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VERNACULAR RELIGION AND CONTEMPORARY SPIRITUALITY:
STUDIES IN RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AND EXPRESSION

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ABSTRACT

Vernacular Religion and Contemporary Spirituality: Studies in Religious Experience and Expression

This submission for a PhD by publication is based on works which adopt a fieldwork-based approach to the study of contemporary religion.

The focus of the publications is religion as it is lived and experienced, not religion as it is defined by texts or as represented by authority figures. The studies examine how people interpret, act out and adapt their beliefs in a variety of spiritual milieux; the emphasis is on the experience and perceptions both of those within traditional belief communities, as well as the increasing numbers whose spiritual lives lie in less established, informal groupings.

The methodology combines a phenomenological approach to the study of religion, and insights and research technologies derived from Folklore Studies. The focus of the publications has been the experiential dimension of religion, involving considerable amounts of participant observation and interview; the work has also taken into consideration the material, cultural tradition and popular culture aspects of religion. By these means, it has been possible to provide original data on how people experience the spiritual dimension of their lives in a variety of traditions.

The scope of the submission is broad, for the publications explore vernacular religion and contemporary spirituality in a range of settings, but as a body the work is clearly linked by method and approach. Of particular value for the understanding of contemporary religion is the work on Glastonbury as a multivalent pilgrimage destination and on Bath as an exemplar of trends in contemporary religiosity, on healing as a form of non-aligned spirituality, on the implications of the contemporary spiritual marketplace, and on the spiritual aspects of the contemporary Celtic revival in Christianity, New Age and Paganism.

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OVERVIEW OF PUBLISHED MATERIAL

Introduction

This submission is based on a collection of publications, through which I have made an independent and original contribution to knowledge in the spheres of methodology, vernacular religion and contemporary spirituality.

The Published Material

For the purposes of this submission, my publications have been grouped into sections under the following subject headings: Phenomenology and Fieldwork; Vernacular Religion and Cultural Tradition; Glastonbury and Bath; Healing and Non-aligned Spirituality; and Contemporary Celtic Spirituality. (A Miscellaneous section containing some specifically Folklore-related papers and selected book reviews is also included for the sake of completeness.) When originally presented for examination, the publications were reproduced in full at the end of the Overview, each section preceded by an introduction. In accordance with the University of Glamorgan's Regulations relating to the PhD by Publication, however, the publications on which the submission is based are omitted from the final hard bound version. A full version of the submission, including the texts of the publications, is available in electronic form.

The first section consists of publications that deal specifically with methodology and with the importance I attach to fieldwork and the study of folk/ vernacular religion. The Vernacular Religion and Cultural Tradition section contains a variety of material based on fieldwork,

archival and media sources, including studies of popular devotion in Newfoundland and examples of vernacular religion in Islam. Articles on Glastonbury and Bath provide illustrations of the ways in which history, myth and vernacular religion interact with the perceived importance of sacred space and significant place in contemporary religiosity. The section on Healing and Non-aligned Spirituality explores some of the cosmologies, beliefs and socio-religious trends associated with the widespread perception of 'the need for healing'. The publications relating to Contemporary Celtic Spirituality present an overview of the many ways in which 'Celticity' is being perceived, customised, commodified and contested within a variety of spiritual traditions, and the issues raised and insights provided both for practitioners and scholars. Having been written over a period of time for different audiences, inevitably a number of overlapping and interlocking themes recur.

Through these publications, my contribution to scholarship has been to show how people are seeing the world and interacting with it, whether within more 'traditional' faith communities or in the looser milieu characteristic of late twentieth century spirituality. In particular, my research on Glastonbury, Bath and contemporary Celtic spirituality has provided a rich body of material which augments and enhances the literature on contemporary belief and practice.

In this Overview of the published material, I first outline my research methodology, explaining its academic origins and showing how it has been highly appropriate to the fields of enquiry with which the publications deal. I then highlight recurring themes and concerns in my work, before introducing the particular areas of research explored in the publications. Finally, I detail my contributions to scholarship.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology informing my publications is the result of my background in Religious Studies and Anthropology at undergraduate level, and in Folklore (as taught in the North American academic context) at graduate level. My investigations of religious phenomena and cultural traditions have therefore been predicated on the combination of the 'phenomenological' approach fostered in Religious Studies by Ninian Smart, and the insights and research technologies of Anthropology and Folklore. Although I deal specifically with methodology in *Phenomenology, Fieldwork and Folk Religion* (1992: Section I), it will be useful to outline how my methodology has evolved and to highlight some of the more important elements here.

Phenomenology of Religion and Religious Studies

Religious Studies scholars study religion as a phenomenon. Unlike Theology, which adopts a position of methodological theism, or Sociology, which tends towards methodological atheism, Religious Studies fosters methodological agnosticism. Its purpose is not to prove, disprove or approve. It is therefore considered inappropriate to start with one view of reality (whether 'scientific' or confessional) against which others are judged. In Religious Studies we are **studying** religion; as scholars, we are neither **doing** religion nor instructing others on how it is appropriate to **be** religious. While we may comment on, contextualise or critique the phenomenon, Religious Studies does not set out to explain - or explain away - religion. Its focus is the myriad manifestations of religious belief, whether its impact is national, social, institutional or personal.

Phenomenology of religion, Bleeker claims, 'must begin by accepting as proper objects of study all phenomena that are professed to be religious'(1971:16). This is important, as it cautions

against scholars choosing to ignore phenomena which lie outside what the academy chooses to see as 'proper' or 'real' religion. As phenomenology of religion 'attempts to describe religious behaviour rather than explain it' (Bettis 1969:3), debates as to the existence or reality of the focus of devotion are futile and inappropriate, for as Smart points out, 'God is real for Christians whether or not he exists'(1973:54).

It might be said that this approach espouses relativism, but in the field, where people continue to perceive many different realities and cosmologies, the issue for the researcher is not that of ultimate truth. It is what constitutes truth or reality for the believer. Those who insist that different religions are 'all the same really', are not accurately reflecting the views of many Moslems, Christians, Buddhists or others who hold that there is something unique, distinctive and right about their tradition. Likewise, the increasingly fashionable view that all religions are 'just different paths up the same mountain' does not alter the fact that people have their own preferred routes and radically different destinations. It is precisely this diversity which makes Religious Studies such a broad and, in my opinion, such a fascinating field.

In terms of physical observation, the world looks the same whether it is believed to be the creation ex nihilo of a loving God, or simply an illusion ('maya' in the eastern tradition). However, such perceptions have great bearing on how people see the world, and how they act in it and towards it. To insist that science 'explains' the world in terms of evolution does not aid our understanding of religion: there are creationists who simply dismiss evolution as a false belief, for example, and many who simultaneously accept evolution **and** perceive the world as a divine creation or an inherently sacred entity.

Phenomenology is a well known approach in the social and behavioural sciences, with its own vast literature. Within Religious Studies, phenomenology of religion has meant different things at different times (Sharpe, 1986). Here I use the term in the sense developed by Ninian Smart as an approach to the study of religion:

The attempt through informed empathy to present others' experiences and beliefs from their points of view, and involving the suspension of one's own values (epoche) (1996: xxiii)

Two terms from philosophical phenomenology, 'epoche' and 'eidetic vision', have been used by Smart as aids to self-awareness when studying religion. Epoche, often described as bracketing, involves self-consciously trying to 'bracket off' one's own beliefs, disbelief, expectations, prejudice, or whatever might interfere with an appreciation of the phenomenon under study from the point of view of the believer. Eidetic vision similarly stresses the need to see what is there, not what one wants to see or thinks should be there; it is alerting one to the dangers of imposing one's own agenda onto a religious phenomenon. As Hufford (1995:61-2) puts it, 'impartiality must be a methodological stance in which one acknowledges one's personal beliefs but sets them aside for scholarly purposes.'

This is no utopian search for a purely 'scientific' method. Acknowledging that the observer has an active role in this enterprise, Smart uses phrases such as 'empathetic objectivity' and 'neutralist subjectivity'. These underline the inherent paradox in such an approach to studying religion, for while one attempts to be 'objective', in the sense of trying not to see or judge the phenomenon studied in terms of one's own belief or disbelief, one is simultaneously urged to subjectively engage with the phenomenon, in order to gain some understanding of what the believer experiences and how she sees the world. The believer frequently comments that one has to

experience in order to understand, while the scholar might observe that experiencing is not necessarily the same as understanding. The 'insider'

has certain feelings and beliefs and they are an important part of the data we as religionists are set to explore. But an insider can be terribly wrong about her tradition, ignorant about or insensitive to the variety of her religious heritage. (Smart 1996:4)

The notion of 'informed empathy' thus involves the combination of knowledge about a phenomenon with some attempt to perceive how that phenomenon might 'feel' from the inside

Smart reminds us that the researcher in religion

is parasitic upon the Expresser, obviously; his advantage only is that he can survey a broad range of religious facts, and this is not the primary aim of, and is often not within the competence of, the Expresser. (1973a:33)

My starting point in research has been to agree with Smart about the scholar being parasitic upon the Expresser; this has led to my perception of the importance of engagement with the Expresser (whether through interview, participant observation or insider literature), and to genuine attempts to understand and accurately portray the worldview of the Expresser. My approach to the study of various religious and spiritual phenomena has been to treat as fact whatever experiences my informants have reported (by which I mean that I do not consider it appropriate for me to question either the reality of the focus of belief or to dismiss their reading of their own experiences), and to attempt to convey the worldview of various groups and individuals. My role in describing various phenomena in publications has therefore been neither as advocate nor debunker, simply reporter on aspects of popular religion and late twentieth century spirituality which might add to understanding of the religious milieu.

Although in the past qualitative research has been regarded as more 'subjective' and consequently less 'scientific' than quantitative research, the 'objectivity' of quantitative research has increasingly been questioned, and the idea that qualitative and quantitative research are mutually antagonistic in terms of technique and epistemology has been challenged. (Bryman (1988) helpfully explores such issues and reviews the social sciences literature in this respect.) Furthermore, the phenomenon being studied often dictates methodology. Some of the traditional means of information gathering used by the sociologist of religion, such as counting numbers in churches or on membership lists, for example, are simply inappropriate for many of the looser, more personal, non-institutionalised forms of contemporary religion. When the focus of research is personal belief, it cannot be assessed 'objectively' as it is frequently based on immanent knowledge, and cannot readily be proved or disproved. If anyone wants to make exact measurements of, or categorical statements about, what is or is not possible or what is or is not true at a metaphysical level, Religious Studies is probably not the appropriate discipline to choose.

In addition to his phenomenological approach, I have found useful Smart's model of religion as a living organism of seven interacting dimensions:

- 1) the mythic or narrative dimension
- 2) the ritual or practical dimension
- 3) the doctrinal or philosophical dimension
- 4) the ethical or legal dimension
- 5) the social or organisational dimension
- 6) the material, artistic or symbolic dimension
- 7) the experiential or emotional dimension

He has recently suggested that political and economic dimensions might also be added (1996:10).

Of these, the mythic and experiential dimensions have been of particular significance in my publications. 'Myth' in the Religious Studies usage means 'significant story' regardless of considerations of truth. While most often connected with the significant stories of figures (divine or human) or events of particular import for a specific tradition, Expressers' narratives relating personal experience or corroborative legends are also highly important in the establishment and maintenance of belief. Of all Smart's dimensions, however, the experiential is probably the most important, the most elusive and most neglected aspect of religion. It is in relation to the mythic and the experiential dimensions that insights and expertise from Folklore Studies have been most useful.

Although Smart's insights concerning phenomenology of religion have been widely accepted and circulated, many aspects of the Expresser's religious life have continued to be ignored in academic literature. 'Grass roots' issues like who calls a Christian meeting place a chapel (Catholics in Scotland, Methodists in Wales); what is considered appropriate behaviour, dress or food for particular occasions (eg Easter Sunday, Beltane or Harmonic Convergence); informal religious musical traditions (eg Goddess chants, or carol singing in Derbyshire pubs) have received comparatively little attention. It was an awareness of what I perceived as a puzzling lack of 'everyday religion' that led me to study Folklore.

As Primiano (1995:41) has commented, 'One of the hallmarks of the study of religion by folklorists has been their attempt to do justice to belief and lived experience.' Although I shall

expand on this later, I would particularly like to draw attention to those aspects of Folklore Studies which complement the study of religion. These include the refusal to privilege written over oral forms; the understanding that 'folk' 'popular' or 'unofficial' beliefs are an integral part of people's conceptual world and not simply willful aberrations; the recognition that belief spills over into every aspect of behaviour, and the appreciation of the dynamic nature of tradition.

Folklorists have paid considerable attention to narrative in various forms (eg legend, memorate, dite), but particularly helpful is Gillian Bennett's characterisation of 'belief story', that class of informal stories which 1) illustrate current community beliefs 2) tell not only of personal experiences but also of events that have happened to other people and 3) are used to explore and validate the belief traditions of a given community by showing how experience matches expectations (Bennett 1989: 291). Stories such as these are precisely the sort of material which I have been collecting for a number of years in relation to contemporary religious phenomena. They provide insights which I have found to be invaluable in the presentation of the worldview of groups and individuals.

Definition of Folk/ Popular/ Vernacular Religion

The area of folk or popular religion has been delineated in different ways in different academic disciplines (cf Yoder 1974) including Religious Studies, but more often than not it has simply been ignored. (I go into this issue in detail in *Phenomenology, Fieldwork and Folk Religion* 1992: Section I). Here I will simply restate my conviction that it can be useful to view religion in terms of three broad, interacting components - the official, the folk/ popular and the individual. What is perceived as the official is concerned primarily with theology, philosophy and ritual, and

is the aspect which has received most scholarly attention. The folk/ popular component I have specifically related to Yoder's definition of folk religion as 'the totality of all those views and practices of religion that exist among the people apart from and alongside the strictly theological and liturgical forms of the official religion' (1974:14). The individual component refers to each person's understanding of religion and the part it plays in her or his life, for as Douglas comments, 'each person's religion has to do with himself and his own autonomous needs' (1973:26). While some have used the term folk or popular religion in a derogatory sense, I have always regarded the term as value free, seeing it as a way of designating an integral aspect of religion *per se* which takes account of the practice as well as the theory of religion. While Yoder's definition of folk religion obviously developed in a Christian milieu, it works for any tradition in which there is a sense (emically or etically) of there being an official/ correct/ authentic 'version'.

Increasingly, however, it may be useful to abandon the term 'folk' religion, because of the possible negative or judgemental connotations, in favour of 'vernacular' religion. Primiano argues that 'Vernacular religion is, by definition, religion as it is lived: as humans encounter, understand, interpret and practice it. . . . Vernacular religious theory involves an interdisciplinary approach to the study of the religious lives of individuals with special attention to the process of religious belief, the verbal, behavioral, and material expressions of religious belief, and the ultimate object of religious belief' (1995:44).

Religion and the individual

There is much talk of the contemporary 'privatisation' of religion. Undoubtedly much religion does not look like it used to and assuredly there is, in Britain, Western Europe and America,

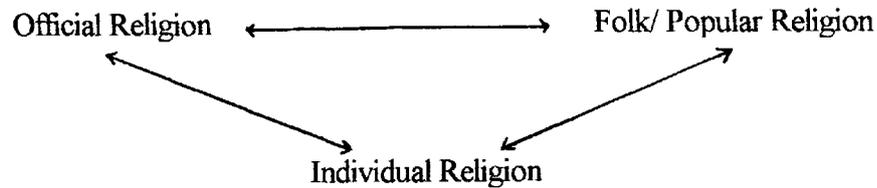
more consumer choice in religion than ever before. What makes the present period unique is that more people have more simultaneous access to more forms of religion than at any other period. While some use the term 'spiritual supermarket' as a derogatory term, I see it as an accurate reflection of the current situation, with the emphasis on variety and consumer choice. Thus, in this post-modern emporium, Irish Catholic nuns are enhancing their devotions with Buddhist meditation, Anglicans are learning spiral dances, and Druids are teaching Neuro-Linguistic Programming.

However, we should not get too carried away with the idea that 'pick and mix' is anything new - individual religion or spirituality is, and I would contend always has been, a very personal package. I have indicated that my working model of religion is very much that it exists in the interaction of official religion (however that is constructed), vernacular or folk religion and individual religion. It is a dynamic interaction of beliefs, practices, attitudes, rationales, narratives, perceptions of efficacy and personal experience.

We hear a lot of talk in New Age circles and elsewhere of 'taking responsibility for your own spiritual life', of 'doing what feels right', of 'seeing what works for you'. But over the centuries that is precisely what people have been doing in their choice of deities, saints and calendar customs; mixing old ways with new. There is the Hong Kong Methodist who goes to the temple of Wong Tai Sin in connection with financial matters, or the mainstream Anglican who visits spiritualist churches or seeks mediums at times of stress or bereavement. Efficacy and experience form the empirical basis of people's faith in the realm of religion as it is lived. We therefore need to be aware of, and if possible record, people's experiences, but furthermore such experiences need to be contextualised. We need to know what people make of their

personal religious narrative.

We might envisage a tripartite model of official, folk and individual religion as follows:



This represents a dynamic process of official and folk traditions interacting and influencing each other and in turn influencing and being influenced by the individual. It might be argued that what has changed for some spiritual seekers in the context of late twentieth century religiosity is not the role of individual or popular religion, but the relative significance of official religion. With some of the more New Age/ privatised/ individualised contemporary spiritual paths we might want to invert the triangle and see the individual at the top, being fed by and feeding upon a **variety** of official and folk traditions, but the model essentially holds good.

While my methodology originally grew out of the 'Smartean' approach to the study of religion (itself built on a great body of existing literature), I have brought to it the values, assumptions and research technologies of Folklore Studies, particularly work relating to vernacular religion. Thus my research, in terms of methodology and focus, has roots in both fields but is slightly anomalous to/ outside the mainstream of both. It is this unusual combination of skills and subject matter which has enabled me to make original contributions to the literature on vernacular religion and contemporary spirituality.

experiences, how people interpret events in the light of their experiences, how their experiences are interpreted in relation to cultural tradition, and so on.

This brings us back to the necessity of understanding, accessing and taking seriously the folk/unofficial/ vernacular and individual part of the religious package. For many in different faith communities the 'grand narrative' of official religion is refracted through lots of little, everyday, not-so-grand narratives: aetiological legends (how the robin got a red breast; how the stones got to Stonehenge), corroborative legends ('Twas only the statue on his dashboard saved him'; 'Synchronicity!'), personal experience narratives ('Oh my dear, we had a miracle down here just the other week'; ' . . . and then I realised I had been a Scot in a previous life'). In the field, we need to guard against either squeamishness or snobbery in relation to such narratives and individual experiences.

Some recent examples from different traditions in Britain demonstrate the potency and importance of being in touch with vernacular religion and individual experience. There was, for example, the phenomenon of aubergines with Islamic content in the Midlands in March and April 1990. Aubergines when split revealed written in the seeds in arabic script the name of Allah or Yah-Allah (cf "Aubergines from Heaven: Folk Religion and Legitimation": Section II). This prompted a BBC Radio 4 'Today' programme featuring, on the one hand, an Islamic scholar stating that there is no place in Islam for miracles, and on the other hand, interviews with British Muslims declaring it a miracle and speaking of its impact upon their personal faith. In the summer of 1995 there was considerable media coverage of Hindu statues drinking milk. For the thousands of people who involved in the aubergine and milk incidents, here was something concrete which was empirically based, something experienced which became part of their

Fieldwork and the Experiential Dimension

Having outlined some of the theoretical background to the published work, it will have become obvious that a major interest has been to engage with religion as it is lived, and that denotes a concern with religious experience.

Religious experience can be experience which is religious, or experience of religion. Religious experience as experience which is religious begs the question 'do people necessarily discriminate between religious experience, and other kinds of experience?' The individual's experience is just that - experience. The grey area is who labels an experience 'religious', and why and when and under what circumstances? Here issues of emic and etic description and discourse come into play. Turning to religious experience as experience of religion, many people experience religion in the formal sense, by sitting through the ritual of a particular faith community, watching 'Songs of Praise' on television or whatever, but what does that do either to them or for them?

From my perspective, to begin to get to grips with either the individual experience of religion or the religious experience of the individual it is helpful to consult the individual and try to understand and appreciate both the role of religion in the individual's life and the role of the individual in religious life. Thus, as far as I am concerned, one of the best ways to explore religious experience is through fieldwork. While there are sometimes practical difficulties in conducting fieldwork - among groups who do not wish to be studied, or initiatory traditions, for example - this form of research can otherwise be practised across the spectrum of religious and spiritual traditions, old and new. Naturally I do not claim that it is the only way, but it is the way that I personally have found most fruitful and the means by which I have made original

contributions to knowledge. By 'fieldwork' here I am embracing all techniques which involve 'live' information, principally interview and participant observation. While the fieldwork-based approach is necessarily small-scale, that does not mean it is without value, nor that it cannot be used in conjunction with other forms of research. There is much to be said for in being able to check one's field data against large-scale trends recorded in, for example, the European Values Survey.

Fieldwork can take a variety of forms, from the formal interview to the casual chat, from deliberate participant observation to accidental encounter. In fieldwork one can never be entirely in control of the agenda, a fact which relates back to Smart's notion of the scholar being 'parasitic' upon the believer. Frequently an interview or encounter results in one being 'passed on' from person to person. Serendipity often plays a part in fieldwork: being in the right place at the right time and thus witnessing an unpublicised event, being talked to by a particular individual, being seen with one person which encourages an approach from another. An advantage of working in a particular location such as Glastonbury or Bath over a period of time is that one gets to know which times and places are likely to be most fruitful. It also allows one to observe continuity, change and syncretism, for a significant aspect of contemporary religiosity is the speed with which things can change.

Experience indicates that one of the most important skills for the fieldworker is to be open to information from the widest possible variety of sources; conventional and unconventional; historical and mythical; written and oral. Material culture (whether crystals, costumes, shrines or ritual objects), popular literature (in the case of New Age and paganism *Kindred Spirit*, *Pagan Dawn*, *Chalice*, etc), ephemera (promotional leaflets, posters, programmes of workshops,

meetings and other events) and Web Pages relating to contemporary spirituality are all vital resources which can be neglected by scholars.

In an interview situation, my preferred means is to tape-record the interaction, for a number of reasons. Above all, as long as one knows one's equipment and can operate it with the minimum of fuss, taping an interview allows one to maintain eye contact and pay more attention to the conversation (verbal and non-verbal aspects) than would be possible with note-taking. Moreover, the tape can be played and replayed, enabling one both to catch nuances which might have been missed at the time, and to let the people 'speak for themselves' by using their own words in transcription. However, on occasions when taping is inappropriate or impossible, note-taking remains an option. In participant-observation situations where note-taking would be unacceptable, photography can sometimes be an acceptable aide-memoire, backed up by supplementary written or tape-recorded comments made as soon as possible after the event.

Though obvious to anyone who has ever undertaken it, it is perhaps worth pointing out that fieldwork is not a 'soft option'. There are interpersonal tightropes to walk; there is the trick of participating, but not losing one's critical faculties, to master. There is that rather difficult self-knowledge to cultivate, so that you know what you need to put into your phenomenological brackets, and you recognise seepage from those brackets when it is occurring. There are the practical details of batteries, tapes and labelling to stay on top of, and the tiresome business of tape summaries and transcription to contend with. But the rewards (for the most part) make it all worthwhile.

Communication

After the fieldwork comes the presentation of the material. In the case of the publications, the form has primarily been articles in academic journals and contributions to scholarly books. I consider it is important for scholars to be introduced to beliefs and practices or areas of religion that they might otherwise not have any access to or interest in, or might not think deserving of consideration. Ignoring a field of study is a way of demoting it, making value judgements as to what constitutes 'worthy' objects of study. I want to question some of the implicit and explicit assumptions both generally and in the academy as to what constitutes 'real' or 'proper' belief, in relation to vernacular religion and contemporary spirituality.

Some of the neglect of popular belief has sprung from a rather 'protestant' attitude that suspects or dismisses religious material culture, ritual or custom. Academic studies of religions, or religions as taught in schools and colleges, sometimes tend to be pared down versions of traditions. While this may be seen as a necessary pedagogic device, the traditions and the students are done a great disservice if we give the impression that this skeletal form is all there is to it. The diversity within religious traditions, the role of vernacular religion and the individual 'spin' on religion are there, and deserve to be acknowledged.

Communication has therefore been a key consideration in my work, wanting both to communicate with the person who holds the belief (the Expresser, in Smart's terminology) and then accurately to communicate her or his insights to others. One of my aims - and one of my skills - is to bridge the gap between practitioners and the academic audience. I aim to respect belief and represent it fairly, while maintaining a critical edge. I want people to understand how others see the world; I therefore attempt to bring out the internal logic of different belief systems,

whether in vernacular religion, New Religious Movements, some forms of holistic healing, or more traditional religious worldviews.

In addition to published work, I have communicated through conference papers and lectures, both for specialist and non-specialist audiences. As well as being an invited speaker at international conferences, I have, for example, been asked to speak at a clergy summer school, to help the participants understand the appeal of New Age and Paganism. Bridging the gap between academic audiences and practitioners, I have spoken at and been involved in the organisation of conferences with a broad spectrum of participants and speakers - academic, non-academic, practitioner, non-practitioner, sceptic - which have provided occasions for lively discussion, but also enhanced understanding. Accessibility has also been a prime consideration in publications and papers. A lot of my writing is descriptive, because I feel that I will be presenting new and unfamiliar material to many readers. While there are points I wish to make, and issues to which I wish to draw attention, I want people to have enough information to get a feel for whatever is being discussed and to develop their own insights on the basis of my fieldwork. One of my major contributions to knowledge has been to deal with material which often fails to be acknowledged, taken account of, taken seriously. At one level what I tend to deal with is the hidden side of religion. One of the things that continues to delight me is when someone says to me, after reading one of my articles or hearing a paper 'I had no idea that...!'

If, as the study of vernacular religion advocates, we interact with practitioners, observe, discuss, take equally seriously all parts of the individual's religious 'package', appreciate and explore the relationship of theory and practice, we are liable to arrive at a deeper understanding of contemporary worldviews.

Religious Trends and Contemporary Spirituality

The rationale for looking at contemporary spirituality through the lens of vernacular religion lies in the extent to which it enables one to present a non-prescriptive, rounded picture of what is happening in the everyday lives of participants. This concern with individual belief and experience is particularly appropriate in the context of contemporary spirituality.

Having concentrated so far on methodology, the reasons for studying vernacular religion and the advantages of such an approach, I now want to look at some of the trends in contemporary spirituality which have become recurring themes in my publications, and to which I have made contributions to knowledge through my field data.

I have already indicated that the 'customised' nature of much of what is now appearing in contemporary spirituality and the roles of intuition, personal experience and 'what works for you' are not entirely new. However, in contemporary religion, the element of **collage** or **bricolage** is particularly pronounced, as people draw upon the great variety of religious and cultural traditions to which they now have access. Also, certain features are emerging which bring together cultural tradition and aspects of vernacular religion in somewhat novel combinations.

The existence of a New Age Foundation Diploma in Tasseography (teacup reading) which is said to 'further your development as a New Age Counsellor', for example, is indicative of the trend towards 'honouring', formalising, packaging and marketing tradition that was previously informally transmitted in one to one or small group surroundings.

There are significant elements of '**revival**' and **syncretism** in much contemporary spirituality. As

pagans, Christians and assorted spiritual seekers try to recapture a Golden Age, there is much 'looking back in order to go forward'. The White Spring in Glastonbury has 'become' an ancient rag well and well-dressing (Derbyshire-style) has been 'revived' there in recent years. Meanwhile, an ecumenical Glastonbury Christian group, in an adaptation of the rag well motif, has created a 'prayer hanging' onto which people have been invited to tie lengths of wool. In Bath, one pagan priestess and psychotherapist describes herself as 'working extensively with the Native American tradition, integrating it with the Celtic Fire Festivals'. Tradition bending and blending are very much the order of the day. However, such behaviour can be problematic when issues of spiritual 'property rights' are perceived (see 'The Noble Savage and the Global Village', 1995: Section V).

At a time when geographical mobility is greater than ever before, there is **topophilia**, a heightened sense of place, a view that certain locations are inherently 'powerful'. People consider all sorts of power (healing, revelatory, restorative, planetary) to be vested in such destinations, which are frequently the focus of myths, corroborative legends and personal experience narratives. Moreover, in addition to clearly marked or constructed sacred space, there is a view that certain landscapes have been meaningfully moulded into symbolic shapes, such as the Glastonbury Zodiac.

All the earth may be sacred, but 'travelling with a purpose' to places considered more sacred or special than others plays a considerable part in the lives of diverse spiritual seekers. Pilgrimage is being developed by new groups, and more traditional adherents are 'discovering' pilgrimage; examples of the latter would be the Baptists who now flock to Iona or the Evangelicals who seek transformation in Toronto. Traditional (or what are perceived to be traditional) pilgrimages

are being revived and new pilgrimages are being created.

A widely recognised trend is that of '**believing without belonging**' (cf Davie, 1994). Although many people may be operating outside traditional forms of religion, this by no means signals lack of belief. The extraordinary growth of 'Body, Mind, Spirit' sections in bookshops across Britain, for example, or the huge quantity of 'cyberspace spirituality' on the Internet, are among the indicators that many people are conducting their search for meaning outside (or in addition to) the more traditional forums. People putting together individual packages of belief can also draw on the many resources available through the 'spiritual service industry' which has arisen to provide specialist literature, artefacts, courses, workshops, lectures, rituals and other aids such as spirit guide portraits (cf "The Commodification of the Celt" 1994 : Section V).

Another significant factor in contemporary spirituality is the widespread perception of a **need for healing**, and the concomitant growth in the variety of healing on offer. Healing has traditionally been closely connected to vernacular religion, frequently involving the individual putting together a 'package' of complementary resources (prayer, charms, folk/ traditional cures, conventional medicine) at times of need. Healing has often been attributed to divine forces. My background in Religious Studies, Folklore and medical history has been helpful in identifying and contextualising certain phenomena within the contemporary healing scene.

A particularly fruitful location for the study of healing and non-aligned spirituality has been Bath itself, for the hot springs of Bath have been attracting people for religious and therapeutic purposes for centuries. While the heyday of Bath's fame as a medicinal spa was the eighteenth century, however, the major influences on the present healing activity are Bath's mythical and

much speculated upon spiritual history and developments in contemporary religiosity (cf "The Need for Healing: A Bath Case Study" 1999: Section IV).

The current multiplicity of forms of healing in Bath and elsewhere reflects diversity not only in means but in worldviews. Many forms of holistic healing stress that spirit, as well as body and mind, must be addressed as part of the healing process. Thus, in addition to the expansion of healing ministries in the Christian context, for example, there are therapies underpinned by Indian or Chinese philosophies, predicated on ideas of 'interconnectedness' and karma or based on native American tradition, 'shamanic' techniques or the use of crystals. The perceived need for healing and the plethora of therapies on offer can be seen as examples of 'non-aligned spirituality', within which the individual (client or practitioner) chooses forms of healing on the traditional bases of experience and efficacy. The new healing industry which has arisen to deal with this need, moreover, is another aspect of the spiritual marketplace (cf "Healing in the Spiritual Marketplace: Consumers, Courses and Credentialism" 1999: Section IV).

Glastonbury

Vernacular religion and contemporary spirituality combine in Glastonbury to produce excellent examples not only of religious trends but also of the value of the broad phenomenological approach outlined above.

Glastonbury has traditionally been a site of considerable importance for English Christianity, but it has also been hailed as the 'epicentre' of New Age in England and the 'heart chakra' of planet earth. The Glastonbury Order of Druids regards it as 'the fountainhead of three major religions;

Wicca, Druidry and Christianity' (Shallcrass 1995:23), while numerous other spiritual seekers (aligned and non-aligned) feel drawn to Glastonbury. In writing and lecturing about Glastonbury, my aim has been to demonstrate the spectrum of beliefs and practices found there, explore the myths that are being made and recycled, record the customs which are being created, and give a flavour of the seeming abundance of spiritual experience (eg "Drawn to Glastonbury" 1993: Section III).

Glastonbury appears to be a multivalent location, in that people not only find in it different meanings, but also see many different places within the one place. Glastonbury Tor serves as an example of this plurality and simultaneity of beliefs. Over the years, among the descriptions received in response to enquiries about the significance of the Tor are: the entrance to the Underworld; a pagan three-dimensional ceremonial maze; a crystal tower; an esoteric Christian labyrinth; the entrance to the fairy realms; the Holy Grail; the site of the nodal point at which a number of different leylines cross.

In my capacity as a Study of Religions lecturer, I take parties of UK and overseas students round Glastonbury from time to time and benefit from their insights. For example, one student was told that the pedestrian crossing on the High Street had been built on a leyline to ensure that people walked on it and benefitted from its energies, whether or not they were aware of it. As I have indicated elsewhere (eg "Reinventing the Celts" 1993: Section V), much information gained in Glastonbury comes through simply giving people the opportunity to talk, like the chance meeting on the Tor with a Druid who considered the Glastonbury Zodiac 'fanciful', but who discerned in the landscape a huge reclining Goddess figure, of which the Tor was one breast.

In Glastonbury, I have gained information from formal interviews with a wide range of people including a variety of clergy and New Age Bed and Breakfast proprietors, and from participant observation in such diverse activities as a self-styled 'Traditional Celtic Wedding' at Chalice Well, the Anglican Glastonbury Pilgrimage and a Glastonbury Zodiac Companions picnic. In addition, however, much has been learned from casual conversation, observation, the ephemera produced to publicise events and the flourishing spiritual service industry. Goods on sale range from the Abbey gift shop's range of Holy Thorn jewellery to locally produced dream-catchers 'specially charged' with Glastonbury energy. The speed of change in contemporary religion is seen in Glastonbury, where there have been numerous examples of groups, shops, individuals and ideas coming and going, with positions and perceptions altering. Fieldwork over a period of years in Glastonbury has confirmed for me the importance of recording 'markers' of belief and practice which can be returned to for comparative purposes.

Since "Drawn to Glastonbury" was published in 1993, for example, there have been a number of developments in the Christian scene. Members of St John's Anglican church have experienced the 'Toronto Blessing' (or 'God's Blessing' as they prefer to term it), which has led to a sense of 'renewal' and increased confidence in relation to 'alternative' groups. The vicar who thought that his ministry would be with 'New Agers', has found himself 'midwife to a Christian revival'. In 1993 an ecumenical group, The Quest Community, was founded 'specifically to work among the many and varied visitors to Glastonbury'. This group took its inspiration from the Iona Community, and draws 'inspiration from the Celtic tradition, whilst holding on to what is good in our own varied church backgrounds'. Its Core Community members have crosses made from Glastonbury Thorn, a symbol of 'Christianity rooted in Glastonbury'. Glastonbury has been home to a branch of the British Orthodox Church, which in 1994 had become a diocese of the

Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria, with the mission of 'restoring' Orthodoxy to the British Isles. In 1997 Glastonbury (along with some other BOC churches) broke away to become the Celtic Orthodox Church, seeing itself as successor to and drawing inspiration from the Celtic Church in Glastonbury and the saints of Britain. While more 'alternative' forms of religion attract media attention, it is important to record that Christianity in Glastonbury (which for centuries has owed much to myth and various manifestations of vernacular religion) maintains a dynamic, creative tension between continuity and change.

Glassie's dictum that 'tradition is the creation of the future out of the past' (1995:395) seems particularly apposite when working Glastonbury. Many a claim is prefaced with 'tradition tells that . . . ', though requests for evidence are often met with indifference verging on distaste; as one informant said dismissively, 'You mean, **observable** phenomena?'. What Glastonbury was, is and might be is largely a matter of perception, as much to do with the people observing as the phenomena observed. 'There are two types of people in Glastonbury,' I was told, 'Glastonians and Avalonians.' Glastonians think they are living in Glastonbury, a small town in the South West of England; Avalonians **know** they are living in Avalon.'

Glastonbury, therefore, exemplifies a number of characteristics of late twentieth century religiosity. These include 'retraditionalisation', 'resacralisation' of nature and the landscape, topophilia, syncretism and the reworking of myth in relation to the past, present and future. My research in Glastonbury has underlined the necessity of polymethodic fieldwork and the need to use a variety of sources, both official and unofficial, which combine historical research and the study of cultural tradition with evidence from material culture, ephemera, oral tradition and individual experiences.

Contemporary Celtic Spirituality

One advantage of a background in Folklore in the milieu of contemporary religiosity is a familiarity not only with cultural tradition but with the history of Folklore Studies itself. While many features of the contemporary Celtic revival can be traced to the eighteenth century, many of the assumptions and materials being used in contemporary spirituality belong to turn of the century 'folk-lore'. These range from ideas of cultural evolution, 'survivals' and lionisation of rural life to 'reconstructed' Celtic texts (cf "The Noble Savage and the Global Village" 1995: Section V).

Just as Glastonbury provides in one place a microcosm of many trends, the spiritual aspects of the contemporary Celtic revival shed light on interlocking issues and elements such as the post-modern approach to history and the perception that there is no one version of 'Truth'; tensions between nationalism and globalisation; perceptions of cultural imperialism; the creation of identity; the enduring appeal of the Noble Savage and the Golden Age; spiritual 'mix and match'; and issues of authority and authenticity.

In contemporary religiosity, the Celts are being 'reclaimed' by a variety of spiritual seekers, Christian, New Age and Pagan. (There is also evidence that at least one Buddhist group in Ireland is consciously 'Celticising'.) A major reappraisal of 'Celticity' is taking place, broadening the definition of who or what is Celtic and what Celticity entails. Some within mainstream Christian denominations look longingly towards Celtic Christianity for inspiration, seeing it as 'purer', more 'authentic' Christianity; there is talk of 'our native tradition' before 'Roman' Christianity was 'imposed' on us. An idealised, pan-Celtic worldview and spirituality has

emerged in some New Age circles, while for a variety of Pagans the Celtic tradition is an attractive and varied source of inspiration for the recovery and reappropriation of the pre-Christian past. Thus, while increasing numbers of people consider their lives enhanced by Celtic spirituality, there is a huge variety of understandings of what it comprises.

One of the major problems some scholars have with contemporary Celtic spirituality in its myriad forms is that they see it as 'inaccurate' and 'inauthentic'. However, the criteria of authenticity and modes of authenticating operating in the various forms of Celtic spirituality are not necessarily located in the Celtic past nor available for empirical scrutiny; they are more often situated in the traits of late twentieth century religiosity, a product of collage, inspiration, channelling or past life experience.

Many of those attracted by and involved in Celtic spirituality are concerned with the present, rather than the past: as one Glastonbury informant said,

There's something there, a wonderful ambience, and we can localise it as no one is sure who the Celts really were. It doesn't matter about strict historicity - it sets up a wonderful warm glow of hope, helps you feel more integrated. What we need in the West is a Celtic renaissance.

Even when practitioners look at the same sources as academics, whether archaeological evidence, literature or cultural traditions, they may gain different insights as a result. As Kaledon Naddair points out in his introduction to *The Ancient Keltic Tradition*,

Academic theorists are next to useless in these matters, being cretinously ignorant of Initiatory Esoterics; Classical Historians are also weak sources, being ill-informed, and biased against the Spiritually superior Keltic Culture' (1987:4).

On occasion I have indicated where and in what ways there may be a mismatch between the conventional academic view and that of the practitioners, but if some scholars find aspects of Celtic spirituality 'inaccurate' or 'inauthentic' that does not negate it as a religious phenomenon. Myths remain significant stories, regardless of whether they are true or false. The 'spiritual Celt' is real, whether or not he or she exists or existed.

My role in reporting and commenting on various aspects of Celtic spirituality has been to present what is happening, as a rich and fascinating aspect of the contemporary religious scene, in the study of which the methodological combination of Smartean phenomenology, fieldwork and insights from Folklore Studies has again proved invaluable.

Summary

The publications on which this submission is based fall into the following categories: Methodology, Vernacular Religion and Cultural Tradition, Glastonbury and Bath, Healing and Non-aligned Spirituality, and Contemporary Celtic Spirituality. Through my writing on these areas, a number of independent and original contributions to knowledge about vernacular religion and contemporary spirituality have been made.

1. Research methodology

In the course of my academic career, I have developed a research methodology which has proved entirely appropriate to my chosen spheres of study. I have taken Smartean phenomenology into the field, where I have demonstrated the utility of Smart's insights concerning respect for the believer's worldview and the desirability of studying religious phenomena without becoming enmeshed in questions of 'truth'.

My particular methodological contribution, however, has been to enhance the Smartean phenomenological position by bringing to it the research technologies and insights of Folklore Studies, particularly vernacular religion, indicating not only how material might be collected, but what sort of material it can be valuable to collect. My work might be described as 'post-Smartean', building on Smart's dimensional model of religion and phenomenological stance, but taking it forward through fieldwork, interview and participant observation to deal more specifically with the experiential dimension which is so often neglected.

2. Cross/inter-disciplinary approach to the study of vernacular religion and contemporary spirituality.

From my unusual combination of subject bases, I have brought an appreciation of vernacular religion from Folklore Studies to Religious Studies and sociology of religion, and an awareness of contemporary religion to folklorists.

I have introduced terms like folk religion and vernacular religion to Religious Studies audiences and have argued strongly for the importance of acknowledging this area as a vital and vibrant part of religion *per se*. I have drawn attention to the importance of efficacy and experience, and the empirical nature of aspects of vernacular religion, in a variety of religious traditions.

3. Provision of unique research data

Because my published work is largely based on fieldwork data, I have provided unique materials for the study of vernacular religion and contemporary spirituality. Research has been undertaken within a variety of religious traditions, including Christianity, Islam, New Age and Paganism.

As my fieldwork tends to be in areas which have been comparatively neglected or seen by some to be problematic, I have made a valuable contribution to scholars in a variety of fields (Religious Studies, Folklore, Celtic studies, anthropology) through the material I have collected and presented.

4. Presentation and analysis of data

I have not only brought to the notice of the academy material which otherwise might have been undervalued or ignored, but I have made connections between belief, practice and cultural tradition which add to our understanding of contemporary religious phenomena and help to contextualise current events.

I have presented material in clear and accessible style, and I have communicated my findings not just to the academy but to broader audiences, encouraging debate, discussion and above all enhanced understanding of vernacular religion and contemporary spirituality.

5. Glastonbury and its role in contemporary religiosity

I have given an overview of the spectrum of activity in Glastonbury, rather than the more usual partial or partisan accounts, and I have demonstrated the importance of popular tradition, vernacular religion and myth to all aspects of spirituality there. I have highlighted the importance of topophilia and spiritual journeying, the creative tensions between continuity and change, and the extent to which there co-exists within Glastonbury a variety of pasts, presents and futures, sustained by the perceptions of believers there.

6. Contemporary spirituality, myth and healing in Bath

I have shown how Bath's legendary, medical and religious history has a bearing on current spiritual and healing activity in the city, and the importance of myth in relation to the main foci of topophilia, the hot springs.

7. Healing in the contemporary milieu

I have highlighted the extent to which some aspects of healing can be seen as forms of non-aligned spirituality. I have shown how the collage or bricolage approach to spirituality is reflected in therapies from a variety of cultural traditions, and how some healing is implicitly or explicitly predicated on New Age or Pagan assumptions. I have also demonstrated how healing functions within the spiritual service industry.

8. Contemporary Celtic Spirituality

Linking contemporary events to the history of Folklore Studies and the history of ideas, I have explored, explained and contextualised many of the ideas and assumptions behind current Celtic spiritual activity. Through fieldwork in a variety of places and with people from a number of belief traditions (Christian, New Age, Pagan, Druid), I have shown why, how and in what ways people are seeking and expressing Celticity for spiritual purposes. Both through providing original field data and through my analysis of events, I have made a considerable contribution to knowledge and understanding of a major trend in contemporary religiosity.

Conclusion

The study of religions is a polymethodic enterprise. Fieldwork is not a substitute for theological, textual, historical or sociological studies, but it undoubtedly complements them. Fieldwork is one of our most valuable tools in recognising, understanding, accessing and appreciating the infinite variety of religious experience. Such research may be small scale, but it provides insights which

could otherwise not be gained and without which the subject area would be poorer.

My fieldwork-based approach to the study of vernacular religion and contemporary spirituality has involved extensive use of participant observation and interview to gain what Smart refers to as 'empathetic understanding' of a variety of worldviews. Since 1990, I have concentrated particularly on Glastonbury as a multivalent pilgrimage destination and on Bath as an exemplar of trends in contemporary religiosity, on healing as a form of non-aligned spirituality, on the implications of the contemporary spiritual marketplace, and on the spiritual aspects of the contemporary Celtic revival in Paganism, New Age and Christianity.

By actively researching and publishing in the field of contemporary religion, I have facilitated the description and informed discussion of significant features of late twentieth century religiosity. My work is frequently cited by scholars in the field and it has inspired others in, for example, Britain, Norway, New Zealand, Australia and North America to undertake research in related areas. The time and academic effort invested in my publications, and the scholarly maturity reflected in my work are, I believe, equivalent to those of a more conventional doctoral thesis.

My submission therefore rests on the contention that through my publications I have made an original and valuable contribution to the study of vernacular religion and contemporary spirituality.

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Details of articles by Bowman referred to in the text appear in the Section indicated.

Section I : Phenomenology and Fieldwork

Introduction

This first section relates to publications that deal with issues of methodology. The papers on phenomenology and fieldwork precede those dealing with specific examples of vernacular religion and contemporary spirituality, as the methodology described has underpinned the material presented in those publications. Religious Studies methodology is not unquestioned and static; it is frequently contested and discussed and I engage in and encourage this ongoing debate.

In 1991 I presented a paper entitled 'Merely Descriptive?: Phenomenology and Fieldwork' at the 1991 British Association for the Study of Religions Annual Conference, which I was invited to write up as the BASR Occasional Paper *Phenomenology, Fieldwork and Folk Religion*. This had its genesis at the Denton Conference of the Network for the Study of Implicit Religion in 1990, where I had been asked to speak on 'Folk Religion and the Study of Folkloristics'. In both cases, I had been given the opportunity to explain to an audience largely unfamiliar with Folklore as an academic discipline what was meant by folk religion, how it related to religion *per se*, and the advantages of phenomenological fieldwork in its study. I illustrated both papers with examples of popular religious activity drawn from archive or media sources, personal experience and fieldwork.

The second methodological piece, the 'Response to **Studying Religions Realistically** by Steven Sutcliffe,' results from a Methodology Symposium I co-organised in 1996 to provide a forum for Religious Studies professionals and postgraduate students to share ideas, perceptions and

practical advice; the Symposium proceedings were published in the journal *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 10:3 (1998).

Phenomenology and Fieldwork Publication Details

Phenomenology, Fieldwork and Folk Religion, British Association for the Study of Religions Occasional Paper No 6, 1992.

'Response to **Studying Religions Realistically** by Steven Sutcliffe', *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 10:3 (1998)

Section II : Cultural Tradition and Vernacular Religion

Introduction

Cultural tradition and vernacular religion are important, if often neglected, areas in the understanding of religion as it is lived. In the varied publications of this section, I have demonstrated some of the richness of popular religion and given some insights into its centrality in the lives of believers. I have also shown how people manipulate and adapt tradition and justify belief in the light of experience. The section contains material from a variety of places and faith traditions, and covers the longest time span. The information used and commented upon is diverse, coming from Memorial University of Newfoundland's Folklore and Language Archive (MUNFLA), literature, the media, interviews, observation, and participant observation. This group contains some of my earliest published work, and a number of the articles have appeared in Folklore (rather than Religious Studies) publications.

Three of the papers in this section deal with Newfoundland material, demonstrating various aspects of cultural tradition and popular belief. "'Twas only the statue on his dashboard saved him": Narratives Affirming the Efficacy of Devotional Objects' briefly explores the role of material culture in popular devotion. 'Folk Religion in Newfoundland' and 'Red in the Bible of the Folk' deal specifically with the phenomenon dubbed by Utley 'Bible of the Folk', 'the tales which derive from the Bible and its silences' (1945:1). The Bible of the Folk is more than simple narrative; by explaining aspects of everyday life and the natural world in terms of Biblical events, the familiar becomes sacralised and a religious dimension is added to the mundane. A brief note on the Scottish tradition of the 'Christening Pieces' is included as an example of vernacular religious activity in conjunction with 'official' ritual.

There are two articles with specifically Islamic content, 'Aubergines from Heaven: Folk Religion and Legitimation' and 'Islam, adat and multiculturalism in Malaysia'. 'Aubergines from Heaven' reinforces the importance of material culture, vernacular religion and personal experience in both popular Christianity and popular Islam; while the two traditions are obviously very different, the article indicates that there are similar connections and tensions between official, folk and individual religion in both. In 1991 I had the opportunity to conduct some fieldwork on Malaysian Islam. It provided certain contrasts with the Gulf Islam I had experienced for two years in Bahrain and the relationship between Islam and 'adat' or Malay cultural tradition was being actively articulated and debated at that time. The influence of pluralism, socio-economic conditions and market forces on religion and cultural tradition were also examined.

The final piece in this section, 'After Diana', briefly records and explores some of the popular reaction to the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, in 1997. I considered it important to record close to the event some of the actions, experiences, speculations and narratives it triggered, as examples of vernacular religion and cultural tradition

Reference

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Vernacular Religion and Cultural Tradition Publication Details

"'Twas only the statue on his dashboard saved him": Narratives Affirming the Efficacy of Devotional Objects,' *Scandinavian Yearbook of Folklore*, 37 (1981), 7-10

'Folk Religion in Newfoundland: The Unauthorised Version,' *London Journal of Canadian Studies*, 9:3 (1994), 86-95

'Red in the Bible of the Folk,' in *Colour and Appearance in Folklore*, John Hutchings and Juliette Wood, eds. (London: The Folklore Society, 1991), 22-25

'Christening Pieces,' *FLS News*, 11 (1990), 5-6

'Aubergines from Heaven: Folk Religion and Legitimation,'
Talking Folklore, 9 (1990), 1-7

'Islam, adat and multiculturalism in Malaysia,' *DISKUS*, 2:1 (1994), 15-27

'Research Note: After Diana,' *Folklore*, 109 (1998), 99-101

Section III : Glastonbury and Bath

Introduction

In this section, publications relating to Glastonbury and Bath are grouped together. My research in both places is ongoing, and in addition to the articles I have lectured and delivered conference papers on Glastonbury and Bath in Britain, Norway, Portugal, Canada and the USA.

There is an unavoidable degree of interconnectedness between my articles on Glastonbury and Bath and those on Contemporary Celtic Spirituality (Section V); for example, 'Reinventing the Celts' in Section V draws heavily upon fieldwork in Glastonbury, while 'Belief, Legend and Perceptions of the Sacred in Contemporary Bath' in this section includes material on contemporary Druidic activity in the city and the importance of its perceived Celtic connections. Numerous examples from Bath also appear in Section IV on Healing and Non-aligned Spirituality.

'Drawn to Glastonbury', written in response to an invitation to contribute a chapter to *Pilgrimage in Popular Culture* (Reader and Walter, eds), provided the opportunity to explore two areas in which I am particularly interested: contemporary pilgrimage and Glastonbury as a multivalent location. In providing an overview of the spiritual scene in Glastonbury, I demonstrated the complexity of contemporary spirituality there and the utility of a fieldwork-based approach.

In 1996 I participated in the Second Symposium of the SIEF Commission of Folk Religion. I spoke on 'Faith, Fashion and Folk Religion in Glastonbury: Joseph of Arimathea's Legendary

Luggage', using Glastonbury as an exemplar of the symposium theme, 'Folk Religion -- Continuity and Change'.

Two other small pieces are included which were written on request for non-specialist audiences: 'New Age Pilgrimage: The Glastonbury Experience' for a special issue on Religion of *Tourism in Focus* (the magazine of Tourism Concern), and 'Glastonbury', an entry for *Sacred Journeys: Paths for the New Pilgrim*. (A chapter on Glastonbury will appear in *Beyond the New Age*, Marion Bowman and Steven Sutcliffe, eds.: Edinburgh University Press, Forthcoming.)

'Religion in Bath: Beyond the Facade' and 'Belief, Legend and Perceptions of the Sacred in Bath' were written to demonstrate the diversity of contemporary religiosity in Bath, the pervasive influence of New Age and pagan ideas, the role of myth, and the importance of the springs to perceptions of history and spirituality in the city. Both articles had their genesis in conference papers. 'Religion in Bath: Beyond the Facade' was written for the first Contemporary and New Age Religions Conference in May 1993. 'Belief, Legend and Perceptions of the Sacred in Bath' was developed from my 1994 BASR conference paper 'Sacred Substance and Sacred Symbol in Bath' and 'Contemporary Legend in Bath: Past and Present' for the 1996 conference of the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research.

The dynamism, creativity and versatility of both vernacular religion and contemporary spirituality are amply demonstrated in Glastonbury and Bath.

Glastonbury and Bath Publication Details

'Drawn to Glastonbury, in *Pilgrimage in Popular Culture*, Ian Reader and Tony Walter, eds. (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1993), 29-62

'Faith, Fashion and Folk Religion in Glastonbury: Joseph of Arimathea's Legendary Luggage,' in *Folk Religion - Continuity and Change: Proceedings of the Second Symposium of the SIEF Commission of Folk Religion*, Anders Gustavsson and Maria Santa Vieira Montez, eds. (Forthcoming)

'New Age Pilgrimage: The Glastonbury Experience,' in **Religion: Is Nothing Sacred?**, Special Issue, *Tourism In Focus*, 11 (Spring 1994), 6-7

'Glastonbury' in *Sacred Journeys: Paths for the New Pilgrim*, Jennifer Westwood (Gaia, 1997), 42-43

'Religion in Bath: Beyond the Facade,' *Religion Today*, 9:3 (1994), 32-37

'Belief, Legend and Perceptions of the Sacred in Contemporary Bath,' *Folklore*, 109 (1998), 25-31

Section IV : Healing and Non-aligned Spirituality

Introduction

This section focusses on issues related to healing in the contemporary spiritual milieu. Much of the material is based on fieldwork in Bath, where there is a variety of spiritual and healing activity (as already shown in Section III). I had a particular interest in this field, having gained some expertise in medical history when I worked as a research archivist and having studied folk medicine as an MA student.

The paper 'Spoilt for Choice: Alternative Healing in Bath, Past and Present', was written for the VIII International Congress on Traditional and Folk Medicine hosted by Memorial University of Newfoundland in 1994. Because healing is such an important feature of contemporary spirituality, it was the theme for the 1995 Contemporary and New Age Religions Conference held annually at Bath Spa University College. My contribution to that conference, 'Healing Currents in Bath', was the basis for 'The Need for Healing: A Bath Case Study'. The following year I presented 'The Need for Healing: Competing Models of Health and Healing in Bath' at the International Society for the Sociology of Religion Conference, Quebec, 1995.

I was invited to contribute 'The need for healing: an aspect of contemporary spirituality' after giving a paper on 'Healing in the New Age', at a conference entitled 'New Age: Old Lamps for New?' organised by the Centre for Inter-Faith Dialogue, Middlesex University, in 1997. This short article gives an overview of the topic for a non-specialist audience.

My interest in healing has extended to its training and business aspects. I touched on this in a

paper I was invited to give for an INFORM Seminar on New Religious Movements and Money at the London School of Economics in 1996, 'Profits, Priestesses and the New Healing Industry', and in 1997 I contributed a paper on 'The New Healing Industry' to the International Society for the Sociology of Religion conference in Toulouse. 'Healing in the Spiritual Marketplace: Consumers, Courses and Credentialism' is developed from both of these.

Healing and Non-aligned Spirituality Publication Details

'Spoilt for Choice: Alternative Healing in Bath, Past and Present,' *Proceedings of the VIII International Congress on Traditional and Folk Medicine: Body, Mind, Spirit Volume* (Memorial University of Newfoundland, Forthcoming)

'The Need for Healing: A Bath Case Study' in *Healing and Religion*, Marion Bowman, ed (London: Hisarlik Press, Forthcoming)

'The need for healing: an aspect of contemporary spirituality,' *Health and Healing*, 48 (1997), 1-2

'Healing in the Spiritual Marketplace: Consumers, Courses and Credentialism,' *Social Compass*, 46:2 (1999)

Section V : Contemporary Celtic Spirituality

Introduction

The articles in this section explore a variety of issues connected with contemporary Celtic spirituality. Written over a period of years for different audiences, these publications clearly interlock with some in the Glastonbury and Bath sections.

I was invited to contribute 'Reinventing the Celts' to a special 'New Age' issue of **Religion** after giving a paper on this topic at the Ilkley Study Group's 'Sociology of the New Age' conference in Glastonbury in 1992. The reception of a similar paper at the First International Conference on Celtic Folk Studies in the same year convinced me of the need to disseminate this material, and it was a delight to receive an undergraduate dissertation inspired by this article from a Sociology of Religion student in New Zealand. 'The Noble Savage and the Global Village: Cultural Evolution in New Age and Neo-Pagan Thought' was originally a paper for Bath Spa University College's annual conference on Contemporary and New Age Religions in 1994, when the theme was International Connections.

The Folklore Society's international conference on The Marketing of Tradition provided the forum to explore the material culture and commercial aspects of Celtic spirituality in 1994, resulting in 'The Commodification of the Celt: New Age/ Neo-Pagan Consumerism'. The paper I was invited to present at the first Contemporary Paganism in the British Isles Conference eventually became 'Cardiac Celts: Images of the Celts in Contemporary British Paganism'.

I was extremely pleased to be asked to contribute the chapter on 'Contemporary Celtic

Spirituality' for *New Directions in Celtic Studies*. It provided an opportunity to give an overview of the phenomenon, outlining its historical influences, giving examples of it across a variety of religious groups, and addressing such methodological issues as insider and outsider perceptions and criteria of authenticity.

Contemporary Celtic Spirituality Publication Details

'Reinventing the Celts,' *Religion*, 23 (1993), 147-156

'The Commodification of the Celt: New Age/Neo-Pagan Consumerism,' in *The Marketing of Tradition*. Teri Brewer, ed. (London: Hisarlik Press, 1994), 143-152

'The Noble Savage and the Global Village: Cultural Evolution in New Age and Neo-Pagan Thought,' *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 10:2 (1995), 139-149

'Cardiac Celts: Images of the Celts in Contemporary British Paganism,' in *Paganism Today*, Graham Harvey and Charlotte Hardman, eds (London: Thorsons, 1996), 242-251

'Contemporary Celtic Spirituality,' in *New Directions in Celtic Studies*, A.Hale and P.Payton, eds. (Exeter: Exeter University Press, Forthcoming)

Section VI : Miscellaneous Publications and Selected Book Reviews

Introduction

The publications in this section cover a variety of topics, and are presented primarily to give a fuller record of my work.

The first item is a special issue of *Religion Today*, which I co-edited with my colleague Professor Brian Bocking; it contains the papers presented at the first Contemporary and New Age Religions Conference at Bath in 1993. This has been a valuable and influential volume, and has attracted much interest and comment. The remainder of the publications are related to some aspect of cultural tradition, and reflect my involvement in the running of the Folklore Society for several years.

Two articles, 'Contemporary Legend and Practical Joke' and 'Travellers' Tales and Malleable Migration Myths', were originally given as papers at International Contemporary Legend Conferences in the 1980s. Both are concerned with narratives which are told as true, and which rely on elements of belief for their effectiveness. 'Not Another Chinese Restaurant Story . . .' is a brief report of an incident in Hong Kong which demonstrated the disruptive power of contemporary legend and rumour. Although none of these papers deal directly with religious matters, this narrative form is one which has informed much of my research in vernacular religion and contemporary spirituality.

'Ring-a-Ring-a-Roses: A Play on Plague or a Plague on Play?' was presented at the Folklore Society's Children's Folklore Conference in 1988. My fascination with the topic grew from the

time I started to collect variants of the many 'aetiological legends' the game has attracted while living in Canada. 'Janneying in Tilting, Fogo (Newfoundland)' reports research I conducted on traditional seasonal drama as an MA student at Memorial University. My brief contribution on the Shrine of St Anne de Beaupre for *Sacred Journeys: Paths for the New Pilgrim* was invited by the editor, who knew of my interest in St Anne from my work on popular devotion in Newfoundland.

In 1993, I was invited to contribute 'Survivals are alive and well and flourishing in Adult and Continuing Education' to the inaugural conference of the Folklore Society Education Group, which explored the theme 'Teaching Folklore: The Relevance of Cultural Traditions in Education Today'.

A selection of book reviews is included at the end of this section.

Miscellaneous Publication Details

(with Brian Bocking, eds.) **New Age and Contemporary Religions in the British Isles**, Special Issue, *Religion Today*, 9:3 (1994)

'Contemporary Legend and Practical Joke,' in *Perspectives on Contemporary Legend* Vol II, Gillian Bennett and Paul Smith, eds. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1986), 171-175

'Travellers 'Tales and Malleable Migration Myths,' *Folklore*, 101:2 (1990), 223-7

'Not Another Chinese Restaurant Story . . .,' *FLS News*, 7 (1988), 9-10

'Ring-a-Ring-a-Roses: A Play on Plague or a Plague on Play?' *Talking Folklore*, 7 (1989), 1-14

'Janneying in Tilting, Fogo (Newfoundland),' *Roomer*, (Newsletter of the Traditional Drama Research Group) 7:2 (1989), 17-20 & 7:3 (1989), 34-38

'Sainte Anne de Beaupre' in *Sacred Journeys: Paths for the New Pilgrim*, Jennifer Westwood (Gaia, 1997), 142-143

'Survivals are alive and well and flourishing in Adult and Continuing Education.' *Lore and Learning* 1 (1993), 37-40

Selected Book Reviews:

Review of *Women in Religion*, Jean Holm with John Bowker, eds. (London & New York: Pinter Publishers, 1994) in *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 10:3 (1995), 313-4

Review of *Religions, Rights and Laws* by Anthony Bradney (Leicester: Leicester University press, 1993) in *World Faiths Encounter* 13 (1996), 63-4

Review of *The Eclipse of Eternity: A Sociology of the Afterlife*, by Tony Walter (New York: St Martin's Press, 1996) in *American Journal of Sociology* 103:2 (1997), 470-1

Review of *Women in New Religions: In search of community, sexuality and spiritual power* by Elizabeth Puttick (London: Macmillan, 1997) in *Church Times*, 7039 (9 January 1998), 13

POSTSCRIPT

Reflecting on this submission as a whole, three issues stand out as being particularly deserving of further reflection. These three areas are the issue of self reflexivity; the limitations of particular methodologies and the need to develop new responses to the contemporary situation; and directions for future research. Each could be explored independently and at length. Here, they are outlined briefly to form a closure to the submission which is at the same time an opening to future work.

Self-reflexiveness

There is a need for constant vigilance in distinguishing the voice of the scholarly researcher from the voice of the researched. The attempt in qualitative, fieldwork-based research to incorporate a worldview in order to produce sensitive and accurate description coexists with the scholar's editorial control and analytical stance.

The work embodied in this submission ranges from research conducted in a traditional 'folklore' context (e.g. popular Catholicism in Newfoundland), where informants were more or less unaware of such concepts as reflexivity, to arenas (such as New Age and Paganism) in which a significant proportion of the informants are avid readers of both emic and academic works. Here, informants may double as conscious representatives or even academic scholars of the tradition to which they belong. In the latter case, the same person may constitute not only an informant for the researcher but also the researcher's academic or public audience. In a context in which educational levels are generally rising, and the spiritual search is in part a literary activity, the issue of reflexivity is becoming more

complex. The researcher must work to remain aware of his or her evolving role within the research 'ecosystem'.

Methodological Issues

Significant methodological issues are bound to be raised in the study of beliefs and practices of vernacular and/or 'marginal' forms of religiosity. The selection of one or another methodology (as here, qualitative studies based on fieldwork) temporarily excludes a number of other possible perspectives (such as quantitative or more theoretically oriented approaches). This will be the case whichever methodology is selected. Experience has shown that the fields of study encompassed in this submission respond well to an approach or combination of approaches located further towards the qualitative/fieldwork end of the spectrum of methodologies. This does not imply that other approaches would not yield equally valuable data and complementary insights. Multidisciplinary studies of the same topics might be encouraged and insights and conclusions compared.

Interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary approaches need to be developed, not only to take account of the changing forms of religiosity in all of the areas under study, but also so that scholars from different academic discourses can develop sound academic approaches to the complex issue of the representation of reality in a cultural context which acknowledges multiple possible realities.

Direction of future research

This submission embodies the results of research conducted over a number of years, and the topics and questions which constitute its focus have by no means been exhausted.

Continuing work needs to be done in each of the areas studied. Further research in the field of Vernacular Religion should be encouraged, both within more traditional forms of religion and in relation to the self-conscious 'revival' of folk tradition in contemporary spirituality. The research on Glastonbury and Bath in this submission constitutes a 'locality-based' study of significant foci of contemporary religiosity, which require to be revisited at regular intervals so that the findings of fieldwork can be informed by and evaluated within a diachronic perspective. In the area of healing and non-aligned spirituality, a rapidly increasing international public consciousness of 'alternative' therapies, remedies and philosophies will continue to generate scholarly interest and debate in this heavily contested field. Finally, contemporary Celtic spirituality looks set to continue to be a major influence on believers across a range of different religious traditions. Consequently, studies of Celtic spirituality will continue to benefit from research which can illuminate areas conventionally regarded as falling in the interstices of religious traditions. The task ahead for scholars of Celtic spirituality is to document and evaluate a phenomenon which is diverse, international and multilocal, recording how it unfolds over time and in different situations.

Vernacular religion and contemporary spirituality are areas which raise a variety of epistemological and methodological issues and warrant considerable further research.