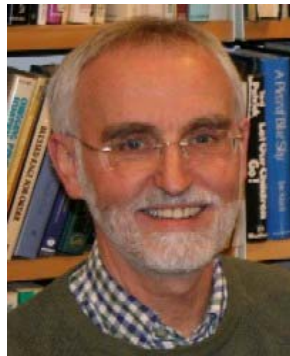




THE RELIGION AND DIVERSITY PROJECT/RELIGION ET DIVERSITÉ



James A. Beckford

Strand Leader (Strand 2) and Co-investigator

J.A.Beckford@warwick.ac.uk

Professor Emeritus

Department of Sociology

The University of Warwick

Research Statement

All my current research activities are concerned with religion and boundaries. The central questions are about the social, cultural, political and legal processes of setting, enforcing, questioning, challenging and changing boundaries.

Religion in prisons. The research questions that interest me are about the administrative principles and everyday practices that establish boundaries between the acceptable and unacceptable forms of the religions practised by prisoners. These principles and practices may involve various forms of official recognition and prohibition; but they may also involve informal concessions and prejudice. Cross-national comparisons can help to explain the shifting location of boundaries and the conditions in which they are enforced or resisted. My personal research in the UK and France is connected to networks of scholars in Germany, Switzerland and the Nordic countries.

Religion and the state. The current focus of my long-standing interest in the institutional frameworks of law and administrative practice governing the expression of religion is on the emergence of 'partnerships' in the UK between the state and 'faith communities.' This represents a reconfiguration of boundaries and a re-framing of religion as a public utility with special reference to social welfare. The central research questions are about the risks of thereby reifying religion as an object of public policy and of using religion for the purpose of achieving policy objectives. Some of this work was conducted with the 'Mercia group' of scholars who produced in 2006 a 'Review of the evidence base on faith communities' for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Other questions reflect my scepticism about fashionable claims that religion is 'resurgent' in the public sphere of many so-called post-secular societies.

New religious movements. My long-running interest in the processes whereby religious movements separate themselves – and/or are forcibly segregated – from the rest of society is reflected in my participation in the work of Inform (Information Network Focus on Religious Movements), a London-based charitable organisation of which I am a co-vice-chairperson. A central concern is to monitor the boundary between popular stereotyping of controversial religious movements and the results of careful scholarly investigation.