

BRITISH ASSOCIATION
for the
STUDY OF RELIGIONS



BULLETIN
No 106 November 2005

BASR BULLETIN

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The British Association for the Study of Religions (BASR), formerly the British Association for the History of Religions (founded in 1954), is affiliated to the European Association for the Study of Religions (EASR) and to the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR), whose object is the promotion of the academic study of religions through international interdisciplinary collaboration. The BASR pursues these aims within the United Kingdom through the arrangement of conferences and symposia, the publication of a Bulletin and an Annual General Meeting. Membership of the BASR is open to scholars whose work has a bearing on the academic study of religions and who are normally resident in the United Kingdom. Those interested in membership may apply directly by writing to the **Hon Secretary** to whom all general correspondence concerning the BASR should be sent: **Dr Graham Harvey, Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Arts, The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA.**

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BASR Web site: <<http://basr.org.uk>>

Editorial: The November Bulletin

Readers who are familiar with Thomas Hood's poem 'November' (1844) may gain the impression of November as a somewhat negative month, as Hood exploits the initial two letters — 'NO' — of the month: 'No fruits, no flowers, no leaves' and so on. This is far from the case with the BASR Bulletin, whose November edition is the one that is invariably more plentiful in its information, containing reports on summer conferences, coverage of the BASR's Annual General Meeting, and a complete and updated list of BASR members.

Despite having to keep an eye on the overall length of the November edition, it is appropriate that substantial space should be given to tributes to Geoffrey Parrinder, who died in June 2005, and it is fitting that such tributes should pay homage to his work both in Britain and in Africa.

As always, the Bulletin carries coverage of national and international conferences. At the time of going to press, details about EASR conferences were not yet posted on the EASR web site <<http://www.easr.de>> where we hope members will soon be able to find information. Conference reporting is a useful way of networking. Since most of us seldom manage more than three or four conferences in any year, I believe it is important to disseminate information about academic discussion in which we may not have been involved. I am always happy to give space to notices for future conferences, and it would be good to establish the principle that, having received advance information, the Bulletin should receive some brief coverage of the event, once it has taken place. So please send in your reports!

Recent conferences have raised the topic of 'engaged scholarship', which was discussed in the last the *Bulletin*. Readers will note that the discussion continues in the present edition, and further comments are welcome.

Finally, the Membership Secretary, Treasurer and Bulletin Editor have liaised carefully to ensure that the November membership list is as accurate and up-to-date as possible. I repeat my usual plea to be notified of any errors and changes in members' details. Information about research interests is growing, but it would be good to fill in the remaining gaps. It is a useful means of networking, finding reviewers for books, and having a picture of the state of Religious Studies in Britain and beyond.

George D. Chryssides

BASR OCCASIONAL PAPERS (order from BASR Web site)

- 1 Miranda Green, *Women and Goddesses in the Celtic World*, 1991
- 2 Christine Trevett, *The Quaker Margaret Fell: Religion and Gender in a C17th Dissenting Group*, 1991
- 3 Ann Bancroft, *Hildegarde of Bingen to Meinrad Craighead*, 1991
- 4 Julia Leslie, *Religion, Gender and Dharma: The Case of the Widow Ascetic*, 1991
- 5 Peter Antes, *How to study religious experience in the traditions*, 1992
- 6 Marion Bowman, *Phenomenology, fieldwork and folk religion*, 1992
- 7 George Chryssides, *Unificationism: A study in religious syncretism*, 1993
- 8 Michael Pye, *Syncretism versus synthesis*, 1993
- 9 Ria Kloppenborg, *A Buddhist-Christian encounter in Sri Lanka: Pandura Vada*, 1994
- 10 Peter Donovan, *Maori rituals add magic to contemporary civic life*, 1995
- 11 Ninian Smart, *Sacred nationalism*, 1995
- 12 W. S. F. Pickering, *Locating the sacred: Durkheim and Otto*, 1995
- 13 Terence Thomas, 'The sacred' as a viable concept in the contemporary study of religions, 1995 (bound together with 12)
- 14 Margaret Chatterjee, *Do we need authority in religious life?*, 1996
- 15 Chris Arthur, *Media, meaning, and method in the study of religion*, 1996
- 16 Gerrie ter Haar, *Chosen people: The concept of diaspora in the modern world*, 1996
- 17 Richard Gombrich, *Religious experience in early Buddhism*, 1997
- 18 James Cox, *Alterity as identity: Innovation in the Academic Study of Religions*, 1998
- 19 Elizabeth Amoah, *African spirituality and religious innovation*, 1998
- 20 Ian Reader, *Religion, conflict and the sacred mission: On understanding the violence of Aum Shinrikyo*, 1999
- 21 Brian Bocking, *Religious Studies: The New Queen of the Sciences*, 2000
- 22 Kim Knott, *The Sense and Nonsense of 'Community': A Consideration of Contemporary Debates about Community and Culture by a Scholar of Religion*, 2002
- 23 Armin Geertz, *Religion and Community in Indigenous Contexts*, 2002
- 24 Guilia Sfameni Gasparro, *Religion and Community in the Ancient World*, 2002
- 25 Tariq Modood, *Multiculturalism, Muslims and the British State*, 2002
- 26 Rosalind Hackett, *The Response of Scholars of Religion to Global Religious Violence*, 2003

Occasional Papers can be ordered from the BASR Web site at
<<http://basr.org.uk>>

BASR NEWS

PROFESSOR GEOFFREY PARRINDER

(30 April 1910 – 6 June 2005)

The last BASR Bulletin (No. 105 — June 2005) carried a note congratulating Geoffrey Parrinder on his 95th birthday. This time we have to record his recent death which occurred only six weeks after he had reached the great age of 95.

Different people will remember Geoffrey for different reasons, having met him in different circumstances and at different times in his life. My own account is based on my personal experience and thus needs to be expanded by the narratives of others. I last saw Geoffrey alive on May 18, just one month before his death, when my husband and I paid a visit to Geoffrey and Mary in their Orpington home when both of them seemed very frail in comparison with a year earlier when I had last seen them. I shall never forget that beautiful, sunny May day with its ideal gardening weather, which he so much loved, the brief exchange of greetings, smiles and good wishes, a warm handshake and gentle nod of his head. All too aware that this was probably a final farewell, I was still caught by surprise that his end came so soon.

For those who knew him, Geoffrey will be fondly remembered as distinguished scholar, friend, mentor, colleague, and happy family man. Remembering his gaunt figure with its energetic forward stride, the twinkle in his eye, his infectious smile comes first to mind, then his witty remarks with always an amusing anecdote or some amazing story from his long life to hand. He would conduct a serious conversation or just indulge in some academic gossip or comment on his recent reading, whether in religion, literature, politics or whatever else caught his imagination. A towering academic figure with an impressive career, he always remained humble and kind, and never boasted about his academic achievements. I still have a copy of his CV, typed by him late in life, laconically listing the main dates, appointments and publications in mere telegram style on a single page!

His rich professional career and wide-ranging experiences are all too evident from the long entry on 'Prof. (Edward) Geoffrey (Simons) Parrinder' in *Who's Who 2005*, giving yet another, though much more substantial, skeleton outline of dates, degrees, distinctions, professional positions, associations and numerous publications, many of which are still in print. Only a few of these details can be mentioned here.

Born on April 30, 1910 in New Barnet, Hertfordshire, into a practising Wesleyan Methodist family, his father worked for glove firms in the city of London and eventually set up his own business. In 1919, the family moved to Leigh-on-Sea where Geoffrey went to school until 16, when he started working as a booking clerk at the local railway station, his job for the next two-and-a-half years. His family takes pleasure and pride in the fact that, after much effort

and prolonged external studies, he eventually rose from the position of a railway clerk to that of an internationally known professor with three doctorates (two from the University of London, one honorary doctorate from Lancaster University)!

He experienced an early vocation to become a Methodist minister and missionary to Africa, and through a close family friend he learnt about people of other faiths, especially Buddhists. While working at the railway, he qualified as a local preacher and then trained for the Wesleyan Methodist ministry at Richmond College in London (1929-1932). He soon responded to a call from the Methodist Mission House to serve in French West Africa by going out in 1933 to Dahomey (now Benin), after studying theology and French in Montpellier. This was the beginning of his formative experience of Africa where, with some interruptions, he worked for nineteen years.

It was Methodism that made Geoffrey Parrinder what he was. It led him to his initial vocation, provided his early training and launched him on his academic career by sending him to Africa. It also gave him his strong Christian faith and fellowship that remained with him for the rest of his life. Methodists will claim him as one of their own, but as one of the internationally renowned religious studies figures of the twentieth century, Geoffrey Parrinder also grew far beyond his own church.

He worked in Dahomey and on the Ivory Coast (1933-1946), and returned to England in 1936 to get ordained and marry Mary, a Methodist nurse he met some years before. Deeply devoted to each other during 69 years of married life, Mary and Geoffrey much enjoyed their growing family life with one daughter and two sons. In 1940 they were on leave in England, but could not return to Dahomey because of Vichy rule in France. Parrinder then worked in the Methodist Circuit in Redruth, Cornwall (1940-1943), and in the French Circuit in Guernsey (1946-1949), with the years 1943-1946 spent on his own in French West Africa. This experience led to his comparative study of African religion in the Ivory Coast, the Gold Coast, in Dahomey and Nigeria, which he submitted for his London Ph.D., examined by E. O. James and Edwin Smith, and later published as his first book, *West African Religion* (1949).

While working in Guernsey, Geoffrey studied externally for a London M.A. and M.Th. in the history and philosophy of religion. In 1949, he was appointed to the new Department of Religious Studies at University College Ibadan, Nigeria, the first department ever to be so called, later followed by many others in Britain. This was the beginning of his academic career and the end of his work as a Methodist missionary and minister, although he continued to take occasional services and perform weddings and other functions for friends and his local church for the rest of his life. Professor Andrew Walls, who co-edited a special number of *Religion* for Geoffrey's 70th birthday in 1980, wrote that 'Geoffrey Parrinder found himself teaching what no-one had ever taught him – what, perhaps no-one had ever taught at university level before: a course in

Indigenous Religious Beliefs of West Africa' (*Religion* 10(2): 144).

During this time, Geoffrey undertook more research on religion in Ibadan, published as *Religion in an African City* (1953) for which he was awarded a London University D.D. Other publications produced during this time included *African Psychology* (1951), *African Traditional Religion* (1954), *Witchcraft* (1958), and *The Story of Ketu* (1956).

In 1958, he was appointed as Reader to a new post in the Comparative Study of Religions at King's College, University of London (having applied on E. O. James' suggestion). In 1970, he was given a personal chair and later was made Dean of the Faculty of Theology (1972-1974). He retired in 1977 after teaching, researching and supervising students' dissertations at King's College for nineteen years. Best known among his former students, many of whom were Africans, is Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Geoffrey taught him for his B.D. at King's College, London, in the 1960s, and subsequently supervised his M.Th. Archbishop Desmond Tutu kindly agreed to write the Foreword to a *Festschrift* published by former students, colleagues and friends for Parrinder's eightieth birthday. (See U. King, ed. *Turning Points in Religious Studies. Essays in Honour of Geoffrey Parrinder*, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1990, which deals with the religious traditions and comparative themes that Geoffrey Parrinder had written on in his own work. John R. Hinnells, who had also been one of his students at King's, Maurice Wiles, who had been a colleague at Ibadan, and John Ferguson provided personal tributes to Geoffrey in this *Festschrift*. Several well-known BASR members contributed important essays to this collection.)

My own meeting with Geoffrey dates from 1969, at a time when I still lived in India. We both attended the memorable Guru Nanak Fifth Centenary conference at the University of Patiala, culminating in an extensive visit of several historical Sikh gurdwaras in the surrounding district. I well remember travelling with him for a whole day in an old Morris Austin around the dusty, bumpy lanes of the Punjab listening to his stories, learning about life at London University, and hearing about his family. We chatted and laughed a lot, an unforgettable encounter, which after my return to London made Geoffrey an obvious choice as my Ph.D. supervisor (1972-1977) whilst I was working as a lecturer at the University of Leeds. When I turned up for the occasional tutorial in London, he took me for afternoon tea to his favourite Twinings Tea Room in the Strand. He was always very supportive and encouraging, pressing me to complete my Ph.D. before his retirement in 1977. I may be one of his last doctoral students, but I have never checked this with him. Later he came to Leeds to examine some of my own research students or to act as external examiner for our undergraduates. He was a colleague to be relied upon, and he became a good personal friend who sometimes talked about some of the difficulties and disappointments he had experienced in his own career, but never with malice or resentment.

Geoffrey Parrinder is well known to long-standing members of the BASR as

one of the original founder members of our Association and one of its honorary life members. For many years he was closely associated with the work of the BASR, especially when he was Honorary Secretary (1960-1972) and President (1972-1977). He was also very active in the London Society for the Study of Religion (LSSR, founded in 1904) of which he was President (1980-1982), and to which he introduced many other scholars, including myself. Another strong commitment was his work for the London Society of Jews and Christians (LSJC), which elected him President (1981-1990), and then Honorary Life President (1990). Yet other important activities included the World Congress of Faiths, of which he was a Vice-President, and the Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education where he was also a founder member and Co-President until 1987. Through his numerous writings in lucid, accessible style, through his public lectures, radio and television talks, his work with educational bodies and academic associations, Geoffrey Parrinder exercised a wide influence on the study of world religions, both in Britain and abroad, and gave much encouragement to those working in schools and colleges.

His name was associated with the boards of several academic journals, and he was invited to give many special lectures: the Charles Strong Lectures in Sydney (1964), the Wilde Lectures in Natural and Comparative Religion at Oxford (1966-1969), published as *Avatar and Incarnation* (1970), the Westcott Teape Lectures in India (1973). He was also a visiting professor at the International Christian University in Tokyo (1977-1978) and a visiting lecturer at the University of Surrey (1978-1982). In 1975, during the Thirteenth International Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions held at Lancaster, the University of Lancaster awarded him an honorary D.Litt., which greatly pleased him.

His publishing output was phenomenal. A bibliography of his writings lists 29 single-authored and six edited books between 1949 and 1992, apart from numerous shorter works. Geoffrey went on writing long after 1992, and he took pride in typing all his works himself. He only finished writing in January 2003, when he produced for the last time his regular report on 'Religion' for the *Annual Register of World Events*, which he had done for forty-five years, the first and only person to do so.

As to the lasting contribution and originality of his research, his pioneering work on African religions probably ranks highest, but his wide influence is largely due to the many works he wrote on Indian religions, on Islam, and on comparative themes which appealed to a wide reading public. The much-used textbook *What World Religions Teach* (1968) has been his best-selling title, and his first work, *West African Religion*, was in print for forty years while others have often been reprinted. During the mid-nineties Oneworld Publishers of Oxford republished five of his earlier books: *Jesus in the Quran* (first published in 1965); *Mysticism in the World's Religions* (1976); *Avatar and Incarnation* (1970); *The Bhagavad Gita: a verse translation* (1974) and *Sexual Morality in*

the World's Religions (formerly *Sex in the World's Religions*, 1980).

Geoffrey loved talking, and talked with great eloquence; he loved reading and writing, even writing the odd verse (he and Ninian Smart exchanged poems for Geoffrey's 80th birthday). He officially listed 'travel, gardening, literature as recreation' as his hobbies in *Who's Who*. He was a great traveller, going to many parts of Africa, first as a missionary and then as a university teacher, and later also to India, Australia, Japan and North America, where he attended many conferences and gave lectures, apart from travelling on holidays around different parts of Europe. He had a tremendous zest for life, much energy and curiosity, and always a project on the go. No wonder that he was active as a scholar into his early nineties and outlived many others, so that he could write about Ninian's death at 73 'we miss his departure from the stage at a relatively young age' (*SHAP Journal* 2001/2002). He outlived Ninian by more than twenty years! By far the most detailed account and critical assessment of 'Parrinder's Life and Career' is given in Martin Forward's book *A Bag of Needments. Geoffrey Parrinder and The Study of Religion* (Peter Lang, Bern, 1998) which, like the earlier *Festschrift*, contains a bibliography of Geoffrey's writing that still needs supplementing since it ends in 1994.

It is a great loss that Geoffrey is no more, but his memory and influence will live on in the people he touched through his presence, his work, his unstinting efforts at promoting dialogue, better understanding and closer collaboration between members of different faiths and cultures, and in advancing the study of religions as a significant subject area which deserves its rightful place in all educational institutions, from schools to universities. A service of thanksgiving for his life was held on 4 July at Orpington Methodist Church where he and his wife Mary worshipped for more than forty years. It was a life of many blessings, richly lived with and for others. It was a service that honoured a truly great and good man, blessed with a sense of abundance and a love of life, a man of learning, a man of family and many friends from many lands. I treasure above all the memory of a man of great compassion, kindness and a large heart who flourished as a human being and made others flourish around him. Let us hope that younger BASR scholars will be inspired by his work and example.

Ursula King
Professor Emerita, University of Bristol

African Memories

E. Geoffrey Parrinder: In Memoriam

The first professor ever to give me one of his or her publications was E. Geoffrey Parrinder. The gift of this book proved more memorable than either of us could have anticipated. I remember the moment well in 1975 — we had returned to his office at King's College, London after a class on Islam. I informed him that I was heading to Ibadan, Nigeria to conduct field research for my M.Phil. He grabbed this unassuming black book off his shelf and handed it to me. I saw that it was entitled, *Religion in an African City* (1953). Professor Parrinder explained that it was the fruits of a team research project, which he led, to document the multi-religious landscape of the great Nigerian metropolis, Ibadan. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, he served as a lecturer in the newly formed Department of Religious Studies at the University of Ibadan (UI). He made it a point to tell me proudly that the department at UI, even though a daughter institution of the University of London, was named the Department of Religious Studies to reflect its more pluralistic setting. He also emphasized its antecedence to many other Religious Studies departments in Britain. Ibadan was, and still is, a huge bustling city where Islam, Christianity and traditional religions share space and negotiate power.

The famous book got packed with personal effects and shipped off to Nigeria. Not long after I arrived in Nigeria, the time came to go to the famed cargo shed at Lagos airport to retrieve the boxes. It seemed like an impossible task, wandering around in the chaos of boxes and spilled contents to locate one's own beloved belongings. On the verge of giving up, I suddenly espied, at eye level perched on top of a pile of boxes, the Parrinder book! I was overjoyed to find it and even more so, when I realized that it was a pointer to my boxes below! I did write to Professor Parrinder and let him know that his book proved to be more illuminating than he could have hoped for. I also took up the challenge that he tossed in my direction, back in 1974. 'Why don't you update the book?' he had said. I did in fact go on to do a study of religious pluralism for my Ph.D., only in the smaller south-eastern Nigeria town of Calabar, over on the other side of the country (*Religion in Calabar: the Religious Life and History of a Nigerian Town*, 1988). By that time, newer churches and religious movements abounded, making the mapping of the town's religious landscape a logistical challenge.

I found it admirable that a former Methodist missionary, turned professor, was so interested in traditional African religions, in addition to his expertise in Islam and Christianity. He had gone and interviewed Yoruba priests and visited shrines when in Ibadan. I learned from a Methodist colleague, who taught several years after he did at the Ecole de Théologie in then Dahomey (now Benin Republic), that Parrinder raised some eyebrows among the staff there by his interest in traditional religious belief and practice. It led him to write a very general, but eminently fair and useful, study, *African Traditional Religion*

(1954). As quite possibly the first ever comparative work on this subject it constituted a landmark text, even though it was eventually eclipsed in popularity by John Mbiti's *African Religions and Philosophy* (1970). *African Traditional Religion* has ensured scholarly recognition and even immortality for Geoffrey Parrinder throughout Africa. It spawned similar studies from the likes of E. Bolaji Idowu's *African Traditional Religion: a Definition* (1973) (Idowu served as head of department at UI, before going on to become 'Patriarch' of the Methodist Church in Nigeria), J. Amosade Awolalu (who also became head) and J. P. Dopamu (*West African Traditional Religion*, 1979). I found that the mere mention of Parrinder's name in academic and religious circles in Nigeria had a cachet which opened doors for me, an unknown postgraduate student from Britain. I can perhaps claim that I learned how to name-drop thanks to Geoffrey Parrinder! This is a vital skill in Nigeria, not least Africa as a whole. You are someone by virtue of whom you come from and who you know.

I am not sure how much Geoffrey Parrinder kept up on the religious news from Nigeria over the last three decades. When he was there, prior to political independence in 1960, Nigeria could vaunt itself as a fount of religious tolerance, something that Parrinder noted in his 1953 study. Not long after I arrived, in the 1970s the harmonious co-existence began to turn sour, with wranglings over the place of Shari'a in the new Constitution, and before long, deadly riots between Muslims and Christians, which tragically continue to the present day. I am sure that Parrinder would not have been happy to have learned that in recent years Muslim scholars broke away from the Department of Religious Studies at UI to found a separate department of Arabic and Islamic Studies (although Islam is still taught by the valiant Professor Joseph Kenny, a Dominican priest). Nor would he have liked to hear that courses on traditional religion no longer have the place in the curriculum they once had, and indeed their livelihood is threatened by those with more conservative Christian leanings.

Geoffrey Parrinder laid important foundations for many, not least me, because of his early African experience and publications. The study of African religions has naturally evolved considerably, and there is now a thriving African Association for the Study of Religion <<http://www.a-asr.org>>, under the auspices of the International Association for the History of Religions. So it is the least we can do to pay our dues to our ancestors such as Geoffrey Parrinder. 'If we stand tall,' the Yoruba say, 'it is because we stand on the shoulders of many ancestors.'

Rosalind I. J. Hackett
The University of Tennessee

BASR CONFERENCE REPORT

BASR 2005 Annual Conference

The annual conference was held on 6 September 2005, at the Warburg Institute, London, with 35 persons attending. After the President's welcome and preliminary remarks, Professor Frank Whaling of the University of Edinburgh presented a paper on 'Religious Studies: Past, Present and Future', which illness had prevented him from giving at the BASR 50th Anniversary Conference in September 2004.

Professor Whaling suggested that the modern study of religion began around 1850, and stressed the importance of taking into account the historical, political and cultural realities within which the field evolved. After reviewing various stages in this evolution, he commented that in future the study of religion may be affected by the so-called 'War on Terror', which restricts the movements of scholars and yet may also increase the reliance of governments on them for specialised information about different religions. This brings forward the issue of 'engaged scholarship': can (or indeed should) scholars of religion become engaged in the wider political and cultural issues of their times? Professor Whaling suggested that the main role of the scholar of religion should be to mediate between factions rather than take sides. The discussion that followed his presentation focused on the issue of engagement, in particular the question of whether it is possible for us to be selective about whether or how we can be engaged, and the importance of involving religious practitioners in explaining their beliefs to others.

Lunch was followed by the Annual General Meeting, which is reported separately. Then Professor Seth Kunin of the University of Aberdeen spoke on 'The dialectical relationship between theory and ethnography in the anthropological study of religion'. He asked what role theory plays (or should play) in the study of religion: is it possible to have no theory at all? Can there really be an 'innocent anthropologist'? There may be an underlying (unacknowledged) premise in academic work that to have a theory is to have a bias; to be 'objective', i.e. without bias, one must be without theory also. But are scholars who say they are 'objective' (i.e. without theory) in fact using theories of which they are unaware?

Professor Kunin suggested there must be a dialectical relationship between theory and ethnography. The anthropologist should start with a theory, test it against the data, rethink the theory in the light of the test results, and move with this new abstraction back to the data. The process of alternately abstracting and testing is continuous. The abstraction allows for a comparative approach, but the constant dialectical testing against data allows the dynamism of complex social structures to be taken into account. The dialectical approach should also help the anthropologist avoid the temptation to selectively disregard data which

do not fit the original theory.

Unfortunately, Professor Kunin had to leave soon afterwards for another engagement, so discussion of his provocative and thoughtful presentation was somewhat curtailed.

Margaret Gounin

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

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at 1.30 p.m. on 6 Sept. 2005
The Warburg Institute, London

1. Welcome. The President, Jim Cox, declared the meeting open by welcoming the members and guests, and noting that in the event of any voting only members would be permitted to vote.

2. Apologies. Apologies were received from the following members: Dominic Corrywright, Mathew Guest, Eleanor Nesbitt, Jo Overend, Terry Thomas, Brian Bocking.

3. Minutes. The Minutes of the AGM held on 14 September 2004 in Harris Manchester College, Oxford, and which had been published in the BASR Bulletin 103 (Nov 2004), were approved and signed by the President.

4. President's Address. The Honorary President, Jim Cox, addressed the Meeting.

The full text of the address is found at the conclusion of these Minutes.*

5. Secretary's Report. The Honorary Secretary, Graham Harvey, reported that the current mailing list contains 245 names, which is a small increase on last year's 238 — but, once again, some names have some names have dropped out and others have been added as some members have lapsed and others have joined.

The Secretary noted that the Executive Committee had met three times since the last AGM: 15 December and 2 February at the University of Wolverhampton, and 11 May at the Open University. The overriding themes of the meetings had focused on four main areas: (1) planning and funding issues to do with the IAHR congress and EASR conferences; (2) preparation of a conference questionnaire; (3) the adoption of *Diskus*; and 4) responses to RAE2008 subpanel documents.

On the first point, as the Treasurer will report, in addition to paying fees to the larger bodies, we have made contributions to enable their international work: especially by facilitating the participation of scholars from poorer countries.

On the second point, as the Conference Organiser will report, a questionnaire was prepared, discussed and distributed to aid organisation of future conferences.

On the third point, Michael Pye and Brian Bocking approached us about the possibility of BASR taking over editorial control and web hosting of *Diskus* — a peer reviewed, on-line journal currently hosted on Marburg University's computer. This is the subject of a report under 9. Occasional Papers Editor's Report.

On the fourth point, we have discussed issues relating to the RAE2008 and will be submitting an official response via their website by the deadline of 19 September.

The executive committee has not proposed any new Honorary Life Members this year. As last year was the Association's fiftieth year it seemed a suitable time to honour a number of significant people. We agreed that "honorary life members should be retired from a full time position and have made a significant contribution to BASR" (Minutes of the executive committee of BASR, 15 Dec 2004, Item 13.). All members are invited to propose Honorary Life Members.

Jim Cox invited discussion. Ron Geaves expressed disappointment that the criteria for honorary life membership does not include "advancement of Religious Studies in Britain". The President suggested that the Association should certainly consider ways of honouring people who have made significant contributions to our field, but argued that honorary life membership is rightly linked to contributions to the Association. Peggy Morgan, past-President, supported the existing system, saying that it honoured active membership in the Association and that other bodies and festschriften recognised wider roles.

6. Treasurer's Report

The Honorary Treasurer, Helen Waterhouse, presented her annual report – with apologies that it had been impossible to have it audited in advance of the meeting. It would be audited on 7 September, and published in the next Bulletin.

Last year's figures are shown in brackets for comparative purposes.

The accumulated balances in the General and Conference funds stand at £10,051.

The Treasurer drew attention to:

- diminished income from Gift Aid (and requested that members complete the forms)
- increased costs and diminishing income of the Occasional Papers
- high costs of committee expenses this year as it was necessary to support

IAHR and EASR participation

- the donation of two sums of £1000 to IAHR: the first to aid scholars from poorer countries, the second following the IAHR Treasurer's Report that the poor state of finances would soon make it impossible for the IAHR to function unless something was done.
- the donation of money to EASR to support conference participation.
- the cost of insuring the Association.

The Treasurer also gave formal notice that subscriptions will be raised on 1 October 2005 — to £20 (£10 concessionary rate).

She also gave notice that she will be stepping down as Treasurer next year — and a new Treasurer will need to be elected.

The Treasurer's report (as audited the following day) appears at the conclusion of these Minutes.

Ron Geaves proposed that the Treasurer's Report be accepted, Hugh Goddard seconded. It was approved by the members.

The President thanked the Treasurer for her meticulous work on behalf of the Association.

7. Bulletin Editor's Report

The BASR Bulletin Editor, George Chryssides began by noting that back numbers of the Bulletin are available. He encouraged members to submit more new material – especially for the regular “Religious Studies in the UK” and “Turning Point” features. “Engaged Scholarship” has attracted some attention both at IAHR and BASR meetings – an article by Jim Cox will be in next Bulletin, but others are invited to discuss and comment on this. The regular inclusion of notices about conferences could usefully be followed by reports of those conferences.

The Bulletin Editor requested updates of addresses and research interests.

The Hon. President thanked George Chryssides for producing a well received and professional Bulletin that is a splendid representation of BASR.

The Honorary President thanked the Bulletin Editor for all the work undertaken in producing the Bulletin.

8. Report of the Conference Organiser

The Conference Organiser, Marion Bowman, began by thanking Peggy Morgan for organising last year's magnificent event, and reminding members that we have established a tradition of having only a one-day conference in the year of an IAHR quinquennial congress.

Having included a “conference questionnaire” in the last Bulletin, we still need more responses in order to be able hand the next Conference Organiser a useful set of hard data about members' wishes, especially about dates and length of conferences. Initial responses suggest that people favour residential, week-day conferences earlier in September rather than later.

Next year's conference will be hosted by Bath Spa University, 4-6 September. Proposed topics include: religion and money / commerce; religion and institutions; religions and geography. More suggestions are welcome.

Invitations for the 2007 conference have been received from Edinburgh and Lampeter.

The Conference Organiser noted that she will also need a replacement next year.

8. Report of the Editor of the Occasional Papers

In the absence of the Occasional Papers Editor, the Secretary reported that the two final Occasional Papers are ready for publication.

With the transfer of *Diskus* to the editorial control of BASR's executive committee, this and future years' annual lectures can be published in that venue. The committee will meet to decide on procedures for considering other material for publication. Information will be provided in the Bulletin.

Diskus will be hosted within the BASR website and freely available to all web-browsers. Past issues may be archived both on the Marburg site and on BASR's site. When this is clarified, members will be notified via the Bulletin.

10. Subject Centre Report

An extended version of Darlene Bird's report is appended to these minutes.

11. AUDTRS Report

Denise Cush, BASR representative to the Association of University Departments of Theology and Religious Studies (AUDTRS), reported that a meeting had been held at King's College London the previous day (5 Sept) to discuss the RAE2008.

George Newlands, chair of sub-panel n61 responded to questions and concerns raised by AUDTRS representatives. Hugh Pyper drafted AUDTRS' summary of the meeting and would consult representatives before submitting AUDTRS response to the sub-panel's criteria via the RAE2008 website.

The following issues were clarified: the sub-panel has an inclusive definition of the discipline; will give weight to Teaching and Learning pedagogy; will not discriminate between type and location (i.e. outcomes themselves will be important).

The following issues were debated: the weighting of 15% for research environment and 5% for esteem indicators; the question of the "superbook" (individuals and departments will have to make decisions); the non-listing of "non-research active staff" this time; the status of "category B" staff this time (i.e. last time they were included if they had moved institution within a defined period before the census date); and the definition of "new researchers" (i.e. it is noted that these will not be expected to submit four outputs – but the question of when someone's "research" activity commences may not always be clear).

It was also noted that the subject's "benchmarks" are to be revised. However, we are promised a "light touch" as our existing benchmarks are considered "a benchmark for benchmarks".

Ron Geaves (University of Chester's AUDTRS rep) also noted that there was some concern with subjectivity, e.g. in converting narratives about research environments into quantitative results.

12. EASR Report

Marion Bowman reported to the AGM as she had represented BASR at the EASR conference in Turku, Finland. It was a successful meeting and the minutes of the General Assembly are available on the EASR website (which can be reached by clicking through from the BASR website – as is true of the IAHR website).

BASR was praised both for paying its dues promptly and for making additional donations to support bursary funds.

EASR now has 19 affiliated national Associations and 8 individual members. However, only 7 groups have paid membership fees. Turkey is the most recent Association to affiliate with EASR and IAHR.

BASR members are automatically members of EASR.

The next EASR conference will be 19-21 Sept 2006 in Bucharest. The theme will be "the Religious History of Europe and Asia". Papers will be accepted in Rumanian, English and French.

The *Internet Journal of Religion* will be transferred to the EASR.

13. IAHR report

The President included a report on the IAHR congress in his report.

The Treasurer reported on IAHR finances in her report. Members who wish to suggest means of improving the IAHR's finances are invited to contact the IAHR Treasurer via their website.

14. Election of President Elect and announcement of further elections

The Honorary President, Jim Cox, noted that the Bulletin had requested nominations for the election of a President Elect (BASR's procedure being that an incoming President would be given a year's "shadowing" period).

The Secretary announced that a single nomination was received by the deadline. Marion Bowman was proposed by Brian Bocking, seconded by Jim Cox.

The meeting unanimously approved. This result will be announced in the Bulletin.

The Secretary also reiterated the notice that nominations would be requested for a new Treasurer and Conference Organiser to replace the existing officers at next year's AGM.

15. President's Word of Thanks

James Cox, Honorary President, thanked Marion Bowman and Helen Waterhouse for their conference organising efforts. He thanked the Warburg Institute. He thanked the executive committee members for their hard work over the year. He thanked Frank Whaling and Seth Kunin for their stimulating papers.

16. Any Other Business. There was no further business.

17. Date of Next Meeting

The President closed the meeting at 3pm and announced that the next AGM of the BASR will be held during the 2006 annual conference at Bath Spa University.

Submitted by Graham Harvey, Honorary Secretary, 26 September 2005.

**Editor's note:* James Cox's address was largely a report on the Nineteenth IAHR World Congress in Tokyo, and the text of his written report is therefore reproduced on page 25.

BRITISH ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS

affiliated to

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS

EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS

REGISTERED CHARITY NO: 801567

INLAND REVENUE REF: XN79047

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE 16 AUGUST 2004 TO 15 AUGUST 2005

INCOME

EXPENDITURE

General Fund

Balance at 16 August 2004	8045 (7426)⁷
Inland Revenue	223 ¹
Subscriptions	2481 ² (2536)
Bulletin insert fees	300 (450)
Occasional papers	145 (18)
Bank int	<u>333 (128)</u>
	11527

Internet charges	(68)
Printing and postage Bulletin	1319 (1020)
Printing and postage Occ Papers	265 (109)
Committee expenses	1370 ³ (914)
EASR/IAHR membership	413 (402)
Donation to IAHR	1000 ⁴
Donation to EASR	214 ⁵
Bank charges	26 (7)
Insurance	205 ⁶
Balance in hand 15 August 2005	<u>6715 (8045)</u>
	11527

Conference Fund

Balance at 16 August 2004	9954 (5577)
2003 conference fees	(3321)
2004 conference fees	14228 (4701)
2005 conference fees	<u>235</u>
	24417

2003 Conference expenses	(3418)
2004 Conference expenses	20082 (220)
Donation to IAHR Tokyo	1000 ⁴
Balance in hand 15 August 2005	<u>3335 (9954)</u>
	24417

FINANCIAL YEAR 16 AUGUST 2004 TO 15 AUGUST 2005

Balance at 16 August 2004		18000
Total Income	17945	
Total Expenditure	(25894)	
Balance at 15 August 2005		10051

Accounts prepared by: Dr Helen Waterhouse, Hon. Treasurer, 17 August 2005

AUDITOR'S REPORT

I have obtained all the information and explanations which to the best of my knowledge and belief were necessary for the purposes of my audit. I have examined the balance sheet and annexed receipts and payments accounts which are in agreement with the Association's records. In my opinion and to the best of my information, and according to the explanations given to me, the balance sheet gives a true and fair view of the Association's affairs at 15 August 2005, and the receipts and payments account shows properly the transactions for the year expired on that date.

Audited by Mrs Jill Rowe 7 September 2005

Notes to the accounts

1. While our capital funds remain buoyant subscriptions are no longer covering BASR's regular annual outgoings.
2. This figure represents the amount we were able to reclaim from the Inland Revenue as a result of members' Gift Aid declarations.
3. Committee expenses are inevitably high because the committee is widely spread across the UK. This year's expenses are particularly high because we had to partially fund representatives at the IAHR business meeting in Tokyo.
4. We have made two separate donations to the IAHR this year. The first, from the conference fund, was to contribute to the costs of IAHR representatives from poorer associations attending the Tokyo congress. The second was made after we learned of the IAHR's precarious financial state.
5. We also made a small donation to the EASR's conference fund. This represented a double payment of our regular subscription.

6. This is a new entry in the BASR accounts. Officers of the BASR believe that we cannot risk being uninsured, especially at the annual conference. We have therefore taken out a policy with a company that specialises in insuring charities such as BASR. This will be an ongoing annual expense.

7. Figures for 2003/4 are given in brackets for comparative purposes.

Treasurer's additional remarks

As usual, we would be very grateful if any members who are income tax payers but who have not completed a Gift Aid declaration would do so. Details and a form are available on the BASR website (basr.org.uk). This is a very straightforward way for you to help us increase our funds and makes no difference to your own tax affairs. If you have worries or concerns about the system please contact me.

For the first time for many years we are raising subscription rates. From 1 October **2006** full subscriptions will increase from £15 to £20 and concessions from £8 to £10. If you pay by standing order from your bank please be sure to make the change in good time for the 2006 payment. The increase is necessary because our regular annual expenses have risen and are no longer covered by subscription income.

Subscriptions are due on 1 October. If you pay annually by cheque and have not yet sent your contribution please do so as soon as possible. Rates remain at £15 for waged members and £8 for unwaged members this year. I am always pleased to receive your payments and it does cut down on tedious and time consuming administrative work if you can send cheques without needing a personal reminder.

My address is as follows: Helen Waterhouse, Arts Faculty, The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA

President's Report:

The 'Socially Engaged' Scholar of Religion: Reflections on the XIXth World Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions

The Nineteenth World Congress of the IAHR was held in Tokyo from 24-30 March 2005 with approximately 1,700 delegates attending from most parts of the world. The theme of the Congress was 'Religion: Conflict and Peace', which was divided into the following sub-themes: 'The Religious Dimension of War and Peace'; 'Technology, Life and Death'; 'Global Religions and Local Cultures'; 'Boundaries and Segregations'; 'Method and Theory in the Study of Religion'. In addition, numerous special lectures and programmes were held during the evening, some providing specific insight into the religious situation in Japan. Concern had been expressed during the Eighteenth World Congress in Durban that African delegates would find the costs prohibitive to attend the Nineteenth Congress in Tokyo, but it was clear that the IAHR and the African Association for the Study of Religions made strong efforts in this regard, since over 70 participants came from regions throughout sub-Saharan Africa. British delegates also were present in strong numbers, including at least five postgraduate students from British departments of Religious Studies, most of whom made presentations in the sessions. Because the Congress was so large, as many as ten panels ran simultaneously throughout the day, after the opening plenary address had been delivered. The British Association for the Study of Religions joined with the North American Association for the Study of Religions and Equinox Press to host a reception for delegates, which was very well attended.

In such a large event, it is impossible to present an overall picture of what occurred, since individuals would have had different experiences and perceptions. From my point of view, there emerged an overriding issue from the Congress, what I am calling the 'socially engaged' scholar of religion. By this I mean to call attention to the question as to if and, if so, how a scholar of religion should relate to the life-threatening situations that religious communities may be perpetrating or victimised by. The theme of the Congress in one sense encouraged this reflection, since very easily the study of conflict and peace can turn to considering ways religion can reduce violence and contribute to peacemaking. That this has become a topic of intense discussion since September 11 has not passed without notice. This, of course, extends prior debates amongst scholars of religion about the insider/outsider problem, or even the relationship of theology to religious studies. It has adopted a far more practical and in some senses human dimension than before due to the many

recent international crises that directly implicate religious participants.

This issue emerged at the Congress significantly in two related contexts. The first was evident during the opening symposium entitled 'Religion and Dialogue among Civilizations'. It is important to point out that the Opening Symposium did not form part of the official academic agenda of the Congress, since it had been organised locally by the Japanese Committee and was meant to involve the larger community beyond the delegates themselves. Nevertheless, it was described prominently in the programme and entailed the first exposure most delegates had to the considerations of the Congress. The aim of the opening session was described by the organisers as considering the 'wars and conflicts in many parts of the world' and how 'there have been attempts among the religious communities of the world to undertake a dialogue between religions'. The Opening Symposium could be described as precisely the application of religion to issues of conflict and peace rather than the academic study of how religion has or is contributing to societal disorder. That this was a critical issue was raised at several of the panels on theory and method in the study of religions and it emerged at the meeting of the IAHR International Committee.

The general argument expressed by those opposed to an 'engaged' position was that the scholar of religion must remain detached from social and political involvement, in so far as he or she is operating as a *scholar* of religion. It is perfectly acceptable and indeed responsible for the academics to become involved as citizens in such issues, but not in the role as one who is studying religion for academic purposes. The counter-argument to this emphasised that the context for studying religion very much determines the methodology one employs. Some delegates asked, for example, how it is possible in the midst of religious violence between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria for a scholar to remain neutral. Or, with respect to the study of witchcraft, where accusations still are made and people put to death, it was asked how a researcher could abstain from assuming a moral position. Similar situations creating ethical dilemmas for researchers occur throughout the world. From an academic perspective, David Chidester has argued forcefully in his book, *Savage Systems*, that the study of religions in South Africa looks very different in the light of the history of colonialism and apartheid than it does to the Western academic working in a European or North American university.

I call attention to this issue, not because it was the only problem to emerge from Tokyo, nor because it was even the dominant theme of discussions. I raise this because I think it stresses an area that those of us conducting research in religion will need to discuss and debate in our own contexts. If the concern over the relationship between theology and religious studies still defines an underlying tension for scholars of religion, it seems to me that it is increasingly being overtaken by the more powerful theoretical and practical problem posed by the sometimes overwhelming human tragedies with which our studies inevitably confront us. In this sense, the Nineteenth IAHR Congress has forced

us to deepen our theoretical concerns to see ourselves reflected in the way religion contributes to situations of conflict and peace.

James L. Cox
University of Edinburgh

OTHER BASR MATTERS

GIFT AID

It is no longer possible to claim Gift Aid on the basis of a signed covenant: all BASR covenants have now expired. Our Gift Aid income has reduced considerably this year because of that. If you pay UK taxes and have not yet made a Gift Aid declaration we would be grateful if you could do so. The tax refund that comes from Gift Aid is a valuable source of income which we want to maximise. A Gift Aid declaration is included with this month's Bulletin and can also be downloaded from the web site. You can either complete that and send it to me by post, or paste the following words into an e-mail for electronic submission:

Please treat my BASR subscriptions as Gift Aid donations with effect from 6 April 2004. I confirm that I pay income tax or capital gains tax equal to or exceeding the tax deducted from the subscription rate.

In the case of an e-mailed declaration no signature is necessary. I would rather receive duplicate forms from you than no form at all and it is quicker for me to deal with duplicates than with e-mail enquiries about whether you have a current declaration. Therefore, if you are not sure whether you have signed a declaration please send another! Thank you.

Helen Waterhouse

Dr Helen Waterhouse, Arts Faculty, The Open University, Walton Hall,
Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA. E-mail: <h.j.waterhouse@open.ac.uk>

EASR NEWS

The EASR Annual Conference took place in Turku, Finland, 17-20 August 2005, the theme being 'Exercising Power: The Role of Religions in Concord and Conflict'. At the time of going to press, no report on the event was available. More information can be found on the web pages of The Donner Institute for Research in Religious and Cultural History at <www.abo.fi/institut/di/Congress/Congress%202005.htm> The General Assembly minutes and the General Secretary's Report will appear in due course on the EASR web site: www.easr.de

In the meantime, BASR members may be interested to note that the next EASR conference will be held in Bucharest, Romania, in September 2006. The theme will be 'The Religious History of Europe and Asia: Past, Present and Future'. Further details will be posted on the EASR web pages.

FORTHCOMING CONFERENCES

BASR Annual Conference

4 – 6 September 2006

at

Bath Spa University

Registration forms and further details will be available on the
BASR website.

The Spalding Symposium on Indian Religions

Jesus College, the University of Oxford

March 31st – April 2nd 2006

Call for Papers

The Spalding Symposium on Indian Religions invites papers on Indian religious cultures and traditions. The Spalding Symposium is an annual conference bringing together scholars from many disciplines who are working in the general areas of Indian Studies.

Proposals in the form of a title, a short abstract and a brief biographical statement including affiliation should be sent by November 30th 2005, to papers@spaldingsymposium.com. It is expected that a selection of papers from the Symposium will be published. Speakers, papers and a provisional programme will be posted on the Spalding website as soon as they become available.

www.spaldingsymposium.com

Annual One-Day Conference on Islamic Studies

Theme: Islam, the Nation-State and Democracy

**School of Humanities
University of Gloucestershire
Tuesday 4 April 2006**

Call for Papers

Papers on any aspect of the above theme are invited for this conference. Presentations for 30 minutes are followed by discussion of about 15 minutes. The title and an abstract of about 300 words may be sent to:

Dr. T. Gabriel, Honorary Research Fellow, School of Humanities, Francis Close Campus, Cheltenham, GL50 4AZ, or by email: <tgabriel@glos.ac.uk> before 31 December 2005.

Faith, Spirituality and Social Change

University College, Winchester

8 April 2006

A conference bringing together people whose action for social change is informed by their faith, organisations working with faith communities for social change, and academics exploring faith-based social change issues.

This conference invites discussion about the dynamic dimensions of inter-faith dialogue, and multi-faith action across a range of social change issues. Opening the debate to include academic perspectives and grass-roots voices will allow for broader conversations about the current state and future direction of faith-based social change.

We invite proposals for posters, 20 minute papers or 30 minutes workshops in the context of faith-based social change which broadly address any of the following themes:

Ecology and/or Environment
Gender and/or Sexuality
Education – formal and/or faith-based
Cultural dimensions – including music, art, literature
Social Protest
World Development and/or Social Regeneration
Lifestyle as Protest

Proposals in the form of a title, a short abstract (300 words max.) and a brief biographical statement including affiliation should be sent by

30 November 2005

to adrian.harris@winchester.ac.uk or christina.welch@winchester.ac.uk

It is expected that a selection of papers from the conference will be published.

Speakers, papers and a provisional programme will be posted on the conference web site as soon as they become available.

<<http://www.fsscconference.org.uk>>

‘SEEING WITH DIFFERENT EYES’

A CONFERENCE ON COSMOLOGY AND DIVINATION

28-30 April 2006

**Keynote speakers: Gregory Shaw (Stonehill College, Mass.),
Peter Struck (University of Pennsylvania),
Barbara Tedlock (SUNY, Buffalo)**

This conference will explore the nature and implications of the visionary knowledge which arises through divinatory practices, the ‘inner sight’ which is evoked through the use of metaphor and symbol in a ritual or therapeutic context, or in everyday life. Questions of *knowledge* and *realisation* will be raised in relation to astrology and other forms of divination. Is divinatory insight best understood as a psychological process, an altered state of consciousness, or a spiritual connection with higher beings? Is it necessarily ‘esoteric’, comparable to the initiation rituals of the ancient mystery traditions, or is it available to anyone at any time? What is the role of training and expertise in divination? In the reading of an omen or interpretation of a symbol, how do imagination and technique work together to bring hidden knowledge to the surface? Does a symbolic perception artificially impose meaning on an otherwise meaningless world, or help to create a more coherent cosmos? Does divination allow a glimpse into deeper levels of existence, or simply distort our rational minds with delusion, projection and fantasy? In short, what can we learn from both historical sources and contemporary practice about the nature and ground of ‘truth’ in divination, its value and philosophical implications? What is being revealed, and through what agency?

Papers on any aspect of these questions (30 mins) are invited from both researchers and practitioners in fields including (but not limited to) ancient history, anthropology, astrology, classics, divination, philosophy, psychology, religious studies and theology.

Please send abstracts (200-300 words) to Dr Angela Voss

(a.voss@kent.ac.uk) by 31st December 2005

Website: www.kent.ac.uk/secl/Div_conf/

अनु प्रत्नास आयवः पदं नवीयो अक्रमुः

The ancient bards have walked in a newer step—R̥g-Veda 9, 23, 2

STIMW

The Sanskrit Tradition in the Modern World

23rd Annual STIMW Symposium

Friday 26 May 2006 11 a.m.-5 p.m.

University of Manchester

CALL FOR PAPERS

Offers of papers please to
Dr Jacqueline Suthren Hirst

Religions and Theology, Humanities Lime Grove,
University of Manchester,
Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL
jacqueline.hirst@manchester.ac.uk

For two decades the seminar, first convened by Dr Dermot Killingley, University of Newcastle, in 1984, has offered a forum for the discussion of papers on varied aspects of Indian religions. Papers have been presented by leading scholars in the field as well as by research students. Papers are sent to participants in advance, so that they can be read and discussed in detail. They are available to those who cannot attend for a small charge. We look forward to continuing this excellent, friendly seminar in Manchester.

For further details, see <http://www.manchester.ac.uk/religion/stimw>

To join the mailing list, please email janet.meredith@manchester.ac.uk

**Theology *and* Religious Studies
or
Theology *vs* Religious Studies?**

**6-7 July 2006
University of Oxford**

This is a two-day conference offering participants the opportunity to explore the relationship between Theology and Religious Studies and to consider the challenges of, and strategies for, teaching both.

Speakers

Gavin D'Costa (Bristol), Kim Knott (Leeds), David Ford (Cambridge)

Call for papers

Abstracts of 150 to 300 words should be submitted no later than 31 January 2006.

Suggested topics include: Theology *and* Religious Studies; Theology *vs* Religious Studies; Teaching Theology; Teaching Religious Studies; the Future of both Theology and Religious Studies.

http://www.prs.heacademy.ac.uk/events/t&rs_or_tvrs.html

Sponsored by the Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies
For more information contact Dr D L Bird at
enquiries@prs.heacademy.ac.uk

CONFERENCE REPORTS

Belief Beyond Boundaries Conference 20 April 2005

This year's one day conference of the Belief Beyond Boundaries Research Group held at the Open University, Milton Keynes, was entitled 'Locating the Ancestors', the term 'Ancestors' in this case referring to persons who, although dead, remained engaged with and by their descendants. The papers given set out to explore the place of 'Ancestors' in contemporary cultures, religions and societies. It was a full day with speakers coming from as far afield as New Zealand and the USA.

The morning began with a paper from Dr Martin Stringer entitled 'Chatting to Gran at Her Grave', and drew on fieldwork studies recently carried out amongst ordinary Christian congregations in the England, which revealed amongst other things, a significant interest in death and the dead: particularly the apparent importance of conversations with the dead within both urban and rural communities, and the implications this may have on the way we understand British popular religion. Dennis Klass then looked at the findings of a twenty-year study on a self help group of bereaved parents carried out in America by the speaker. The paper looked at the bonds which bereaved parents form with their dead children, and described the ways in which the parents as a group found solace through interaction with the dead children by linking objects, religious ideas and identification and by taking part in rituals such as cemetery tours and butterfly releases.

Audrey Linkman discussed the practice of post-mortem photography found in the family photograph albums of the late Victorian, early Edwardian era. The paper which explored such issues as the treatment of the subject, the specific way in which they were photographed and its meaning and what the role and significance of such portraits was in this minority practice. Ancestor worship on ANZAC Day was used by Dr Leon Grandy to illustrate the civil, formal and personal religiosities that make up the New Zealand religious experience by the second speaker. This paper explored how the veneration of martial ancestors on ANZAC Day proves that although New Zealand is outwardly seen as a secular culture it has more subtle and complex ways of expressing its religious convictions, thus denying the contentions of Sharpe and Sinclair. Helen Cornish considered the ways in which rural 'cunning folk' are seen by some as a source of ancestral knowledge, in turn providing an accessible past based on the idea of continuity through a craft based, rural magical tradition. Jenny Blain looked at the indigenising of heathen ancestors through a collection of images drawn together by practitioners and anthropologists for a current project on sacred sites. She looked at the past and how we visualise it

today, at ancestors past and present, recent and distant, spiritual and physical, at how the ancestors within heathenry become indigenous within the landscape. With the evolution of new groups and communities of Shamanic practitioners these connections with the sacred landscape are being made again, through the re-embedding of personal spirituality in the landscape.

Dan Weinbren looked at the Friendly Societies and Mutual Aid Organisations which grew up to counter the restrictions placed on the treatment of paupers' dead in nineteenth -century Britain. These societies were set up .to help impoverished people protect themselves against problems incurred through the illness or death of a breadwinner. Some claimed ancestral descent from the Druids and Garden of Eden, and created their own funeral rites. Members paid money into the Society to pay for family burials, reassuring them that they would not end up in a pauper's grave. The Societies stressed that there was fraternity in both the lodge and death. Garry Tregidga looked at the findings of a recent Community study carried out by CAVA (Institute of Cornish Studies) into kinship, memory and identity continuity, and in particular at the symbolic importance between Cornish Methodism and the dead maintained through oral tradition, written texts and family. This study looked at how the grass roots were affected by the vernacular tradition, at the spiritual power of the cultural setting, how all these and other elements re-affirm the cultural identity of Cornwall.

Finally, Helen Waterhouse looked at ancestor worship within a Buddhist new religion — Soka Gakkai — which has had significant success in gaining converts across the world. At a time when ancestor rites do not appear to interest Western Japanese Buddhism. and despite having distanced itself from ancestor worship in Japan, Soka Gakkai is the only group to retain twice-daily prayers in the UK which are very structured and include elements of ancestor worship. Prayers for the dead are very popular, even though many UK members have no understanding of the central importance of ancestor worship in Japan. The prayers give people a way of connecting with dead relatives and friends; mostly the prayers are for re-birth and enlightenment, but they are also important for their attitude to relatives and their relationships when they were alive. These prayers give structure to remembering and honouring the dead.

After tea and the plenary session the conference came to a close, having given us much to think about.

Jan Sumner
Bath Spa University

**CESNUR 2005 International Conference in Palermo, Sicily, Italy
(2-5 June, 2005)**

The traditional home of the Italian Mafia played host to a 4-day International Conference 'Religious Movements, Globalization, and Conflict: Transnational Perspectives' organised by CESNUR (Centre for Studies on New Religions) in cooperation with ISAR (Institute for the Study of American Religion), Santa Barbara, California and the Region of Sicily, Italy. CESNUR and ISAR are international, independent networks of associations of scholars working in the field of new religious movements. CESNUR's annual conference, such as the Palermo 2005, is undoubtedly one of the largest world gatherings of those active in the field of studies on new religions. The gorgeous seaside resort Hotel Saracen, Isola delle Femmine (Palermo), a tourist beehive, provided an additional congenial atmosphere for over 70 scholars and practitioners of new religious movements to share intellectual insights comparatively about the perceptions, reactions, conflict and adaptations of individuals, religious groups and secular institutions to globalisation and to the burgeoning religious pluriformity that confronts many contemporary societies.

The academic programme, spread through 21 sessions, comprising three plenary and 18 concurrent sessions, was thematically grouped. Themes ranged from Issues of Identity and Future of NRMs, of Religious Controversy, of Local and Global Movements, of Esoteric Movements, of Religious Pluralism within the globalisation context. Closely related are issues bordering on religion, violence and geo-politics; inter- and intra-religious dialogue and conflict; death, evil and religious movements. These and other issues benefited from interesting case studies from Scientology, Mormonism, ISKCON, Jehovah's Witnesses, Soka Gakkai, Falun Gong, Satanism and other NRMs such as those within or linked to Islam and Christianity. The theme of the conference is more than timely especially in an era when the world is awash with the inherent contradictions of the globalisation process.

As the organisers disclosed, participants were drawn from over 27 countries in Europe, North America, Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East. This coupled with an atmosphere of interdisciplinarity that characterised presentations and discussions gives it a somewhat 'glocalised' thrust. An interface between NRMs, researchers, scholars and practitioners definitely has its pros and cons. One advantage is that it provides an opportunity within a singular space-time for scholars and researchers to make public their research findings and hypotheses on NRMs and get corresponding feedbacks from the practitioners. Sometimes, such deliberations are indeed not far from being unproblematic, especially to the extent to which tensions and controversies are generated and

negotiated by participants. However, a number of interesting insights emerged from the lively, provocative and informative debates that followed each presentation. The conference provided a forum and opportunity to participants for charting new and widening old networks.

For many of the participants, the lunches, the dinners and the lavish Banquet at La Montagnola, Contrada Carrubella, Borgetto (Palermo) will definitely keep memories of Italian cuisine and hospitality lingering for a long time to come. The field trips to several historical-religious sites and particularly the excursion to the Catacombs may have appeared bizarre to many unsuspecting participants, but nevertheless connects neatly to the recurring discourse at the conference on ‘death’ and ‘evil’ as both of central research concern and among NRMs practitioners. The hot, sunny, summer weather throughout the conference drew some nostalgia, as I felt most times as if I was home in Africa.

Afe Adogame
University of Edinburgh

Epic Constructions: Gender, Myth and Society in the *Mahabharata*
SOAS, University of London, 7-9 July 2005

This conference forms part of the three-year AHRC project of the same name currently running in the Department of the Study of Religions at SOAS. Despite minor disruptions on the first day due to bombings in central London, the conference was great success. It brought together some fifty-five *Mahabharata* scholars from many different parts of the globe, predominantly Europe and North America. A keynote address entitled ‘Text or pretext: will the real *Mahabharata* please show itself?’ was delivered by James Fitzgerald of the University of Tennessee, who is the driving force behind the continuation of the University of Chicago Press translation of the *Mahabharata* left unfinished in 1979 by the death of J. A. B. van Buitenen. In addition, twenty-four research papers were presented and discussed. Most of the papers focused exclusively on the Sanskrit *Mahabharata* and employed a text-critical methodology to illuminate the text in terms of its historical context or its own internal logic. Several papers considered more recent *Mahabharata* (or *Mahabharata*-inspired) texts, or, using an anthropological approach, explored the integration of *Mahabharata* characters into localised religio-political structures in the present day.

Inevitably the conference was dominated by the absent figure of Julia Leslie, who set up the Epic Constructions project, but who died last September before she had had a chance to turn much of her attention to the *Mahabharata*. Her presence and her absence were both keenly felt at the

conference, the former most obviously in terms of the exciting, respectful and generous collaborative mood which predominated throughout. Many delegates shared reminiscences of Julia with the conference. Several of the papers discussed *Mahabharata* passages specifically germane to Julia's interests and experiences: there was a repeated focus on *Mahabharata* stories featuring birds, and on those which examine the responsibilities of men towards women, and husbands towards wives.

The papers were loosely grouped into three themed categories, one per day: Gender and Identity; Myth, Narrative, and Textual Structure; and Society and Ideology. All the words making up these categories have been subject to a great deal of theoretical exploration in recent years, usually without much reference to South Asian materials, and so, when attempting to discuss the *Mahabharata* in these terms, there is the danger of a frustrating mismatch between those familiar with this theoretical literature and those familiar with the *Mahabharata* itself. Because of the long and specific training required in either case, these two groups are too rarely found to overlap, and where they do there has often been some distrust from one side or the other. However, there were encouraging signs at the conference that the younger Sanskrit scholars in particular are increasingly willing to integrate critical theoretical perspectives into their own work, and to appreciate its integration into that of their colleagues. For example, on the question of gender, several different careful approaches were visible, and it was notable that the assembled scholars did not seem to view the text as straightforwardly prescriptive (that is, as intended to propagate normative gender roles for an ancient social context), acknowledging instead the playful complexities of the text's gendered symbolism.

In keeping with the title of our Association and Bulletin, and for want of any more pressing criterion, I shall limit my mention of specific speakers to those working in Britain. Brian Black (SOAS) demonstrated that particular female characters are included as an implied silent audience of many of the text's didactic discourses (I am, by the way, entirely responsible for any interpretive infelicities underlying these summaries); James Hegarty (Cardiff University) proposed that the *Mahabharata*'s view of its own textual function is patterned on the Vedic view of the creative and sustaining function of ritual; Nick Allen (University of Oxford) explored the various marriages arranged by the character Bhishma in terms of a para-Dumézilian Indo-European ideology of social functions; Simon Brodbeck (SOAS) showed that the Drona-Drupada section of the Poona *Mahabharata*'s first book is made up of three superimposed compositional rings; Nick Sutton (Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies) demonstrated the thematic centrality and the contextual specificity of the *Bhagavadgita* within the *Mahabharata*; with exemplary linguistic skill, Vaughan Pilikian (John and Jennifer Clay Foundation) detailed and discussed certain

recurring metaphorical overtones in the *Mahabharata*'s battle books; Lynn Thomas (Roehampton University) tracked the transposition of the motifs of the Rigveda's Indra-Vritra myth into an elongated series of different narratives in book three of the *Mahabharata*; and Irina Kuznetsova (University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne) positioned the *Bhagavadgita*'s theory of continuous sacrificial action as the culmination of a series of earlier ideas of sacrifice discernable in Vedic texts. Clearly, and most encouragingly, *Mahabharata* scholarship on these shores will have strength in depth for the foreseeable future.

A brief discussion of one question raised at the conference may be of general interest to those engaged in the study of religion. It concerns the place of textual scholarship within the study of the *Mahabharata* and within the study of South Asian religions more generally, and the perception and critique of an overconcentration on textual (predominantly Sanskrit) materials at the expense of present-day lived religious realities. At the conference this question revealed something of a gulf between practitioners of anthropological approaches and practitioners of text-critical ones. A general field of *Mahabharata* studies must accommodate both approaches, since as well as being a more or less specific Sanskrit text completed in early medieval India, 'the *Mahabharata*' is also a complex but pervasive network of local textual and performative traditions in the present day and stretching back into the past. As long as neither approach claims to represent the other, and each is specific about its scope, there should not be a problem. The interaction of the two approaches is necessary most obviously because these present-day traditions, *qua* traditions, do see themselves as stretching into the past, a past which then includes, for us as scholars, that Sanskrit text as its earliest known landmark. But although present-day *Mahabharata* cultures and scholarly cultures cannot retrospectively affect what that old text is, or what made it what it is (and thus the interaction of the anthropological and textual approaches may seem to be a one-way relation), nonetheless these cultures may certainly affect what is said about what that text is, and about what made it what it is. Thus, if any old text is considered worthy of investigation on its own terms, then steps may be taken to minimise misunderstandings resulting from the political interests of present-day or historically intermediate others, be they religious individuals or groups to whom that text and/or associated texts are sacred; ideologues who have co-opted or who wish to co-opt such individuals or groups in the short or long term; community leaders, self-appointed or otherwise; patrons; or other scholars. So, for example, there will always be some respectful resistance to the suggestion that to understand the Sanskrit *Mahabharata* it is not just potentially useful but somehow *necessary* to take note of what modern Hindus say about it, or of what Nilakantha and the other great commentators wrote about it, or of

what the American philologist E. W. Hopkins or any other scholar or human person wrote about it. It is important to acknowledge that these kinds of methodological concern remain pressing if ‘that old text’ is replaced, as the subject of inquiry, by ‘that (or this) present-day community, tradition, or religion’. But texts are excellent subjects for collective inquiry because it is surprisingly easy to agree on an extremely specific working definition of what is being inquired about (a certain precise sequence of syllables or marks — that is, an artefact), and thus there will seem to be an objective and external point of reference grounding the endeavour, however much it might be argued, and however correctly, that the artefact has been produced recently for this very purpose (the ancient artefact being merely hypothetical), or that the ancient artefact is in fact not at all accessible ‘on its own terms’, present-day considerations forcing the interpretation in every case.

Simon Brodbeck
SOAS, University of London

E-Publishing Seminar, AHRC, 24 May 2005.

The Arts and Humanities Research Council’s 2005 programme included a one-day Research Strategy Seminar on E-Publishing in the Arts and Humanities. Since the BASR is about to assume control of the e-journal *Diskus*, the Executive Committee decided to send a representative to find out more.

Keynote speakers were Professor David Robey (Director of the AHRC’s ICT in Arts and Humanities Research Programme), Dr Michael Jubb (Director of the Research Libraries Network), Martin Richardson (Managing Director, O.U.P. Journals Division) and Dr Paul Ayris (Director of Information Services, UCL).

A number of key issues emerged. Perhaps predictably, Arts and Humanities subjects are less prone to use digital resources than the sciences. Quality assurance is a concern, since anyone can place material on the World Wide Web. However, provided that appropriate refereeing is maintained, web publishing need not be considered inferior to traditional ways of disseminating material, and can certainly be put forward for RAE purposes.

Many electronic publications are simply e-versions of traditional ones. Where publishing is exclusively on-line or in CD-format, many innovations are possible. One obvious example is hypertext linking, including links to graphics and video material. Other possibilities are on-line refereeing, and progressive versions of one’s academic material — although this raises the issue of how and when one defines a definitive final version of a paper. On-

line resources can be ephemeral, and attention needs to be given to preservation and archiving of scholarly work.

In keeping with these recommendations, the AHRC has published the various presentations on-line, and these can be accessed at: www.ahrc.ac.uk/news/events (Scroll down to 'Previous events'.)

George D. Chryssides

**Annual Report for the BASR on the Activities of the
Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies
(formerly the PRS-LTSN)**

Name Change

The Subject Centre has undergone a name change. It is no longer called the PRS-LTSN but is now the Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies of the Higher Education Academy. For simplicity sake, it has been suggested that it be referred to as the Subject Centre for PRS.

Appointments

Two new appointments have been made in the past nine months. A new Subject Coordinator, Dr Darlene Bird, began in January and she is responsible for coordinating the activities of the Theology and Religious Studies Team, working closely with Dr Simon Smith, Dr Gary Bunt and Dr Emma Tomalin. With the recent appoint of Ms Julie Closs as Information Officer, the Subject Centre plans to expand its publication activities.

Conferences and Events

This past year the Subject Centre along with the Association of Muslim Social Scientists co-sponsored a very successful conference called 'Teaching Islam in Higher Education' (January, Birmingham). Approximately 100 delegates were in attendance. As a result of the success of this event, the Subject Centre is currently working with members of the British Association for Jewish Studies and other relevant Subject Centres to put together an interdisciplinary conference called 'Teaching Jewish Studies in Higher Education'.

The Subject Centre also organised a New Teachers Event which was held at Sheffield in January and approximately ten new TRS teachers (including postgrads and members of staff) were in attendance. There will be another event for new teachers on 11 January 2006 in Durham.

Support was provided by the Subject Centre for the following conferences: the British Sociological Association, Religion Group (April, Lancaster); the Women and the Divine Conference (June, Liverpool); the

British Association for Jewish Studies Annual Conference (July, Birmingham).

AHRC Award

In June the Subject Centre applied for and was awarded an AHRC Specialist Award for a Yorkshire and North East Collaborative Doctoral Research Training Programme for Philosophy, Theology, and Religious Studies. The Subject Centre plans to pilot this regional programme with a view to developing a larger, national programme in future.

Publications

The AUDTRS Handbook was updated from information provided by departments and has now been distributed. (Please note that it is imperative that departments provide the Subject Centre with updates on staff membership in order to ensure accuracy of the Handbook.)

A series of Faith Guides is forthcoming. The purpose of the Guides is to provide individuals, departments, and institutions with a resource for information on issues relating to teaching people of faith in a Higher Education environment.

Visits

The Subject Centre has visited over 8 per cent of all TRS departments in the country. A member of the TRS Team visited York St John College in February. Also, the Subject Centre offered a workshop at Cardiff University on implementing PDP (personal development planning) in June.

Upcoming / Future Conferences and Events

The Subject Centre is currently working towards increasing the number of conferences and events it sponsors and welcomes input from the subject communities on possible themes and topics. Some upcoming and future conferences and events include the following:

Religions in Conversation with the Environment, 2 November 2005 (Birmingham). This will be a one-day workshop event offering participants an opportunity to explore the relationship between the religions and the environment. The speakers for the day are Graham Harvey (Religious Studies, Open University), Simon James (Philosophy, Durham), Martin Haigh (Geography, Oxford Brookes).

Theology and Religious Studies or Theology vs Religious Studies? 6-7 July 2006 (Oxford). This two-day conference will offer participants the opportunity to explore the relationship between Theology and Religious

Studies and consider the challenges of, and strategies for, teaching both. Keynote speakers: Gavin D'Costa (Bristol), Kim Knott (Leeds), James Cox (Edinburgh), David Ford (Cambridge). Call for papers deadline is 31 January 2006.

Further information is available on the Subject Centre's website: <http://www.prs.heacademy.ac.uk>

Darlene Bird
Subject Centre for PRS

RELIGIOUS STUDIES IN THE U.K.

Studying Religions at the Open University

It is difficult to talk about the Open University (OU) without immediately getting into numbers. The eight full-time members in the Religious Studies Department currently manage the production and annual presentation of four undergraduate courses, in addition to supervising research students.¹ In 2005, approximately 1,200 students registered for these courses, which are delivered in the OU's thirteen regions in the UK and throughout Europe by 74 Associate Lecturers. The department's contribution to far larger interdisciplinary courses, such as 'Introduction to the Humanities' (formerly referred to as a 'foundation course') taken annually by some 6,000 students, 'From Enlightenment to Romanticism', and 'European Identities', ensures that many more students have some acquaintance with the study of religions. Although a significant number of students who choose Religious Studies courses do so because of vocational relevance, many more are studying simply for self-fulfilment and thus tend to pick a varied selection of courses (perhaps from more than one faculty), which might include one or more courses on religion. The department strives to meet the needs of this large and highly diverse student body.

The early phases in the development of Religious Studies at the OU have been described by Terry Thomas.² Much has happened at the OU since the early 1990s, not least to Religious Studies. Since achieving full departmental status in 1993, staffing in Religious Studies has increased steadily to its present level. Three research associates, selected from its Associate Lecturers, are linked to the department. The gradual expansion in staffing over the last ten years has enabled the department to produce a new suite of courses. Building on early strengths in religious history, relating particularly to nineteenth century Britain, and a commitment to the study of a range of religions, the department continues to focus on the modern period. Recent appointments have strengthened the department's expertise

across a wider range of contemporary religions, most recently in indigenous religions.

Since the end of the 1990s, Religious Studies has been able to participate fully in the B.A. in Humanities scheme, which offers students the opportunity to specialise in Religious Studies up to the level equivalent to a Joint Honours award. 'Introducing Religions', a new introductory course on six religions with accompanying DVD, will be launched in 2006. This will provide the platform from which students who wish to specialise in Religious Studies will be able to proceed to higher level courses on religion and conflict (*Conflict, Conversion and Co-existence*), religion and change (*Religion Today: Tradition, Modernity and Change*), and a project-based course *Evangelicals, Women and Community in Nineteenth-Century Britain*.³ The text books for two of the department's earlier courses, *The Growth of Religious Diversity: Britain from 1945* and *Religion in Victorian Britain*, continue to be used by students at other universities. The department was delighted to receive the 2002 Shap Prize for its contribution over many years to the study of religions.

Just as the department's curriculum has broadened, so has its research, some of which is represented by the work of the 'Belief Beyond Boundaries' research group <www.open.ac.uk/Arts/relstud/bbb>. 'Belief Beyond Boundaries' has attracted international interest in its conferences. In 2003 it organised the Alternative Spiritualities and New Age Studies (ASANAS) conference at the OU, which led in turn to the generation of the electronic journal JASANAS, now hosted by the OU <www.open.ac.uk/Arts/jasanas>. Members of the department are active in scholarly associations affiliated to the IAHR and in many other societies, ranging from the Ecclesiastical History Society to the Folklore Society, and regularly present papers at conferences of national and international standing, including the 2005 IAHR congress. Funded research currently in progress includes a pilot project to index Victorian periodical articles on women and religion (Susan Mumm) and an evaluation of cross-community reconciliation projects in Northern Ireland (David Herbert). Funding mechanisms that offer little, if any, support to part-time students continue to hamper the department's desire to increase its intake of research students. It is hoped that the planned inclusion of a Religious Studies route in the MA in Humanities programme in the near future might strengthen the recruitment of research students.

Like the Open University in general, Religious Studies faces the challenge of maintaining recruitment in a sector in which part-time, adult students are no longer its almost exclusive preserve. Recent decisions about financial support for part-time students will create particular difficulties for the OU. New technology brings new opportunities but the full utilisation of the OU's considerable technological capacity immediately raises questions

of access, and thus delicate decisions about the timing of the shift to electronic delivery. With a suite of new courses that consistently attract students, the department is well placed to meet these challenges.

Notes:

¹For details of the members of the department, see www.open.ac.uk/Arts/relstud

²T. Thomas (1990) 'Religious Studies in the Universities – The Open University' in U. King (ed.) *Turning Points in Religious Studies* Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark.

³Courses in Religious Studies, each with different style of presentation, are described on <http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/relstud/text/course.htm>

Gwilym Beckerlegge
The Open University

Completed Ph.D.

Congratulations to Fang-Long Shih, who was awarded her Doctoral Degree by the Study of Religions Department, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, on 28 February 2005. Her Ph.D. thesis is entitled *Dead Maidens in Taiwan: Breaking Down Chinese Religious Tradition* in which she engaged in a close analysis of religion, gender, and modernity in relation to rituals for the disposal of dead maidens in contemporary Taiwan. BASR members heard Fang-Long deliver a paper on aspects of this topic at the BASR Annual Conference in Chester in 2003.

BOOK REVIEWS

Bowker, John (2005). *The Sacred Neuron: Extraordinary New Discoveries Linking Science and Religion*. London and New York: I. B. Tauris. xiii + 226 pp. £18.99. ISBN: 1 85043 48 1 6

The title of John Bowker's latest book implies a review of recent (neuro) scientific work and a discussion of its significance from a religious perspective, but anyone hoping for such will be disappointed, for the author's project is a somewhat different one. In keeping with the book's origin in his 'Henson' Lectures, Bowker's aim is, in an age in which 'relativity' is the dominant metaphor, to defend the paramount importance of reason in the decisions and judgements we make, despite its seeming

deposition by subjectivity; in so doing, he also aims to establish the existence of an 'independent court of appeal', rooted in our common neurobiology, to which aesthetic disputes and moral dilemmas can be taken for adjudication.

In pursuit of this goal, Bowker takes his readers on a whirlwind journey through history, religion, aesthetics and ethics, taking in everything from Auden to Zen; the whole shot through with periodic appeals to the neuroscience that he believes to provide the necessary support for his theses. However it is questionable whether in the end he succeeds in either of his aims and this is due, in no small measure, to how he uses the neuroscientific research on which he draws.

It is only relatively recently that the study of emotion has become a more prominent feature of neuroscientific research, and whilst there is a growing corpus of work relating to fear responses, very little is known about the neural basis of the 'higher' emotions and what role cognitive systems play in the generation and experience of these. Unfortunately, Bowker's commitment to his project leads to some questionable use of the neuroscientific data he addresses and he tends to draw inferences which these do not necessarily warrant or which they cannot adequately support. He also pays scant attention to the discussion within neuroscience about the wider significance of such data: One may have little sympathy with those who espouse a more reductionist interpretation of these, but the summary dismissal of their accounts as 'simply wrong' is an embarrassing blemish on a book such as this and merely reproduces the approach for which Bowker later implicitly, and rightly, scorns Cupitt. Ultimately Bowker's project fails I think, because he simply does not, to use his own criterion, offer sufficiently convincing 'warrants of proof' for his central assertions.

However, there are certain elements amongst the ideas that he advances for which the neuroscientific evidence would be more compelling (because not overstretched), and these might well repay further thought and development: Thus whilst it might not be possible to sustain the argument that there is a rationally governed response to objects and acts which is both stable across time and prior to any cultural conditioning and which therefore can form the basis of an independent court of appeal, the neuroscience on which Bowker draws could well be used to argue that what we do all share is neurobiological apparatus enabling us both to undergo and experience emotional responses, and to develop from these concepts such as beauty and goodness and appropriate supporting vocabularies. The proven existence of these processes, taken in conjunction with Bowker's idea of conducive properties acting as a 'means of grace' might well enable the development of an argument for the existence of a 'sacred neuron' (although interestingly, this is a term which never actually appears in the text of the book) whose actions connect us with certain

characteristics of the Creator.

Bowker's erudition and the wisdom distilled from a lifetime's worth of learning and thinking means that it is impossible to read him without benefit and there is much in this book, the final two chapters for example, that amply rewards the reader. However, at a time when there is an urgent need for a sustained and creative dialogue between theology and neuroscience, one is also left with a frustrating feeling of an opportunity missed. But this is in part, due to the fact that both the book's title, though poetic, and its subtitle (of which nothing good can be said) are, in different ways, totally misleading, and thus serve it poorly – they should both be changed.

Pat Bennett
The Westminster Institute, Oxford Brookes University

Nicholson, Ernest (ed.) (2003). *A Century of Theological and Religious Studies in Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. ix + 306 pp. £40 (hbk). ISBN 0-19-726305.

This book, comprised of ten essays edited by Ernest Nicholson, Provost of Oriel College Oxford, was commissioned by the Theology and Religious Studies Section of the British Academy to mark the Academy's centenary in 2002. My immediate reaction, as one writing from the perspective of religious studies, was one of consternation when I noted the heavy preponderance in the book of topics devoted to theology. Its chapters, which are written largely by notable theologians, biblical scholars and church historians (one even by the Archbishop of Canterbury), read like a theological syllabus: The Old Testament, The New Testament, Early Judaism, British patristic scholarship in the twentieth century, the medieval church, the Reformation, the long eighteenth century, theology in the twentieth century, philosophy of religion in the twentieth century, and then, at long last, chapter ten by Keith Ward on the study of religions.

The chapter on Early Judaism by the Jewish scholar Martin Goodman does little to alleviate the Christian bias in the book, since early Judaism is seen as necessary for understanding Christian theology and church history. In his introduction to the book, Nicholson sets the tone very clearly by referring to 'theological controversies at the second half of the nineteenth century', which he attributes to 'the sea change in theological enquiry and scholarship in Great Britain'. His scant references to religious studies are limited to notes about William Robertson Smith, J. G. Frazer and Max Müller, whose 'original project of "comparative religion"', when considered together, 'came to nothing'. Nicholson quite rightly observes

that religious studies today must be understood in a fully interdisciplinary way, but he adds that it embraces both adherents and opponents of specific religions, a point which implies that scholars of religion take sides about the truth claims of a religion.

My contention that the balance of this book is radically uneven in favour of Christian theology might be opposed by those who argue that religious studies in Britain was a product of theology and philosophy, and that the theological controversies at the end of the nineteenth century paved the way for an academic study of the world's religious traditions. The scientific approach to Christian theology and its scriptures, which emerged in the latter half of the nineteenth century, certainly led to a broad intellectual climate that helped create historical and phenomenological studies of religion, but it must be emphasised that these often took the form of reactions against overtly theological approaches. From a historical perspective, the omission in the book of references to the missionary movement is striking. Important British figures such, J. N. Farquhar, Edwin W. Smith and Geoffrey Parrinder, who became leading scholars of comparative religions during the early to mid-twentieth century, are entirely missing.

Despite the one-sidedness of the book, Ward's chapter on the study of religions acknowledges that different approaches are employed in religious studies from those normally adopted in theology. Although in the end Ward defines religion as the relation of humans to transcendent or supernatural realities, he clearly understands that by defining religion in relation to a transcendent referent, he becomes susceptible to the charge that he is employing an essentialist and theologically-loaded category. Ward counters that it is religious people themselves who believe in a transcendent reality and who claim to have experienced such a reality. In an implied criticism of Timothy Fitzgerald's position in *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (Oxford University Press, 2000), Ward argues that there is nothing 'particularly "Western", elitist or essentialist' about studying what religious people believe, do and postulate, particularly since the study of religion does not 'commit the scholar to any presuppositions about what he or she should believe or practise'. Towards the end of the chapter, however, the theologian in Ward takes over. Much in line with Cantwell Smith and John Hick, he argues for a global theology where 'it is quite possible to say that in many religious ways people are justified in believing what they do on the basis of their experience and of the plausibility of the tradition as they see it'. The academic study of religions, in the tradition of Ninian Smart at least, refuses to assign to scholars the task of justifying religious beliefs; questions of truth and value literally are bracketed out.

What is most alarming about this book is that it demonstrates little awareness of the immense imbalance of power implied when institutions

refer blithely to ‘theology and religious studies’ Religious studies is portrayed at best as an offshoot of theology and at worst as subservient to it, frequently described in the tradition of Keith Ward as ‘comparative theology’. In this regard, it is both apt and encouraging that the Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies is sponsoring a major conference in July 2006 under the theme ‘Theology and Religious Studies or Theology versus Religious Studies’. That this longstanding issue needs much further detailed examination and open discussion is confirmed by this volume, which, at the very least, should be re-titled, ‘A century of theological studies in Britain’.

James L. Cox
University of Edinburgh

Gross, Rita M. and Ruether, Rosemary Radford (2001). *Religious Feminism and the Future of the Planet: A Buddhist-Christian Conversation*. London: Continuum. viii + 229 £19.99 (pbk). ISBN: 0-8264-1278-5.

Take two western feminist academics, who are also religious practitioners — one Christian, one Buddhist. Make sure they have known each other for some time and are willing to go out on a limb within their own traditions. Bring them together in a structured dialogue on the oppressive and liberating aspects of religion. Make them look to the future as well. And the result will be a conversation like this. *Religious Feminism and the Future of the Planet* is an engaging and important contribution to the study of religion. It grew from a weekend workshop Rita Gross and Rosemary Radford Ruether co-presented in Ohio in 1999. Rooted in western experience, it embodies a dimension of religion that no student of religious studies should overlook: religions in encounter with ‘the other’.

The book is divided into five sections. In the first, Gross and Reuter explain how they became involved in Buddhist-Christian dialogue, particularly how they were drawn into membership of the International Buddhist-Christian Theological Encounter set up by John Cobb. In the next three sections, they deal consecutively with the following: What is most problematic about my tradition? What is most liberating about my tradition? What is most inspiring for me about the other tradition? The last section is devoted to what religious feminism can offer to the future of the planet. The whole is prefaced by a lengthy introduction that asks what dialogue is and what its aim should be.

Each section has a similar structure. First, one of the partners to the dialogue speaks at length to the question. The other then gives a short response to this, before speaking to the question herself. The first speaker then responds to the second contribution. It is a pattern well known to the

International Buddhist-Christian Theological Encounter.

The book is striking for the honesty and openness of the partners to the dialogue. Both are willing to be critical of their traditions. Neither is afraid to draw on painful personal experience. The conversation is situated and energetic. Let me take the third section, ‘What is most liberating about my own tradition?’, as an example. Reconfiguring the question as, ‘What keeps me in Buddhist orbit?’ Gross explains that it is not the doctrine of Buddhism that she finds most energizing, but meditation, a way of working with the mind. She then offers a moving testament to the transforming power of meditation in her own life. It had led her, for instance, to modify the rage behind her feminism, and to realize how aggressive conviction can be, without mental calm (p.114). Responding to this, Reuter explains how close she had once been to the Christian contemplative tradition, before stressing that, for her, contemplation should be embedded in action and the relationship between individual and social change more rigorously debated. When she then answers the question herself, she presents a prophetic, liberationist framework for reading Christianity, one that subverts the oppressive reading she had outlined in the previous section. She mentions women’s monastic communities in the Patristic and Medieval periods, the Quakers and the Jewish prophetic tradition before outlining feminist mini-systematic theology (p.130) that reconstructs concepts such as sin and grace, Christ and church. Rita, in responding to this, points to the difference between her own approach and Reuter’s — Reuter’s concentration on doctrine and her own focus on practice. She goes on, ‘This is because I would claim that the most basic problems in Buddhism are not with the view but with the practice’ (p. 141). She then explores what equivalent story she could tell and fails, not, she claims, because ‘Buddhism is better and requires less fixing’, but because it is more difficult to explain how the practices of Buddhism surrounding gender ‘could be so far off’ (p.142).

Both partners to the conversation draw on material they have already published. The book is not about presenting new research. Rather, it is about the ‘mutual transformation’ — a phrase used by Rita Gross — that can occur when two insiders with a similar social commitment but different faith identities interact with each other as individuals. In addition to Buddhist and Christian studies, it is relevant to courses on gender and religion, contemporary religion in the West, and inter faith studies. I recommend it.

Elizabeth J. Harris
University of Birmingham

DISKUS

Progress is being made on the transfer of the e-journal *Diskus* to the BASR. *Diskus* was launched under Brian Bocking's editorship in 1993, originally on floppy discs, before it went on-line, hosted by the University of Marburg's web page. The next edition (volume 7) will be edited by the BASR, and will appear as part of the BASR's web pages.

From now on, the journal will be the BASR's own. The aims will remain largely the same, namely promoting discussion of contemporary religion from a detached rather than religious standpoint.

The *Bulletin* will continue to keep members informed of progress.

DISCUSSION

I enjoyed Professor Karel Werner's description, in his 'IAHR and Japan: A Review Article' (*Bulletin* no.105, June 2005: 11-12) of the Round Table Discussion in which he tried to participate at the conference in Tokyo. I lived in Japan for several years and his description matched many experiences of my own, including the irrelevant reminiscent ramble of the most senior *sensei*, the polite consensus of his Japanese colleagues as knives are being vigorously sharpened beneath the table, and the foreign expert bending over backwards (or possibly forwards) to avoid giving offence to anyone.

However, I wonder if the statement that Professor Werner describes as misguided and untrue is clear enough in meaning to warrant his criticisms? Even in English it is difficult to divine what meanings such expressions as 'Western society', 'Christian society', 'Christian worldview', or 'highly integrated ways of seeing' were intended to communicate. I don't mean that the person who wrote this had no serious point to make, but it is possible that it was originally thought and written in Japanese and then translated into English. Given Professor Werner's own highly distinguished career in translating Indian languages into English and possibly into other European languages also, I am surprised that he seems to take such a statement at face value, as though its intended meaning is obvious.

And his response may be more revealing of his own assumptions about the meanings of words than those of the writer who drafted this pamphlet session statement. After all, what does Werner mean by the ambiguous phrase 'religious scholarship'? Why does he think that the 'academic study of religions' can be 'impartial' given the highly problematic, ideological history of the English language category 'religion' itself? This point may evoke even greater scepticism given that the only two exemplars of this impartiality he mentions are Rudolf Otto and Mircea Eliade. And why does he assume that the crucial point for whoever wrote this pamphlet session

statement is concerned with ‘denominational’ bias? No wonder there was no reply from the panel; they might have been wondering a number of different things, such as (a) ‘What did he say?’ since levels of English comprehension are relatively low in Japan, or (b) ‘I’d better keep my mouth shut because it was drafted by Kusan, who is Tusensei’s favourite Ph.D. student’, or (c) ‘How can one even begin to discuss this issue with a western scholar who interprets the statement in such an ethnocentric way?’

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Karel Werner was invited to reply, and makes the following response:

The editor has kindly let me have a glance at Timothy Fitzgerald’s comments to my little piece on ‘IAHR and Japan’ and suggested a brief response. My reaction is that Timothy Fitzgerald goes a bit over the top in questioning the meaning of virtually all the basic concepts of our subject. I do not doubt that radical conceptual and semantic analysis of these ‘tools of our trade’ is worthwhile and important, but it has its place in specialised research papers which try to contribute to their clarification and may — or may not — eventually ascertain their precise meaning. Meanwhile we have to use them in our discussions and there is usually a degree of consensus about what they designate.

I do think that the passage which I quoted from the pamphlet conveys the views of its authors clearly enough to merit a critical response. When they say that Christian society was responsible for developing modern academic studies, they are simply wrong. Modern academic studies developed over centuries in the course of the struggle of the intellectually alert elite to free academic studies in universities from the straightjacket of Christian orthodoxy. The study of religion as an academic discipline, far from being profoundly influenced by Christian worldview, followed suit and developed by dissociating itself from theology (as was rightly pointed out from the panel by Michael Pye and as it was demonstrated even in the work of Rudolf Otto, a Christian theologian turned religionist; many others followed his example, not least the late Ninian Smart). Although it happened ‘in the West’, it is not a ‘Western-centric worldview’; it is being adopted by academic institutions around the world. When the authors of the pamphlet suggest (oblivious of Eliade’s work) that our discipline should be multivalent, they are re-discovering America after Columbus.

I do not think that the Japanese panellists did not understand my points and, besides, in translating my contribution into Japanese, had they been willing to do so, they could have easily invoke the help of Michael Pye on the panel. They chose not to. Perhaps because it is rare in Japan to admit

mistakes? Mistake was made obviously also on the part of IAHR representatives in the course of the preparation of pamphlets. Either they did not notice or were too 'polite' to point it out and insist on reformulation.

Other comments of Fitzgerald and his last three hypothetical questions appear to me rather presumptuous.

Karel Werner

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Conference reports (short, one-day)	500-800 words
Reports on major conferences	1,000-1,500 words
Notices of forthcoming conferences	Not more than one page
Book reviews	500-800 words
Religious Studies in location	750-800 words
Research in progress	800-1,000 words
Turning Point	800-1,000 words
Tributes	normally 500 words

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The *BASR Bulletin* will carry notices of relevant conferences and calls for papers (up to one page) free of charge. Preference is given to conferences where members may offer papers; other non-participatory conferences, which are more akin to courses, may be included if space permits.

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