A series of research papers produced in conjunction with the Community Religions Project in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Leeds.

The papers in this series are working documents only, some having been given at seminars and conferences, and some having been published. They may be cited freely, but quotations from them may be published only with the written permission of the Head of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, The University of Leeds, Leeds, LS2 9JT.
If we consider religion, identity and ethnicity, and the vast quantity of research and writing that has been undertaken on each may be surprised when we find, if we take the three together, a relative scarcity of published material. Of course, many empirical accounts on the subject of ethnicity entail a discussion of the religious life of a group, and religion and ethnicity are not infrequently mentioned in theoretical works on identity. Serious studies on religion which discuss its relation to ethnicity and identity, however, are few and far between. In 1972 Arnold Dashefsky wrote an article which comprised all three terms: 'And the search goes on: the meaning of religio-ethnic identity and identification'. In this paper Dashefsky concentrated on explaining identity and identification amongst what he called 'religio-ethnic' groups. In this context he chose to define an ethnic group as 'a group of individuals "with a shared sense of peoplehood" (M. Gordon, p.24)' (p.239). A religio-ethnic group, he added in a footnote, was the same thing. He used the terms interchangeably throughout, suggesting that he saw religion as playing a significant role in the life of an ethnic group. Despite Dashefsky's admission that religion and ethnicity could be separated when circumstances demanded it, he did not discuss them separately in this paper. Religious belief and practice were not central to his discussion, and while we learnt a considerable amount about the nature of identity in such groups, we were given no account of the particular role of religion or the effects on religion of religio-ethnic identity. Dashefsky's main aim in mentioning religion was to respond negatively to the earlier conclusions of Glazer and Moynihan (1970) that religion had declined as an instrument in ethnic identity formation.

Other studies of ethnicity have given more attention to religion. In his book entitled Interethnic Relations Francis devoted a chapter to the relation between ethnicity and religion. In this he discussed the role of religion in ethnic identification, precisely that which
Dashefsky had presumed, but had not discussed in detail. In his conclusion he wrote,

> It is the ethnic group which sanctions a particular church affiliation, and which supports a religious congregation and its institutions as an effective means for its own maintenance and the preservation of its cultural traditions. Thus, when religious affiliation and ethnicity are coextensive, both tend to support and sanction each other. In other cases, however, instead of increasing the unity and coherence of an existing group and of protecting it against the influences of the social environment so that assimilation is inhibited by religious taboos on intermarriage and apostasy, religious differences may weaken and divide ethnic groups, promote union with different ethnic groups, and facilitate transculturation, assimilation, and eventually absorption. (p.157)

This reflects his particular interest -- the role played by religion in ethnic identification -- but also shows his awareness of the effect ethnicity itself has on religious organization and affiliation.

These concerns were also taken up by Abramson in his 1979 article on migration, and religion and ethnic identity. He asks, 'Is there any ethnic group or ethnic identity which does not have a distinctive religious component?... Is there any religion or religious group which does not have a unique sense of peoplehood or ethnicity?' (p.8). Abramson answers 'No' to both, but he does not choose to follow Dashefsky in conflating the roles of religion and ethnicity in identity formation. He continues instead to treat the two as separate but related variables. From his discussion of the socio-cultural consequences of migration he says 'we may learn something more about the meaning of ethnicity and religion in individual lives' (p.29).

It is perhaps the work of Hans Mol which most consistently discusses the relationship between these concepts. In an article in 1979 he reviews some of his own contributions to this subject, stating that the earliest works suffered from an 'oversimplified treatment of religion' (p.32). This had certainly changed by the early seventies when, in a discussion on migrant socialization, religion was 'defined
in terms of its function to reinforce specific views of reality' (1979:33). This idea was later used in Identity and the Sacred and in the introduction to Identity and Religion: International Cross-Cultural Approaches. In these the discussion had moved away from a particular interest in ethnicity, although the theory, of religion as the 'sacralizer' of identity and the 'harnasser' of social change (1979:34-5), continued to hold good for situations of ethnic pluralism. Lewins, for example, in his chapter on 'Religion and ethnic identity' in Mol's 1978 book, makes use of Mol's theoretical material on identity in his account of Italian and Ukrainian Catholics in Australia. Turning to the perennial question of the relation between religion and ethnicity he asks whether religion reinforces ethnic identity or is a separate focus of identity? Lewins, like Mol, sees it as reinforcing ethnic identity, although the nature of this process depends on the particular ethnic group and its situation. He points out though that this relationship is not the one described by Glazer and Moynihan in their essay volume (1975), that of religion as an instrument in the advancement of ethnic group interests. In both relationships, however, religion is seen as functioning in a certain way for ethnic identity. In the former it is seen as a reinforcement of ethnic identity; in the latter as a vehicle in the pursuit of ethnic power interests. We will return to this distinction later.

Two other studies are worth mentioning before this, however.

The first is Will Herberg's Protestant Catholic Jew. It is probably true that little of Herberg's theory actually holds water in the cold light of historical development. However, this does not wholly devalue its contribution to the sociology of religion. Of course, today we are beyond, Beyond the Melting Pot (Glazer and Moynihan, 1970). The 'melting pot thesis' itself now lies forgotten. Herberg's book, however, written in the mid-fifties, provides an early account of the relations between religion, ethnicity and identity in the USA.

Coming up-to-date and crossing the Atlantic, we have a recent article by Muhammad Anvar entitled 'Religious identity in plural societies: the case of Britain'. Anvar has written a number of books and articles on South Asians in Britain, particularly on the Pakistani Muslims. In this article he concentrates on the religious identity of
this particular group, and, more specifically, on the question of the attitudinal differences of the different generations. Here he takes seriously the pressures, caused by migration and the new location, which are being brought to bear on Muslim religious identity. He considers this identity and attempts to characterise its history and development by asking questions of the old and the young. While he does not deny the effect of religion on ethnicity -- he sees Islam 'as a regulating agency for all aspects of life...' (1980:111) -- he concentrates instead on the effect of ethnicity on religion.

Anwar's work is refreshing because it is one of the few pieces of research which puts religion squarely at the centre of discussion. In the British tradition of ethnic and racial studies, religion has been still more peripheral to discussion than it has in the American equivalent. When it is mentioned one sometimes gets the feeling that religion is like stamp-collecting or playing squash, a minor hobby. This is more often the case in statistical, sociological and geographical studies of ethnicity than in anthropological or phenomenological writing or in studies conducted by researchers who are members of the religious and ethnic communities themselves.

During the course of this short review several different perspectives and orientations have surfaced which relate to the complex relations between identity, ethnicity and religion. First of all there are those perspectives which relate to the question of the status of religion and ethnicity vis-a-vis identity. Are they both variables of identity, independent but related, and of equal importance and strength? Is religion a part of ethnicity, either in the sense that religion might be like stamp-collecting to an ethnic group with an important tradition of philately, or in the sense that it is an instrument in the pursuit of ethnic group interests? Are religion and ethnicity qualitatively different in relation to identity, perhaps as Mol suggests, with religion the sacralizer of identity, ethnic and otherwise? Then there is the question of directional influences. Does religion affect ethnicity, or vice versa? Or are the influences mutually felt? Which questions one chooses to ask, and even which answers one chooses to give, may well be the result of one's particular research interest. Sociologists, geographers, political theorists, anthropologists, religious studies...
scholars, statisticians etc may well have quite different views. Three in particular seem to have arisen in the review of research on religion, ethnicity and identity presented above.

First, there is what has been called the Marxian view, in which religion is seen as a means of advancing the interests of the group, in this case the ethnic group. Many writers have adopted this perspective in some form or another (e.g. Cohen, Glazer and Moynihan (1975), Tambs-Lyche) in their discussions of ethnicity and its social and political context. The second is more Weberian in character, perceiving religion as a significant element in the social change which is experienced in the context of ethnicity (e.g. Mol: 1978, 1979; Lewins). In both these views religion and ethnicity are seen as different features of personal or group identity. In the first, religion, like other aspects of culture, is superstructural in character. It is selected as a vehicle for the pursuit of interests at the infrastructural level. In the second, ethnicity is given its particular quality by religion. Religion 'sacralizes' ethnic identity. Ethnic identity is the name given to the particular kind of identity experienced by migrants; religion is that which gives this identity its character.

The third perspective -- I call it perspective and not theory because we are concerned here with ways of looking at data on religion and ethnicity rather than uncovering watertight explanations -- is that which explores the influence of ethnicity upon the religion and religiousness of groups (e.g. Abramson, Anwar: 1980). Ethnic identity is not a static phenomenon. The migration experience and its immediate context clearly produce very different types of identity and identification from the experience of the established settler. Religion is not static either. Both its content and its effect on its adherents alter according to social circumstances. Migration is the very type of crisis event which could be expected to affect religion. (The Exodus of the Jews from Egypt is a good example of this process.) Abramson's account suggests he sees both religion and ethnicity as candidates for such an impact: 'It is only in contact between cultures, as in the classic role of migration, that ethnicity and religion assume a dynamic and social reality of their own' (p.8). The consequences of this impact are underlined in a different way by Pye:
'Since religion is subject to the passage of time religious leaders and believers are forced to respond to ever-lengthening perspectives. In particular the transmission of religion from one culture to another whether geographically or chronologically means that new cultural elements are introduced to the tradition and new demands are made upon it' (1979:17).

This general, religious perspective is the one I plan to concentrate on here. A great deal of work, both empirical and theoretical, has been done already in which ethnic identity is put at the fore, with religion to one side, either supporting, influencing, or being used in the pursuit of ethnic identity. Focussing on religion does not imply a denial of these other perspectives. For example, it is quite clear when one looks at South Asian ethnic groups in Britain that on occasions religion is used as an instrument in support of either caste interests or religio-ethnic interests (e.g. the Gujarati Lohana caste (Michaelson), and the Punjabi Sikhs (Helweg)). Neither can such a focus be maintained without reference to the related social changes encountered in the migration and post migration experience. This becomes clear if we look at the different levels of identity in relation to religious change in such situations.

If we take the three levels, of personal, group and social identity described by Mol in _Identity and Religion_ (1978), we can appreciate how all three are of significance in relation to the experience of ethnicity. At the individual level, ethnicity forms an important part of personal identity, sometimes competing with other features such as age or gender as a focus for identification, and at other times contributing to an expression of such features. At the group level, ethnic identity is of great importance, although sectarian identities frequently cut across it (e.g. caste, kinship and religion in South Asian groups) causing divisions within the ethnic community. Then, at the third level, the ethnic group is subsumed within the overarching category of the society of which it forms a part. This type of identity is of less immediate importance but comes into force in particular circumstances (e.g. war).

Religion and religious choices are clearly influenced by the way in which the individual, the group and the society see themselves. At
the individual level the degree of religious participation may well be
determined by a desire to be identified as part of an ethnic enclave.
The same is true for groups. The increase of public participation in
Hindu temple practices in East Africa and Britain compared with the
Indian subcontinent is evidence of the way the migration experience
has affected religion at this group level. Then, at the third level
we have the example of the education debate. While many Muslims,
Hindus and Sikhs are keen to see separate schools for their children,
many others reject this idea on the grounds that as members of British
society such sectarianism is divisive and against the interests of
both children and the religious groups themselves. The formation of
the identity of ethnic groups and their members is thus not without
influence on their religion and religiousness.

Religion, of course, makes its own impact on identity. The three
levels again help us to see this. Life cycle rites, and the beliefs
and practices which are related to them, have a tremendous impact on
the nature of personal identity. Then, at the next level, traditions
of religious authority and organization help to determine the shape
and nature of the group's ethnic experience. Hinduism, for example,
is a relatively 'unorganized' tradition without a geographical centre
or a bureaucratic structure or regular temple practices (although its
sectarian movements are not without these). As a result, it
contributes to the production of a less formal religio-ethnic identity
than Sikhism, with the latter's history of brotherhood and
persecution, its Punjabi background and its tradition of collective
ritual practice. Then at the level of social identity we can see the
influence of religion in the case of ecumenism. The leaders of
minority religions have been keen to participate in encounter and
dialogue because they have recognised that their communities are part
of something wider than the religio-ethnic group. This has had an
important impact at the local level in terms of community relations
and community education.

As other writers like Abramson and Anwar have suggested, both
religion and ethnicity influence identity. It is not necessary to
assume, however, that they are alike in their relation to identity.
Ethnicity would seem to be a particular type of identity, experienced
by people in particular circumstances. Religion is clearly something
which can be part of this type of identity or indeed of other types. For migrant groups religion and ethnicity are not without mutual influence. Religion, however, in the meaning and function it has for individuals and groups, is of a different order to ethnicity. Mol calls it the 'sacralizer' of identity. I think this helps us to know how it works in general, and how it operates in specific relation to ethnic identity. It is important to remember, however, that in addition to performing a function -- that of 'sacralizer' -- religion has content. It is this content with which our work in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at Leeds is concerned. Our interest is in the complex and changing relations between migrant religions, their adherents, and their social, political and geographical locations, and, in particular, in the effect these relations have on religions and religiousness. Quite simply, this represents a 'religious studies approach' to the question of religious and ethnic identity.

Most of the writers reviewed earlier have a commitment to studying religion as a serious factor in identity formation. As sociologists, however, most are interested primarily in religion as social function and as social structure. Our interest certainly includes this: sectarianism, the role of the place of worship and its leadership structure are of vital importance in understanding the religions of ethnic minorities. The other dimensions of religion and religiousness are also studied: to use Pye's categorization, the conceptual, the behavioural, and the psychological or experiential (1979). Perhaps the most important dimension, however, referred to by Pye as the 'dynamics of religion' (after Van Der Leeuw (Pye, 1969:234; 1979:17)), is religious change. We are concerned to record and understand religious change as it occurs through migration and settlement experiences. No religion remains unchanged through such occurrences. Beliefs, practices, social organizations and religious experiences adapt and develop as a result of the new geographical and social location. In a sense, then, this is a 'comparative religion' exercise: How does a religion and the religiousness of its people change in an alien milieu? How are they different from their parent traditions in the homeland?

These are some of the current concerns of the Community Religions
Project at the University of Leeds. Begun in 1976 as an informal research group with an interest in local religions (both the established religions and the new ethnically-related religions), it has in recent years focussed on the religions of those ethnic minorities most recently settled in Britain.¹ This includes the South Asian religions -- particularly Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism, and related sectarian movements -- and the Afro-Caribbean groups: the Black Churches, and black allegiance to established Christian denominations.

Since 1983 the Community Religions Project has been engaged in full-time research to undertake a national survey of the religions of these ethnic minorities.² This survey includes the collection of geographical, historical and statistical information (on the geographical location and numerical distribution, ethnic composition, history of immigration, religious affiliation, and beliefs and practices of the members of ethnic minority groups), the production of maps, and an analysis of the religious dynamics of ethnic minority groups within British society as well as of indigenous reactions to the presence of religious beliefs and practices originating from different cultures.

Within this broad aim of conducting a national survey, there are a number of practical objectives. These include the production of a handbook on the religions of ethnic minorities in Britain for the use of students, teachers, and those working in the fields of community relations, education and social work, and the production of a series of research papers and monographs on related topics. The other major task is the establishment of a computerised data base for the provision of materials, minority contacts, and parallel studies in this general field. Support continues to be given to research students studying in this area, and for an undergraduate course currently running in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at Leeds on the 'Religions of Ethnic Minorities'.

On the one hand this is largely an empirical task, a task involving the collection of secondary source materials on the religions of these minorities and, where necessary, of primary fieldwork information. The scope for particular studies in this area
is immense. To date, three postgraduate theses have been completed in conjunction with the Community Religions Project, one on Bengali Muslims in Bradford (Barton), one on Hinduism in Leeds (Knott:1982), and another on the Hindu Satya Sai Baba movement in Britain (Bowen). In addition, project staff give information to other researchers, to community relations workers, Church leaders and the media on the religious beliefs, practices and organizations of Britain's ethnic minorities.

However, this kind of research cannot be pursued without a consideration of the theoretical issues involved in the study of ethnic minority religions. Of course, it is impossible to give a comprehensive account of what is happening to the religions of these groups in Britain. Each group is very different, and so is its religion. Some groups have arrived in Britain direct from their homeland (e.g. Bengali Muslims); others have experienced a lengthy settlement in East Africa before arriving on Britain's shores (e.g. the majority of Gujarati Hindus). Some groups share a general allegiance to the host faith, albeit a complex and pluralistic one (e.g. Afro-Caribbean communities); most come from alien philosophical and religious traditions (e.g. the South Asian groups). In addition to such broad differences, there are the internal ones of caste, sect, kinship, and so on. Quite apart from such diversity, however, the Community Religions Project, and the minorities themselves, have not been established for long enough for general trends in religious change to be fully observed.

Less speculative theories have been of greater value, however. For example, it has been necessary to attempt to construct a framework for understanding what happens to a religious group and its tradition when it moves to a new geographical and social location. When such a change in circumstances occurs a number of factors contribute to producing new patterns of religious behaviour, organisation, experience and self-understanding. These can be classified as follows.

(a) **Home traditions**

Those who have come recently to Britain from the countries of the New Commonwealth have not come empty-handed. They have brought their own religious and cultural traditions. It is these, in
interaction with the new environment, which produce consequent religious changes -- new interpretations, new forms of religion and religiousness, and a new self-consciousness concerning religious matters. The precise nature of the changes which occur will stem partly from (i) the nature of the religion itself (e.g. its unity or diversity, its universality or its ethnic particularity) and (ii) the nature of the other cultural factors such as language, customs, food and dress, etc.

(b) Host traditions
On arrival and throughout the subsequent period of settlement migrants come into contact in various ways with the established traditions of the 'host community'. In the case of Britain this means a form of religious and cultural pluralism, impregnated with a deeply ingrained and commonly understood and shared 'English' cultural tradition. Like all societies, Britain also has an overarching political framework into which newcomers are fed. This includes its laws and legal traditions, its educational and welfare systems, its immigration and settlement procedures.

(c) Nature of migration process
Individuals and groups who have arrived in Britain in the last fifty years have not all followed the same routes or had the same intentions. Some have come from their original homelands; others from other migration situations. Some have been migrants; others refugees. Some have planned to return; others to stay. The characteristics of the migrant group, and its consequent religious development have been greatly affected by these conditions. (These questions have been considered by Anwar:1979, Barton, Knott:1982, Michaelson.)

(d) Nature of migrant group
As the migration processes differ so too do the groups themselves. As those who have worked on or with ethnic minorities will know, it is generally rather futile to talk, for example, of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, or South Asians, of Indians and Pakistanis, or even of Gujaratis, Bengalis and Punjabis. These terms, while helpful descriptive categories, do not give a true indication of how people associate or how groups form and assert themselves in
the wider society. To understand more about the dynamics of the migrant communities it is necessary to give serious consideration to group size, geographical dispersion, division, and cohesion (especially in relation to place of origin, history of settlement, caste, and kinship).

(e) Nature of host response

The other major set of influences is that which comprises the host response. Admittedly, this is a rather nebulous category, including general social attitudes rather than cultural traditions. Racism, attitudes concerning assimilation and integration, and ecumenism are examples of such responses, which are many and various in type and scope.

Together, these factors contribute to the development of religions, and to the religiousness of those who adhere to them in migration and settlement situations. The complexity of these factors, and the way in which they interrelate, is evidence of the variety of types of consequent religious response. As we saw earlier, in the quotation from Francis (see p.2), the different religious and cultural backgrounds of migrants can, on their own, produce startlingly different religious forms. We can see this if we compare the institutionalization of Hinduism and Sikhism in Britain. Both religious groups face the problem of caste divisiveness but nevertheless, because in Sikhism religion and ethnicity are what Francis calls 'coextensive', the Sikhs have been more effective in forming a local and national religious network. There is a close fit between being Sikh and being Punjabi, and this has had important consequences for religious development outside India. In Hinduism, where adherents come from a variety of geographical and cultural backgrounds, institutionalization has been more complex and less effective. Mixed ethnicity has produced unstable institutional structures (temple management bodies, religious leadership etc).

The religions of ethnic minorities take a variety of forms, therefore, according to factors relating to the religious, social and cultural traditions of the group, and the many characteristics of the new location. These forms are not stable, however. They change over time. The processes of institutionalization and of the
reinterpretation of traditional beliefs and practices are without end. This dynamism is itself important. Whether those who comprise a religion, according to place and time, choose to standardize their beliefs and practices, to reject their 'little' traditions at the expense of their 'great' traditions, to retraditionalize, to 'ethnicize', to spiritualize, to denominationalize, they are involved in the making of their religious tradition in its contemporary forms. Young people are a perfect example of this. What young British Asians and West Indians choose to do in the name of religion will contribute to the future face of British Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Black Christianity etc. Their experience of English culture and religion, of the religion of their parents, of new religious movements and sects both inside and outside their home traditions, of feminism, political involvement, education, language learning, and so on, will all contribute to the development of their personal identity and the subsequent development of the identity of the groups to which they belong.

Like the other perspectives on ethnicity, religion and identity, the 'religious studies' approach has considerable empirical and theoretical potential. This is only just beginning to be realised, although, as I hope this short paper shows, in Britain as elsewhere this potential is in great need of unleashing. In the sense that the religions of ethnic minorities are dynamic we know they will always be there in some form or other to quench our research interest. However, in order to understand the nature of this dynamism, it is important that its stages -- from migration onwards -- are closely observed and examined. The results of ignoring such phenomena might well be that vital evolutionary developments go unnoticed and that the meaning and significance of the religious changes which occur become impossible to interpret and understand.
NOTES

1. See Knott (1984) for an account of the historical development of the Community Religions Project. Since its inception its affiliated members have pursued a variety of research tasks, many of which are written up in research papers, monographs, or theses. A list of such works can be found in the research paper cited above. Brief details of the aims and objectives of the current scheme of research can be found in the brochure 'Ethnic Minority Religions in Britain', produced by the Community Religions Project.

2. This scheme of research is funded by the University of Leeds for a three year period from October 1983 to September 1986. I am employed as the full-time research fellow on the project. In addition, there is part-time secretarial help and general departmental support. This year we have also been awarded grants from The Hibbert Trust and the British Academy to fund a part-time temporary research assistant to work specifically on the Black Churches and on Afro-Caribbean religiosity. From October 1986 the work of the project will be funded largely by the Leverhulme Trust for a period of four years. During that time it is hoped to continue research on South Asian religions in Britain and to develop the Project's teaching programme.

3. These postgraduate theses have recently been produced as research monographs. They are obtainable from the Community Religions Project in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies: see list of publications at the end of this paper for details.
# LIST OF WORKS CONSULTED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publisher/Press</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abramson, Harold</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>'Migrants and cultural diversity: on ethnicity and religion in society', Social Compass 26:1, 5-29.</td>
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<td>Bowen, David</td>
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<td>'The Sathya Sai Baba community in Bradford: Its origin and development, religious beliefs and practices'.</td>
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4. A report on Afro-Caribbean Christianity in Britain.

5. The role of the Polish Catholic church in the Polish community of the U.K: a study in ethnic identity and religion.

   Katherine Kotsoni, 1990.

7. The role of religious studies in understanding the ethnic experience.

8. The religious beliefs and practices of Hindus in Derby.

9. The religious beliefs and practices of the Vietnamese community in Britain.


11. The changing character of the religions of the ethnic minorities of Asian origin in Britain: final report of a Leverhulme Project.

12. The function, education and influence of the 'Ulama in Bradford's Muslim communities.
    Philip Lewis, 1996 (forthcoming)

Cost: 1-5 £2.50 each; 6-12 £3 each.
Community Religions Project Monographs

♦ Hinduism in Leeds:
   A study of religious practice in the Indian Hindu community and in Hindu related groups.


♦ The Bengali Muslims in Bradford:
   A study of their observance of Islam with reference to the function of the mosque and the work of the Imam.


♦ The Sathya Sai Baba Community in Bradford:
   Its origins and development, religious beliefs and practices.


♦ The Evolution of a Sikh Community in Britain:
   Religious and social change among the Sikhs of Leeds and Bradford.


♦ Sectarian influences within Islam in Britain with reference to the concepts of 'ummah' and 'community'


Cheques should be made payable to 'The University of Leeds' and sent to the Project Secretary, Jill Killington, Department of Theology and Religious Studies, The University, Leeds LS2 9JT.