

# Information Network on Religious Movements



**inform**

# Annual Report

## April 2019 – March 2020

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Inform is a registered charity (No. 801729) and is  
incorporated in England as a company limited by  
guarantee under the Companies Act (No. 2346855).

## Introduction

Inform has continued to fulfil its charitable objective of collecting, assessing and disseminating reliable information about minority religions, and, as usual, we were able to help a wide range of enquirers and service users. The enquirers included government departments, the police, chaplains, members and former members of religious, spiritual and other ideological movements, their relatives, students, academics, journalists and documentary makers, as well as a variety of members of the public. Inform staff have continued to update the database of religions and the Inform library with publications.

However, due to ongoing financial constraints, we have had to focus on completing funded projects, and searching for new sources of funding. In this period, we have completed work for the Department for Education, the Centre for the Critical Study of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements (CenSAMM) and the Religion Media Centre. We have an ongoing project with another government department to look at a potential extremist organisation. In this period, we also became a member of the National Working Group on Child Abuse Linked to Faith and Belief, and have attended their regular meetings.

During this period we have been able to hold two further public seminars in association with the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at King's College London; these have been well received. We have also developed proposals for a regular monthly newsletter, and are exploring whether a subscription model of membership is feasible.

## Some Significant Developments within NRMs

#MeToo continues to affect minority religious movements across all traditions, with some movements dealing with contemporary cases and others facing historical cases of sexual abuse. There are ongoing cases and investigations among both yoga movements and Buddhist movements, although the most notorious of the latter – accusations of abuse against Sogyal Rinpoche, founder of Rigpa International, ended with the death of Rinpoche in August 2019. Sexual abuse claims have also been made against Pentecostal preachers in Brazil and Mexico; and a Charity Commission investigation into historic sex abuse claims against the Jehovah's Witnesses and their Watch Tower Societies is ongoing.

One of the most significant events in this period was the collapse in May 2019 of the Jesus Fellowship, an evangelical Christian movement. There had been a number of cases of child sexual abuse within the movement, one of which was successfully prosecuted in 2009. Following this, and the prosecution of historic cases of sexual abuse within other Christian movements, the Northampton Police opened an investigation and in 2017, the leadership team stood down over their handling of the abuse allegations. In May 2019, the new leadership team revoked the Church's constitution and it will cease to exist once all legal matters have been processed.

In March 2020, a Birmingham pastor, Michael Oluronbi, was jailed for 34 years for the sexual abuse of children. Oluronbi broke away from the Nigerian-based Cherubim and Seraphim movement to establish an independent church in his own home. Over a period of 20 years he abused seven minors, describing the abuse as a spiritual process that could ward off evil.

In December 2019, the Charity Commission opened an Inquiry into financial and safeguarding concerns about the South London-based Christian movement, SPAC Nation. SPAC Nation members were largely black and ethnic minority youth, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds. There has been a large number of media exposes in which former members raised financial complaints. The investigation is ongoing.

Abroad, Jehovah's witnesses continue to experience persecution in Russia (where they were banned as a legal entity in 2017). At the time of writing, 328 Witnesses had been accused of 'extremism'; 31 were in pretrial detention and 18 under house arrest. There are reports of torture of the accused and of general hostility and intimidation of Jehovah's Witnesses, including children.

In China, religious minorities including members of the Church of Almighty God, Falun Gong and Uyghurs continue to experience persecution. March 2020 saw the publication of the final judgement in the Independent Tribunal into Forced Organ Harvesting from Prisoners of Conscience in China, which had sat in London. This concluded that forced organ harvesting had been committed for years in China; that Falun Gong members were likely to be the largest group of victims; but that the more recent persecution of Uyghurs could entail an increase in their deaths through organ harvesting.

### *Coronavirus*

From late February 2020, media coverage has focused on the impact of the Coronavirus on religious movements worldwide. In some cases, religious movements are being criticised for not containing the spread of the virus: charges are being brought against the founder-leader of Shincheonji Church of Jesus Christ in South Korea and against the leader of the Delhi branch of the Tablighi Jamaat, a Muslim reform movement. Ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities in Israel and the USA are reported to have high numbers of cases because of both the high concentration of people and the lack of access to up-to-date information about the virus and preventative measures through mainstream media. Media reports have also focused on movements which have flouted lockdown measures, particularly Evangelical Christian movements in North and South America.

In the UK, media reporting has largely focused on how religious movements have moved their services online, especially when major religious festivals occur during lockdown. There is discussion about the role of faith groups in providing online support to people in this unprecedented situation, and about how the crisis will affect faith groups in the long-term.

## **Inform's Governors**

No new governors were appointed in this period; however there were a number of changes to the Board. In September 2017 Professor Eileen Barker had retired as Chair after 29 years and had been succeeded by Dr Marat Shterin as Acting Chair; on 31 December 2019 she also retired as Honorary Director. Her sterling service to the charity over so many years was recognised by Professor Kim Knott and all of the Inform governors and staff.

In summer 2019, Dr Marat Shterin resigned as acting Chair of the Board of Governors. Professor Kim Knott succeeded him as Chair, and Dr George Chryssides as Chair of the

Management Committee, which now has three members: Professor Knott, Dr Chryssides and the Reverend Andrew Maguire, with the Director attending meetings ex officio.

The Board met twice in this period, once under the Chairmanship of Dr Marat Shterin and once under the Chairmanship of Professor Kim Knott. Inform's Treasurer, the Reverend Andrew Maguire, presented Inform's annual accounts, which had been audited by Knox Cropper, at the Annual General Meeting on 1 October 2019 and, following approval by the Governors, these were submitted to the Charity Commission and to Companies House.

The Management Committee met in person or by Zoom or Skype on six occasions under the chairmanship of Dr Chryssides; however, most of its work was conducted on a weekly or, often, daily basis by email, which enabled quick responses to issues arising over the practical running of Inform.

## Staff

Inform is now under the Directorship of former Research Fellow Dr Suzanne Newcombe, following Professor Eileen Barker's retirement as Inform Honorary Director on 31st December 2019. Dr Newcombe has continued to work part-time as a lecturer at the Open University, and expects to complete her European Research Council funded project, AYURYOG, at the end of May 2020. Since taking up the role of Director she has focused on fundraising efforts and mapping out possible scenarios for future revenue streams. As part of AYURYOG work, she has been preparing an edited book (together with Karen O'Brien-Kop of SOAS) under contract, the *Routledge Handbook of Yoga and Meditation Studies*.

Dr Shanon Shah has continued as a limited-term Lecturer at King's College, London, but has returned to the Inform team part-time to work on the research commissioned by a government department. He has been joined in this work by Jane Cooper, a researcher and writer, and former employee of Inform.

The rest of the team remained the same: Dr Sarah Harvey, Senior Research Officer, worked three days a week and has been responsible for contributing to and managing projects, responding to enquiries and ensuring the database of information is as up-to-date as possible. In November 2019 she was awarded her Doctorate, having completed her thesis on 'The Birth I Want: Negotiating the Ideal and the Practical in Natural Birth', at the University of Kent.

Silke Steidinger continued in her post as a part-time Research Officer. Warwick Hawkins continued as the Office Manager and worked closely with Andrew Maguire on managing Inform's finances and identifying potential grants.

Since the onset of the Coronavirus lockdown in March 2020, the staff have been working from home and the office is locked up. Monthly online team meetings have been instituted to monitor workstreams and address funding questions.

## Student Placements

Inform had six student placements in this period.

- 1: Oliver Smith, completing a Masters at LSE, worked one day a week from October 2018-June 2019
- 2: Mandeep Sidhu, completing a Masters at King's, also worked one day a week from October 2018-June 2019
- 3: Joseph Banks, completing a Masters at King's, did some occasional work for us between February and June 2019
- 4: Anna Nedey, an undergraduate at King's, has worked one afternoon with us since February 2019
- 5: Abineash Barathan, an undergraduate at King's, has worked one day a week from March 2019
- 6: Natasha Potts, a Masters student at Nottingham University, worked with us for five days over the Christmas holidays.

The volunteers are a great help in keeping the database up to date and assisting at seminars. They also have the opportunity to attend numerous events and to take notes for the Inform files. Unfortunately, other student placements have had to be postponed whilst the office is closed from March 2020.

## Enquiries

Between April 2019 and March 2020, 177 enquiries were received about 34 different groups. These do not include either enquiries about groups we classified as 'unknown' (10, which are in the process of being researched, classified and filed), or any of the 81 enquiries concerning 9 different general themes. This is a higher number of enquiries than in the previous two years.

It should be noted that the number of enquiries received about a particular group is merely a statistic relating to which groups are generating the most enquiries; it does not indicate either negative or positive evaluations.

The groups most enquired about between April 2019 and March 2020 were:

New Kadampa Tradition	10
Unification Church	7
Jehovah's Witnesses	5
Christian Science	3
Church of Scientology	3
La Luz del Mundo	3
Mohan Singh	3
Believer's Loveworld	2
Black Hebrew movements	2
Church of Almighty God	2
Landmark	2
School of Economic Science	2
Tiratna Buddhist Community	2
White Brotherhood	2

## *Enquirers*

Inform responded to a wide range of enquirers, with the media making the highest number of enquiries (34), followed by government bodies, academics and students (22 enquiries in each category). The number of enquiries from former members was much lower in this period (13), than in the previous few years.

The greatest number of enquiries between April 2019 and March 2020 were from:

Media	34
Academics/ writers	22
Government bodies	22
Students	22
Relatives of members	21
Former members	13
Chaplains and Church network	10
Current members	7

Enquiries were also received from: general public (3), lawyers (2), cult watching groups (1), education institutions (1), prospective members (1), psychiatrists (1), student unions (1) and teachers (1). 9 enquiries were received from organisations classified as 'other'. As always, we received some enquiries from anonymous sources unwilling to identify themselves (6).

Thirty-five international enquiries were received from: the USA (15), Germany (3), Iran (3), the Netherlands (3), Russia (2) and one each from Australia, Canada, France, Hong Kong, Israel, Kenya, Pakistan, Poland and Slovakia.

56 enquirers had contacted Inform previously; 121 were new enquirers. The majority of enquiries were received via email (95); 27 were via telephone; 54 went to Professor Barker first.

## **Speaking and other Engagements**

### ***Inform Governors***

#### **Eileen Barker**

“Minority and Muted Voices: Challenges in Identity Construction for Second Generation and Former Members of Unpopular New Religions” (Sogang University, Seoul).

“The Brainwashing/Deprogramming Controversy” (Seoul Foundation of Women and Family).

“We’re Happy to Talk, But Dialogue...? Establishment Parlance and Courteous Discrimination” (Strasbourg).

“Of course, it’s all just a load of superstitious nonsense: an examination of attitudes of “real” religions to new religious movements (University of Louvain La Neuve).

“Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered – Fings ain’t wot they used to be” (University of Turin)

“The Law, Money or Guns? Unification Diversification: Striving to Restore the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth” (American Sociological Association, New York)

“N. J. Demerath III: A Paradox of Many Parts” (American Sociological Association, New York)

“Peter L. Berger and the Sociology of Religion: 50 Years after The Sacred Canopy” (University of Barcelona)

“Making the World a Better Place: One Woman’s Journey into Terrorism” (International Cultic Studies Association, Manchester)

“The Dynamics of Persecutions” (Central European University, Budapest)

“Challenges of Religious Coexistence” (Cumberland Lodge)

“Minority Religions Reactions to the Law” (Inform Seminar)

“Cults and New Religious Movements” (Sceptics in the Pub, High Wycombe)

Further activities included:

Had meetings with members of other “cult watching groups” (CIAOSN; Info-Secte and CIC (Centre intercantonal d'information sur les croyances)) in Brussels, where the Belgium Report on Jehovah’s Witnesses and sexual abuse was discussed, and in Geneva, where there was a general discussion about exchanging information and particular problems that were emerging in the minority religion scene.

Wrote Expert Report and appeared as Witness in court for an asylum case re member of London Church of Jesus Christ.

Approached by various inquirers within the UK and from other countries such as China; Iran; Japan; Korea; Lithuania; Mexico; South Africa; Ukraine; and the United States, including one from the FBI.

External examiner for a PhD on Reiki.

Various contributions to radio and television included “the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as Viewed in Contemporary Society” (Brigham Young University); and The Missing Cryptoqueen (BBC Radio)

Interviewed and/or visited members and former members of several minority religions, including: Ainu; Baha’i; Brahma Kumaris; Christian Science; Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; Church of Scientology; Daesoon Jinrihoe; Exclusive Brethren; Falun Gong; Family Federation for Unification and World Peace; The Family International (Children of God); Family Peace Association; Jehovah’s Witnesses; New Kadampa Tradition; Sanctuary Church; Shincheonji; Spiritual Healing; Umbanda; Weixin Shengjiao.

## **George Chryssides**

“Life Beyond Armageddon – Jehovah’s Witnesses in the 21st Century”. Conference on “Religion in American Life”. University of East Anglia, 23-24 July 2019.

2-4 September 2019: “Jehovah’s Witnesses Go Digital”. British Association for the Study of Religions; Leeds Trinity University.

5-7 September 2019: “Following the Charisma: Understanding Charisma Through Followers”. CESNUR Annual Conference, Università di Torino, Torino, Italy.

10 April 2019: Contributor to a multi-faith symposium on “Abraham” at Lichfield Cathedral, with Professor Dan Cohn-Sherbok and Dr Usama Hasan.

Dr Chryssides has been appointed to the Scientific Committee of the European Federation for Freedom of Belief, based in Rome. He has been reappointed to the International Advisory Board of The International Academic Forum, based in Nagoya, Japan.

## **Graham Harvey**

May 2019: Keynote lecture: 'Trusting senses for wellbeing / countering Cartesian disassociation', 32nd annual conference of the Association for Anthropology and Medicine (AGEM), University of Münster, Germany.

November 2019: Invited lecture 'Religion as relations with the larger-than-human world' in the Critical Thinkers in Religion, Law and Social Theory series, University of Ottawa, Canada. YouTube video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UOkVY4L4MrY&t=22s>

November 2019: Invited lecture, 'We have always been animists... but we became confused about "nature"', in 'Matter and Spirit: Ecology and the Non-Human Turn' lecture series, Harvard University, USA

## **Kim Knott**

11-12 April 2019: Shap Jubilee conference, Shap Wells, Cumbria. This occasion marked the 50th anniversary of the Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education.

Presented research on 'Understanding radicalisation through the lens of ideological learning' to UK security practitioners at seminars and workshops throughout 2019.

'What has worked?' panel, EU Council Presidency Conference on 'Preventing Violent Extremism', Helsinki.

Paper on 'Analysing religious transmission and learning: A framework and case study', annual conference of the European Association for the Study of Religion, June 2019, Tartu, Estonia.

Keynote lecture on 'Religion matters in security practice: The contours and limits of expert knowledge exchange and collaboration', annual conference of the Irish Society for the Academic Study of Religions, October 2019, Dublin.

## **Marat Shterin**

Presentation: 'Religion and the Demise of the Soviet System', training seminar for the Foreign Office Academy of Diplomacy, London, September 30, 2020

Leading a seminar on "Anti-Extremist Litigation and Academic Evidence on Minority Religions", October St. Petersburg, Russia, 18-19 October, 2020

Dr Shterin continues as Co-editor of the Journal of Religion, State and Society.

## ***Inform Staff***

### **Sarah Harvey**

Sarah assisted Suzanne in running a workshop entitled 'Empowerment and Abuse - The Complexity of Gender Dynamics in Religious Groups' for a conference organised by the National Female Genital Mutilation Centre, 'International Women's Day: Harmful Practices and the Quest Towards Gender Equality', 10<sup>th</sup> March 2020.



## **Suzanne Newcombe**

January 2020: 'The Varieties of Modern Yoga in Early Twentieth-Century Britain' at the Modernism and Alternative Spiritualities Symposium Royal College of Art, Kensington. <https://modspirituality.wixsite.com/symposium>

4 October 2019: 'Yoga in Britain: Book launch' Centre of Yoga Studies, SOAS, University of London. <https://www.soas.ac.uk/yoga-studies/events/04oct2019-yoga-in-britain-book-launch-and-reception.html>

21 May 19: 'Yoga and Gender' Postgraduate Seminar for Yoga Studies students at SOAS.

## **Shanon Shah**

10 September 2019: "LGBT Inclusion and Christian-Muslim Relations", presentation at the World Congress of Faiths Conference, "Meetings of Minds: Conflict, Reconciliation and Inter Faith Relations", St Michael's House, Priory Row, Coventry

12 December 2019: "LGBTQ Inclusion and the Persistent Securitisation of Muslims", keynote speech at the Jewish-Muslim Research Network's Symposium on Gender and Sexuality in/around Judaism and Islam, the University of Manchester

Dr Shah also delivered a guest lecture for the 2019/20 term of King's College London's degree-equivalent Associate of King's College (AKC) programme on 25th November 2019, entitled "Identity and Justice-Seeking: The Experiences of Gay Muslims".

## **Inform's Visitors**

Inform has welcomed many visitors to its office, ranging from academics, writers, researchers for media institutions and think tanks, to members and former members of religious movements, and more. Some were academics and students using our resources and expertise to work on their own projects; others were concerned with networking and funding. Professor Barker, Dr Newcombe and Dr Harvey met with numerous people from the police and other government bodies in this regard.

Other visitors included lawyers from the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, representatives from the Metropolitan Police, members of the National Working Group on Child Abuse Linked to Faith and Belief, staff from the National FGM Centre, the Director of the Religion Media Centre, and members of minority religions, including the Bahá'ís, Jehovah's Witnesses and La Luz del Mundo.

Other meetings and visitors that we had arranged for the second half of March and beyond were cancelled when King's College closed its buildings due to Coronavirus on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020.

## **Resources**

Throughout the year we updated and added to Inform's resources. By the end of March 2020, our electronic database held information on 5111 organisations; 34 new groups were added to the database during the period covered by this report, and details of countless others were updated by Inform staff and students during their placement with Inform.

We have received a small grant from the Spalding Trust in order to update all of our existing information leaflets. These will be available on the Inform website by the end of the calendar year.

Although we have the use of two storerooms in the basement of Kings College's Norfolk Building, these are too small for books, journals etc to be displayed or easily accessed. We are therefore anxious to find somewhere, preferably in London, where we might store our books and archival material.

## Funded Projects

In this period, we completed a further project for the Department for Education. We produced two information booklets for the Department's internal use: one on faith and fundamental British values and another on right-wing extremist movements, as well as two shorter reports on types of enquiries to Inform and on Sikh movements. Plans to deliver presentations to the Department on this material are on hold whilst lockdown continues.

We have also written some further blogs and dictionary entries for CenSAMM (the Centre for the Critical Study of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements - <https://censamm.org/>). Dr Harvey's blog piece on the Twelve Tribes is available at <https://censamm.org/blog/twelve-tribes>. She has also written two entries for the online dictionary which will be published later in the calendar year – one on Jehovah's Witnesses and another, co-authored with Professor Barker, on the Family International. Another entry on Gender in Millennial Movements, will be co-written by Dr Harvey and Dr Newcombe later in the year whilst Professor Barker is writing entries on the Unification Church and New Religious Movements and Millennialism. Dr Shah has written an entry on the Order of the Nine Angles.

We wrote five fact sheets for the Religion Media Centre (<https://religionmediacentre.org.uk/>) in this period about: ISIS, Christian Zionism, ISKCON, Hillsong Church and Yoga. We are in regular contact with the Director, and assist with their media enquiries whenever we can.

In early 2020, Inform was commissioned by an agency of the Home Office to conduct research on a 'right-wing extremist' movement. This project remains ongoing.

## Publications by Inform Staff and Governors

### Routledge Inform Series on Minority Religions and Spiritual Movements

With Professor Eileen Barker continuing as the series editor, work has continued on the 'Routledge Inform Series on Minority Religions and Spiritual Movements' <https://www.routledge.com/Routledge-Inform-Series-on-Minority-Religions-and-Spiritual-Movements/book-series/AINFORM>.

The latest book is 'Health and Healing in Minority Religions', which comes as the culmination of Professor Barker's BA/Leverhulme Small Grant project, 'Health and Healing in Minority Religions'; this is presently being edited by Professor Barker and Dr Harvey.

## ***Inform Governors***

### **Eileen Barker**

#### 2019 articles:

"Paradise? How on Earth? ." Journal of Korean Academy of New Religions.

"The Curse of Cults and the Scourge of Sects: Or a Come-Outing of New Religious Movements." Pp. 157-88 in *Come Out from among Them, and Be Ye Separate, saith the Lord: Separatism and the Believers' Church Tradition*, edited by William H. Brackney and with Evan L. Colford. Pickwick: Eugene Oregon.

"The Unification Church." in *Encyclopaedia of Latin American Religions*, edited by Henri Gooren: Springer.

#### 2020 articles:

"We need to know the truth about cults." Pp. 86-92 in *Cults, Sects, and New Religions*, edited by M. M. Eboch. New York: Greenhaven.

"So What's New about Violence? A Reflection on New Religions and Physical Force." Pp. 169-91 in *Religionen und Gewalt*, edited by Franz Winter. Vienna: Tyrolia-Verlag.

"Children of God." Pp. 126-27 in *The Sage Encyclopedia of the Sociology of Religion*, edited by Adam Possamai and Anthony J. Blasi. Thousand Oaks, CA; London: Sage.

"Scientology." Pp. 735-36 in *The Sage Encyclopedia of the Sociology of Religion*, edited by Adam Possamai and Anthony J. Blasi. Thousand Oaks, CA; London: Sage.

"Unification Church." Pp. 876-77 in *The Sage Encyclopaedia of the Sociology of Religion*, edited by Adam Possamai and Anthony J. Blasi. Thousand Oaks, CA; London: Sage.

"Peoples Temple." Pp. 570-572 in *The Sage Encyclopedia of the Sociology of Religion*, edited by Adam Possamai and Anthony J. Blasi. Thousand Oaks, CA; London: Sage.

"New Religious Movements." Pp. 536-39 in *The Sage Encyclopedia of the Sociology of Religion*, edited by Adam Possamai and Anthony J. Blasi. Thousand Oaks, CA; London: Sage.

"Hare Krishna (International Society for Krishna Consciousness)." Pp. 341-2 in *The Sage Encyclopaedia of the Sociology of Religion*, edited by Adam Possamai and Anthony J. Blasi. Thousand Oaks, CA; London: Sage.

"Freedom of Religion." Pp. 305-7 in *The Sage Encyclopaedia of the Sociology of Religion*, edited by Adam Possamai and Anthony J. Blasi. Thousand Oaks, CA; London: Sage.

"Preface." Pp. 8-17 in *New Religious Movements in Modern Asian History: Socio-Cultural Alternatives*, edited by David W. Kim: Lexington.

"Contemporary Creations and Re-cognitions of Sacred Sites." Pp. 25-62 in *Scared Sites and Sacred Stories Across Cultures: Transmission of Oral Tradition, Myth, and Religiosity* edited by David W. Kim: Palgrave Macmillan.

"Denominationalization or Death? A comparative examination of processes of change within the Jesus Fellowship Church and the Children of God aka The Family International " in *The Demise of Religion*, edited by Michael Stausberg, Stuart A. Wright, and Carole M. Cusack. London: Bloomsbury.

### **George Chryssides**

#### Books:

Chryssides, George D. and Stephen E. Gregg (eds) (2020). *The Bloomsbury Handbook to Studying Christians*. London: Bloomsbury. ISBN 978-1-3500-4338-1.

Chryssides, George D. and Stephen E. Gregg (eds) (2019). *The Insider/Outsider Debate: New Perspectives in the Study of Religion*. Sheffield UK: Equinox. ISBN 978-1-78179-343-5 (hbk); 978-1-78179-344-2 (pbk).

Articles:

Encyclopaedia of the Bible and Its Reception (De Gruyter):

Chryssides, George D. (2019). *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter. Entries on: Love V.D.; Lucifer II.E; Magi V.D; Manna IV.B; Maranatha II.B; Mark, Gospel of II.D; Martyr, Martyrdom IV.D .

Vol.17: 45-47; 113-114; 421-423; 783; 871; 940-941; 1087-1088.

Journal articles:

Chryssides, G. D. (2019). 'Jehovah's Witnesses in Britain – A Historical Survey'. *Alternative Spirituality and Religion Review* 10 (2): 225–253. ISSN 1946-0538. doi: 10.5840/asrr201910260.

Chryssides, G. D. (2019). 'Beyond Armageddon: Is the Jehovah's Witnesses' Paradise Earth Conceivable?' *Journal of the Daesoon Academy of Sciences* 32, June: 237-267. <https://doi.org/10.25050/jdaos.2019.32.0.237>.

Blog articles:

Chryssides, George D. (2020). "Jehovah's Witnesses and Covid-19." 30 April. Bedford UK: The Centre for the Critical Study of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements (CenSAMM) Accessible online at <https://censamm.org/blog/jehovahs-witnesses-and-covid>

Chryssides, George D. (2020). "Jehovah's Witnesses and the 2020 Memorial." 6 April.

London: Religion Media Centre. Accessible online at URL:

<https://religionmediacentre.org.uk/factsheets/jehovahs-witnesses-and-the-2020-memorial>

## **Graham Harvey**

Harvey, G. (2020). *Indigenizing in European Religious Movements*. Sheffield: Equinox. ISBN 9781781797914

Harvey, G. (2020). "Bear Feasts in a land without (wild) bears: experiments in creating animist rituals" in G. Harvey (ed.) *Indigenizing in European Religious Movements*. Sheffield: Equinox. pp. 31-49

OU RS department blog: "All that glitters doesn't always shimmer: values during and beyond the pandemic" <http://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/religious-studies/?p=1053>

"Sitting among the trees", CelebrationEarth blog

<https://www.celebrationearth.org/post/sitting-among-the-trees?>

OU RS department blog: "Art, science and diplomacy with an Amazonian shaman", <http://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/religious-studies/?p=1030>

## **Kim Knott**

Kim Knott & Benjamin J. Lee (2020) 'Ideological Transmission in Extremist Contexts: Towards a Framework of How Ideas Are Shared', *Politics, Religion and Ideology*, 2:1, 1-23.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21567689.2020.1732938>.

## **Marat Shterin**

Shterin, M., and Dubrovsky, D. "Academic Expertise in Anti-Extremism Litigation in Russia: focusing on minority religions", *Soviet and Post-Soviet Review*, 46/2, 2019.

## **Inform staff**

### **Sarah Harvey**

2019. "Twelve Tribes", CenSAMM blog - <https://censamm.org/blog/twelve-tribes>

### **Suzanne Newcombe**

Book:

(2019) *Yoga in Britain: Stretching Spirituality and Educating Yogis*. Equinox. 324pp. ISBN: 9781781796597.

Online Courses:

November 2019 'Why Religion Matters? Religious Literacy, Culture and Diversity'  
<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/why-religion-matters>

July 2019: Author of OpenLearn course, Exploring Immortality, with Carolyn Price (10 minutes) (60% work). <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/philosophy/exploring-immortality> As of January 2020, 348 visitors to the page on OpenLearn, 413 visits made in total

June 2019: Author of OpenLearn course Life after Death (5 minutes)  
<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/philosophy/life-after-death> As of January 2020, 4049 visitors, 4408 visits;  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=77Q0aWLC88U&t=2s> (12,8832 views on YouTube as of April 2020)

Blogs/Podcasts/Popular writing:

23 October 2019: 'Why do we teach Religious Studies? Because Religion Matters.' Religious Studies Departmental Blogpost <http://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/religious-studies/?p=950>

5 August 2019: 'Yoga in Britain' factsheet for the *Religion Media Centre*  
<https://religionmediacentre.org.uk/factsheets/yoga-in-britain/>

20 June 2019: 'How yoga conquered Britain: the feminist legacy of Yogini Sunita and Kailash Puri' *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/how-yoga-conquered-britain>  
Also published in *The Independent* and *Scroll.in* (12,312 readers as of April 2020).

21 April 2020: New Book Network interview on Yoga in Britain.

<https://newbooksnetwork.com/category/religion-faith/hindu-studies/>

2 December 2019: 'Avoiding Fundamentalist Histories – AyurYog and the launch of Yoga in Britain'  
<http://ayuryog.org/blog/avoiding-fundamentalist-histories—ayuryog-and-launch-yoga-britain>

22 July 2019: 'Discourse' Podcast Religious Studies Project  
<https://www.religiousstudiesproject.com/2019/07/22/discourse-9-july-2019/>

### **Shanon Shah**

'Populist Politics in the New Malaysia', *New Diversities*, 21:2, 53-68.

'My Pop Star Life', *Critical Muslim* 32: Music, 67-83.

## Inform Seminars

Inform held two successful day-long seminars in this period, both in association with the department of Theology and Religious Studies, King's College, London. Both took place in the impressive ground-floor lecture theatre of Bush House. The first, on 1st June 2019, was entitled, 'How Minority Religions React to the Law'. Professor Barker gave an introductory talk and was followed by academics, members of minority religions and others, some of whom had travelled a great distance to present at the seminar. Papers from the seminar are being collected together for a volume in the Routledge-Inform Series on Minority Religions.

The second seminar took place on 1st February, with the theme 'Immortality: Beliefs and Practices'. This was held in association with Inform Director Dr Suzanne Newcombe's ERC Horizon 2020 Project AYURYOG (2015-2020). This project explores the entanglements of yoga, ayurveda and alchemical and longevity practices in South Asia. As always, the Reverend Pedr Beckley chaired lively panel discussions at the end of each seminar.

## The Future

Coronavirus has impacted the work of Inform, with all staff moving to homeworking from 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020. This has meant that our summer seminar, booked for 11<sup>th</sup> July on the topic of Sexual Abuse within Minority Religions, will not go ahead as planned. Instead, we will look to hold a short online webinar on this topic in July. It also means that Dr Amanda Lucia, from the University of California-Riverside, will not be able to be Visiting Scholar at Inform from mid-June to mid-July 2020, as planned. However, we will continue to work remotely on her Henry Luce Foundation funded project on Sexual Abuse.

We will also continue work with the government department looking at extremist movements and with CenSAMM and the Religion Media Centre. Inform staff will assist Dr Suzanne Newcombe with the final stages of the AYURYOG project in May 2020. Dr Newcombe is also exploring the possibility of creating a Religion in Public Dialogue Network through the Open University, and the staff and Management Committee are exploring possibilities for an Inform subscription service.

Despite the ongoing challenges of its financial situation, Inform remains committed to its charitable objective of helping enquirers, through providing accurate, up-to-date and contextualised information about minority religions to the wide range of enquirers who approach us every year. We shall continue to gather material to add to our unique collection of resources, and to further a greater understanding of minority religions through our publications and events.

## **Appendix I**

### **Patrons**

The Reverend Dr Hugh Osgood, The Moderator of the Free Churches' Group  
Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia (Greek Orthodox Church)  
Bishop Paul Hendricks, Nominee of the Westminster Roman Catholic Diocese  
Professor Lord Desai of St Clement Danes  
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Professor Graham Harvey, PhD; *Reader in Religious Studies, Open University*  
The Right Reverend William Kenney; *Auxiliary Bishop of Birmingham, Nominee of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster*  
The Reverend Andrew Maguire, MA, BD (Treasurer), *Nominee of the Free Churches' Group; Superintendent Minister of the West Norfolk Methodist Circuit*  
Reverend Alan Walker, MA, MTh, LLM, *Parish Priest*

*Observer from the Church of England: Anne Richards, DPhil*

### **Management Committee**

George D. Chryssides, DPhil  
Professor Kim Knott, PhD  
The Reverend Andrew Maguire, MA, BD

### **Staff**

Suzanne Newcombe, PhD (Director)  
Sarah Harvey, PhD (Senior Research Officer)  
Warwick Hawkins, MBE (Office Manager)  
Silke Steidinger, MSc (Research Officer)

Honorary Research Fellow: Professor Jean La Fontaine, PhD  
Honorary Research Fellow: Dr Bernard Doherty, PhD

## Appendix II

### How Minority Religions React to the Law Saturday 1st June 2019 Bush House, King's College, London

#### Programme:

- 10.00-10.10 Welcome
- 10.10-10.35 Eileen Barker, FAcSS, FBA, OBE, Professor Emeritus of Sociology at the London School of Economics - Introduction to How Minority Religions React to the Law
- 10.35-11.00 Eric Roux, President of the Union of Churches of Scientology of France and Vice President of the European Office of the Church of Scientology for Public Affairs and Human Rights – Scientology Behind the Scene: the Law Changer
- 11.00-11.25 Effie Fokas, PhD, Senior Research Fellow at the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP), host institution to the Grassrootsmobilise project - The legal status of religious minorities: exploring the impact of the European Court of Human Rights
- 11.25-11.55 Coffee
- 11.55-12.20 Susan Palmer, Professor and Director of SSHRC Insight research project, 'Children in Sectarian Religions and State Control' at McGill University's School of Religious Studies - The Trials of the Old Order Mennonites of Manitoba, 2013-2016: From Child Abuse Investigations to the Transformation of a Community
- 12.20-12.45 Peter Zoehrer, Secretary General of FOREF Europe (Forum for Religious Freedom) and a member of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification – “Big Fish Eats Little Fish” or “Why Religious Minorities are Still a Soft Target in the Marketplace of World Views”
- 12.45-13.10 Aliyah Saleem, co-founder of Faith to Faithless and member of Humanists UK – Apostates and the Law
- 13.10-14.10 Lunch
- 14.10-14.35 Rin Ushiyama, PhD, Postdoctoral Fellow, Department of Sociology, University of Cambridge - Reactions by Aum Shinrikyō's successor organisations to legal challenges
- 14.35-15.00 Ringo Ringvee, PhD, Religious Affairs Department of the Estonian Ministry of the Interior - Stand Up for Your Rights: (Minority) Religions' reactions to the Law in Estonia
- 15.00-15.30 Tea
- 15.30-15.55 Jason Wise, J.D., lawyer and a Jehovah's Witness – Jehovah's Witnesses and the Law - 'Caesar's Things to Caesar, but God's Things to God'
- 15.55-16.45 Panel



**Immortality: Beliefs and Practices**  
**Saturday 1st February 2020**  
**Bush House, King's College, London**

Programme:

- 10.00-10.10 Welcome
- 10.10-10.35 Suzanne Newcombe, Director of Inform, Post-doctoral Research Fellow on AYURUOG, Lecturer in Religious Studies at the Open University – Introduction
- 10.35-11.00 Mark Singleton, Senior Research Fellow on the Haṭha Yoga Project, SOAS, University of London - Yoga, Immortality, Technology
- 11.00-11.25 Megan Long, National President of The Greater World – Immortality – The Gateway of Life
- 11.25-11.55 Coffee
- 11.55-12.20 Mikel Burley, Associate Professor of Religion and Philosophy at the University of Leeds - Competing conceptions of immortality and nirvāṇa among interpreters of Buddhism
- 12.20-12.45 Tobi Olujinmi, founder of the W TALK Network - Created in the image of the infinite
- 12.45-13.10 Peter Fenwick – What do near death experiences show us about the actual process of dying?
- 13.10-14.10 Lunch
- 14.10-14.35 Lindsley Cash and Tracey Hood, co-owners of Clearly Destiny – Immortality, Beliefs and Practices
- 14.35-15.00 Aled Thomas, Visiting Fellow at the Open University - “I Know I’m Immortal ... I Don’t Fear Death”: Approaching Notions of Immortality in Free Zone Scientologist Spheres
- 15.00-15.30 Tea
- 15.30-15.55 Susannah Crockford, Post-doctoral researcher on the NARMESH project, Ghent University, Belgium - How the 1% Plan to Survive Climate Change and Live Forever: Immortality as the Teleological Outcome of Hyperinequality
- 15.55-16.45 Panel