Peggy Morgan and the Support of Twentieth Century Scholars of Religion

Elizabeth J. Harris

Birmingham University
(E.Harris.2@bham.ac.uk)

Introduction

My contribution to this Festschrift merges autobiography with developments in the field of religious studies in the United Kingdom in the late twentieth century. Using a narrative method, I begin in the 1980s with the 'religious experience' that eventually led me to embrace the methods of religious studies, specialising in Buddhist traditions. Within this, I reflect on Peggy Morgan's influence on my development, both when I was resident in Sri Lanka and when I worked with her at Westminster College in the mid-1990s. My aim is to illustrate her untiring support of younger scholars, her contribution to socially relevant expressions of the study of religions and her engagement with the emerging phenomenon of interreligious or interfaith encounter. The paper, therefore, offers a window onto some critical twentieth century moments within the history of religious studies, which have been both a formative influence on and a foil for religious studies in the twenty first, whilst at the same time offering a tribute to Peggy Morgan.

Autobiography: Crossing Religious Boundaries in the 1980s

In the early 1980s, in my thirties, having taught English in Jamaica and in the multi-cultural classrooms of Brent and Harrow in London, I was working for a small non-governmental organisation, Christians Abroad, providing an information service for people who wished to work abroad in different sectors from agriculture to education to medicine. With my experience of the Caribbean, I was totally committed to the benefits of inter-cultural learning but was also opening myself to the religious diversity of North-West London. I joined the new inter-faith group in Harrow and the World Conference on Religion and Peace, now Religions for Peace. Then, in 1984, I visited Sri Lanka as part of

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an interreligious group and it was there that the 'experience' happened. Years later, I described it in this way:

> When at the ancient city of Anuradhapura, I stole away from the group I was with to return for a few minutes to the shrine room adjacent to the sacred bo tree, the one believed to have grown from a cutting of the original tree under which the Buddha gained enlightenment. Devotees dressed in white were sitting or prostrating silently. I joined them and looked towards the image, which showed the Buddha sitting in meditation against a painted scene of pale blue sky, white clouds, and mountains. Suddenly the image became more than mere plaster. All I can say is that it communicated. It beckoned. Against the blue of the sky, the serene head became suffused with cosmic significance. I knew that there was unfinished business between me and the Buddha (Harris 2000: 89).

This 'experience' seemed to come from nowhere without 'an initial situation' (Antes 2004: 35-38), except perhaps an aspiration towards empathy. For I hardly knew anything about Buddhism at the time, and was simply an outsider, curious about what was happening in the shrine room. The result of this experience, however, was that I responded to an invitation from the Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue in Colombo for westerners to come to the country to study Buddhism, and lived in Sri Lanka between 1986 and 1993, eventually completing a doctorate at the Postgraduate Institute of Pali and Buddhist Studies of the University of Kelaniya (PIPBS).I had not expected to stay over seven years. Initially, I had envisaged a one year break from paid employment but one thing led to another in a serendipitous way.[1]

Kenneth Cracknell, Executive Secretary of the Committee for Relations with People of other Faiths (CRPOF) at the then British Council of Churches, helped me prepare, and it was he who introduced me to Peggy, whom he knew through bodies such as the Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education. I believe we met before I travelled in June 1986. Most certainly, we corresponded before I left and continued to do so for my entire time in Sri Lanka. We also met again on my three return visits to England. For instance, my diary for 1987 shows that I visited Oxford to see Peggy on 3 July, during a four week visit to England. When I came back for six months in 1990 to raise money to do my doctorate, we were again in contact and I still possess a letter she sent to Sri Lanka in

[1] The main influence on my extended time in Sri Lanka was the Indologist and liberation theologian, Aloysius Pieris S.J. who asked me to be his research assistant in 1988 and encouraged me to undertake doctoral work at the PIPBS.

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1991, encouraging me to persist in my research: 'It will be a splendid contribution to the area of study, I know, and you will have so much to give in understanding and knowledge when you return'.[2]

When I returned to England in December 1993, without a job, it was Peggy who encouraged me to apply for one of two Junior Research Fellowships that were advertised in 1994 at Westminster College, Oxford, where she was teaching. I had not considered applying at first. I was, after all, 43 years old and unrealistically thought I should earn more than £11,000 a year, since, in real terms, it was less than my salary before I had left for Sri Lanka! But, having failed to gain a post with a non-governmental advocacy organisation connected with Sri Lanka, I submitted an application and was successful. The dye was then cast for the rest of my career and, in retrospect, I can see that working with Peggy at Westminster College was the best preparation I could have had. I will always be grateful for it.

Let me return, however, to my years in Sri Lanka and what I learnt before I arrived at Westminster College. I travelled there as a Christian but was convinced that my task was not to engage in 'dialogue' with Buddhism, and certainly not to compare Buddhism with Christianity. Rather, I sought to enter Buddhism, to immerse myself in it, in order to see the world through Buddhist eyes. I wanted to be a learner who was willing to experience Buddhism, not a western expert. Conversations with Kenneth Cracknell and Peggy helped me to reach this position, although it is difficult to trace its exact provenance now. My long-held conviction that inter-cultural learning invited vulnerability, humility and a letting go of preconceptions about the superiority of one's own cultural practices without doubt contributed as well. It was a framework that could be transferred without difficulty to learning from a new religious tradition. And conversations with Sri Lankan mentors confirmed me within it. So I did not label myself when I visited Buddhist *vihāra*s, meditated at the Buddhist Meditation Centre at Nilambe or went to lectures at the PIPBS. Only those who became close friends knew my background.

My chosen position, however, was not easy. I struggled, for instance, over whether I was a participant or observer, when I joined the line of devotees at a Bodhi *pūja* during the rains retreat (*vassa*) or sat with them during safeguarding recitals (*paritta*), unaware of the importance of this issue within religious studies. In situating myself as a 'learner', I respected the 'authority of believers' (Kristensen 1960), uncritically at first, and sought to place my Christian preconceptions and judgements in hibernation – to bracket them. Seen in retrospect, my chosen stance was similar to that advocated by early religious

[2] Peggy Morgan to Elizabeth Harris, 5 November 1911. See Harris 1993b for my doctorate. It was re-written with new research as Harris 2006.

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studies pioneers, as they separated themselves from theological disciplines and a comparative method conditioned by Christian frameworks. As Ninian Smart said in 1982:

> It seems to me that one of the noblest as well as one of the most immediately practical of human endeavors is that attempt to voyage into other minds, to walk in the moccasins of others, which is represented in the study of religion by the phenomenological method. (Smart 2009a: 225).

My choice of an emic rather than an etic method certainly enabled me to encounter and engage with what Theravāda Buddhism meant for its practitioners. After I took a decision to use only Buddhist meditation methods when meditating at Nilambe in December 1986, opening myself to experiencing rather than simply learning about concepts such as *anicca* (impermanence) and *anattā* (non-self), what I would call a further religious experience occurred, on the early-morning return train to Colombo. What I wrote in my diary afterwards is worth quoting:

> Mist, an early morning, white, numinous touching, blurred the hills and the paddy fields. White birds rose up from the water. An occasional blue or green flashed among the trees, in brilliant colour…….Suddenly the Buddhist concept of the body and the world as a series of processes became clearer. The idea of static entities suddenly seemed ridiculous. Everything was moving. My seeing no longer seemed to belong to my individual body. Rather, it was a cosmic process working through me. 'Seeing' became a gift, an exciting and changing thing. The fields became greener and the mist more beautiful. 'Seeing' was happening through me without thought dominating it. I realised that to think of the senses as processes rather than as my possession was not to diminish them, but to enhance the wonder of seeing, hearing and touching. *Anicca* and *anatta* suddenly became clear, not as doctrine but as experience. (Personal diary, 23 December 1986, quoted in Harris 2002: 13-14)

Here, there certainly was 'an initial situation', namely my meditation practice, and I interpreted it through that practice and my academic work at the PIPBS. I realised, through experiences like this, however, that the attempt 'to voyage into other minds' could be both unsettling and energising. At this point, I could not lay claim to 'methodological agnosticism', *epoché.* I was actively embracing another way of seeing and being religious, drawing it into myself, whilst, at the same time, studying Buddhism

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academically under Buddhist scholars. Both, however, helped me towards the accurate description that is still important within religious studies (e.g. Bowman 2004).

At the academic level, I was fortunate that the founder and director of the PIPBS, Jotiya Dhirasekera, insisted that the Institute was non-confessional. It was for the academic study of Buddhism rather than a Buddhist institute. In addition, a number of the academic tutors there had attained their doctorates in the West in a religious studies environment.[3] Almost by a process of osmosis, therefore, I absorbed some religious studies methodology, although my tutors did not hide that they were committed Buddhists.

There was a naiveté, of course, in my initial journey into Buddhism that mirrored a naiveté in some early representations of phenomenology within religious studies, in that they overlooked the situatedness of the agents involved in the processes of observing, participating and listening, and the historically contingent nature of the result, as Flood cogently pointed out in 1999 (Flood 1999; Cox 2006: 211-216). I learnt that my mind was not a clean slate onto which Buddhism could be written, and also that Buddhism in Sri Lanka was multifaceted, with a diversity of practitioner 'voices', conditioned by the country's colonial past. Respecting the authority of believers, I realised, involved asking what diversity of opinion meant for and within Buddhist traditions (Morgan 1996). As for my own situatedness, however hard I attempted to bracket the spirituality I had brought to Sri Lanka, it conditioned what I selected from Buddhism, the Buddhists I associated with, and the conversations I had with people of all religions and ethnicities in the country, making a neutral position impossible. In other words, my twentieth century western spiritual explorations before 1986 did not go into complete hibernation, for instance my feminism, my concern for social justice and the work I had already done on contemplation/meditation. As an avid reader of the *New Internationalist*, a member of CND and an anti-apartheid campaigner, I could not immerse myself in Sri Lankan Buddhism without also interrogating and questioning some facets of the Buddhism around me, most particularly Sinhala Buddhist nationalism and its aggravation of an increasingly violent ethnic conflict (e.g. Bartholomeusz & De Silva 1998; Rāghavan 2016). The same was true for my feminist side. As a critic of patriarchy in all religions, I was naturally drawn to women who similarly critiqued Sri Lankan Buddhism. And the benefit I gained from meditating at Nilambe, under its teacher, Godwin Samararatne, was conditioned by the contemplative practice I had already experienced in Britain, in spite of my choice to use Buddhist rather than Christian meditation methods. I would eventually

[3] For example Chandima Wijebandara (Lancaster) and Y Karunadasa (London).

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ask myself whether there is not always, 'a colonisation of the other by the perceiver, a drawing of the other into the perceiver's own thought patterns?'(Harris 2004: 334).

I experienced the unintended consequences of my initial naiveté in the mid-1990s, when I returned to Sri Lanka, during my time at Westminster College, with the Head of the BBC World Service, David Craig, to make a series of radio programmes, *The Way of the Buddha.*[4] During this time, a Buddhist friend came to see me, not in connection with the programmes but about an article of mine, 'The Female in Buddhism', which had been published locally and was based on a talk I had given in 1989 in Kandy, fairly early within my time in Sri Lanka (Harris 1993a). In the talk, I had chosen to approach the topic from a feminist perspective, using the analytical model I would have used if I had been writing about Christianity - women as symbol, image and metaphor in the texts. Under these headings, the article contained an exploration of both negative and positive representations of women in the Pāli texts. After this conversation, my friend wrote an article for the *Daily News*, a local newspaper, that accused me of distorting the *Dhamma* by arguing that Buddhism was patriarchal, pointing out that I was a Christian who expressed an affinity to Buddhism (Karunaratne 1996). Her criticism, therefore, was that I had learnt about Buddhism only to undermine it. At the time, I was convinced that she had misrepresented me and my reply to her was also printed in the *Daily News* (Harris 1996).

Eight years afterwards, I reflected more deeply on the episode and realised it concerned issues at the heart of debates within religious studies. I wrote this:

> Why was this? [her accusatory reaction]. It was certainly not because I had any personal wish to undermine Buddhism. It was because I had not seen myself as dealing with something that was truly 'other' when writing on the female in Buddhism. I had assumed I would meet issues I was familiar with in Christianity. I therefore used tools I knew well, those that feminists in the West were using to judge all religion. Overlooked was the historical context I was working within and the fact that I, as a Christian, could not be seen as a neutral academic. If I had attempted to see the paper through the eyes of a Sri Lankan Buddhist woman such as my interviewer, I would have taken into account the historical legacy of mistrust between Christians and Buddhists in Sri Lanka because of 19th century missionary activity, which, among women, had resulted in the wish to defend the record of Buddhism's treatment of women

[4] David Craig and I gave a presentation on communicating Buddhism through radio at the 1996 BASR conference, which was on the theme of 'Religion and Media', held at the University College of St Martin, Lancaster. Harris 1998 was based on the interviews conducted for the programmes.

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> against western criticism. I did not and clashed. In retrospect, I realise that I could have done more to enable my listeners/readers to see that the negative case I built towards the beginning was a caricature that I wanted to challenge rather than a view that I supported. (Harris 2004: 342)

Another way of putting this would be that I had not listened carefully enough to the diversity of attitudes among Buddhist women in Sri Lanka or recognised the 'contingent conjunctures' that affected the reception of my 1989 presentation (Abeysekara 2002: 3-4), which incidentally was well-received by some western Buddhist women (See Harris 1999). I had failed to realise that, as Flood argued, representation is always interpretation, and that 'all accounts of religion are from a location' (Flood 1999: 90; Cox 2006: 211-215). The experience reinforced my awareness that my immersion within Sri Lankan Buddhism was inextricably conditioned by the country's postcolonial context and the revivalist Buddhist modernism or Protestant Buddhism (Obeyesekere 1970) that had emerged through the encounter between evangelical Christian missionaries and Buddhism in Sri Lanka (Harris 2006: 168-180). To be fair to the early religious studies pioneer, Ninian Smart, he neither denied the multidisciplinary nature of the field, stressing that it was 'plural, polymethodic non-finite and aspectual' nor the impact of colonialism on the development of religions (Smart 2009b: 22 & 29). But it took later scholars to give additional stress to self-reflexivity, the insights of postmodernism and the historically contingent nature of religious traditions.

Return to Britain

Where was Peggy in all this? I returned to Britain in 1993 with attitudes that were primed towards a religious studies approach, although the criticism of 'The Female in Buddhism' was yet to come. My doctorate had been a contextually dense study that entered the western discourse about Protestant Buddhism, through challenging theoretical approaches that ignored the agency of Asian Buddhists, and the dialogue that took place on the ground between them and western missionaries and orientalists (Harris 1993b: 491-566).[5] However, I rightly saw myself as lacking in methodological formation within religious studies, due to my rather unconventional entry into postgraduate research. Experience had certainly taught me much, not only about Buddhist meditation and devotional practice but also about the activities of some Asian Buddhist women – I had attended the conference in Bodh Gaya that had given birth to Sakyadhita (Daughters of

[5] One study that ignored this agency through an over-reliance on Edward Said was Almond 1988.

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the Buddha; see Lekshe Tsomo 1988) and had been a member of the Sakyadhita Committee in Colombo – and Buddhism in times of ethnic war. My knowledge of the Pāli textual tradition was also sound. Yet, I had much to learn with Peggy as my guide, at a time when religious studies scholars were rigorously interrogating phenomenology, and concepts such as the 'authority of the believer' and 'methodological agnosticism'. Peggy entered all these debates and at least two others, namely (1) the existence of gender and ethical awareness in religious studies and (2) the relationship between religious studies and interreligious engagement. To explore her involvement with these issues, I will continue in autobiographical mode.

Diversity, Gender and Ethical Awareness

The first event Peggy involved me in after 1993 was a conference she organised in March 1994 at Westminster College on 'The Contribution of Methodists to the Academic Study of Religion'.[6] The line-up of speakers was impressive, including Geoffrey Parrinder (Forward 1998; Cox 2006: 146-153), Andrew Walls (Cox 2006: 153-159), Frank Whaling and Wesley Ariarajah (e.g. Ariarajah 1985), although it was rather male dominated. Most of the papers concerned interreligious encounter in line with the extended conference description, although Parrinder spoke on 'Rabindranath Tagore and Robert Bridges'.[7] I will return to this aspect of Peggy's work. Suffice to say at this point that it was an early confirmation of Peggy's willingness to engage with this emerging field.

The next thing Peggy quite rightly encouraged me to do was to give a paper at the 1994 fortieth anniversary conference of the British Association for the Study of Religions (BASR), held in Bristol. My topic was 'Reclaiming the Sacred: Buddhist Women in Sri Lanka' and it drew on my empirical experience, for instance of Sakyadhita and the aspiration of some of its Sri Lankan members to restore an Order of *Bhikkhūṇi*s (Buddhist nuns with higher ordination) in the country. I can remember my nervousness, particularly when I realised that Rupert Gethin and Paul Williams, key scholars within Buddhist Studies in the United Kingdom, were in the front row. I think it went well! Peggy then helped me prepare the paper for publication, with a more sophisticated theoretical

[6] 19 March 1994. The journal *Discernment*: *an ecumenical Christian journal of inter-faith encounter* was also relaunched at the conference. My own paper was on 'Buddhist-Christian Encounter with special reference to Sri Lanka', concentrating on the colonial period.

[7] The small-print of the conference programme included 'The College provides an excellent venue for this celebration and sharing of the contribution of Methodist thought and Methodist scholars to the study of religions and interfaith dialogue'. The papers included: 'Interpretative Dialogue: A Christian Reflects on the Meaning of a Hindu Tradition' (Eric Lott), 'Wesley's Premonitions of Interfaith Discourse' (Frank Whaling), 'The figure of Jesus in Interfaith Dialogue' (Wesley Ariarajah), 'The Pioneering work of James Hope Moulton' (Andrew Walls).

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framework (Harris 1997a). She similarly helped my next BASR paper in 1995, in Wolverhampton. Speaking to the conference theme, 'Authority and Religious Traditions', Peggy gave a critically important paper, 'The Authority of Believers in the Study of Religions' (Morgan 1996) and, using fieldwork undertaken in the summer of 1985, I spoke on 'Internal and External Authority among lay Buddhist Women in contemporary Sri Lanka' (Harris 1997b). The very framework of the paper – internal and external authority – emerged from conversations with Peggy. Through these conversations, my sensitivity to religious studies methodology in the West increased, as did my awareness of key issues such as the frequent absence of gender awareness.

Peggy was also a mentor in my teaching. I had been teaching and moderating discussions since the 1970s but preparing undergraduate lectures was new to me, since my doctoral research responsibilities in Colombo had not involved this. My diaries hint at the help Peggy gave me. On 3 February 1995, for instance, I rose early to finalize a lecture on Buddhism – Buddhist ethics I think - and wrote, 'I'm not sure how it went. Peggy claims I paced myself well and one mature student said how much she'd enjoyed it'. At that point, however, I was placing far too much emphasis on the Pāli texts in my lectures on topics such as ethics, following the method of the PIPBS. Pace was perhaps one of the few things I got right! Through listening to Peggy's lectures, learning from her method, my focus broadened so that I did greater justice to lived Buddhist traditions, across the globe, in their diversity and complexity, without losing my love of the Pāli textual tradition. I must also thank her for creating a slot in the curriculum for me to draw on my empirical experience, namely a course on 'Buddhism in Context: Sri Lanka', which moved from lived devotional practice to the impact of colonialism, Buddhist Nationalism, Buddhism and Gender, and Socially Engaged Buddhism, playing to my strengths. In contrast to my experience within some other institutions, Peggy's wisdom drew the best out of me.

Enabling encounter between students and practitioners of different religious traditions as well as experts in the discipline was also at the heart of what Peggy sought to offer students. According to Peggy, no religious studies course worth its name could omit this. For instance, between 1994 and 1996, students engaged with Sulak Sivaraksa, pioneer of engaged Buddhism from Thailand or Siam as he prefers to call it, Martine Batchelor, writer on women in Buddhism, Frank Whaling and Ninian Smart. And Peggy set an example for me of how to introduce such visiting speakers. She had a rare gift of gracious and courteous affirmation that I will always remember and have sought to emulate. Under her mentoring, teaching became exciting, challenging and relevant. The application to religious studies of Westminster College's openness to the contemporary world owed much to Peggy and had an influence wider than the immediate College context.

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During the 1990s, Peggy was collaborating with other specialists on two key publications that related to ethics: *Ethical Issues in Six Religious Traditions* (Morgan & Lawton 1996) and *Testing the Global Ethic: Voices from the Religions on Moral Values* (Morgan & Braybrooke 1998). Written with great attention to accuracy, both faced outwards into the world and encouraged students to do the same. Peggy was not uncritical of the idea of a global ethic, declaring that its initial documents had 'an air of inter-faith confessionalism and para-theology' (Morgan 1995: 167). Her willingness to engage with it as an object of academic study, however, in collaboration with one of its supporters, was indicative of her method and integrity in religious studies. For the book 'tested' the idea of a global ethic rather than advocated it, using the voices of practitioners as data, a method completely in line with her positioning within religious studies. Similarly the undergraduate 'Guided Research Project' on the topic that we prepared together recognised its importance for some practitioners but also its drawbacks.[8] Her stance in this was similar to her position within the emerging field of interreligious encounter.

The Relationship between Religious Studies and Interreligious Encounter

Within contemporary religious studies, inter-faith studies and inter-faith dialogue are kept at arms' length, because of their historical link with the theological agendas of one faith, Christianity, and their perceived endorsement of a now discredited world religions paradigm. In the 1980s and 1990s, however, the line between religious studies, and the study and practice of interreligious relations was more porous than now, with a number of religious studies pioneers involved also in the practical task of enabling interreligious encounter. After all, at that time, both those involved in religious studies and Christians who pioneered inter-faith dialogue were united in their opposition to Christian hegemony. Unlike some religious studies scholars, Peggy was not, to my knowledge, involved with CRPOF and the British Council of Churches.[9] As a member of the Shap Working Party and other such initiatives, however, she encountered some of the Christians who were attempting to build a new relationship with other religious traditions such as Kenneth

[8]This encouraged students to interrogate three areas: 'the nature of the crisis' - global inequality, consumerism and the sustainability of the natural environment; the contribution of religious traditions; the barriers to implementing any global ethic.

[9] Ursula King, Shirley Firth and Kim Knott, for instance, were, in the late 1980s, members of CRPOF. All were also involved with BASR. See for example minutes of the 35th Meeting of the Committee held at the Stony Croft Hotel in Leicester, 22-23 November 1989. Under this umbrella, King was also a member of the Women Interfaith Dialogue Group. Lambeth Palace Library holds the Minutes of CRPOF, from which this information was gained.

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Cracknell (e.g. Cracknell 1986), Marcus Braybrooke (e.g. Braybrooke 1992) and Owen Cole (e.g. Cole 2004), and was very well informed about developments in this area, as demonstrated in the March 1994 conference on the contribution of Methodists to the academic study of religions and inter-faith encounter.

Given this emerging context, it was inevitable that the relationship between religious studies and interreligious encounter became the focus of academic reflection and Peggy became instrumental in this. The September 1993 BASR conference in Newcastle included a panel discussion on the issue, chaired by Ursula King, with the discussion led by Terry Thomas and Brian Bocking (Morgan 1995: 156). It coincided with events to mark the one hundredth anniversary of the 1893 Chicago World's Parliament of Religions (Seager 1993), one of which, in Bangalore, Peggy attended. Concurrent with these events, she was writing a paper entitled, 'The Study of Religions and Interfaith Encounter' (Morgan 1995), which quoted one of Thomas's remarks in Newcastle, 'nothing that religions do is outside the scope of the study of religions', reformulating it as 'nothing that religious people do is outside the scope of the study of religions' (Morgan 1995: 168).

Since religious people were involved in interreligious encounter, it was a legitimate field for engagement and study for Peggy. She avoided being labelled as belonging to any religious tradition but both supported and critically studied developments in this field. During my time at Westminster College, we both went to meetings of the Oxford Roundtable of Religions, hearing a diversity of presentations from the Bhahma Kumaris at Nuneham Courtney to a Zoroastrian woman on women and religion. Together, we participated in events at Amaravati Buddhist Monastery, for instance a Buddhist-Christian meditation retreat from 7-8 October 1995, and in an interreligious dialogue hosted by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKON) from 19-21 January 1996. In all of these meetings, we were both participants and observers, enjoying the interactions they afforded but also gleaning material for research and for our religious studies lectures.

Peggy's principal interreligious activity in Oxford was in connection with the new International Interfaith Centre (IIC), which Peggy hoped to bring to Westminster College.[10] In December 1993, the Centre was inaugurated at the College, Peggy giving the first draft of her paper on the study of religions and interfaith encounter. In brief, the paper outlined how she saw her role in the Centre's development, namely as a critical friend, adviser and consultant, who could ask questions about representation and focus, noticing and exposing gaps between confessional and scholarly perspectives (Morgan 1995). She sought to take this further through the theme of the 1995 IIC conference, entitled 'Interfaith Activity: Threat or Promise', which included the theme, 'Threat or Promise? The

[10] To cut a long story short, this was prevented because of opposition from residents local to Westminster College, who feared an increase in traffic and congestion.

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Study of Religions and Interfaith Activity'. With case studies from countries such as Bosnia and Sri Lanka, the focus was contemporary and engaged. The relationship between the study of religion and interfaith activity was not given as much attention as it could have been, except perhaps by Michael Pye, who affirmed that 'in one sense reflection on religious pluralism began with the emergence of religious diversity in ancient India and ancient China' (Braybrooke 1995: 20).

Peggy, I would suggest, was a key voice in arguing for a role for the religious studies scholar in the expanding field of interreligious encounter and interreligious dialogue, as consultant and adviser. Without ever becoming a confessional participant in this landscape, she gave support to those who were involved, and cast her critical academic gaze on the result, convinced that it was as valid a subject for research as any other expression of religion in the contemporary world. In this she was supported by BASR. Ninian Smart, for instance, wrote in 1998, 'I consider it as part of our task as intellectuals not only to theorize about the configurations of religions and worldviews, but to reflect more philosophically about the relations between religions' (Smart 2009b: 18), as he had done in 1993, the year of the BASR conference debate (Smart 1993). And, in the 1990s, the BASR Bulletin certainly reported on and publicised conferences that focussed on interreligious relations, for instance, in 1999: 'Islam and other Faiths' at Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education; and the Parliament of the World's Religions in Cape Town, on the theme 'A New Day Dawning: Spiritual Yearnings and Sacred Possibilities'.[11] It also reviewed books on these issues, for example Masao Abe's *Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue*, edited by Steve Heine (Werner 1996: 41-42), and *All in Good Faith*: *A Resource Book for Multi-faith Prayer*, by Jean Potter and Marcus Braybrooke (Whaling 1998: 39-40).

In the third decade of the twenty first century, it could be argued that this field is no longer 'expanding' but rather that there has been a retrenchment, which offers itself as a further subject for academic scrutiny. Yet, in the 1990s, Peggy's critical engagement with this field and principled position helped me immensely in my own negotiation of it, especially during the time when I acted as adviser to a Christian church on its relationships with other religious traditions.[12]

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[11] BASR Bulletin No. 86, March 1999, 13 & 22-23.

[12] Between 1996 and 2007, I was Secretary for Relationships with People of Other Faiths for the Methodist Church in Britain. Some religious studies specialists saw this as a betrayal of my religious studies credentials. In contrast, I saw it as an opportunity to be a resource person on the religious landscape of Britain for a significant religious body, utilising principles connected with religious studies such as accurate representation/description and the challenging of theological bias. Throughout my time in this post, I continued to write within Buddhist Studies, serving on the Management Committee of the UK Association of Buddhist Studies, and acting as a visiting lecturer at Birmingham and Lund Universities.

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Conclusion

When I started writing this contribution, I knew that I owed a debt to Peggy Morgan. Writing it has increased that sense of debt. I am not, of course, the only younger scholar Peggy has encouraged and influenced. The other contributions in this issue prove that. In this and the other areas outlined in this paper, she was a pioneer in religious studies, convinced that the discipline should be critical, outward facing, relevant and socially responsible, emphases that have not lost their potency.

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