

# Spirituality and religion in academic psychology: my adventures

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# Why is this topic important?

- Undergraduate and clinical psychology syllabuses empty of references to religion and spirituality
- But these issues are important to many patients
- Generally, religion is only slowly being recognised (in psychology) as an important influence on, and aspect of, behaviour, thoughts and feelings
- Patchy introduction of systematic training

# The study of religion in UK psychology

- My memories of points from lectures at University College in the early in 1960s
- Religious affiliation declining
- Galton and the power of prayer
- Intermittent reinforcement
- Was Torquemada tender-minded?

# A conversation in the corridor

- Professor Brian Foss and his new friend
- An interview with Professor Hywel Lewis at Kings College
- Laurie Brown's textbook
- Teaching psychology of religion at Kings College 1974-1990

## 4: Psychology of religion teaching and research in the UK 1990s-2000s

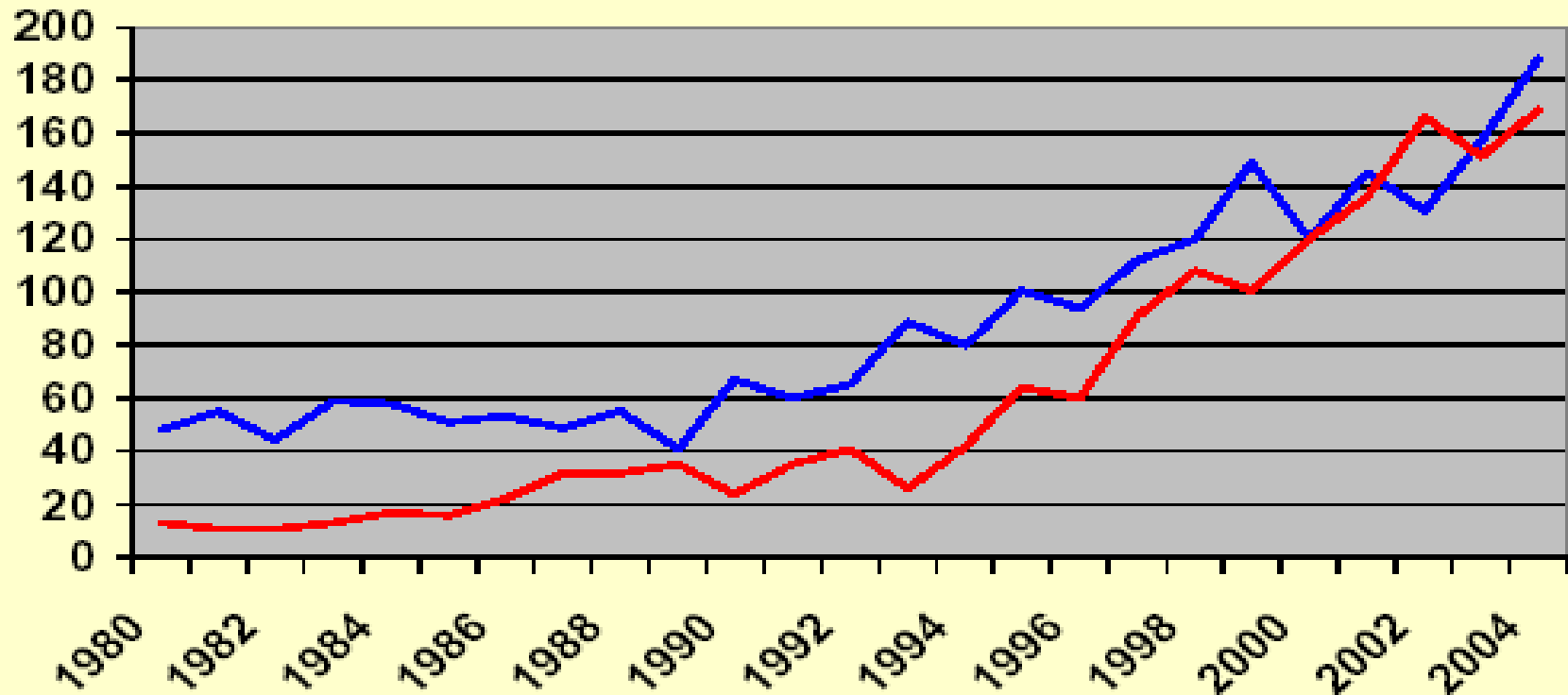
Teaching in religious studies departments: Lancaster, Cambridge, Heythrop (Kings, London has stopped). A struggle to place this teaching in psychology departments: Surrey and Glyndwr starting (Royal Holloway, London has stopped since I retired, Oxford uncertain).

Prosperes more in some other countries e.g. Belgium, some US universities, and in the UK, in sociology and psychiatry.

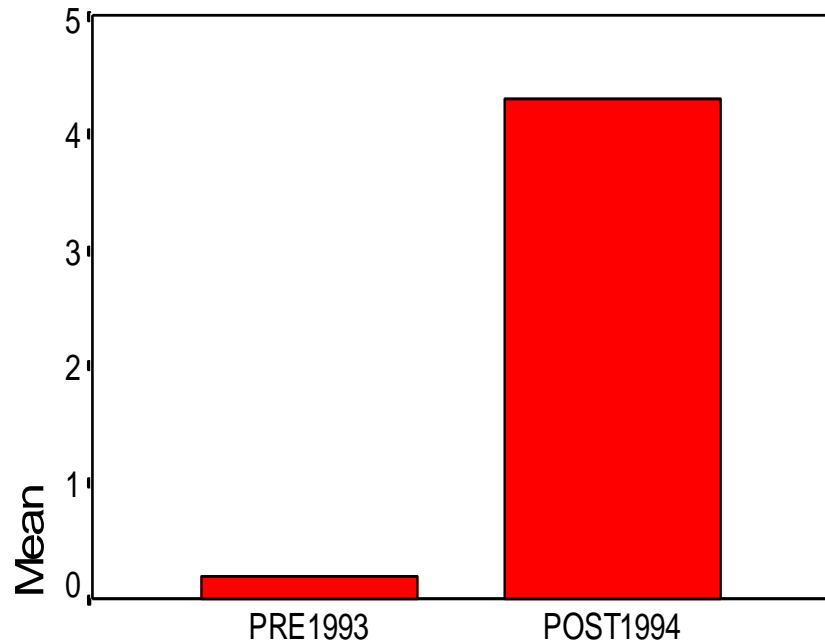
Research: some units – Warwick, Cambridge, Royal Holloway (the latter now closed). Funding very hard to obtain, and the area is regarded as too “soft” by many psychologists in the current climate, which favours cognition and neuroscience. Some political impetus since 9/11.

# Growth of scientific focus on religion and spirituality

Number of Medline-Indexed English Articles  
by Year, with TITLES Using the Terms  
*Religion/Religiosity/Religious/Religiousness*  
and *Spiritual/Spirituality*

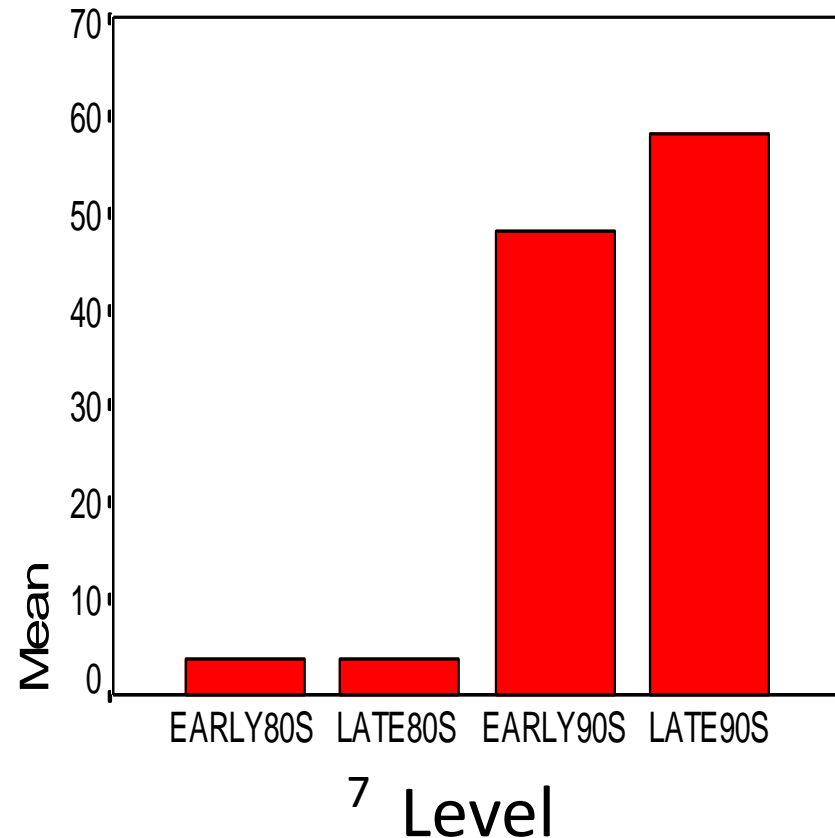


Mean number of references to religion per book, in undergraduate textbooks on social psychology and personality.



Average annual number of publications in religion and mental health, 1991-1996 (based on Dein & Loewenthal, 1998)

- Click to edit the outline text format



# The rise of spirituality

Becoming a focus of research and scholarly activity – legacy of NRMs (New Religious Movements), and a feature of individualist societies

**Definition:** beliefs, practices, relationships or experiences having to do with the sacred that are not necessarily linked to established institutionalized systems.

Influential discussions in books by Heelas & Woodhead (2005) and Pargament (Pargament et al, 2012), and textbooks.

The British Psychological Society (BPS) – Consciousness and Transpersonal divisions, advised that a division concerned with religion would be too redundant/overlapping

# Religion in clinical training

Not a feature of Clinical Psychology (DClinPsy) syllabuses in UK universities

I did teach one 2-hour session at Royal Holloway, on religious issues in clinical practice. This stopped when I retired. Growing numbers of DClin Psych theses focusing on religious issues.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists has attempted to incorporate knowledge of religious issues into the training of psychiatrists.

There is a large and growing body of published knowledge (many journals and books) based on research and clinical practice which could and should play an increasing role in clinical training.