Fourth International Conference of the
British Association for the Study of Spirituality

Can spirituality transform our world?
New frontiers in understanding and exploring contemporary spiritualities

Monday 23 May - Thursday 26 May 2016

CALL FOR PRESENTATIONS

BASS invites presentations in the form of an oral paper, poster, workshop or performance.

The specific aim of this conference is to critically examine four questions, each at the heart of an important critical theme, which are key to the further development and continuing relevance of contemporary spirituality studies. The identification of four cross-cutting themes is intended to facilitate in-depth exploration through a range of media, with potential transferability across disciplines, topics and arenas. Throughout, we aim to explore the transformative power of spirituality when brought to bear on key issues and challenges of our age.

Theme 1: Religion, spirituality and secularisation

Drawing a distinction between ‘religion’ and ‘spirituality’ was arguably the starting point for contemporary spirituality studies and the relationship between the two continues to be of interest. Key to the early conceptualisations of spirituality was the notion that a person might identify her/himself as not religious but few would say they were not spiritual. ‘Spiritual but not religious’ became the rallying cry for those seeking to address a perceived impoverishment of relationships and environments in social and educational institutions, business organisations and health and social care services across the secularised western world. This notion has increasingly been subject to criticism from a range of sources: for being counter-cultural and a tool of postcolonial oppression (Wong and Vinsky, 2009); as a conceptual ‘wrong turn’ (Rowson, 2014); and as lacking meaning and depth (Daniel, 2014). Some attempts have been made to soften the religious-spiritual bi-furcation by presenting ‘humanistic spirituality’ as an umbrella term in which religious and secular spiritualities find core common ground in the notion of
what it is to be human (Crocker, 2010; Nolan and Holloway, 2013). However, the continuously evolving spiritual-religious dynamic and manifestations of each phenomenon in a broadly secularising world remain vastly under-explored.

**Theme 2: Spirituality, health and wellbeing**

In the most comprehensive review to date of research on the relationship between religion and health, Koenig et al (2012) identify the drive to demonstrate a correlation between religiosity and/or spirituality and positive health outcomes. Where US studies tend to equate religious and spiritual practices, a recent UK study which distinguished between them found the ‘spiritual but not religious’ (SBNR) group to have worse mental health outcomes than either the ‘religious’ or ‘neither religious nor spiritual’ groups (King et al, 2013). Other research has demonstrated that people can experience ‘spiritual well-being’ when they are not actually well (Paloutzian et al, 2012) yet the relationship between well-being (itself a contested concept) and spirituality has proved difficult to explicate (Holloway et al, 2011). Reaching back into mystical and spiritual traditions and taking seriously the accounts of mental health service users about their spiritual journey (Gilbert, 2011) lead us to question the linking of spirituality to contemporary positive models of mental health and suggests that the time is ripe for a re-examination of the assumptions underpinning spiritual well-being and to broaden the focus to consider societal well-being and spirituality and its impact on the individual.

**Theme 3: Spirituality research, methodological questions and forms of knowledge**

Much of the early research on spirituality took a measurement approach to the assessment of spirituality and spiritual need in individuals experiencing health or social care services, resulting in the production of numerous standardised validated scales and models (Holloway et al, 2011). These quantitative approaches and their products have been found to have limited application in health and social care practice but at the same time, the ‘What works?’ approach to western policy-making and implementation presents spirituality research, much of which produces rich qualitative data, with significant challenges. Implicit in this dilemma are epistemological and culturally-situated questions which challenge dominant research paradigms. Spirituality, by virtue of its nature, presents a radical research agenda - the opportunity and the challenge for mutual enhancement between knowledge about spirituality and spiritual knowledge.

**Theme 4: Distinctiveness and appropriateness of spiritual care in secular organisations**

It was not uncommon in the early days of spirituality research amongst the caring professions for experienced practitioners to suggest that this new ‘spiritual care’ was simply a return to good ‘traditional practice’. Indeed, researchers in nursing were keen to point to the profession’s early religious roots (McSherry, 2006) and, in social work, to the early adoption of Judeo-Christian ethics (Bowpitt, 1998). The more recent policy drive towards person-centred holistic practice has compounded the apparent merging of spiritual care in the secular professions with anything which purports to be ‘best practice’, allowing critics such as Paley (2008) to argue that ‘spirituality’ has become a ‘giant conceptual sponge’ arising from fluffy unsubstantiated thinking - essentially religious care under another guise and having no place in a secular organisation.
Countering this, some have argued that, as with Lewis Carroll’s Alice, if the person says it is ‘spiritual’, then it is (Moss, 2005); that empirical studies consistently produce a particular combination of elements which they label ‘spirituality’ (Holloway et al, 2013); and that just because spirituality is a constructed concept does not mean that it is not ‘real’ and of value (Swinton, 2014). With a new generation of practitioners who are the product of competency-led training and regulated within professional standards frameworks, combined with public concern about the human quality of the care provided, the issue of defining and authorising spiritual care within secular organisations and professions is urgent and highly relevant to the future of our care and education systems. Likewise, in the business world, attention to ethics and arguments that humanising cultures and environments leads to better worker productivity may be in danger of diluting the focus on spirituality in the workplace forged by pioneers in business and spirituality studies.

References


Swinton, J. (2014) Spirituality-in-Healthcare: Just because it may be ‘made up’ does not mean that it is not real and does not matter. Journal for the Study of Spirituality 4:2, 162-173.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

Preparing your Abstract Submission
This document identifies the information you will need to successfully submit an abstract. It is important that you review the categories and fields below before submitting your abstract.

A. Author information
- First Name
- Middle Initial
- Last Name/Surname
- Telephone
- E-mail Address
- Affiliation (company/institution etc)
- **One author must be designated as the primary presenter.**
  - We recommend the presenter be the contact person to receive updates and correspondence by e-mail.
- E-mail confirmations are sent only to presenting author.

B. Preferred presentation type (select oral paper, poster or workshop/performance)

Oral Presentation
- Oral presentations are allocated 20 minutes (15 minutes for presentation + 5 minutes for discussion).
- Presentation date and time will be announced at a later date.
- All oral technical session slides must be in PowerPoint. You will be contacted at a later date with instructions on how to submit your PowerPoint presentation file for preloading onto a laptop computer.

Poster
- There is a limit of one (1) poster submission per presenter.
- Poster presenters will be required to be present at their poster during certain time frames throughout the meeting (to be announced).

Poster format
Your poster must comply with the following specifications:
- Poster should preferably be laminated.
- Maximum poster size is 1 metre across (from left to right) by 1.5 metres high (top to bottom).
- Accepted poster presentations will be allocated a POSTER NUMBER — posters must be erected at the site with the corresponding number during the allocated poster session.
- Posters must be erected using VELCRO DOTS only. Please apply velcro “rough” dots to the reverse side of posters.
- After the allocated poster session, authors must remove their posters by the nominated removal time. Failure to do so will result in their removal by the organisers who will not be responsible for posters not removed by the due time.
Workshop/performance

- Workshops/performances are allocated 50 minutes.
- Presentation date and time will be announced at a later date.
- Please state the media for your workshop – e.g. art, music, dance
- Please make clear the expectations of attendees – e.g. participation, non-participating audience.
- Information for conference organisers: please state size of room required and any other technical requirements (please note, we cannot guarantee to be able to meet every requirement and will discuss with the presenter once the abstract is accepted)

C. Presentation title

- Capitalize only the first letter of the first word and any proper nouns.
- The title is limited to 150 characters including spaces. (Approximately 30 word count.) Registered names and trademarks are not permitted in title.

D. Presentation theme

The themes for the presentation appear below. Please select the primary theme and secondary sub-theme that best relates to your presentation.

Oral papers should (ideally) sit within at least one of Themes 1-4 but may identify their own sub-theme within the broader Theme 5. Posters, workshops and performances may address any of Themes 1-5 as their primary theme.

Theme 1: Religion, spirituality and secularisation
Theme 2: Spirituality, health and well-being
Theme 3: Spirituality research, methodological questions and forms of knowledge
Theme 4: Distinctiveness and appropriateness of spiritual care in secular organisations
Theme 5: Spirituality as transformative

E. Abstract text

- Prepare an abstract of your presentation of not more than 250 words excluding the title, authors and addresses.
- Make sure the abstract clearly and succinctly outlines the purpose, intention and contribution of the presentation, workshop/performance or poster. The abstract should be in one paragraph.
- Abstracts must be presented in the following format:
  - as an MS Word file (Word 97 or later)
  - First line: 11 point font, bold. Title of your presentation
  - Second line: 11 point font. Give full first names and other initials of authors in capitals. If more than one author, provide names for all authors and underline name of the presenting author.
  - Use superscript numerals to link names to addresses in third line. - Third line: 10 point font, Italics.
  - Full postal addresses of authors
  - Email address of presenting author — all communication will be sent to this address. - Body text: 10 point font.
Review Process
Abstracts will be reviewed by a multidisciplinary panel of experts in the field of spirituality.

Submission
All proposals and abstracts must be received by **30 November 2015 (extended)**. Authors of abstracts accepted for presentation will be notified as soon as possible after submission. Abstracts must be created and submitted on the on-line form.

Acceptance
The lead presenter will be required to formally confirm their attendance and register for the conference within one month of being notified of acceptance of their abstract. Please note that BASS does not pay a speaker’s fee or reduced conference fees to parallel sessions presenters.
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- Submit your **Abstract** online.

For any **enquiries**, please do not hesitate to contact:

- Prof. Emeritus Margaret Holloway (m.l.holloway@hull.ac.uk)
- Mrs Helen McSherry (01630 638177)
- Dr Linda Ross (01443 483109 or linda.ross@southwales.ac.uk)

Thank you for your interest in the BASS 2016 conference.

We look forward to seeing you…