

Editorial: Report of the Denton Conference 2006

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The Denton conferences cultivate a welcoming scholarly environment where scholars can test out their ideas in a safe and collegial setting. One of the exceptional traits of the Denton conference is its ability to nurture the development of new research into the study of Implicit Religion. As a result, it is not uncommon for presenters to offer divergent approaches to this area of study.

But such an array of treatments of Implicit Religion also raises other challenges because, while advancing the field's relevancy in different areas of the academy, a common understanding of what constitutes Implicit Religion is not always clearly articulated by all speakers. And it is not uncommon for presenters to introduce papers that can leave audience members wondering the extent to which their papers apply to the study of Implicit Religion.

Still, the overall quality of many of the presenters' papers delivered at this year's conference can only enhance the study of Implicit Religion. A number of presenters delivered a multilayered analysis of their chosen subject matter, providing a rich trove of intricate angles from which to understand and interpret a particular manifestation of Implicit Religion. The presenters, whose works conveyed a level of in-depth research, produced written papers of scholarly sophistication. Such was the written quality of some of these papers that many of these contributions could be submitted to an anthology dedicated to the study of Implicit Religion without much editorial intervention.

Other outstanding papers were delivered by presenters whose well paced and thoughtful manner allowed readers to ponder the intricacies of their ideas and grasp the innovative dimensions of their perceptions.

Such papers encouraged stimulating discussions on the subject matter at hand, and their ideas were aided by their readiness to offer their written paper to conference attenders so that they could follow the development of their assertions.

Some of the most lively discussions emanated from those sessions that provided insightful comments or introduced ideas that provoked critical debate and fostered meaningful discussion. A spirit of congeniality underscored many of the attenders' responses to presenters' papers. The observations of these respondents signaled their genuine interest in seeing the scholar develop their ideas to its fullest potential. Other times, respondents peppered their comments with personal narratives that lightened the mood of the conversation. It was not unusual for other respondents to share similar or differing stories related to the subject matter under discussion. These insights, put forward by floor audience members, were particularly heartwarming because they affirmed the practical and relevant nature of the study of Implicit Religion—it is not an abstract hypothesis, or irrelevant theoretical construct of the Sociology of Religion, but is steeped in, and inspired by, the every day lifestyle religious choices of many. It also shows a dimension of the Denton Conference that is rarely replicated in many academic conferences. Edward Bailey has been the principal architect of the Denton Conference, and is the founding articulator of Implicit Religion. Dr Bailey should be commended for his diligent work in organizing these conferences because he has struck the right balance by fostering a collegial environment where meaningful scholarly rigor, critical engagement, and informal reflections on any given subject matter, is common place. The picturesque setting of Denton Hall provides a slice of quintessential Britain that only adds to the relaxed atmosphere underlining this conference gathering.

While it is encouraging that a number of papers were delivered during this conference, and while the volume of subjects offered demonstrates a growing and vibrant interest in the study of Implicit Religion, the tight schedule of the conference may well have compromised, or at least cut short some of the more provocative conversations that began to evolve during some of the sessions. This is a good dilemma for any conference organizer to have, since it shows that the interest in this field encourages thoughtful, critical debate. It is my hope that more time will be set aside for discussion and it is my suggestion that one session should be devoted to an unstructured conversation that would allow

attenders to offer further observations on the papers given by presenters. This kind of exchange can provide presenters with fresh insights on how they can improve their work.

Another noteworthy element of the conference centres on the organization of some of the panels. Some of the strongest papers were framed within an umbrella theme or common area of interest. Such papers provided presenters and listeners alike with the opportunity to consider some of the interconnecting ideas that both complemented, and at times complicated, assertions made by some scholars in the field of the Sociology of Religion. This formulation of some of the panels highlighted and in some ways addressed the challenges facing organizers of previous Denton conferences. How do we embrace the various tangents of Implicit Religion in a coherent manner? I believe by intentionally incorporating specific themes within the body of the Denton conference programme a more cohesive discussion on the study of Implicit Religion will emerge. For the 2007 Denton conference, a number of central themes will pinpoint some of the key trajectories of Implicit Religion. After a long day of conferencing a number of enthusiastic attenders kindly offered their ideas on possible themes that future presenters can be mindful of when they tailor their writings to the panels that will frame next year's conference programme. This format can only enhance the scholarly coherence of the Denton conferences.

The year 2007 marks the thirtieth anniversary of the Denton conference that will be held Friday 11 May to Sunday 13 May at Denton Hall, Ilkley. With great delight we can announce that Dr Bailey will present the keynote speech on the first night of the conference. This landmark anniversary is a remarkable feat since Edward has played a pivotal role in shaping the progression of the Denton conference. His dedication to the study of Implicit Religion, his commitment to furthering dialogue on how expressions of contemporary spirituality and Implicit Religion are manifested in society, is commendable. The 2007 Denton conference promises to be a not-to-be-missed event.