SocrelNews

2015
Issue 2

Announcements

- Socrel Response Day - The Future of Learning about Religion and Belief - Save the date - 5th November 2015, BSA Meeting Room (updates coming soon)
- Socrel Postgraduate and Early Career Scholar Study Day – Registration now open
- Peter B. Clarke Memorial Prize 2016 – Call for submissions
- BSA Annual Conference 2016 - Global Societies: Fragmenting and Connecting - Call for papers
- Socrel Annual Conference 2016 - Save the Date - 12th-14th July 2016, Lancaster University (updates coming soon)
- Socrel Mentoring Scheme - Mentor and Mentee applications

Welcome

It has been another exciting and busy year for Socrel and we have hosted a number of really successful and engaging events, including our Religion stream at the BSA's annual conference in April 2015 with a keynote address from Professor Steve Bruce, and our amazing 40th Anniversary conference in July 2015 with inspiring plenaries from Professors Linda Woodhead, Jim Beckford, Nancy Ammerman, Grace Davie, and Sophie Gilliat-Ray.

This year we were able to award five members through our funding competition, including

Anja Pogacnik, Khatereh Eghdamian, George Ioannides, Sylvia Meichsner, and Karen O'Donnell. In addition, Timothy Stacey's essay titled 'Rediscovering a shared spirit of association: why religion is central, but nothing special' won the 2015 Peter B. Clarke Memorial Prize. And finally, the founder and first Chair of our study group - Jim Beckford - was presented with our very first lifetime achievement award.

It has been wonderful to come on board as interim Convenor at this celebratory moment to reflect on Socrel's long-running success and achievements over the last four decades. My congratulations are also extended to Rebecca Catto who gave birth to baby Peter in April, and who will be back in post as Convenor in January 2016.

Sadly we said our goodbyes to Dr Abby Day - former Socrel Chair - who has done a sterling job in developing Socrel over the last four years, as well as Dr Tim Hutchings who has been a great Conference and Events Officer. We warmly welcome to the committee Professor Adam Dinham - new Chair of Socrel - and Rachael Shillitoe, who was co-opted into the role of Conference and Events Officer.

As highlighted at the AGM our bank balance is very healthy and we will be using the ideas generated from members to discuss as a committee the potential ways to spend our surplus funds. As one member said to me in an e-mail, this is a nice problem to have! And I concur. We shall update members in due course about the decisions that are taken.

Dr Sarah-Jane Page (interim Convenor)

Chair's Note

The 40th anniversary year of Socrel is not only a noteworthy moment to take over as Chair, but also a particularly interesting one. Sociology of religion stands on a number of thresholds: religion and belief are being newly noticed by publics and policy makers for the first time in a generation; the sheer prevalence of religion and belief is becoming practically impossible to refute; their significance is being reaffirmed by the rest of sociology; and disciplines outside of sociology are increasingly studying religion and belief from their own perspectives too. This is a deeply rich moment, intellectually and practically. It is also a complex one.

My own formation in Theology and Religious Studies (BA, MA), Social Policy (MA), and Politics (PhD), and my professional role as a social worker, has enabled me to connect research with policy and practice. My work in religious literacy is one response. It's especially exciting to look more widely and see the breadth of connections, dialogue and data across our field. Together we have an enormous contribution to make to the wider debate about religion and belief in societies which often remain bewildered about them. Socrel is a precious space for us to connect with and support one another - especially in a context where we're often working on islands within our own departments. It can also talk out to the wider debate. I'm excited about our contribution over the next few years, and I'm hugely looking forward to working together.

Prof Adam Dinham (Chair)

Kingston University London

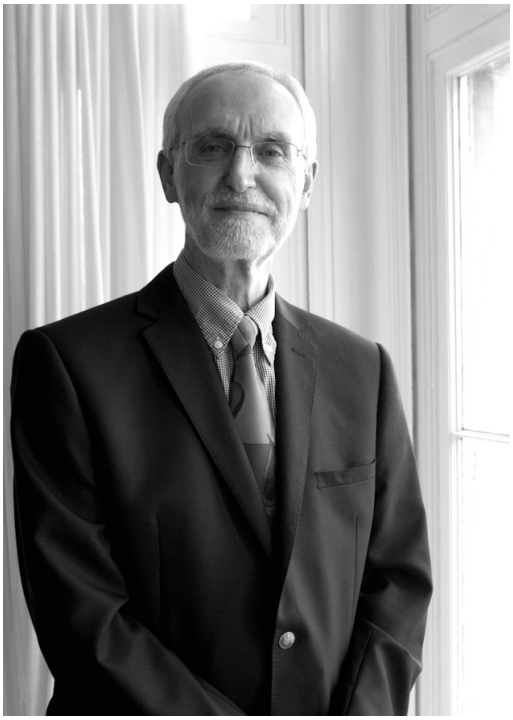
2015 Annual Conference
Foundations and Futures

Organisers: Dr Sonya Sharma, Dr Sylvia Collins-Mayo, and Dr Luke Doggett

Keynote Videos

Secularisation with Added Agency

Linda Woodhead
Professor of Sociology of Religion
Lancaster University



Forty Years On: The Study Group We've Built

Jim Beckford
Professor Emeritus of Sociology
Warwick University

Expanding Conversations in the Sociology of Religion

Nancy Ammerman
Professor of Sociology of Religion
Boston University

Religion in Britain: Continuity and Change

Grace Davie
Professor Emeritus of Sociology of Religion
University of Exeter

British Muslim Studies and the Sociology of Religion: Reflections and Prospects

Sophie Gilliat-Ray
Professor in Religious and Theological Studies
Cardiff University

Socrel Member Interviews

Jim Beckford
Fellow of the British Academy
Professor Emeritus of Sociology at University of Warwick
Department of Social Sciences
First Chair of Socrel and Keynote Speaker 2015 Annual Conference

We all seem to be aware of the relative gulf between our specific area of study and the sociological discipline as a whole. What would you say lies at the core of this condition? Can we truly boil it down to the secularist ideology of mainstream sociology, or are we ourselves to blame for failing to develop the sociological imagination?

I make a distinction between two aspects of this question. On the one hand, there's a tendency for some sociologists of religion to insulate themselves against ideas circulating in mainstream sociology. And on the other hand, there's a tendency among some mainstream sociologists to isolate themselves from an interest in what passes as religion. We need a distinction between insulation and isolation, but they need to be considered together; and their relative importance changes from time to time. There's no reason, however, for them to induce paralysis or metaphysical pathos. The best response is for sociologists of religion to learn much more about sociological debates and to persuade other sociologists that religion can give rise to interesting questions about change and continuity in societies and cultures.

How can we show that religion might be interesting to other sociologists? My approach is to take, say, social movements, prisons or government departments and to explore the ways in which religion may – or may not – feature in their activities. I make no assumption that religion is even a particularly important feature. And religion should always be considered in its intersections with other factors such as gender, ethnicity, social class and age. But this is a good way to tease out any religious strands that may be woven into the social life of groups, organisations and institutions. If comparisons can also be made between expressions of religion in different countries and periods of time, so much the better. And if the results feed into broader arguments about sacralisation and secularisation, so be it.

Ideally, sociological analysis would also unpack the meanings that terms such as 'religion' and 'non-religion' carry in different discourses and contexts. Many of the sites where sociologists can do their best work are at the points of tension and conflict between competing notions of what counts as 'real', 'good' or 'authentic' versions of 'religion in general', or particular phenomena labelled 'Hinduism', 'Islam' or 'Christianity' or of 'non-religion' and 'secularity'. The same point could be made about uses of 'spirituality'.

As the first recipient of Socrel's Lifetime Achievement Award, you've clearly done a few things right in your career. However, what about the wrong ones? What would you say was the biggest professional mistake you made in the past?

I've made lots of mistakes, but two in particular have taught me lessons that might be helpful to scholars near the beginning of their careers. The first was failing to check the truth of claims that informants had made to me about the leader of a controversial new religious movement. As a result, an article that I wrote for a popular magazine sparked a libel case that dragged on for several years and interfered with my research. The lesson is the need to be rigorous about checking informants' claims before going public.

The second mistake was failing to protest more energetically when a division of UNESCO abandoned plans to publish a pioneering set of chapters on religion and human rights that it had asked me to put together in 1985. The UK government's temporary withdrawal from UNESCO at the time had left a hole in the organisation's finances, but with more persistence it might still have been possible to rescue the publication. The lesson is not to let the bureaucrats grind you down.

You've already given us a wonderful look back at the early days of our study group. Looking ahead, how do you see Socrel and our field as a whole developing in the future?

It seems to me that the study group has gone from strength to strength in recent times. This year's meeting at High Leigh was a wonderful shop window advertising the group's solid foundations, rising talents and increasing diversity. What would I like to see in the shop window in the future? There are two items on my wish list. My first wish is that an interest in the sociological aspects of religion could be fully integrated into more of the teaching and research activities in all faculties of social sciences, arts and humanities. The study group will only continue to thrive if it has a steady supply of well trained, well-read and securely employed scholars who can keep sociological questions about religion close to the centre of their intellectual interests. My second wish is that more links could be nurtured and strengthened with scholars working outside the UK and/or in languages other than English. My early training in modern languages has made me well aware of the rich benefits that can be reaped from familiarity with debates and discourses in other languages and countries. It's time for the study group to go global. I'm doing my bit by learning Japanese. And you?

Regarding your latter point and based on your own experience of working at the helm of some of these organisations, please could you tell us a little more about how Socrel compares with its global partners (ASR; ISSR; SSSR)?

Taking an active part in scholarly networks and organisations which have aspirations towards a global outreach is the best way to broaden one's interests in the sociology of religion. I've always made a point of reading the journals published by international organisations and of trying to give papers and organise sessions at as many international conferences as possible, although it isn't always possible to obtain funding. But these days, participating in online forums, blog sites and other social media is a relatively inexpensive way of increasing the range of one's contacts and interests.

Having served as president of four organisations with international outreach (the Association for the Sociology of Religion, Research Committee 22 of the International

Sociological Association, the International Society for the Sociology of Religion, and the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion) I've had many opportunities to compare them with the study group. In some ways the study group remains distinctive for its ease of access to graduate students and early-career researchers. Its meetings also retain a 'homely' atmosphere and relatively uncluttered conference programmes. And its form of governance is mercifully simple and flexible even after 40 years – in contrast to organisations that have to accommodate a wider variety of languages and national differences in academic cultures. Perhaps the study group operates more like Research Committee 22 of the International Sociological Association than any of the others in so far as they are both plugged into umbrella organisations with wider interests than the study of religion. I've always considered that this arrangement brings more advantages than disadvantages. So long as Socrel retains its distinctiveness, it will continue to have a valuable role to play alongside its global partners.

Elisabeth Arweck
Senior Research Fellow at University of Warwick
Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit
Centre for Education Studies
Editor of the Journal of Contemporary Religion

As the editor of the JCR, please could you tell us a little about your typical day at work?

'A typical day at work'—that is quite a challenging question. I don't think there is anything like a 'typical work day' for me. Every day seems to have its own demands and dynamics. This is probably due to the fact that I do not have what I would call a 'neat' job description. As a research fellow my work consists of various projects and activities and these involve portfolios of tasks and responsibilities. The *Journal of Contemporary Religion* is one such 'project'—and quite a complex one. I can only describe what my editorial role involves in general terms. Different aspects move into the foreground at different times, for example, when the material for a particular issue needs to be prepared for publication, a lot of activities revolve around getting articles and reviews ready for the production team. At the time of writing, the October issue for 2015 has moved into the proof stage, so the corrections for this issue move into the foreground. Also, I have just been informed that there is a major change in the production team, with the key person changing roles, with immediate effect.

As the editor of JCR, I am at various interfaces, for example, at the interface between submitting authors and the publishers (Taylor & Francis). When someone submits their paper, my job is to accompany this paper from the point of submission to the point where

the paper is published or rejected. This means seeing a paper through the referee process, the revision stages (it's quite rare for a paper to be accepted in the form that it was submitted), and then, if accepted, through the production process. Often, there are issues which arise after an article is published; for example, if an author wishes to use the article or parts of it, say, as part of a book chapter or if s/he wants to promote it on a web site such as Research Gate, there are enquiries about copyright issues. How much work all these processes create for me also depends to some extent on the authors. For example, have they prepared their submissions according to the guidelines? Are they providing all the details and information needed at various points? Are they responsive?

Besides being at the interface between authors and publishers, I am also at the interface between authors and referees. Given that the peer review is anonymous for both sides, I am the connecting point between them, corresponding with authors and liaising with referees, to make sure that the referee process proceeds in a timely and appropriate manner. Another interface in my work as editor is related to the reviews section, involving a range of publishers and reviewers. This involves taking care of review copies and identifying suitable reviewers. Once reviews have been submitted, they are checked and prepared for publication.

Apart from the various tasks that are linked to this 'interface work', there is a steady flow of enquiries about almost any aspect of the journal, such as: is the topic of my proposed paper relevant to the journal? How long does the referee process take? When will my paper be published? Will I see proofs? Etc. So, when I open my e-mails or my post on a given day, I never quite know what I will find in my inbox or in the envelopes or packages. A new submission? A new book? An enquiry about a special issue? What I can be sure about is that there is often something that I did not expect.

Do you think it is possible to speak of a certain trend in the historical trajectory of JCR publications?

This is quite a difficult question to answer. When we put together the selection of articles and research notes for the 30th anniversary collection this year, I asked myself whether this could reflect major trends in the relevant scholarship over the years. The conclusion I drew after looking through the 30 volumes of JCR is that this is well-nigh impossible to identify any trends. The selection of articles from the archive could only suggest the breadth and distinctive character of the journal. In case readers have not seen them, the collection is still available until the end of this year (see *Journal of Contemporary Religion* Anniversary Collection). The reason is, I think, that JCR does not commission articles, so the papers that are submitted are prompted by particular scholars choosing JCR for their work. Also, because of its interdisciplinary and international character, JCR has a wide scope, both in terms of topics and in terms of academic approaches. Thus the articles and research notes published so far represent a kind of self-selected rather than a representative sample of all the work that is done on religious and spirituality.

One feature that is fairly recent for JCR is special issues. This means a thematic approach to a given edition of the journal, so that all the articles speak to a topical issue which has arisen in the study of religion. The enquiries about such issues has increased, as has the submission of special issue proposals.

What is your own research currently based on?

My own current research revolves around the role of religion in times of austerity. This is a project supported by a small grant from the British Academy, so it is quite a modest study.

It is a collaborative project, involving Prof. Eleanor Nesbitt at Warwick as PI, Dr Sonya Sharma at Kingston University as Co-I, and myself as the main researcher. Basically, our aim is to find out whether religion plays a role when families (meaning adults and adolescents) experience financial hardship, such as redundancy or the reduction of working hours. The main research question is whether their faith supports their coping strategies or whether their faith does not come into the picture as they are trying to adjust to new circumstances. As it is a small project, we had to restrict the faiths we are looking at to Christianity and Islam. The conversations I have conducted so far with individuals and representatives of organisations who support people in need (such as food banks or outreach services connected to places of worship) suggest quite a complex picture. The recession of 2008 has obviously had an impact, as have subsequent changes in the benefits system and the provision of social services, but there are other aspects that come to bear on families' situation as well. And, yes, individuals' beliefs do play a role, although we have yet to tease out the ways in which this occurs.

Alison Robertson
PhD Candidate in Religious Studies
Open University

What is your PhD about?

Succinctly, I'm currently in the second year of my PhD which is about the practice and experience of BDSM, and the extent to which it can be said to function as a religious practice for individuals who engage in it. But I think that probably requires some unpacking. BDSM is usually understood as an acronym for Bondage, Domination, Submission and Masochism (or similar term) or as a set of overlapping pairs of abbreviations – Bondage & Discipline, Dominance & Submission, Sadism & Masochism. I don't like this way of understanding it though, as it fragments interconnected and complex behaviours into defined categories and this is not how people really use the term. Most of my research participants present a view of BDSM as a word in its own right. To most of them it's a collective term for anything people do which is "kinky" and that is a matter of personal judgement rather than an absolute standard – in other words if you think you belong under the BDSM or Kink umbrella then you do.

Could you give a few examples of the BDSM sub-culture?

As a self-selected group of people the BDSM sub-culture encompasses a vast range of activities and finding any unifying element beyond that chosen label is probably impossible

but I can have a go at a broad summary of its nature as activities involving the mutually consensual and deliberate use of intense sensation (which may include pain), power, taboo, perceptions/expectations about power and/or taboo or any combination of these for psychological, emotional or sensory fulfilment. The use of these activities can create powerful and intense experiences, including experiences of altered consciousness and these experiences are the central focus of my research.

Can you tell us more about the nature of those experiences?

Creating a kink scene with another person creates a play-space; that's more than just the physical location you've chosen to play in – people talk about it as a 'bubble' or a 'different world'. Within the play-space perceptions are altered, the sense of time passing is distorted or lost altogether, sense of self changes (in different ways for people taking different roles), and the flow of memory of a scene is different from other memories. These things seem to be true of any successful play, but they can also peak in what kinksters call a sub-space or Top/Dom-space experience. That's where description really becomes challenging! But sub-space involves elements like a total loss of self or control over the body, physical sensations and reactions are wholly transformed, speech may become impossible or nonsensical and understanding of spatial orientation can be distorted. Dom-space seems to differ more depending on the individual but can include euphoria, feelings of flow and the feeling that you cause things to happen without acting. People build up different kinds of experience, pushing and exploring limits and creating new intensities in a way that is consistent with ideas of religion as lived and involved in the creation of personal story. Hence my interest!

How then would you say do you conceive of the relationship between BDSM and religion?

Like religion BDSM is a gestalt, it is more or other than the sum of the parts which make it up and which contribute to individual experiences of it. I think that once something becomes a gestalt it assumes a different role than just sex, or just entertainment or whatever other single element it might be reduced too. At that point it can be connected with religion, as I understand that concept. I make a distinction between the idea of 'a religion' and the broader sphere of "the religious"; I see the word 'religion' as the best fit word in the English language to serve as an etic term for all the myriad ways in which people make and find their place in their worlds, create stories, encounter Otherness, explore and connect with self and/or other, and make tangible realities out of aspects of human nature and potential. Spirituality is an aspect of religion, and in the contemporary world it is many people's preferred term – the reasons for that are interesting but that usage does not mean that they are talking about a fundamentally distinct thing. A lot of people talk of their BDSM practice as a spiritual thing; even when they don't they are likely to talk about journey, self-exploration, inter-connection, joyous embodiment and similar concepts. So if I accepted the "spirituality and religion are different things" argument then I suppose I would have to say I'm studying spirituality. But I don't say that; my study is of lived religion, a religious practice people make for themselves as they live their lives.
So to return to the original question - I would say that my work is exploring the idea that BDSM is, for some, a personalised religious practice which creates experiences that feed and contribute to people's spiritual lives in all the ways identified above as aspects of religion/spirituality.

What has been the biggest stumbling block in your research to date?

One of the most common questions I get asked when I tell people what I'm working on is 'how will you find the people?' so I imagine most people think of that as the most likely

stumbling block. But actually I have almost the opposite problem – I have done loads of interviews, with really interesting people, who have generously shared their experiences with me and now I have to transcribe them. And that's my biggest issue – transcription. I have to get the things they said off the audio files before I can do anything else with them and I am loathing that process. It's time-consuming and physically much harder work than you think it's going to be. Basically I would rather do almost anything else, and I'm procrastinating on it dreadfully!

And finally on a more practical level, what does your typical working day look like?

At the moment it looks like a list of things I can do instead of transcribing! But in all seriousness even if I wanted to I couldn't spend all day transcribing. I think of my PhD related work as falling into three categories – reading, writing and transcribing. And I try and do some of all three during the average day. They overlap of course, so reading could be re-reading finished transcripts, which might then lead to writing in the form of analytical thoughts. I try to finish one day with an idea of how I want to start the next one, and then I let whatever that is lead me on to the next thing. So if I start with reading it might lead me on to writing my thoughts or responses to what I've read or it might help me to identify which interview to transcribe next if it calls something particular to mind.

Tribute

The Revd Canon Professor Edward Bailey

1935 – 2015

by

Leslie J Francis
Professor of Religions and Education
University of Warwick

I welcome this opportunity to celebrate the personal life, the pastoral ministry and the academic achievements of a special person and (for me) a special friend. Edward was a person who connected cultures, bridging past and future, church and academy, parish ministry and intellectual creativity, and theology and social science - a rare and impressive achievement.

Edward's feet were rooted in the very best historic tradition of the Church of England, in which the parish priest was granted the freehold of the rectory in which to reside and the living from which to be freed from undue material concerns. The responsible priest, thus inducted, was enabled to exercise pastoral care over the local community, and if so equipped, to engage in wide-ranging intellectual activities that both nourished the local

community and served the wider benefits of church and society. For 36 years, Edward made Winterbourne Rectory the centre for a rich and sincere pastoral ministry, and (increasingly) the location for academic advancement of international significance. All of this was achieved (in the very best tradition of Anglican ministry) in the context of engaged family life.

Edward's mind, while properly rooted in the intellectual heritage of the Anglican theological tradition, was actively searching for ways of connecting that heritage with the contemporary context for building bridges into the future. Edward's original doctoral research put in place the essential foundations for (and equipped him to undertake) his life- long commitment to the notion of 'implicit religion'. That quest, began in three related projects (a series of careful interviews, the disciplined investigation of human experience and activity within an English public house, and the observed life of his parish), generated the consultations in Winterbourne Rectory, the annual conference (since 1979) in Denton Hall, the Centre for the Study of Implicit Religion and Contemporary Spirituality, the research post in the Faculty of Divinity at Cambridge University, and the launch of the peer-reviewed journal *Implicit Religion*. It is through the journal in particular that Edward's legacy continues to inspire and nurture a new generation of scholars.

The achievements of earlier generations of Anglican priests in the arts and sciences have helped to shape many fields of studies, and in the past a few have become so influential that their names remain inextricably connected with their field of study. This phenomenon becomes rarer and rarer. Part of Edward's unique achievement in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century is that the name of Edward Bailey is going to remain always inextricably linked with the notion of implicit religion.

Behind Edward's distinctive profile and achievements lay a number of early formative influences, including education at Oundle School, National Service in the RAF, reading history and theology at Corpus Christi College in Cambridge, experience of India travelling on a World Council of Churches scholarship and exploring development issues, ministerial formation at Westcott House, curacy in Newcastle and chaplaincy at Marlborough College, and life in Winterbourne Rectory with Joanna (married in 1968) and their three children, Charlotte, Christopher, and Catherine.

For Edward, the study of implicit religion brought together in one family the three different settings of the secular world, informal religion and organised religion. In the secular world, implicit religion is present in 'secular quests' (reflected in commitment to sport and celebrities, for example). In the world of informal religion, implicit religion is connected to the sense of deep meaningful purpose (reflected in animal rights and politics, for example). In the world of organised religion, implicit religion is connected to non-religious motivations (reflected in seeking infant baptism for cultural or superstitious reasons, for example). For Edward the three defining characteristics of implicit religion were identified as commitments, integrating foci, and intensive concerns with extensive effects.

For those of us who have enjoyed the privilege of travelling with Edward over the years, the annual Denton Hall conferences have been a key and core part of the experience of accessing and unlocking the significance and potential of implicit religion. Denton Hall, the headquarters of the family engineering business (N. G. Bailey) of which Edward was a non-executive director for many years, provided the ideal ambience in which to link the genteel ways of the Cambridge Senior Common Room with the connected expectations of contemporary engagement. While not there in Denton Hall when the foundations of the annual conference were put in place in 1978, I arrived soon afterwards to be welcomed into

a warm, open and generous community of scholars and friends willing to present their research, engage in critical but generous conversation, and to feast together around the oak tables discretely carrying the mouse trademark of the celebrated Yorkshire craftsman (Robert Thompson). While this academic community housed in Denton Hall was never compromised by personal matters of religious conviction, close to the Hall stood the parish church where the 8.00 am 1662 Communion Service always seemed to attract a good number of the conference participants. Here Edward was at home as priest, scholar and family man.

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