG), ANTWERP.

This is one of the strangest conferences I have ever attended. The event was originally conceived as a scholarly investigation of the various schisms in the Unification Movement that have developed after the death in 2012 of founder-leader Sun Myung Moon. CESNUR usually attracts a few representatives from new religious movements, but on this occasion the Unificationists' presence far outnumbered the impartial scholars. I counted that out of roughly 50 attendees, only eight were academics who did not belong to the organisation.

The three main factions in post-Moon Unificationism were present and gave presentations: the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (the largest organisation, headed by Moon's wife), the Family Peace Association (led by Moon's eldest son Hyun Jin), and the Sanctuary Church (the smallest splinter group, with Moon's youngest son Hyung Jin in control).

Representatives of all three factions gave presentations, generating heated debates with their rivals, often on detailed points of Unification theology such as whether or not Hak Ja Han Moon (Sun Myung

Moon's widow) was born free of original sin, whether she had the status of "True Parent" or "True Mother", or—as the Sanctuary Church maintained—the "whore of Babylon", having allegedly failed her husband in the final hour. Some even accused her of murdering her husband by switching off his life-support equipment.

Feelings ran high, and various attendees claimed that their rivals should not have been given a platform, or that there was insufficient right of reply. At a personal level, relationships were cordial, since members of rival groups had previously worked together and established friendships when Sun Myung Moon was leader. However, it became unclear whether we were present as scholars, or whether the organisers had set the stage for a fascinating piece of fieldwork in which we were participant-observers, or whether this was a negotiating table, since it was evidently the first occasion on which these three main rival parties had been brought together.

It was a fascinating phenomenon, although, having listened to the minutiae of Unification theological debate, I came away unsure whether I was better informed or even more confused.

George D. Chryssides
York St John University

THE EUROPEAN SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF WESTERN ESOTERICISM (ESSWE) CONFERENCE, 1-3 JUNE 2017, UNIVERSITY OF ERFURT, GERMANY

The sixth international conference of ESSWE, on the theme "Esotericism and Deviance," was organized by Dr Bernd-Christian Otto (University of Erfurt), in association with University of Erfurt's Max Weber Centre for Advance Cultural and Social Studies. The opening had speeches from the Director of the Weber Centre Hartmut Rosa, the President of ESSWE Andreas Kilcher, and Bernd Otto, welcoming a sizeable attendance to what promised to be a fascinating meeting in a picturesque small city. The presence of drinks, finger food, and a musical ensemble only added to the pleasure of this reception. The first real session was a Plenary Panel of three

speakers: Olav Hammer (University of Southern Denmark), Jay Johnston (University of Sydney) and Kocku von Stuckrad (University of Groningen). These opening remarks on differing views of deviance set the tone for the four parallel streams of paper sessions. Due to the large number of papers this report is necessarily selective. The “Deviance and Othering” session featured: Per Faxneld (Mid-Sweden University) speaking on “Baron Jacques and Double Deviance: Homosexuality and Satanism in 1900;” followed by Justine M. Bakker (Rice University) on “Race in/and the Construct and Study of Western Esotericism;” Christian Greer (University of Amsterdam) presenting on “Electric Kool-Aid on the Altar: A Typological Definition of 1960s LSD Sectarianism;” and concluding with Susannah Crockford’s (London School of Economics) “We Are Not New Agers: Spirituality, Othering, and Appropriation in Neoliberal Capitalism.” All these papers superficially sound very different, but strands emerged that connected them all quite effectively, in terms of personal spiritual quests and popular cultural trends.

In the afternoon of the first day I attended a session titled “The Cultic Milieu Reconsidered: Mapping, Modelling, and Explaining ‘Deviant’ Subcultures,” in which the stand-out paper was Jesper Aagaard Petersen (Norwegian University of Science and Technology) on “The Satanic Milieu: Mapping and Modelling Double Deviance.” Friday 2 June’s parallel sessions included “Contemporary Esotericism”, in which I presented on “Deviant to Mainstream: The Process Church of the Final Judgement and the Holy Order of MANS,” in company with Rafal T. Prinke (Eugeniusz Piasecki University, Poland) on “The Four Glasses: Lionel Snell’s Esoteric Analytical Categories and the Scholarly Discourse,” and Cavan McLaughlin (University of Northampton) on “Occultural Intrusions: Signposting and Mediating Otherness.” The session rather vaguely termed “Magic 2” contained excellent presentations from Katerina Zorya (Independent Scholar) on “Possession, Summoning and Magical Ability in Fiction-Based Esoteric Practices” and Bernd Otto on “Western Learned Magic and Deviance.” The second plenary was focused on historical research, with Richard L. Gordon (University of Erfurt), Claire Fanger (Rice University) and Marion Gibson (University of Exeter, UK).

The conference dinner was held at Pier 37, a picturesque restaurant on the river in the old part of the city, and was a large and convivial gathering. On Sat-

urday 3 June, the third plenary panel addressed “ES-SWE Related Research at Erfurt” and featured presentations by Martin Mulsow and Jörg Rüpke (University of Erfurt) and Marco Pasi (University of Amsterdam). Paper sessions were interesting and challenging: Massimo Introvigne’s session on the Movement for Spiritual Integration into the Absolute (MISA), a little-known group centred on Grigorian Bivolaru in Romania, which featured papers by Pierluigi Zoccatelli (Pontifical Salesian University) and Raffaello di Marzio, as well as Introvigne himself, that covered legal and popular cultural issues associated with this controversial new religious group. Scholarly publishing efforts were recognized, with Egil Asprem delivering a topical paper “Introducing the Brill Dictionary of Contemporary Esotericism: How to Map the Mutable Present?” In addition to being an academic event, ESSWE as Erfurt was linked to popular media, with Franck Agier of Baglis TV, a media organization based in Paris with an online channel devoted to religion and esotericism, filming several sessions: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCqWpM-apH8LoJG8mfymz1uzw>. At the conclusion of the conference Bernd-Christian Otto and his team from Erfurt were resoundingly thanked for a stimulating and entertaining conference.

Carole M. Cusack
University of Sydney

SPALDING SYMPOSIUM ON INDIAN RELIGIONS, DURHAM, 13TH - 15TH APRIL 2018

The 43rd Spalding Symposium on Indian Religions was held in the graceful surroundings of Hatfield College, University of Durham, and was hosted by Dr Yulia Egorova with the assistance of Dr Jonathan Miles-Watson. This year’s Symposium did not have a stated theme and the papers ranged broadly from concealed anti-Semitism in contemporary India (Dr Yulia Egorova), to Early Mahāyāna Buddhist textual strategies for eliciting transformative aesthetic experience (Professor Nathalie Gummer). However, it did have the flavour of a homecoming, something that Dr Miles-Watson made explicit when he traced the connections between the symposium’s founder Professor Karel Werner, the Spalding family, Durham



Postgraduate presentation by
Güzin A. Yener (Oxford)

University, and the collections at the Oriental Museum.

The keynote speakers were Professor Kunal Chakrabarti (Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi) and Professor Emerita Eleanor Nesbitt (University of Warwick). Unfortunately, disputes at JNU prevented Professor Chakrabarti from attending; as a result of which, his paper on the evolution of negative and

positive concepts of feminine divinity in Brahmanical contexts was instead engagingly read by Dr Brian Black (Lancaster University). Closing the symposium on Sunday Professor Nesbitt presented a fascinating, and self-reflexive, view of her on-going project on the representations of Sikhs in over two centuries of western women's writing. This was followed by lively discussions on the previously dominant ideologies haunting several of these accounts and the possibil-

ity, or not, of categorising any of these sources as ethnographies. This was a conversation that highlighted the unique perspectives collated by Professor Nesbitt. Perspectives mostly unencumbered by an investment in the official narratives and positions so often exhibited by state supported commentators. All in all a fascinating look at an evolving project.

Aside from the keynotes, and the contributions of the organisers, we were offered eleven papers and two related presentations. This number comprised those that included findings of fieldwork in India, and those that concerned themselves more exclusively with ancient textual source materials. In the former category was an intriguing and visceral look at possession during the *Manasā Pūjā*, or Deodhanī festival, at the temple of *Kāmākhyā* near Guwahati in Assam by Dr Mikel Burley (University of Leeds). Whilst documenting these ritual transgressions of Brahmanical purity norms, Dr Burley also brought Mikhail Bahktin's version of the concept of 'the grotesque' into play as a theoretical framework for interpreting the animal sacrifices enacted. The presentation was further animated both by video documentation of the performances, and by recreations from behind the lectern. Combining both categories was Dr Marzena Jakubczak's (Pedagogical University of Cracow) paper. This was a philosophically orientated delineation of the distinctions between devotional practices—particularly *īśvarapraṇidhāna* (meditation on god)—in the classical texts of *Sāṃkhya* and *Yoga* that provided the basis for a discussion of more modern related practices in the neo-classical *Sāṃkhya* of Swāmi Hariharānanda Āraṇya and his disciples. This discussion was enlivened by documentation of the current state of the Kapil Math in Bihar.

Also notable as a special treat for all Mahāyāna enthusiasts was the back-to-back presentation on Saturday morning of papers by Dr Chris V. Jones (University of Oxford), and Professor Nathalie Gummer (Beloit College, Wisconsin). Dr Jones gave us elucidations of the previously underexplored notion of 'saṃdhā-speech' from the Mahāyāna–Mahāparinirvāṇamahāsūtra (*Nirvāṇa Sūtra*) and *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra* (*Lotus Sūtra*), teasing out the nuances of this slippery term from translators' terminological choices in several Classical Chinese and Tibetan textual variants and ancillary sources. He also argued convincingly for the concept's critical position within a later Mahāyāna rhetoric that sought

to justify doctrinal innovation by re-categorising the Buddha's utterances to allow for oblique, strongly allusive, and even contradictory interpretations. Following this was Professor Gummer's contribution to the emerging 'poetic turn' in Mahāyāna scholarship. Unwrapping the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*'s and the *Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra*'s (*Sūtra of Utmost Golden Light*) perlocutionary capacities, Professor Gummer argued for continuities between Vedic sacrificial rituals conferring sovereignty, the Mahāyāna literature exemplified here, and the nascent genre of courtly eulogy / poetry (*praśasti/kāvya*).

Further to these stimulating papers, Dr Garima Kaushik (Nalanda University) made the long journey from Bihar to discuss her work on Indian inscriptional evidence and Dr Brian Black stepped in again to fill the gap left by a withdrawal, providing insights into his forthcoming work on the *Mahābhārata*. We were also offered wide-ranging contributions from the following post-graduate students: Sophie Barker (Lancaster University); Sayori Ghoshal (Columbia University NY); Güzin A. Yener (University of Oxford); Durga Kale (University of Calgary), and Zuzana Špícová (Charles University, Prague). Finally, adding valuable perspectives were presentations on the teaching of Indian religions in schools by Drs Naomi Appleton (University of Edinburgh) and Brian Black (Lancaster University), and the work of the Oriental Museum in Durham by curator Ms Rachel Barclay and access and community engagement officer Ms Charlotte Spink.

In sum, the symposium reflected the inclusive ethos of its organisers and exhibited a programme with a carefully considered structure. This allowed the space for a good amount of discussion on the sidelines to be combined with the open, and rigorous, academic discourse held in the formal sessions. Furthermore, a convivial atmosphere and the provision of excellent victuals complemented the olde-world charm of Durham to make this a memorable occasion.

Next year's symposium will be held at Lancaster University; details of which will be forthcoming on <https://spaldingsymposium.org/>

Nic Newton
University of Edinburgh

BRITISH ASSOCIATION FOR ISLAMIC STUDIES (BRAIS) CONFERENCE 2018, UNIVERSITY OF EXETER, 9-11TH APRIL 2018

The 2018 Conference of the British Association for Islamic Studies recently took place at the University of Exeter's Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies (IAIS) from the 9th to the 11th of April; this was the fifth annual conference, and built on the successes of previous gatherings (Edinburgh 2014, London 2015 and 2016, and Chester 2017). BRAIS' mission is to showcase the best of current research in Islamic Studies, broadly defined. This year's papers represented an impressive range of disciplinary backgrounds, historic periods and geographic foci, from the Late Antique to the Contemporary and from South East Asia to the Americas. Philologists, anthropologists and art historians, among others, were active participants in this year's proceedings; BRAIS actively cultivates diversity in contributions to its conferences. This year as previously, doctoral students were heavily represented in the programme, alongside more established scholars, with attendees travelling from as far away as Australia and Indonesia to present. In total, around 110 papers were presented, and more than 200 people attended. Attendees were particularly impressed by the publishers' exhibition, located adjacent to the refreshments area, which included many university presses (Oxford, Edinburgh, etc), as well as commercial ones (such as Brill and De Gruyter).

BRAIS was delighted to welcome three distinguished scholars as plenary speakers. Robert Hoyland spoke of the place of Persian narratives in early Islamic historiographical writing; Jon Hoover addressed Ibn Taymiyya as an ethicist who sought to balance pragmatism and idealism in his work; the final speaker, Masooda Bano, concluded with a lecture on Islamic Education. At any one time, there was an average of six parallel sessions taking place. Important business was decided at the annual general meeting, with thanks being conveyed to the outgoing Treasurer (Saeko Yazaki), and a warm welcome being extended to the new Secretary (Sean McLoughlin), who had been in post for several months and was already heavily involved with conference organisation. BRAIS members voted to approve a new statement of the association's commitment to equality and diversity, and questions were entertained on the year's financial incomings and outgoings.

Shortly after the annual general meeting, the annual BRAIS-De Gruyter Prize ceremony took place; this year's competition for the best doctoral thesis was exceptionally tough. The Prize Committee, faced with deciding between a number of outstanding contributions, chose to split first place between Drs Sara Verskin and Elias Saba, for theses completed at Princeton University and the University of Pennsylvania respectively. Dr Verskin, with her thesis on barrenness in medieval Islamic thought, made a 'remarkable' contribution to the field, a contribution acknowledged by the leading specialist in the area (who served as external reviewer) as in some respects surpassing their own. Dr Saba's thesis on the literature of *Furūq* (distinctions between legal cases) was equally lauded by the external reviewer and the Prize Committee, who concluded that it will be indispensable to future studies of post-classical Islamic Law. Feedback received by the organisers indicated that participants were, overall, highly satisfied with the academic quality of the papers presented and pleased with the organisation of the conference. BRAIS looks forward to welcoming attendees to its next annual conference, which will be taking place on the 15th to 17th of April 2019 at the University of Nottingham.

Omar Anchassi
University of Exeter

Image credits: Cover - Statuette of Isis-Fortuna, 2nd century A.D., Bronze. 19 cm (7 1/2 in.). The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program. 7 & 8 - Dominic Corrywright. 15 - Christopher Cotter. 20 - "holzfigur totem" by anaterate on pixabay.com. 24 & 25 - David G. Robertson. 29 - Nic Newton.

reviews

DONOVAN O. SCHAEFER, 2015. RELIGIOUS AFFECTS: ANIMALITY, EVOLUTION, AND POWER. DURHAM, NC AND LONDON: DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS.

It was language that ultimately saved us from the death of *sui generis* religion. Even lacking in essence, we still had the category named “religion” and the history and present of its interpellation—its (frequently violent) mappings onto a plurality of beliefs and practices, varied in form and function, across the world. These at least could yet be studied—and studied as “religion.” Further, we could conceive of this “religion” as itself a language, as tied to and working like a language to designate and explicate the unstable contours of our world. And as language is a system built upon the differentiation between linguistic signs, the linguistic paradigm of religion also permitted the continued differentiation—once grounded in assumed essence, now in the effects that assumption had wrought—of “religion” from its others, from the things we continued to name other than “religion”—as “culture” or “society,” “philosophy” or “politics.”

Donovan O. Schaefer’s *Religious Affects: Animality, Evolution, and Power* is a strident critique of the linguistic paradigm of religion—of religion as a set of axioms, a language that believers use in rationalistic fashion to comprehend the world. It is also an equally strident critique of the idea of religion as a discrete object, named and nameable, easily differentiated from its occasional bedfellows. Hybridizing affect theory—itsself a queer, hybrid of diffuse critical theories—with post-Darwinian evolutionary biology,

Schaefer reimagines religion as inextricable from the bodies that practise it, bodies ineluctably embedded within networks of power and conditioned by an inheritance of intransigent, accidental evolutionary legacies. The many threads of the work cohere around a binary drawn from an 1864 speech by Benjamin Disraeli, in which the Member of Parliament contrasts Darwinian evolution’s association of humanity with apes to Christianity’s alignment of it with angels—declaring himself for the latter. In *Religious Affects*, Schaefer becomes Disraeli’s Devil’s Advocate, knowingly joining the Primate’s Party and framing the work as an impassioned defence of humanity’s embodied animality against “the presupposition that we are angels, that we can dictate to our bodies how to feel about the world, or lack thereof” (100). The systemic consequence of this critique are made clear early in the work, when Disraeli’s angel is aligned with what Schaefer terms, following Teresa Brennan, the “foundational fantasy” (65) of the liber, the “freeman”—the a priori auto-nomous (self-lawed, self-sovereign) and self-contained individual that grounds the political and cultural imaginary of Western liberalism, “the language-using, animal-eating, male subject who masters the world” (153).

Affects actualize Schaefer’s work of ape apologetics, driving its deconstruction of the “myth of angelic self-sovereignty” (117). “Affects invert the metaphysical emphasis on the human’s rational sovereignty over its body,” Schaefer writes, “retracing us as nests of animal becoming... Affective economies are directed by compulsions—by autotelic forces that derail the abacus of rational self-interest” (166).

Such an affective resituating of the human as more animal than angel requires a similar resituating of human religion, in which affect theory “shifts the focus from religion as an ensemble of well-thought-out rationales to the animal religion of endless chase: our fragility, our compulsion, and our need” (100). This animalization of religion does not deny religions’ linguistic dimensions, but enfolds them in broader affective economies; “Religious talk is a way of articulating bodies to systems of power mediated by affect: it addresses itself to the problem of where bodies go not by explaining things but by instrumenting its own regime of compulsions” (118). Schaefer explores a range of such regimes, including discourses of Islamophobia around Park51—the “Ground Zero Mosque” that was neither—fundamentalist Christianity as displayed in the documentary film *Jesus Camp*, and popular philosophy of science, such as the work of Daniel C. Dennett. Theorizing each, Schaefer weaves his disparate examples into a web of affective relations enmeshed in, but not predetermined by, networks of bodies and power. Schaefer’s text is often as affectively charged as the contexts he examines, his rhetoric—particularly in the final chapter—soars and dives, at times threatening to destabilize the reader (indeed, this is often its purpose); nonetheless, his analysis is always nuanced and apposite, revealing how actors of diverse inclinations and allegiances conduct and are conducted by complex affective economies of hatred and compassion, hope and despair, aversion and desire.

This affective animalization of religion as inextricable from fluid intersections of bodies and power, as bound up with need rather than a system of nomenclature, disrupts the ease of mapping the category “religion” onto sets of discursive or material practices. Ideas of “‘authentic’ religion—whether it presumes that religion is always social control, always violent, or always peaceful” become “unworkable” (143), but the Enlightenment-style taxonomies ensured by the linguistic paradigm that facilitate a marking of con-

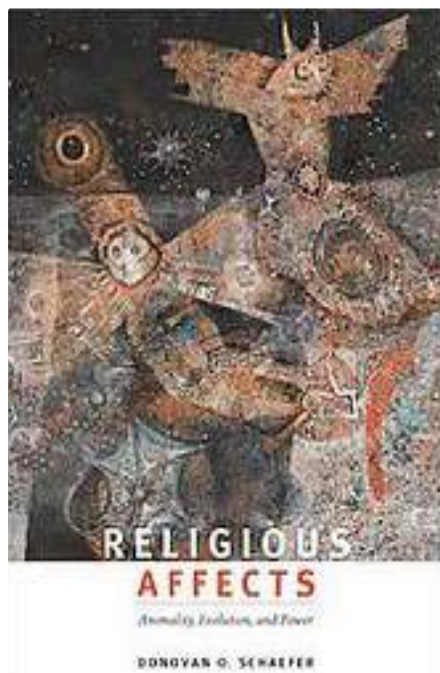
cepts as religious/not religious also begin to blur.

Approaching the midpoint of *Religious Affects*, Schaefer outlines one possible ramification of affectively unsettling this paradigm: “does the liberal model of the separation of church and state dissolve when we imagine bodies as fluid systems of force?” he asks (86). The idea of “religion” as a set of axioms, a language that may (or may not) be mapped onto the world, permits a demarcation of terrain. By marking some notions as religious, others as political, cultural, social, etcetera, it renders the cross-contamination of spheres both detectable and avoidable; to shatter the reduction of religion to linguistic roadmap is to blur the possibility of differentiation that language—as a system built on the differentiation between linguistic signs—enables. Ending the supremacy of the linguistic paradigm (which is not to dissolve the paradigm tout court, only unsettle its primacy) demands an interrogation

of how ostensibly disparate categories hybridize rather than syncretise, mobilized by affects that compel bodies into worlds, heedless of whether such compulsions or their effects are catalogued and codified under the header “religion” or one of its others.

Maybe the clearest—and ironically underdeveloped—example of this breakdown is that of Schaefer’s structuring metaphor itself. Framing his book through the conflict between ape and angel, Schaefer elides the double meaning inherent in the “myth of angelic self-sovereignty.” One thread that runs through Christian theology might aptly be called the theme of “angel-

ic compulsion.” For Aquinas, for example, angels were seen as compelled to virtue or sin by the force of their first choice either to serve or defy God. Phrased otherwise, angels—perhaps even more so than apes—are not free. Like the ape enmeshed in affective economies, the angel is also directed by an intransigent inheritance that it cannot choose. Yet it is compelled not by the surging flux of embodied affects, the chaotic dance, the game of endless chase,



but by a singular love and devotion, an unbreakable loyalty to a transcendent power—to God—that gives purpose to its action and stability to its sense-making, predestining it to beatific fulfilment. This observation is not intended as a critique of Schaefer’s frame, for if anything the compulsion of angels reinforces rather than undermines his critique of the West’s “foundational fantasy.” It asks us to reconsider whether the fantasy of the liber—and the political, cultural, and intellectual imaginary that this figure enables—is merely that we are angels, or whether it might be the belief that being angels—corralling our unruly affects in absolute allegiance to a unitary image of transcendence, whether God or Reason, being devoted to and compelled by it and it alone, cradled in the unambiguity its categorical certainties promise us—makes us free.

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MICHELLE MARY LELWICA. 2017. SHAMEFUL BODIES: RELIGION AND THE CULTURE OF PHYSICAL IMPROVEMENT. LONDON, NEW YORK: BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC.

Shameful Bodies continues themes from Lelwica’s earlier works, in particular *The Religion of Thinness* and *Starving for Salvation*. It broadens her concern beyond the relationship between religion and body image to look at the social construction of the body in terms of size, age, disability, and chronic pain or illness. Lelwica characterises the normative construction of the body as “the better body story”. Throughout the work she explains what this story is and why it is so pervasive in American culture. This is a timely work that speaks to a particular liberal American sensibility. It aims at empowerment and overcoming prejudice in regards to the body, and is especially concerned with ending self-directed body shaming.

Part one deconstructs “the better body story”. Lel-

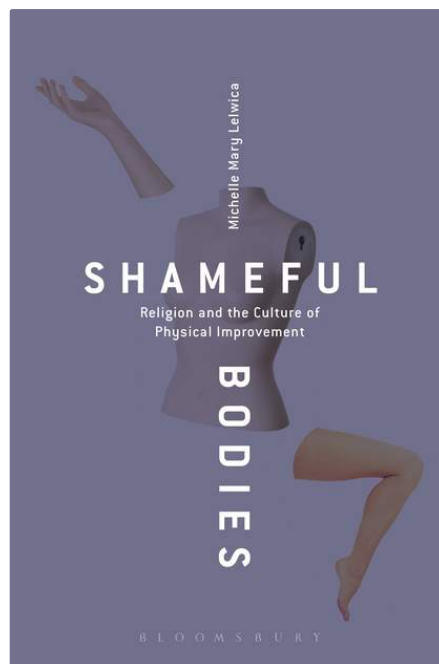
wica addresses the corporeal history of Christianity and relates how self-improvement functions as a form of religion. She offers an alternative religious paradigm for embodiment, derived from a Western interpretation of Buddhism. Part two goes through each of the ‘other’ embodiments, framed as shame; first disability shame, then fat shame, the shame of chronic pain and illness, and lastly the shame of old age. In each section, Lelwica refers to relevant literature by specialists in these fields.

Throughout, Lelwica illustrates how “the better body story” is connected to religion. She traces Christianity’s influence in creating this story. She argues that Christianity is fundamental to embodiment in American culture. The crux of this argument is that it is a

salvation myth; a culturally normative body will save the individual from suffering. However, is this influence really hidden, as Lelwica argues? What she means is that it is hidden in the sense that most Americans would not immediately connect Christianity to contemporary body ideals, especially in regards to oversexualisation. Lelwica makes important points about the religious weight of shame culturally inherited from Christianity. She makes pertinent connections to capitalism, suggesting that there is a profit motive behind the telling of this story.

It is a reflexive work, in which Lelwica tells her own story of dealing with arthritis diagnosed at the age of 47 and her subsequent hip replacement operation. Lelwica describes how she rejected walking with a cane because of its shameful association with age-related deterioration. Instead she tried to deal with the pain through yoga. A personal journey through chronic pain and surgery is used to illustrate the enduring power of “the better body story”, even for one who, as Professor of Religion at a small liberal arts college in Minnesota, has thought deeply and critically about embodiment throughout her career.

Perhaps the most problematic aspect of this work is



the way that Lelwica uses Buddhism as a counterweight to Christianity in suggesting a religion from which to construct a new telling of the story. Embodiment in the Buddhist tradition does not create shame but rather is empowering, she seems to advocate. These points feel the flimsiest. Lelwica mentions Buddhism has patriarchal roots and carefully selects feminist Buddhist and Western Buddhist authors. This utilitarian approach to Buddhism produces a selective glossing rather than a critical engagement.

This is a short book, aimed at university students. It is an easy, quick read. It is not a deep or complex analysis. It is illustrated throughout with photographs of 'better bodies'. Bullet points in the introduction and conclusion summarise the themes of the book and connect them to wider topics. It is not only academic, it clearly has pedagogical and empowerment aims. Lelwica wants to help students and other readers think beyond "the better body story". She wants to aid readers overcome their own feelings of shame and inadequacy and live a richer, more compassionate life. She argues that this has a wider social significance than just feeling better about one's own life. It is about creating a better story for everyone than "the better body story".

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IBRAHIM ABRAHAM, 2017. EVANGELICAL YOUTH CULTURE: ALTERNATIVE MUSIC AND EXTREME SPORTS SUBCULTURES. LONDON: BLOOMSBURY.

In a new contribution to the growing literature on Evangelicalism and popular culture, Ibrahim Abraham provides an excellent overview of the relevant sociological literature (while bringing a few new influences to the debate). From fieldwork in a range of settings, he draws together a fascinating global picture of Evangelical engagements with extreme music and extreme sports. The book surveys an at first dizzying array of youth cultures (surfing, skating, hip hop and punk music) and locations (South Africa, Australia, the UK and the US). While this initially seems a rather broad range, Abraham shows that the influence of evangelical outreach and involvement in youth cultures can be observed in these globalised

settings.

The first chapter proper, 'Evangelical Christianity and Youth Subculture Theory', gives an excellent introduction to and analysis of relevant theoretical foundations. Rightly critical of those who "employ the term 'subculture' offhandedly" (15), Abraham comprehensively but efficiently covers the necessary history of subcultural theory from the Chicago School's ethnographies of "subterranean lives", to the emphasis of the Birmingham CCCS on deriving nascent political resistance from subcultural practice, to a "post-subcultural theory" which recognised that this kind of approach may skate over participants own understandings and motivations in search of the fabled resistant potential. Also brought into this narrative are the specifically Christian and Evangelical inflections of subculture: the Catholic Worker movement, for example, and particularly the Jesus Movement, the latter a vitally important touchstone for understanding post-1960s Evangelical engagements with popular culture and popular music.

We run, then, from subcultural theory to counter-cultures to counter-countercultures. Abraham suggests that this latter term, though an "admittedly obscure idea" (16) is one that is worth examining in relation to religious or Evangelical youth cultures. Here the term can articulate a conjunction of definitions and values constructed in line with or against aspects of a perceived mainstream culture, as well as in relation or response to a counterculture. Marcus Moberg (with whom Abraham engages in places throughout) has described a similar tension in Christian metal as a "double controversy", a stark example of the counter-counterculture. While the literature on subcultures and neotribes and countercultures and resistance might be a well-trodden path, Abraham deals with the material succinctly and concisely, providing an excellent overview of the debate as well as contributing new interventions. These include inviting political philosopher John Rawls to the conversation on punk and postsecularity, thus situating the material within a wider philosophical and sociological tradition.

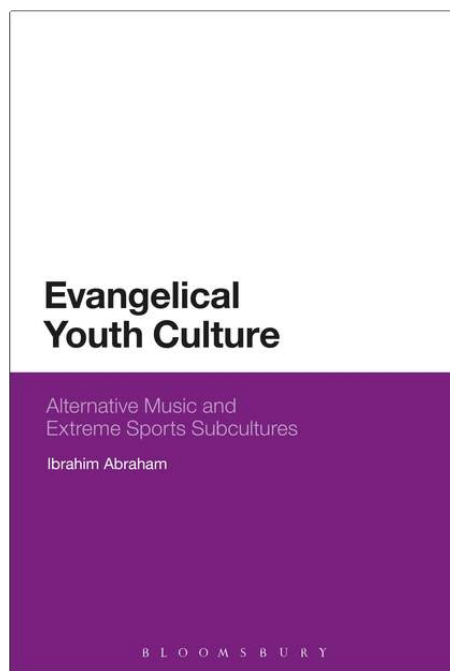
As with many treatments of Evangelicalism in popular music cultures there is little on the sounds of the music and how it might be understood to link to religious ideas and aims, beyond the commonplaces that loud and fast music might be attractive to teen-

agers. Abraham notes in the Introduction that the music-based sample “is primarily made up of musicians, who are the most prominent members of the population” involved in music cultures (11). While this may be true, it is also certainly the case that audiences participate in the construction of meanings and practices, religious and otherwise. The lack of focus on musical sounds and how they can be mobilised or interpreted or used, together with this inattention to audiences, appears to reproduce at the level of analysis the statements of some Evangelicals about the importance of intent to the Christian meaning of particular practices or cultural productions. While this may be an important way for participants to understand how their own religious commitments and youth culture participation are related, I would be interested to hear more about the notorious ambiguities of what sounds and noises might mean, and how the specifically sonic and musical qualities of authenticity relate to the other complexities which Abraham so excellently presents. There is more, for example, on the specific affective qualities of surfing and the ways that a feeling of exhilaration can be harnessed or oriented towards an Evangelical framework. The sociology of class is covered well, though a chapter which could have sharpened its focus on ethnicity and race does not quite live up to its stellar title - ‘Fear of a Black Magic: Evangelical Opposition to Alternative Youth Culture’.

Abraham captures well the tensions and anxieties of negotiating authenticity, recognising (notwithstanding the critical suspicion with which academics may treat the term) that it is a crucially important concept in punk both Christian and secular. Authenticity is thus at stake in notions of artistic creativity and honest self-representation in DIY punk individualism, or from reproducing God’s creative agency, and witnessing the gospel in the different arenas of secular shows or church-affiliated settings. When appeals to authenticity straddle different sources and authorities, things necessarily become complicated, and a

temptation—which Abraham refuses—is to separate the Evangelical punk scene from its secular influences (and vice versa). A real strength of the book, then, is its adept approach to the complexities of authenticity and influence, where the author understands the significance of Christian punk “having achieved a place within any secular local punk scenes and having attracted a significant non-Christian fan base” (41) in marked contrasts with other forms of Christian Contemporary music (and scholarly treatments of them). Acknowledging too that “secular experiences of nominally religious performances are possible as well”, Abraham then is right to assert that “insofar as Christian punk struggles to achieve authenticity within two quite differently organized metagenres, its struggle for recognition constitutes a novel study in the negotiation of identity and ethics in popular music and youth culture” (73). Theoretically astute and an exemplary multi-sited, multi-themed ethnography, Abraham’s book admirably accounts for global commonalities and local specificities in the important relationship between Evangelism and youth cultures.

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The Open University



MALKHAZ SONGULASHVILI, 2015. EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN BAPTISTS OF GEORGIA: THE HISTORY AND TRANSFORMATION OF A FREE CHURCH TRADITION. WACO, TX: BAYLOR UNIVERSITY PRESS.

Whilst much scholarship on evangelicalism focuses on either English speaking countries in the west, or the global south, Malkhaz Songulashvili’s monograph traces the rise and development of the Evangelical Christian Baptist Church in Georgia through the Soviet and post-Soviet eras. The volume begins with a detailed introduction that highlights some of the uniqueness of the Evangelical Christian Baptist Church of Georgia, explains the sources of Songu-

lashvili's research, and outlines the subsequent chapters. Songulashvili discusses the origins of the Eastern Orthodox Church in Georgia through the preaching of St. Nino. Afterwards, he outlines the genesis of Baptist Christianity in Europe and in the Russian Empire through German settlements throughout Eastern Europe.

The first chapter outlines the socio-historical context of Georgia in the nineteenth century, which served as the precursor to the establishment of the Evangelical Christian Baptist Church of Georgia (ECBCG). Songulashvili argues that the social setting of Georgia in this time created, "circumstances favourable to the birth and development of evangelical Christianity" (p. 26). For example, he explains that German Protestants were settling into eastern Europe in search of religious freedom, and although were non-conversionist, established Baptist churches in Transcaucasia, which then contributed to evangelisation of the indigenous population. The writer also notes that under Tsar Nicolas I, a number of Slavic ethno-religious groups settled in Georgia because of forced relocation for their religious beliefs. He further stipulates that a number of these groups held theological positions and exercised Protestant spiritualities that would later be adopted by Russian Baptist and evangelical Christians.

It is asserted that this milieu of increasing religious plurality generated yet more Christian diversity, and that the Tiflis Baptist Church was born out of a mixture of European cultures. The writer also explains that the new denomination was socially engaged and participated in evangelism, and that increased popularity led to the persecution of the Church's members until the start of the twentieth century where Nicholas II demanded religious tolerance. It is claimed that during this time the Church drew on Orthodox spirituality and continued to gain converts from the indigenous population of Georgia. Hence, "Tiflis Baptists became the driving force in spreading the Gospel in its evangelical interpretation to the Russian population of Georgia" (p.84).

The second chapter explores the initial years of the ECBCG, analysing its attempts to become a culturally and politically relevant denomination in the Soviet era. The writer details that the ECBCG came about as the result of the forced amalgamation of the Evangelical Christian and Baptist churches in 1944. According to Songulashvili, the mission of the

Evangelical Christian Baptists occurred in the context of religious repression, but this did not deter them from seeking a culturally relevant missional action plan. He asserts that this undertaking was understood as a revival of what was seen as the underlying, even if eroding, Christian culture of Georgia.

Songulashvili claims that this undercurrent of past religiosity contributed -alongside other factors- to the spread of the ECBCG. Building on previous scholarship, he claims that having a central figure as a means to access salvation (in this case Christ) helps the spread of religion. Fortunately for the ECBCG, this was a pre-existing social resource, according to the writer, who explains that public gatherings and voluntary commitment were also seen to contribute to religious growth, and that both of which are present in the story of the ECBCG, given that, in the communist era, Christianity was an opt-in religion, but also because of the public nature of their worship gatherings. Songulashvili also states that the translation of Bibles into the vernacular was responsible for the denomination's growth, as well as a number of external factors. For example, religious pluralism, it is stated, allowed it to compete in a spiritual market place where there was no monopoly. According to the writer, the establishment of specifically Georgian speaking congregations (rather than Russian) contributed to this also. On the micro level, however, he explains that personal relationships between members of the ECBCG and those outside of it were also influential in its growth.

The proceeding chapter concerns the formation of the ECB's identity as a denomination, primarily between 1942-1989. In particular, it discusses the Church's mission and the wider context of Church-state relationships. Concerning the latter, Songulashvili discusses the ambivalent relationship that the Soviet Union had with Christianity. He suggests that Stalin's approach to the Church was analogous to Constantine's, in so far as Stalin believed that the Church could serve the intentions of the State. For example, Songulashvili's claims that by re-establishing the Moscow Patriarchate (i.e. the Russian Orthodox Church) the state attempted to smooth relationships with the west. Nonetheless, he evidences that tolerance (however convoluted) extended to other Christian denominations, and allowed Baptists and evangelicals to reopen churches, although the state put pressure on both parties to

merge, indicating that the state did not grant churches full autonomy.

Nevertheless, it is argued that religious belief, and the ECBCG in particular, enjoyed growth for a number of reasons. For example, the writer asserts that, after Stalin's death, de-Stalinisation damaged irreligion as those living in the USSR lost their faith in communism. Songulashvili also states that the relative freedom and openness to religious belief was utilised by the ECBCG and evangelism became a pressing concern for some key leaders in the Church, and that this period was, in part, characterised by ecumenism, for example, between the ECBCG and the Russian Orthodox Church. It is claimed that this impacted their mission: in particular, the ECBCG emphasised the catholicity of the Christian Church's mission, and thus that all Christians, regardless of national identity, ought to be seen as belonging to the nation. Crucially, it is argued, this reveals that ecumenism was seen as integral to evangelism in Georgia.

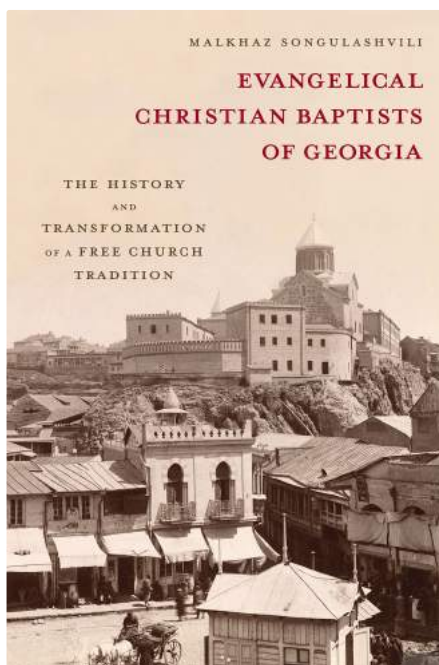
Chapter four discusses the nature of evangelism in Post-Soviet Georgia. It is noted that the break up of the USSR gave the ECBCG increased independence from the Russian Orthodox Church, and that this led to the ECBCG adopting art, symbol, and language within their worship that more organically reflected Georgian culture. The writer describes how the Church established a seminary, and the conscious effort to engage the Georgian people by indicating what the Church positively stood for, rather than only what it stood against. He also explains that evangelistic efforts were employed towards intellectuals, children and youth, and marginalised groups, such as the disabled, forging links with social institutions as they did so. However, evangelism was viewed as an invitational activity, rather than as one of coercion, according to Songulashvili, who also details that the Church affirmed gender equality and ordained wo-

men. However, it is argued that relationships with the Moscow Patriarchate waned and the possibility of competition for laity became a stark possibility as the Orthodox Church questioned the legitimacy of the ECBCG to preach. Nonetheless, the writer states that by 2001 relationships were improving and the ECBCG maintained that evangelism was about conversion to Christ, rather than from one religious group to another, and intentionally avoided proselytism.

The final chapter explores the reforms that happened in the ECB from the 1990s. It examines the pre-conditions, particularly those involving politics, ecclesiology, history, ecumenical, educational and national factors. It then explores the reforms that were necessary in this milieu. For example, the fact that the ECB followed the lead of the European Baptist Women's Union who began to engage with the social needs of those outside of the Church is discussed. It is posited that they sought to aid those in economic hardship with food, medicine, cleaning and washing, and it is claimed that this was entering into new territory for the ECB as the authorities had previously only granted permission for the denomination to look after

those with denominational affiliation. Songulashvili also states that the ECB began relief work among refugees in Georgia, and engaged in political activism.

However, the chapter evidences that reform also had internal manifestations. For example, changing the liturgy to meet contemporary needs amongst the Georgian population, as well as including women (ordained and lay) more fully in the liturgy are noted. Songulashvili also describes the introduction of a painted cross onto the walls of church buildings as a point of contention, because it was seen by some as a symbol of previous persecution under the Tsars.



The conclusion reflects historically on the relationship between the ECB and its wider culture. Songulashvili concludes that the mission of the ECB has been marked by, “a unique convergence of cultures and socio-political experiences” (p.336), as well as by a strong desire to integrate Georgian culture with mission, with a particular emphasis on aesthetical concerns. These aspects, he claims, demonstrate the uniqueness and pioneering spirit of the ECB.

This is an unusual volume in so far as it explores a little known religious phenomenon, not least by employing historical material inaccessible to many scholars of religion due to linguistic barriers. That is, Songulashvili draws on texts written in a number of languages from Eastern Europe. Naturally this is an appropriate enterprise for such an undertaking, and it brings knowledge into the wider academic community that, without the author’s efforts, risk being lost to English-speaking researchers. This is

something for which scholars of evangelicalism in particular ought to be grateful to Songulashvili for. It is a thoroughly comprehensive monograph that is chronologically and thematically arranged in a coherent manner. It is a delightful contribution to research in World Christianity, and certainly has scope to be useful to students and researchers of the Soviet era also. It is saturated with primary sources, although it would have been beneficial to have greater engagement with theoretical frameworks than it does, in order to more intentionally interact with wider scholarly debate. On the other hand, it should be appreciated that this could risk detracting from the rich and detailed exploration of historical data, and would have enlarged an already substantial and highly informative volume.

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GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

News Items	Up to 150 words
Conference Reports	500-1500 words
Conference Announcements	Not more than a single page
Book Reviews	700-1000 words
Features	Around 1000 words
Members' Recent Publications	Maximum 5 items

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Members' Recent Publications

George D. Chryssides

- 2017 "Ethical Scholars and Unethical Committees." *Fieldwork in Religion* 12 (2), 223-238.
- 2017 Editorial and guest editor. *Fieldwork in Religion* 12 (2), 143–147. Special Issue: "Ethics and Fieldwork".
- 2017 *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*. De Gruyter. Entries on: Krishna; Labor (Work) IV.E; Land IV.C; Last Supper II.C; Law V.E.; Leader, Leadership IV.E. Vol.15, 474-477; 576-577; 794-795; 839-840; 1015-1016; 1143-1146.

James L. Cox

- 2018 *Restoring the Chain of Memory: T.G.H. Strehlow and the Repatriation of Australian Indigenous Knowledge*. Equinox.

Douglas Davies

- 2017 *Death, Ritual and Belief: The Rhetoric of Funerary Rites* (3rd edition). Bloomsbury.
- 2017 "Death's Impossible Date". In *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Mortality and its Timings*. Shane McCorristine (ed.). Palgrave/Macmillan, 103-117.
- 2017 "Death in Material and mental culture." In *Materiality and the Study of Religion: the Stuff of the Sacred*. Tim Hutchings and Joanne McKenzie (eds.). Routledge.
- 2017 *Cremation in Modern Scotland: History, Architecture, and the Law*. With Peter Jupp, Douglas Davies, Hilary Grainger, Gordon Raeburn, and Stephen White. John Donald-Berlin Ltd.

Wendy Dossett

- 2017 "'A daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition.' A commentary on Kelly, J. F. (2016). Is Alcoholics Anonymous religious, spiritual, neither? Findings from 25 years of mechanisms of behavior change research: How AA works." In *Addiction* 112, 942-943.
doi.org/10.1111/add.13731
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Mathew Guest

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Rosalind Hackett

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2017 "Sounds Indigenous: Negotiating Identity in an Era of World Music." *The Brill Handbook of Indigenous Religion(s)*. Greg Johnson and Siv Ellen Kraft (eds). Brill, 108-119.

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David Henderson

2014 *Apophatic Elements in the Theory and Practice of Psychoanalysis: Pseudo-Dionysius and C.G. Jung*. Routledge

2014 "Nkisi nkondi: an image of transference and projective identification in the analytic process." *Psychodynamic Practice*, 20 (1), 62-67.

Michael Miller

2015 *The Name of God in Jewish Thought: A Philosophical Analysis of Mystical Traditions from Apocalyptic to Kabbalah*. Routledge.

2016 "Mordecai Kaplan and Wittgenstein: Atheism, Phenomenology, and the Use of Language" *Melilah - Manchester Journal of Jewish Studies* 12, 70-83.

2016 "The Evolution of the Patriarch Enoch in Jewish Tradition." *Distant Worlds* 1.1, 128-141.

2018 (in press) "Prophecy and Visions: Jewish Traditions" and "Journey to the Other World: Jewish Traditions" in *Prophecy and Prognostication in Medieval European and Mediterranean Societies*. Matthias Heiduk et al (eds.). de Gruyter.

2017 "Apocalypse of Enoch" in *End of Days: An Encyclopaedia of the Apocalypse in World Religions*. Wendell Johnson (ed). ABC-Clio, 20-22.

David G. Robertson

2018 *Handbook of Contemporary Religion and Conspiracy Theories* (ed. with Asbjørn Dyrendal & Egil Asprem). Brill

2017 "Tuning Ourselves': Fripp, Bennett, Gurdjieff." *Religion and the Arts*, 21:1-2, 236-258.

2017 "The hidden hand: Why religious studies need to take conspiracy theories seriously." *Religion Compass*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/rec3.12233>

2017 "Am I a Religious Studies Scholar?" in Russell McCutcheon (ed.), *Fabricating Identities*. Equinox, 13-19.

2017 "Hermeneutics of Suspicion: Scientology and Conspiracism" in James R. Lewis & Kjersti Hellesoy (eds.), *Handbook of Scientology*. Brill. 300-318.

Paul-Francois Tremlett

2017 *Edward Burnett Tylor, Religion and Culture*. London: Bloomsbury, 219pp, ISBN: 978-1-3500-0341-5 (co-edited with Graham Harvey and Liam Sutherland, co-written Introduction and chapter 10).

2017 'Protest Objects: Bricolage, Performance and Counter-Archaeology' in *World Archaeology* 49 (3): pp. 423-434 (co-authored with Katy Soar).

2016 'Affective Dissent in the Heart of the Capitalist Utopia: Occupy Hong Kong and the Sacred' in *Sociology* 50 (6): pp. 1156-1169.

2016 '(Post)-structuralism' in Engler, S. and Stausberg, M. (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook for the Study of Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 220-234.

2016 'Looking Back on the End of Religion: Opening Re Marx' in Cotter, C. G. and Robertson, D. G. (eds.), *After World Religions: Reconstructing Religious Studies*. London: Routledge, pp. 92-106.

"The violent and disparaging criticism of contemporary spirituality is stimulated by the threat that this new cultural category poses to entrenched scholarly assumptions and research practises."

(Boaz Huss, *Spirituality: the Emergence of a New Cultural Category*, 2014: 58.)



Podcast Transcript

Version 1.1, 9 March 2018



The BASR and the Impact of Religious Studies

Podcast with **Steve Sutcliffe**, **Stephen Gregg**, **Christopher Cotter**, **Suzanne Owen** and **David Robertson** (12 March 2018).

Transcribed by **Helen Bradstock**.

Audio and transcript available at: <http://www.religiousstudiesproject.com/podcast/the-basr-and-the-impact-of-religious-studies>

Steve Sutcliffe (SS): Ok. Well, thanks for waiting on a bit. Sorry about the delay in getting started. Because impact and knowledge exchange are so much the discourse of the day for academics – whether you're still a research student, or whether you've got a post – we thought it would be useful to have some kind of a brief event where each of us, from the committee of the [British Association for the Study of Religions](#), say a few words about what they thought some of the challenges and issues of that were for the study of religions, and for Religious Studies in particular. So we tried to put together this panel to tie in with a committee meeting of the British Association of the Study of Religions, which we've just come hot-foot from in the McIntyre Room. Because, of course, our committee members live all over the country. Stephen, in particular, has come up from Wolverhampton, and has spent most of the day on the train even getting here. And Suzanne, who'll be familiar to some of you as a former student here, has come up from Leeds. So we thought, “We'll be all in the one place, so let's also do some sort of outward facing event.” So we've got four brief, informal presentations from each of the folks here: [David Robertson](#), [Christopher Cotter](#), [Stephen Gregg](#) and [Suzanne Owen](#). And I thought I'd introduce it first, with just a few words on the perspective of the British Association for the Study of Religions, in so far as it represents Religious Studies scholars and Study of Religion scholars in the UK. And some of this will be familiar to some of you, but it may be less familiar to others. And we're not giving you a kind of official line. This isn't a BASR statement, it's just individual committee members' views on – what they call in the old clichéd media – the burning issues of our time. So the British Association, just to give you a little bit of history – this is me, by the way! I'm Steven Sutcliffe. And when I'm not teaching here, I've also been president of the British Association for the Study of Religion, for the last two and a half years. So the BASR began in 1954. And it was part of an organisation called the [International Association for the History of Religions](#), which was set up in

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1950. And then later on BASR, in 1999, helped to launch the [European Association for the Study of Religion](#), which is very much still in business. And we actually hosted the European Association's first annual conference in Cambridge, that year. We began, in the mists of time, as a dozen or so members in what seems to have been a fairly clubby style, based around Oxford, Cambridge and London. But we've now grown to about 180 fee-paying members. And we've been helped very much getting the membership list nice and lean, with all paying members, with our membership treasurer Chris Cotter, here. We publish an electronic [Bulletin](#) twice a year, and we publish a [journal](#) once a year. We hold archives of the Bulletin and other papers in the Bodleian Library in Oxford, and one of our members, Chris Cotter again, is currently completing a small project on the oral and documentary history of the British Association, which we hope to build on in the future, for some more grant funding, to get a larger history for the study of religions in the UK. Past presidents – in which august tradition I'm very proud to stand – have included [Ninian Smart](#), [Geoffrey Parrinder](#), [Ursula King](#), [Kim Knott](#) and [Marion Bowman](#). So, I give you this institutional background just to be sure that you realise that we've got about 60 years-plus of a learned society, promoting the study of religions in the UK. We define ourselves in this way, which is consonant with the International Association of the History of Religions, and the European Association for the Study of Religions: “The object of BASR is to promote the academic study of religions – understood as the historical, social, theoretical, critical and comparative study of religions – through the interdisciplinary collaboration of all scholars whose research is defined in this way. BASR is not a forum for confessional, apologetic or similar concerns.” Most members of our association have Social Science or Humanities backgrounds and are interested in working across religions in a comparative and theoretically informed way. Looking to analyse wider patterns in behaviours and belief including, importantly, the history and uses of the category “religion”. Our scholarship is not normatively committed to particular traditions or worldviews. And so, while some of our members include the study of theology in their portfolios, we don't practice – we don't *do* Theology *per se*. (5:00) Coming to this question of impact and engagement, we think in the life-time of the association and, of course, before the association – because the study of religions, in at least the European contexts, goes back to at least the mid-late 19th century – we think we've developed an excellent store of knowledge about religions and religion. And we transmit this store of knowledge to our students and we disseminate it in our publications. But, of course, the call for demonstrating impact and engagement out-with classroom and conference has brought us a new set of challenges, like most academic fields. So, well and good. We're just like other learned societies and disciplinary fields in the modern academy. We've got to come to grips, now, with this added level of work in already packed portfolios – this added work about engaging the knowledge we produce, and having a

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social and public impact with the knowledge we produce. However, the category religion is bound up with an especially complex set of issues and positions that permeates education, politics, church-state relations, media and law to name just a few fields. Now, I'm not arguing that there's something special about religion, but I am arguing that it's particularly heavily-freighted and loaded with assumptions and contestations that bring an unusual set of issues for us to deal with in our field. So, that's happening. At the same time, specific named religious traditions have developed their own associations since 1954- or perhaps they pre-existed 1954, anyway - their own journals and conferences, in an era of increasing specialisation. So that raises the question of what the general theoretical comparative study of religions might be for, in terms of exchanging our knowledge and impacting with our knowledge. That's really the thing that faces us as an organisation whose *raison d'être* is to work theoretically with the historical concept of religion, and comparatively across more than one tradition, for example. So that's a kind-of very brief, potted history of where BASR comes from, what it sees itself as having been doing effectively, and where we are now. The arrival of knowledge exchange, of impact – impact was 20% in the 2014 REF and will be 25% in the 2021 REF – is now a particular challenge for us. So this formal panel is specifically about what impact is Religious Studies making, and what knowledge is it exchanging? So having said that, I want to now open the way to our first contribution on that theme. And it's Dr Stephen Gregg from the University of Wolverhampton.

Stephen Gregg: Thank you, everybody. And it's always nice to be in Edinburgh. My first ever BASR conference as a not-so-young post-graduate student was in Edinburgh, I think in 2007. So it's very nice to be back here. And thank you to Steve and Naomi for organising this. I've just got a little ten minute slot and I'm going to try not to be too formal in this. Because what I want to talk to you about is based on some research and thinking that I've developed in recent conference papers and also a [recent article](#) specifically for the Bulletin of the British Association for the Study of Religions. And that's really asking questions about the place of Religious Studies in public discourse in the United Kingdom. And by that I mean political discourse, I mean media discourse, but I also mean interdisciplinary discourse. And I want to argue that we're at a juncture in the history of the academic study of religion, because I'm slightly concerned that we've become a “muted voice”. In fact you're probably familiar with [Charlotte Hardman's](#) term of muted voices. She used this to look at female participants in some of her early anthropology in the '70s and '80s. But a muted voice for Hardman: those groups whose medium of articulation is not easily grasped by other sectors of the population; groups who are marginal or submissive to the dominant power group. **(10:00)** And, quite simply, I want to argue that Religious

Studies has become a muted voice. I think this is important, particularly – and I want to agree with
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Steve – that there's nothing special about religion. I'm not having a *sui generis* argument at this point. But the fact remains that every bugger has an opinion on religion. If you are an accountant, you don't go to dinner parties and people get really het up about accountancy methodologies. A friend of mine, that did his PhD at the same time as me, was studying barnacles at Swansea Bay. When he goes to dinner parties, people don't have an opinion on barnacles in Swansea Bay. When you tell people that you're studying religion everyone has an opinion about religion, usually informed by The Daily Mail, but that's a slightly separate issue. And there's a serious point behind this, which is that those of us who would like to consider ourselves at the cutting edge of the methodology and the discipline of religious studies, are I think, becoming a muted voice. I would argue, even within the wider study of religion. This comes out, really, of changes to approaches to Religious Studies in recent years. Particularly, the shift away from the world religions paradigm towards a new paradigm which is variously called vernacular religion, lived religion, living religion, everyday religion. We're still arguing about the terminology there. And this really rests on scholarship from [Primiano](#), [Ammerman](#), [Orsi](#), [Harvey](#), [McGuire](#) – and I've made some modest contributions to this debate myself. And this examination of lived or living religion preferences people not texts, practices rather than beliefs. And this cutting edge of the study of religion, I want to argue, is absent when we look at media discourse, political discourse and, crucially, the interdisciplinary discourse when it approaches the study of religion in different contexts. And I want to give you just a couple of examples of this, because I'm very aware that we're short on time here. One example is political discourse. You may have noticed in the cabinet reshuffle last week, that one of the new faces is [Rehman Chishti](#), who is a Conservative MP of British Asian heritage. And under the old Government of David Cameron he consistently lobbied parliament to use the term Daesh instead of ISIS, when it was talking about the terrorist group in Syria and Iraq. And he did this on the grounds that he didn't want the word Islam, or anything Islamic, linked with a terrorist organisation. And I totally understand the political expediency for that, to help with community relations. But the problem I have with this – and this isn't a deep analysis of ISIS, this really isn't the time or the place for that – but the problem I have with that is the assumption behind it, which is: anyone that commits a violent act, in the name of religion, isn't a *real* Muslim; or, if we're thinking of suicide bombings in Sri Lanka in the Civil War – they're not *real* Buddhists; or sexual abuse by clergy isn't something that a *real* Christian would do. And this understanding of religion as a benign act, this essentialism and reductionism of what religion is, takes away the everyday experience of people that I hope you disagree with in the name of religion, but they *are doing so* in the name of religion. And so what we get is a confessional, theological approach to what religion is, essentialising in a benign hermeneutic circle, which I think mutes the voice of people that

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are understanding the everyday experiences of these religious practitioners – whether we agree with their actions or not. This saturates public discourse within the media, within politics. It's always faith leaders that are interviewed. It's never an expert on a particular religion. It's always an Imam or someone from the [British Council of Muslims](#) or someone from the [Hindu Council of Britain](#) and so on. And again we're preferencing this notion of confessionalism. We can see the new initiative of the [Religion Media Centre](#). We can think of religious literacy projects that have run out several universities in recent years. We can think of the Archbishop of Canterbury saying how important it was- just in the last few months he's said this- that we improve [religious literacy](#). Well I don't think anyone in this room would disagree with that. But whose understanding of religion are we going to improve the literacy of? The confessional theological understanding of the Archbishop of Canterbury or the academic study of religion in diverse contexts? This filters down through education systems as well. (15:00) You can think of our recent or current - I should say - education policies where the study of religion is not a part of the National Curriculum, but is still a legal requirement to teach in schools. And I have to say, I'm not an expert on the Scottish education system but, certainly in England, religion is something to do, not something to study. It is something that is practised and it is confessional from its starting point. And it concerns me that Religious Studies has become a muted voice within this discourse. Just briefly, I wanted to talk about interdisciplinary contexts. If we're changing what we mean by religion, by looking at everyday practices, by people instead of texts, practices instead of beliefs, if we're understanding mundane everyday actions as religious actions, then when we talk to an art historian or an archaeologist, or a museum curator or someone in textual analysis and we're using the same terms but meaning radically different things – how is that working in an interdisciplinary way? I wonder that we're often having divergent, not convergent conversations. But I don't want to be completely negative about this. I want to suggest that there are solutions. Talking to Steve about this informally, he's used a phrase – a couple of times – which has pricked my ears up. Steve Sutcliffe has said, “We need a Ninian Smart moment.” Which is: we need a new revolution as to what the study of religion is, perhaps beyond the Religious Studies of the late 20th century. And I think we need to start by looking at public discourse and focussing specifically on diversity. And I think it's very simple and we make small simple steps. Because, when you're trying to explain to a journalist that, actually, this is complicated – that's not what a journalist wants. They want sound-bites. They want public discourse about our academic disciplines to be simple and to be black and white. Well binaries don't work anymore, we know that. Look at religious identity, belonging, insider/outsider: it doesn't work with binaries. So, I want us to make those first small steps by focussing on diversity and particularly hyper-diversity. And if we take those small steps, perhaps – the

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Religious Studies cutting edge – this new move away from textbook essentialisms of “Christians believe this”, or “Hindus do that”, can filter down into public discourse about lived religious experiences, beyond the textbook boundaries of identities and practices. Thank you.

SS: Thanks very much Stephen, and we'll move swiftly on, so we'll have the four presentations and we'll have plenty of time for discussion about the themes arising. So we're very pleased to welcome back Dr Suzanne Owen, who studied here for her PhD, and her undergraduate degree, and is now Reader in Religious Studies at the University of Leeds Trinity. I think Suzanne is going to address the question that I mentioned of the category of religion, and how this was an important part of the expertise of our field. And she's going to be looking at a case study where expertise in how categories are used actually does have some quite important impact.

Suzanne Owen: Yes. Well, hello. So I'm going to talk about the charity registration of a particular case, showing up an area where scholars of religion have had some impact and where they could have even more. And this case, in particular, shows these points. So the charity registration is one means by which a group can claim status as a religion in the UK. As groups must also prove that their religious activities are for public benefit, as a charity, this then domesticates religion by forming groups to conform to, perhaps, liberal Protestant Christian values that religion is a force for good and benign. It is interesting to examine how groups negotiate this criteria for religion, as defined by public bodies, in order to highlight both the problems with defining religion, and how the state marginalises groups that do not fit their criteria by denying them access to certain benefits. Not only is conforming to state definitions of religion a challenge for groups but – according to [Matthew Harding](#) and his book on [Charity Law and the Liberal State](#) – in charity law we find the state marking out certain purposes as charitable according to contested conceptions of what is the good, and then extending legal privileges to those citizens who pursue those purposes. (20:00) So taking a critical religion approach, similar to the work of [Timothy Fitzgerald](#) and others, to examine critically the social processes whereby certain groups are counted as religions, as [James Beckford](#) also noted, we can really see how the category of religion operated in public discourse and then actually creates a kind of public conception of religion that gives it status and legitimacy. So, in my case, the focus is on how the category of religion operates in charity registration cases, looks at how religion is framed in charity law and is then interpreted by the Commissioners. And these Commissioners are not religion specialists, as you can imagine. They come from Law and Economics, and other areas like that. And so they are using a kind of folk understanding of religion in their conception, that's been handed down through case law. So the case of the [Druid Network](#) was for registering as a charity in England and Wales. Scotland, of course, has

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got a separate commission for registering charities, and so the Druid Network case was only for England and Wales. But there are groups in Scotland, of course, that have had their own negotiations with the state. So charity registration as a religion – as I said, this kind of folk understanding of religion has been passed down through the generations. It defines religion in a certain way, which is based on their understandings and experience of religion in this country, mainly liberal Protestant Christian. So the criteria is: belief in a Supreme Being or Entity, worship of the Supreme Being or Entity, theological cohesion and ethical framework. So every religion, or group that wants to be registered as a religion, needs to prove this criteria or show evidence of it. And some groups have failed to do this, like [Scientology](#), and the [Gnostic Centre](#), and the [Pagan Federation](#) as well. But the [Druid Network's success](#) has made it a significant case in law, because it actually altered the definition of religion in charity law, slightly. And much of their success seems to be due to the influence of scholarship on religions – particularly a statement that was sent in with the application by Graham Harvey at the Open University, in Religious Studies. And this was cited repeatedly in the decision document that you can get on line, where you can get the charity commission [decision documents](#). And they are repeatedly citing his statement as an authority for giving them a reason, a justification, to grant charity registration to the Druid Network as a religion. So the problems for the initial application by the Druid Network was they had problem trying to fulfil the criterion of belief in a Supreme Being or Entity. And the Druid Network wanted to present the concept of Nature as this Supreme Entity. And they failed in their first application but, as I said, in their second application with Graham Harvey's statement, they gained success and were able to convince the Charity Commissioners that Nature could be conceived of as a Supreme Being or Entity. And thus they've – well, in my view, they haven't actually changed the definition of religion, but they've expanded it. And this is definitely an issue, because after their registration it was thought that other pagan groups would have an easier time. And this is not the case, because the pagan federation's application came after – or one of their applications – and they still failed. And they failed on theological cohesion. And they contacted me because they knew that I was working on the Druid Network case. And, basically, I think for them they would either have to present themselves as a single religion (which they don't at the moment – they are an umbrella of different pagan groups) or to challenge the definition of religion in charity law. And, as far as I know, they are not going to do that anymore. And they've now decided to apply in a different category, like for education or some other purpose. But still, they need to register as a charity. Groups have to register as something if they're non-profit, and so forth. So, not for religion for them, it seems. And so I think the next step then is . . . [Eileen Barker's](#) also written lots of witness statements or supporting statements for groups, and she wrote one for the Pagan Federation at one time. **(25:00)**

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When they failed she wrote something along the lines, reported by [Michael York](#), that "If they don't accept the Goddess as a Supreme Being then they're sexist" or something along those lines that Michael York had reported. So we are already being employed to write statements for groups applying for charity registration as a religion. And I think the more that we are involved in such cases, the more we can influence on trying to erode the popular conceptions of what religion might be. But then, beyond that, there's also the issue of: why have a separate category of religion at all, for charities? The charity's work is for public benefit. Why does there need to be distinction between a religious charity and a non-religious charity? And this special sort-of status of religion, I think, does not make a huge sense in religion and just ties them in knots, constantly, when they're trying to define whether a group is religious or not. But there may be . . . this is an area where we can look more broadly at how the category of religion is operating, and also how it is actually a hindrance and a problem within the state as well. So we're looking at the discourse and conception of religion, so what that means, of course – the implications of that. Is there something called religion that we can see and define? And my view, of course, of that is that it is a part of discourse; it is a kind of construction. But the state does not see religion that way. It sees it as *sui generis*: as something that is unique, and something that emerges out of self in distinction to politics, economics and culture and other areas. But by doing that, you marginalise and limit the activity of religions, so that: they are not meant to be political; they are not meant to be making a profit. The problem with Scientology is that, perhaps, they're seen as a business. And that is the issue. They might not state that, but it might be an underlying bias. And the same thing . . . the way that Government gets angry every time the Archbishop says something political, because religions aren't meant to be political. So you can see how this sort-of permeates throughout the discourse. And when you study the discourses on religion, you can see these patterns. And also the conception of seeing religion as being inherently good, as well. That plays into that. So, lots of areas where we can actually look at these discourses and how they are defined in law. Thank you.

SS: Ok. So we move onto another kind of case study where this is impact going on, and in Suzanne's talk, there, it was interesting to see that a key witness to the Charity Commission is a scholar of religions, a senior scholar of religions, in the Religious Studies tradition in the UK. So there's something going on there – even if it's room for changing the definition or pushing further at that – that there's impact from the scholar. This time I've got Dr Chris Cotter here, who's going to talk about another empirical example of impact – this time within the wider scholarly arena of student knowledge, spread around the world, which is one of the criteria of the 2014 REF and will be again in 2021, probably with an expanded remit. In other words, the ability of scholars to effect classroom

understanding and pedagogical disseminations of good ideas and cutting-edge theories of research on

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religion – with a particular focus on postgraduate students. But Chris will tell you about the Religious Studies Project that he co-founded with David, here.

Chris Cotter (CC): Indeed! And as our business cards say: “The Religious Studies Project: Podcasts, Opportunities, Debate!” And this – we're actually recording for the Religious Studies Project now. We'll not be recording your discussions so feel free to speak freely. So, the RSP began in May 2011 when David and I met in the bar of Teviot Row House, and decided to record a couple of audio interviews that were passing through this very Edinburgh RS Seminar series. And, formally launching in January 2012, it's become a truly international collaborative enterprise. We're currently headline sponsored by the BASR, also the [North American Association for the Study of Religions](#) and the International Association for the History of Religions. **(30:00)** In September 2017, we became a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation – so, one of those educational charities that Suzanne was mentioning. By this point we had amassed over 250 podcasts of around 30 minutes each, with leading scholars on cutting-edge theoretical and empirical issues in the study of religion, in combination with regular response essays that reflect on, expand upon, or critique the podcast output. And, by 2017, listeners had downloaded our podcasts over 400,000 times – with new podcasts averaging over 100 downloads in their first week, growing to over 7000 for some of the more established ones. The website receives over 150,000 hits per year and we're currently followed by over 4700 accounts on Facebook, and 4200 on Twitter. But, why do podcasts at all? So, back in 2012, we could see a number of advantages to the podcast format. We thought about our own consumption of the medium. They provided us with company when engaged in lonely solitary tasks, a feeling of community, personally curated 24/7 radio station on topics of interest, and an accessible Edu-point to a wide variety of topics. But, where was the podcast for our chosen discipline the academic study of religion? So we decided to start recording the podcasts that we wanted to hear. And this format, we think, democratises knowledge and humanises knowledge production, by giving listeners a chance to hear academics talking naturally, and offering an introduction to the topic somewhere between a Wikipedia entry and a full-length journal article or book. A lot of material can be covered in half an hour, yet this can be digested at the listener's own pace, time and time again, *ad infinitum*. And, regardless of our position in the field, we all have to focus our reading, and a podcast can help fill those gaps that we don't have time to read, and help us to keep up with the latest research and current perspectives of older scholars and themes. But also – in an era of departmental streamlining and closure, and with increasing isolation and stress brought on by the marketisation of education, and by limited budgets for conference participation, etc. – regularly listening to a podcast, we hope, can

provide a vital connection to the world, outside the confines of one's own institution, that can be

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academically stimulating and provide a sense of community and common purpose. And similarly – given the increasing pressure to relate research to public interest and to make sure that our research is accessible for the public and has impact – recording a podcast is a simple and efficient way to disseminate research freely and accessibly to thousands of potentially interested listeners, and in perpetuity. So, when setting up the RSP, we quickly adopted an attitude of "Don't wait to be given permission." And this attitude has pervaded our output to this day. The point wasn't merely to replicate existing academic structures and outputs but to compliment, challenge or expand upon them. And indeed, it's unclear whether we would have been able to build anything like the resource that we have, had we been bound by a department or an institution, because of the issues in justifying the cost in time and resources for each episode, slow moving checks and balances, and the inbuilt conservatism of institutions. But after we'd built up a reputation, however, it's been encouraging to see these existing academic structures engaging with RSP outputs in the form of citations, entries into course syllabi and the occasional more creative or innovative engagement. But all of that being said, it's not been plain sailing, and we've been on the receiving end of a number of important criticisms over the years – the most frequent of which has surrounded the quality of our audio, which we've been consistently improving over the year, and which I'm not going to dwell on here. But, you know – try producing your own free podcast! But related to this, it was pointed out along the way that our podcasts might be problematic, for example, for listeners for whom English was not their first language, or – how were people with hearing impairments going to be accessing all of this scholarship? So although we do still try to maintain a level of irreverent humour that's characterised the podcast from the beginning, I think we decided that bit more professionalism on our part would reduce the opportunity for things to be lost in translation. And we've also, recently, begun to transcribe our podcasts – which means that now they can be more easily cited and utilised in the classroom, and it's also softened some of the barriers surrounding spoken English. (35:00) But, of course, that adds a lot in terms of time and cost. You know a half an hour podcast can take two, three for hours to transcribe. On a different note, given our – by "our" I'm referring to David and I – our situatedness as two white, relatively privileged, relatively heterosexual British men, who've been closely associated with the RS system at the University of Edinburgh for over a decade, and who have very specific, very niche research interests, it's hardly surprising that – despite our best intentions – RSP output has not been as wide-ranging, representative or diverse as it arguably should be. A simple lack of resources is partly to blame – including time and money to fund travel etc. – as is the need for a timely and topical content. You know, if we're faced with a choice between a less than ideally representative collection of scholars or not recording

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anything at all, we've generally opted for the former. A more cynical response to all of this might be to ask: "Well, who made us the police of religious studies?" We started this free podcast, why should we bother? We've been producing this resource for over five years, in our "spare time" with very limited resources, so of course there's going to be omissions. Of course things will slip through the net. And of course we will unintentionally repeat and reinforce some of the inequalities that plague the field globally, and in our UK context. And whilst there is undoubtedly some truth in this cynical response, we are keenly aware, however, that we do have great deal of responsibility. We had this responsibility when we started, even though we may not have realised it. But this is particularly the case now, given our growing position of authority in the field and our recently acquired charitable status, and the fact that we're sponsored by some of the highest bodies in Religious Studies. It's not just our reputation that's on the line, any more. So although we might be irreverent, we hope that we do take things seriously. And we're trying to become more proactive than reactive. Controversies thus far have been relatively few and far between, and we'd like to think that when something has gone awry, and problems have been pointed out, we've been gracious, understanding and attempted to move forward in a manner that will preserve the existing ethos of the RSP whilst incorporating the critique, learning from it, and putting measures in place to ensure that things are different in future. And we can, maybe, talk more about that later. There will, of course, always be more to be done. And I'm onto my final page, now! The name Religious Studies Project – we deliberately chose this to be ambitious. As we've heard already, the discipline is at a crossroads: departments are being squeezed because of cuts and the neoliberalisation of the academy. The subject is – as we've also heard – being balkanised into departments, being made up of multiple Area Studies scholars who don't seem to have the time or interest in cross-cultural comparison, or of theoretical issues, necessarily. Religion is a more prominent aspect of public and political discourse than it has been for decades, yet it seems that our analysis is not being sought or heard. Our larger Project then, with a capital P, is to get Religious Studies the voice that it deserves. No-one knows what RS does. We can help to change that. We believe that these topics are intrinsically interesting and we know that a person talking naturally about a subject they're passionate about is always engaging. However, too few of us know how to actually go about this. And these are not skills that we're typically trained in, as academics. And, moreover, the current academic climate – we'll see how this develops – rewards us for work aimed only at our peers and all-but inaccessible to the public, in journals, conferences, committees etc. The RSP, here, has built the platform for scholars to put forward their research for free, and in a way that anyone can understand, which after all should be a central concern for the publicly funded intellectual. Thinking

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beyond podcasting and RS, what can others take from this? Because there's an important difference of approach between the RSP and traditional academic platforms. Had we sought perfect audio, an ideal website, and perfectly diverse participants from day one the project would arguably never have happened – and certainly not keeping to a weekly schedule. Like Facebook's original motto, which was: “Move fast and break things”, we use an iterative model where we try a lot of things, and improve on what’s working as we go along. And, in this way, our publishing model is closer, we think, to journalism or software development than traditional academia. But this may be an approach that academia needs to embrace in future. That one perfect journal article, behind a paywall, *that* belongs to another age. And it's only really serving your own ego, or publishing houses. **(40:00)** If you want the public to listen, they have to be able to hear you. Hmm!

(Laughter)

SS: *OK. Thanks very much, Chris. And onto David Robertson now, Dr David Robertson of the Open University is going to ask a very clearly-defined question: Who are we speaking to?*

David Robertson (DR): I hope I give a clearly-defined answer.

SG: The people in this room!

(Laughter)

SS: *Yes, well today that's true isn't it? But we're recording it for the Religious Studies Project, so it will be a podcast going out to the world.*

DR: Good

Audience Voice: As long as they speak English!

CC: Alright! I'll see you afterwards . . .

(Laughter)

DR: Edit that out please! Yes. OK. To slip into business speak for a little minute: if this has been a SWOT analysis of the field, then the previous panels have been mostly on the strengths and weaknesses, but I want to focus instead on threats and opportunities. So as not to – because I'm last – to end on too pessimistic a note, I'm going to start with the threats.

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(Laughter)

DR: But I want to say, before I start, that we honestly and seriously face the issues before us. Because I don't think you can answer a question before you correctly understand the question. In short, I think that the current muted voice of RS is not the issue *per se* but is rather a symptom of larger currents of which, I think, RS is particularly vulnerable. The first is de-traditionalisation and anti-elitism. Now I'm sure I don't need to point out to anybody here that traditional institutions are increasingly challenged. The scholar can no longer expect their word to simply be accepted as authoritative. I think this will ultimately be for the best, but it will certainly require those who are interested in speaking to the public, to realise that our voice is but one voice in a marketplace. This means we need to make the effort to speak directly to that marketplace. We need to speak and write plainly and simply and, importantly, without appeals to intrinsic authority. And we need to sometimes put aside concerns that are of primary interest to specialists. But the bigger issue is not only whether the public can hear us, it's whether they even want to. For the public to regain trust in academia, like other institutions, we need to demonstrate its value to them. Why is it in the interests of the public to have a non-confessional social scientific study of religion? And who is making that case? Secondly, is marketisation and neoliberalisation of the university: scholarship is expected to show public impact, yet academics also need to produce REF-able work for a closed academic market, as Chris was saying. This leaves us between two stools, and our working hours further squeezed. This is further the case because high fees are driving more and more attention onto the quality of our teaching. Again, another thing – but another factor that's taking our time away. The economic values of qualifications is increasingly stressed. It's not an easy case to make, for RS, to a lay audience. And emphasis on citizenship and morality now means that secondary RE now has very little to do with tertiary RS. And the third point I want to raise, is that the growth of identity politics means that public intellectuals are increasingly required to speak from a particular insider perspective – which is something that Stephen mentioned. For public discourse in religion, this favours apologetic scholarship over critical scholarship. For policy makers in such a climate, scholarship is only useful insofar as it eases tensions between identity groups. So to sum up, at present, successful public intellectuals in the field of RS are generally those whose work addresses and usually supports identity politics, citizenship and economic factors. Indeed, why would public institutions want to hear from, or support a project which seeks to destabilise ideas seen as essential to social order and to individual self-identity? We need to address this issue convincingly and seriously, beyond a REF panel or the British Academy. However, to turn to opportunities, now: the question posed by Stephen, “Why are we being ignored?” leads to the

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question, “Well, who are we speaking to?” And this is important and because different groups have different needs and different expectations. So we've heard from Suzanne, talking about the law; we've heard from Chris, talking about the university; but there are other audiences, such as education at secondary level in schools. RE is a requirement in schools in the UK, but has long been under-funded and under-supported. (45:00) Certainly, a legacy of public sector cuts and an outdated assumption that secularisation meant that it would ultimately become unnecessary anyway. The conversation has come back recently, starting with Linda Woodhead and Charles Clarke's: [A New Settlement for Religion in Schools](#), 2015, which built on the [Westminster Debates](#), but has a rather normative Christian position which troubles many RS scholars – myself included – and an emphasis on themes of citizenship, tradition and morals. It did, however, kick-start a rather long-overdue discussion. And this year's [We Need to Talk about Religious Education: Manifestos for the Future of RE](#), edited by Mike Castelli and Mark Chater, is a much bolder contribution which offers a number of manifestos for the future of RE. It argues that leaders of the RE community are struggling to make clear and safe positioning between the wreckage of old assumptions and the messy incomplete birth of the new. These changes are in part the responsibility of RS but we've been slow to take up the challenge. There's definitely been some progress, however, and a number of colleagues have been much more involved in teaching and learning issues, particularly [Dominic Corrywright](#) of Oxford Brookes, who was until recently a committee member of the BASR and [Wendy Dossett](#) of Chester. The BASR's new Teaching Award was designed to reward and highlight such work. But we still need increased clarity on the function of RE at secondary level and how that relates to the function of RS at Tertiary level. And indeed, should those subjects be necessarily related? A fourth audience is media which Steven talked briefly about, but I would like to add a slightly more positive note. The old media is on its last legs. Newspapers and TV channels, as we know them today, won't exist in ten years' time. Long-form media, however, like documentary series and podcasts, are growing year on year. We're in a unique position to be able to seize the means of production here, but it requires clear ideas, strategies and, above all, action. The traditional media still thinks in terms of sensation and conflict. But at the same time there is a move to long-form documentary work which is allowing for greater subtlety and nuance. [Ben Zeller](#)'s recent involvement with the ten-[podcast series on Heaven's Gate](#), which just concluded, is a great example. By compromising slightly, he was able to influence the series producers enough that it was by far the fairest and most sympathetic portrait ever in the media, not only of that group, but of an apocalyptic new religion, full stop. I'm at present involved in the early stages of two similar projects, although on a much smaller scale. And in both cases simply setting out some of the historical background to the

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producers, to show that these ideas do not simply just spring from nowhere, has been enough to influence the direction that the project's going in. If we consider how much time we spend on journal papers and the return on our investment, this is obviously worth doing. And there's no real reason why such projects can't be part of a REF submission – it's something that other disciplines do all the time. The final one I want to bring up, briefly, is policy-makers including security. Now [INFORM](#) has had a great influence here, as Suzanne mentioned already. But recently Kim Knot and [Matt Francis](#) of Lancaster have done some great work with the [CREST](#) project on security and terrorism. [Suzanne Newcombe](#) from INFORM and myself took part in a workshop in London for Whitehall and MI6, recently, that they organised. And, actually, the RS focus papers were among the most responded to of the entire event. Similarly the massive [European Union Project on Conspiracy Theories](#) COST also involves a number of RS colleagues who have again had considerable impact, there. Similarly, the Open University has had great interest in a proposal to start a course designed for Home Office Staff on dealing with different religions. The short version of this is that, in fact – although these people are even busier than we are – if we can make our services available, there is a ready demand: they're keen to hear what we've got to say, especially if we can make it practical. So we need to think about more realistic ways in which we can make that possible. So just to sum up, then, I want to ask a couple more questions. One is: do we really want to be public intellectuals? Are we prepared to put in the extra effort and learn to play the rules of that field? And if not, are we prepared to concede that role? And what becomes of Religious Studies in that case? Thank you.

SS: (50:00) *OK. Thanks very much, David. So that's the end of our contributions. And then the floor now will be open to some questions and observations, engaging with one or other of the informal presentations that we've heard. Just to remind you, I tried to put it into context by emphasising the history of the British association of the Study of Religions and that widely generic field of Religious Studies. We had Stephen talking about the danger of Religious Studies becoming a muted voice, where it had little effect in public arenas; Suzanne was then giving us an example, as was Chris in a different way, of actual empirical impact: REF-able impact. REF-able is this terrible kind-of adjective which we're all using now, which means "able to be submitted to the REF panel." Two very different case studies there. And David's finished off by asking a series of interesting questions about audiences as well as the threats that proceed those. So the floor is now open for any contributions, clarifications from our speakers, or observations.*

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