CONTENTS

Editorial		3
A View from the Chair	Andy Burns	4
The Politics of Religious Experience: Part II	Mike Rush	5
Reflections on the Timeless Present	John-Francis Phipps	9
The Cheshire Cat's Smile	Geoff Olson	15
Reports:		
Spirituality for a World in Crisis	Marianne Rankin	18
The Llantarnam Gathering 2013	Compiled by Patricia Murphy	21
Alister Hardy Trust: The Financial Situation	David Greenwood	26
Reports from the Local Groups		28
WebNews	Mike Rush	34
Letter to the Editor		35
Remembering Friends:		36
Edward Armitage Robinson	Peggy Morgan John Franklin Anne Watkins Wendy Dossett	
Elaine Morgan	Patricia Murphy	
Book Reviews		44
Books Received for Review		52
List of AHSSSE Events September 2013 to September 2014		54

The views expressed in *De Numine* are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent those of the Alister Hardy Society for the Study of Spiritual Experience or the Religious Experience Research Centre.
The Editor

RERC has an overprinting of ***The Divine Flame: an Essay towards a Natural History of Religion*** **by Sir Alister Hardy** – one of his seminal works, first published in 1966. Copies are available to AHS members at the special price of £2.00 & p&p.

Please contact Jean Matthews: j.matthews@tsd.ac.uk or at the Religious Experience Research Centre, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Lampeter. SA48 7ED. Tel. 01570 424821

Information for contributors and contact details are shown on the inside back cover.

Editorial

I greet the 'View from the Chair' each Spring and Autumn with eager anticipation. There is pleasure in sharing thoughts as seasons go by. I found this particularly with those of Jonathan Robinson, our resident priest/philosopher who retired from this post last year, but I also look forward to discovering what the new Chair has to offer – *autre temps, autre mœurs* – and there has been a distinctive change of pace with Andy Burns' first offering in this issue. The view from the chair can reflect the very different personalities that have filled this position in a way that reports to the committee perhaps cannot …

We are introducing a new initiative, a partnership between *De Numine* and the AHSSSE website. We are printing abstracts in *De Numine* of articles which are too long to go in one or two issues, and making these available as PDFs on the website (see page 34 for links). It is not only a question of length, but articles with diagrams, and illustrations requiring colour for instance, work better on the website.

Which brings me to Part II of 'The Politics of religious Experience' (page 5) by Vice Chair and Webmaster Mike Rush. The splendid illustration of the sacred tree on page 7 is a reason for putting this article too on the website, as black and white does not do justice to the painting, and readers might welcome the opportunity to download a PDF and have it all in one piece, so to speak. John-Francis Phipps' 'Timeless Present', also in two parts, is available complete in printed form (see page 14 for details).

I would like to draw readers' attention to the publication of Professor Paul Badham's book *Making Sense of Death and Immortality* which is now available for review; also Dr Robert Govaerts' book *Cosmic Prayer and Guided Transformation: Key Elements of the Emergent Christian Cosmology*. Information on these books can be found on the 'Publications' page of the AHSSSE website.

I am pleased to note that as well as the Llantarnam Gathering, which will be in its fifth year next July, there has been another residential weekend, hosted by the Oxford and Cotswold Group last Easter (see page 32). Both these events are local group initiatives, although the Llantarnam Gathering has now 'gone national'. The local groups responsible are to be applauded for their initiative and commitment; it's been a fairly long time since the last workshop and conference was organised nationally. I do hope there are more residential events to come.

On to a practical matter: please can contributors note our copy deadlines (inside back cover). We do try to be flexible, especially if we know when to expect a late submission and how long it is, but we would appreciate co-operation on this, as we have to book printing and proof-reading well ahead of time, and have no flexibility on these dates ourselves once they are agreed.

Patricia Murphy

A View from the Chair

I hope that you have all had a pleasant summer and caught some of the sunshine, which may now be leaving us as winter approaches once again. The seasons seem less defined to me now compared to when I was younger and we often see extremes of weather occurring out of season. This reminds us of the complexities of nature and how we really do not have any control over it. It is perhaps not surprising that many of those having spiritual and religious experiences find 'triggers' for these in the natural world.

In this issue you will find reports of the local group activities, the annual gathering and a one-day conference organised in partnership with other like-minded organisations. All of this shows that our members are very active and are engaging with spiritual issues and in doing so keeping the legacy of Sir Alister Hardy very much alive and relevant.

I was sad to hear of the death of Edward Robinson, a former Director of the RERC, whose own pieces of artwork hang in the University building at Lampeter. Peggy Morgan, who knew Edward well, has written a tribute to his life and work. [*We also have tributes from John Franklin, Anne Watkins, and Dr Wendy Dossett. Ed.*]

I am aware that rumours have been circulating for some time about the future of the RERC, library and archive with speculation that a move to Glyndŵr University (in Wrexham) is imminent. I can report that the future of the AHRERC is currently being considered by the Trustees and that if a presence is eventually established at Glyndŵr University it does not necessarily follow that AHRERC activities within the enhanced University of Wales Trinity Saint David and Swansea Met will cease. The AHSSSE interests will be an integral part of any discussions and I hope to be able to report in more detail in a future edition of *De Numine* if, and when, any decisions have been made.

I would like to thank Paddy and Jean for their continuing hard work on *De Numine* which always offers a careful selection of balanced, informed articles, together with updates of our local group activities, poems, and book reviews.

With best wishes,

Andy Burns
Chair, AHSSSE

The Politics of Religious Experience
Part II

Unity & Diversity

Over the last few years there seems to be a significant number of people who feel a) that there is a 'common core' to religious experience, b) that this is a constructive contribution towards interfaith understanding, c) that this supports a form of Perennial Philosophy or wisdom tradition, and d) that this is the result of a progressive spiritual evolution. At this point I must make my second confession. Personally, I am a sceptic (i.e. someone who requires evidence and a good argument) and I remain to be convinced about some of these aspects. I am agnostic about many things as this seems to be the only intellectually honest position I can adopt. I also believe in the proven ability of science to explain many phenomena. So, what has the 'common core' hypothesis or the Perennial Philosophy got to do with the politics of religious experience? Well, I would suggest that looking for similarities between experiences and traditions can be influenced by a desire for ecumenicalism or political-correctness. A quote from Aldous Huxley (1993) makes this connection explicit:

> The Perennial Philosophy and its ethical corollaries constitute a Highest Common Factor, present in all the major religions of the world. To affirm this truth has never been more imperatively necessary than at the present time.

Marianne Rankin, former Chair of the AHS, concludes her *Introduction to Religious and Spiritual Experience* (2008) with the words 'However, as we are faced with an ever-growing need for mutual understanding and global co-operation, a spiritual approach to life may be our best hope for the future of the planet'. In his book *Exploration into Spirit: A Power Greater Than* … John Franklin (2006), Honorary Secretary of the AHSSSE echoes this sentiment regarding unification of world religions and the need for ecumenical concern:

> Today, it is of great importance to find a common basis for human co-operation. Much is quietly being achieved, through the Parliament of the World's Religions, the United Nations, UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation), through Ecumenical and Interfaith movements, and through the attempts to achieve a 'global ethic'. But still the religions divide through their interpretations of scripture and tradition: seeming too bound by the weight of cultural history to look further into the idea of a possible ultimate unity behind the traditions, a vision perceived by the mystics and often revealed in contemporary spiritual or religious experience. This is perhaps where the work of the Religious Experience Research Centre might contribute – by continuing to point to the growing evidence of personal testimony; by showing and sharing with other disciplines the ways in which this relates to revelation and to the core principles of the major world religions; and by 'widening the horizons' of perception.

There is nothing necessarily wrong with this 'search for the common core', but it should not blind us to the differences between experiences and traditions. On one side we have people such as Frithjof Schuon (1984) or Keith Ward (2005) arguing for the 'common core' and essential unity of religions, whilst on the other side we have people like Steven Katz (1978) and Gershom Scholem (1946) arguing for the uniqueness of experience and tradition. This could be seen politically as an interdependence/unitive stance versus an individual/diversity stance respectively. This suggests that our politics can affect our research and also that our research can affect our politics. Whilst such unitive aims may be laudable there is an inherent danger in any resulting concordance. This is the spectre of elitism or the honouring of one religion over another. For example, when Pico della Mirandola adopted and adapted Jewish Kabbalah to his Christian philosophy, he did so to convert Jews to Christianity rather than out of respect and empathy for Jewish mysticism (Wang, 2001). Similarly, some scientists who have studied religious experience have encouraged the development of an 'experimental faith' (Hardy, 1979) or a 'mega-theology' (d'Aquili & Newberg, 1999), which could be

understood as forms of a universally acceptable religion. But does this run the risk that religion will lose its inner meaning, its cultural relevance and personal impact; what has elsewhere (Daniels, 2005) been referred to as myth-mongering? Does the unitive stance risk the extinction of traditions by blending them into one homogenous whole?

I would like to emphasise that, whilst interfaith dialogue is obviously important, it is also important to preserve traditions and value their differences. Academic integrity should be sacrificed neither to the ideal of unity or an elitism of individuality.

Empiricism & Experientialism

There is a third aspect, not unrelated to the above, of the politics of religious experience. This is the apparent tension between objective, empirical research versus experiential, hands-on spirituality. In his history of the AHS, John Franklin (2006, p.22, p.37, pp.45-46, & p.49) refers to issues around this area such as pastoral care, counselling responsibilities, and the academic side of the Society. Interestingly, a course I studied on Consciousness and Transpersonal Psychology offered core modules in both empirical research methodology and integrated experiential learning. The danger is, of course, again one of perceived academic respectability. There are a multitude of organisations offering opportunities for experiential practices but the majority of these are not academic. My view then is that, as far as research is concerned, experiential approaches are useful and necessary provided they are performed for a specific purpose and use a stated methodology. However, for researchers, hands-on spirituality should never be simply an opportunity to experience for experience's sake.

Science and Scientism

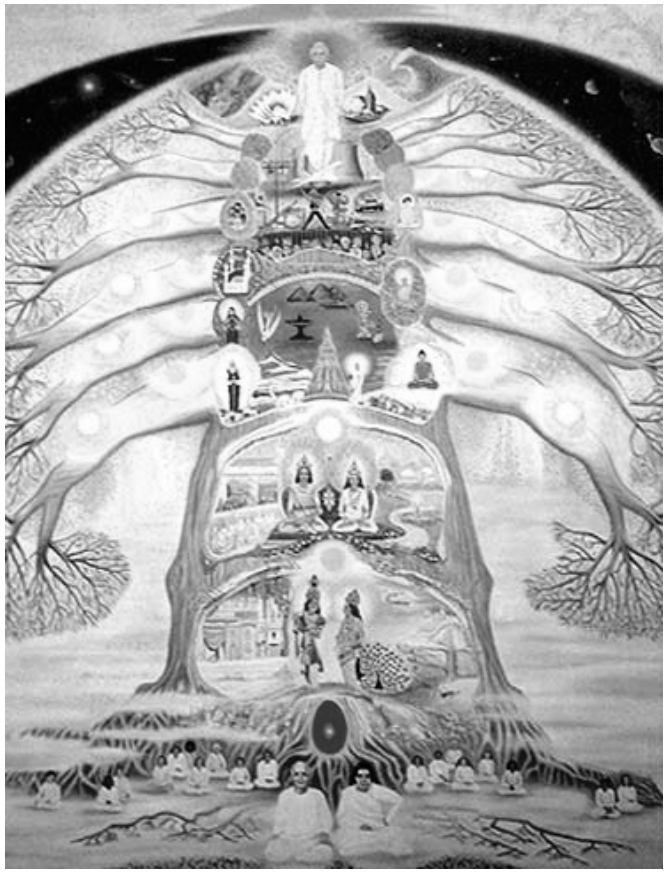
In some holistic circles it seems (or perhaps I'm just being paranoid?) that there is a certain anti-scientific bias. Science is perceived to be trying to 'explain away' the spiritual aspect of our lives and the world. In criticising Teilhard de Chardin's *The Phenomenon of Man* (1959), Sir Peter Medawar coined the phrase 'nothing-buttery'. This isn't a sort of low fat spread but the claim that science is trying to say that spiritual experience is 'nothing but' neurotransmitters and brain waves, etc. A distinction is often made comparing evil 'reductionist' science with goody-two-shoes 'holistic' worldviews, and a move is afoot to create a new holistic science (whatever this may mean). Paradoxically it also seems quite clear that some people adopt and redefine scientific terminology to support their own metaphysical doctrines. This is most apparent in appeals to quantum physics to support various holistic theories. Is this an attempt to capitalise on the success of science in understanding and controlling natural phenomena?

It may help to understand science in the following four senses. The first is that of the scientific method. This is a process of observation, hypothesis formation, prediction, testing, further observation, and hypothesis amendment. By its very nature this process is reductionist; an experiment isolates all variables but the one of interest, and thereby focuses on the isolated parts rather than the whole system. I find it difficult to understand how this could ever be made more holistic. The second sense is science as a cumulative collection of knowledge. This, I would argue, is the holistic side of science; biochemicals are related to organs, organs to physiological systems, systems to the body, the body to the mind, the body and mind to the environment, and so on. Science in the third sense manifests in the form of technology, from toasters to spacecraft. And science in the fourth sense of the word I understand as 'Scientism'; a Dawkinsian worldview where science is gospel. All of this can help to distinguish between science as a body of knowledge and individual scientists. Scientists may believe or disbelieve, have spiritual experiences or not – they are not organising a reductionist conspiracy to 'explain away' religion. It also allows that someone can be a scientist and a

materialist, a scientist who is spiritual, a scientist who is religious, or a scientist who subscribes to Scientism.

Whilst not wanting to deny that there are militant atheists who preach their own anti-religious gospel of Scientism, it is important not to stereotype science, or scientists, as a whole in this unconstructive way. We need to transcend the myth of 'reductionist science' versus 'holistic spirituality' and understand how science and spirituality can mutually inform and illuminate each other.

Spiritual One-Up-Manship



The final form of the politics of religious experience I want to mention is what I think of as 'spiritual one-up-manship'. It can be seen in the way that what was originally a small Jewish sect became a major world religion with its own '*New* testament'. Also, in the way that Mohammed was the *last* of the prophets, or in the way that Joseph Smith restored the *true* gospel or the way Swedenborg was given the *correct* interpretation of the Bible. In the meeting hall at the Brahma Kumaris meditation and retreat centre at Nuneham House, Oxfordshire, hangs an interesting painting. It shows a tree with its roots in the earth and its branches in the heavens. Its title is 'The Tree of Humanity' and each lateral branch represents a major religious tradition. At its roots sits Brahma Baba, founder of the Brahma Kumaris and his followers. This is probably just an innocent attempt to convey the unity of different world faiths, but the positions of the founders and leaders of the Brahma Kumaris on the tree should be noted.

Self-reflection is therefore important in the politics of religious experience. Everyone must stand somewhere to make their observations, whether this be on the shoulders of our spiritual leaders or the ivory towers of our academics. Therefore, we need to be aware of the tendency for spiritual one-up-manship, or as Jorge Ferrer (2002) calls it, 'spiritual narcissism', influencing our models and understanding.

Conclusion

So then, what is my own perspective on religious (or spiritual, or paranormal, or anomalous, etc.) experience? The only thing I can do is to take an intellectually honest position and declare myself to be a sceptical, (but open-minded!) agnostic about these kinds of phenomena. My preferred framework of understanding is a neurocognitive approach but with the oft-quoted caveat that 'correlation does not prove causation'. I agree that the religious, or spiritual, worldview and the potential for such spiritual experiences, is a natural part of our biological makeup, regardless of the reality or not of any transcendent realm.

This, by the way, also leaves open the possibility that even an agnostic such as I can have a spiritual experience. However, over the years I have become less interested in questions about *proof* and more interested in questions about *meaning*. I don't know how best to define religion or spirituality, so I let people define it for themselves. I don't know if there is such a thing as a 'core experience' or a Perennial Philosophy, so I appreciate commonalties whilst valuing the differences. I think that science is the best tool we have yet developed for answering questions about the world, but it cannot answer them all. Quantitative research can go a long way towards answering these questions, but qualitative methods can also contribute much to our understanding. I am comfortable to take the role of co-explorer in the spiritual or metaphysical worldviews of others, whilst I endeavour to understand and respect their own perspectives. Although I recognise the evidential value of spiritual experience for a world beyond, I feel that these experiences have a more immediate, and perhaps more cogent, value for this one. And finally, I don't know if there is life-after-death, so I am happy to wait and see (the longer I have to wait, the happier I will be). As Albus Dumbledore once said, 'To the well organised mind, death is but the next great adventure' (Rowling, 1997).

Mike Rush
Vice-Chair, AHSSSE
www.esoteric-experience.org.uk

Bibliography (Parts I and II)

d'Aquili, E & Newberg, A. (1999). *The Mystical Mind: Probing the Biology of Religious Experience*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, p.177.

Boyer, P. (1994). *The Naturalness of Religious Ideas: A Cognitive Theory of Religion*, University of California Press, Berkeley.

Daniels, M. (2005). *Shadow, Self, Spirit: Essays in Transpersonal Psychology*, Imprint Academic, Exeter.

Dawkins, R. (2006). *The God Delusion*, Bantam Press, London.

Ferrer, J. (2002). *Revisioning Transpersonal Theory: A Participatory Vision of Human Spirituality*, SUNY, Albany, pp.35-36.

Franklin, J. (2006). *Exploration into Spirit: A Power Greater Than …* AHS, Lampeter, p.22 & p.89.

Hardy, A. (1979) 1997. *The Spiritual Nature of Man: A Study of Contemporary Religious Experience*, RERC, Oxford, p.140.

Huxley, A. (1993). The Perennial Philosophy in *Paths Beyond Ego: The Transpersonal Vision*, Walsh, R & Vaughn, F. (Eds.) Tarcher Putnam, New York, p.213.

Katz, S. (1978). Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism in Katz, S. (Ed.) *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*.

Rankin, M. (2008). *An Introduction to Religious & Spiritual Experience*, Continuum, London.

Rowling, J.K. (1997). *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, Bloomsbury, London, p.297.

Rush, M.J. (2009*). On The Side Of the Angels: Neuroscience & Religious Experience*, RERC, 2nd Series Occasional Paper #49.

Rush, M.J. (2011). *The Esoteric Experience: Positive or Negative?*, Paranthropology, Vol. 2, No. 3,

Scholem, G. (1946) 1995. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, Schocken Books, New York.

Schuon, F. (1984) 2005. *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, Quest Books, Wheaton.

Smart, N. (1996). *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs*, University of California Press, Berkeley.

Teilhard de Chardin, P. (1959) 1963. *The Phenomenon of Man*, Collins, Glasgow.

Wang. R. (2001). *The Rape of Jewish Mysticism by Christian Theologians*, Marcus Aurelius Press, Columbia.

Ward, K. (2005) 2006. *Is There a Common Core of Religious Experience?*, RERC, Lampeter.

Reflections on the Timeless Present

We are printing this monograph by John-Francis Phipps in two parts. Ed

Part I

January, 2012

The meadow was looking especially beautiful this morning when I walked up the hill. I paused at the fence and just stared at the silvery grey, frosty white, gentle landscape. A woman had also paused to admire the view. 'Beautiful', she said. 'Yes', I said. I should have left it at that, since silence is best on these contemplative occasions. But for some reason I found myself churning out arty clichés, comparing the view to a Turner painting, or a Brueghel. The woman said nothing, but gave me a look as if to say: 'Why bring in arty stuff when the view is its own beauty?'

Angelic neutrinos

I went on up the hill and over the bridge. Then I felt as if I was being continuously blessed by billions of angelic little neutrinos (subatomic particles) passing through me. Not just through me, but through everybody. Not just through everybody, but through every different species, from cats to caterpillars. Not just through all species on the planet, but through mountains, rivers, rocks, oceans – through everything, all the time, continuously.

We're all part of the cosmic whole, whether we perceive this or not. This particular moment on that clear frosty morning was both just an ordinary moment and, at a different level, a non-ordinary moment. At the outward, observable level, I was just admiring the view. But at a deeper, inward level, this particular moment also expressed something beyond the ordinary everyday aspect of time.

Dark matter

Sometimes we become aware of non-ordinary aspects of reality in their absence. Being aware of something in its absence seems to apply to dark matter.

The cosmologist, Paul Davies, believes that a consensus is now emerging among scientists that dark matter mostly consists of massive particles, originating in the big bang. 'The reason for the appellation "dark"', writes Davies, 'is because, unlike atomic particles, they have no electric charge, so cannot emit or scatter light. Nor do they feel the strong nuclear force that traps protons and neutrons in atomic nuclei. As a result, the dark particles interact so feebly with ordinary matter that they mostly pass right through it'.[1] Davies observes that when scientists discover the nature of dark matter, our knowledge of the cosmos will be utterly changed.

February, 2012

An even colder, frostier morning, with minus 11° recorded in some places. I paused again at the same spot and contemplated the same view over the meadow, which was if anything even more beautiful, with some children sliding around on the ice. But this time I was feeling low and there was no repeat of the magical dance of the neutrinos.

A moment of alienation

I felt cut off from my own surroundings, as if I was trespassing and had no right to be where I was. So it was somehow reassuring to see that the church was still at the top of the hill, standing there in its English solidity, while my moods changed. The meadow is where it is and is what it is, regardless of how I might feel at any given moment. The natural world is the

world and the universe is the universe and presumably those little neutrinos continue their cosmic dance as usual, every single moment, day and night, regardless of how I'm feeling at the time and whether I imagine the neutrinos to be angelic, demonic or just neutral.

Absence is no proof of non-existence, whether on a personal or cosmic scale. Our epiphanies and special timeless moments are often dismissed as 'merely anecdotal', which is a reductionist way of saying they never really happen. But we know from our own first-hand experience (first person science) that they are just as true as any other aspect of reality. The philosopher, Mary Midgley, believes that we urgently need to find a new way of understanding human beings.

Outdated view of matter

Currently prevailing scientific models are still largely based on the 17th century view of matter as dead, inert stuff incapable of producing life. This narrow mechanistic outlook means that we lack an appropriate context within which to discuss important mind-body topics, such as consciousness, or the origins of life. Least of all, argues Midgley, can we 'go on pretending to believe that our own experience – the source of all our thought – is just an illusion, which it would have to be if that dead, alien stuff were indeed the only reality.'[2]

In my dictionary, 'moment' is defined as 'a period of time considered too short to measure'. And yet we also experience the opposite: timeless moments so immeasurably vast that they seem to contain all the time there is. Unless we've already got some kind of alternative perceptual context that can accommodate the timeless mythic aspects of life, then all we're left with is the dominant linear-successional model and the obsession with absolute beginnings and ends that goes with our western package of time.

It doesn't make much sense to try and measure precisely when a given moment 'began' and 'ended' if the very essence of that particular moment is perceived as being timeless.

Nostalgia for the present

The poet and novelist John Burnside describes how he often feels a form of 'nostalgia for the present', the feeling that he is being constantly distracted from the wider and deeper ramifications of any given moment. This means that such moments never have a chance to unfold or cohere, 'sliding quietly from anticipation to memory without ever being properly savoured'. Burnside goes on to say that this sense of loss feels like a form of theft.[3]

It does indeed feel as though something of deep value has been stolen from us. We may feel nostalgic for the kind of timeless present we imagine our ancestors experienced as a normal part of life, where they would have 'made time', via mythic rituals, to savour the moment and explore its ramifications.

On the one hand there's the ever-shrinking now of modern life, where we cram so much stuff into the present that we lose sight of the most interesting and possibly inspiring 'bits' of any given moment.

On the other hand, there's the actual, real, universal human experience of an infinitely expanded timeless moment, often including a sense of oneness and inner tranquillity, a form of now that seems eternal.

The artist and writer, John Berger, observes that the consumer is essentially somebody who is made to feel lost unless he or she is consuming. Berger believes that we need to find our bearings within a different time-set where we become more aware of the eternal, which is now: 'It is not something that awaits us, but something we encounter during those brief yet timeless moments'.[4]

One day many years ago, when I used to work as an editor in a publishing firm, I came across an article on immortality by the philosopher George Santayana. He argued that, although the tide of evolution carries everything before it, there is a sense in which events are timeless in their status. It will always remain true that these events took place in the way they did, which is their inalienable place in history.

Santayana held that the human mind, having both intellectual and contemplative capacities, is able 'To see things at once, in their mutual relations, or, as Spinoza put it, under the form of eternity. When a person's life is over, it remains true that he has lived and has been one sort of person and not another. Santayana went on to say that when we understand ourselves under the form of eternity, we know the quality that eternally belongs to us: 'When the movement of a particular life is over, the truth of that life remains'. [5]

Spinoza

This was when I first became aware of Spinoza's way of seeing things under the form or aspect of eternity (*sub specie aeternitatis*). This way of seeing things enables one to perceive events both in ordinary temporal terms and in terms of timelessness. Spinoza believed that we know from our own experience that there is a timeless or eternal aspect to existence, because, as he put it, 'The eyes of the mind by which it sees things and observes them are proofs' (*Ethics, xxiii*). This deeper aspect of our experience cannot be measured in terms of time.

In his main philosophical work, the *Ethics*, Spinoza argued that there can only be one substance and that this single substance must be identified with the universe as a whole. This unique, all inclusive totality he called 'God or nature' (*Deus sive natura*, 'or' being used in the sense of equivalence.) The *Ethics* stands as a supreme example of logical monism – a step by step way of proving the oneness of God and nature. Spinoza rejected any idea of a transcendent creator God remote from his creation. So in granting the words 'God' and 'nature' equivalence, he was bound to upset the guardians of the religious orthodoxies of his day, both Jewish and Christian.

Baruch or Benedict de Spinoza was descended from Portuguese Jews who had been exiled by the Inquisition. He was born in Amsterdam in 1632 into a community of 'Marranos' – people who had been forcibly 'converted' to Christianity, but most of whom had secretly maintained their Jewish practices. In 1656 Spinoza was duly excommunicated by the wardens of Amsterdam Synagogue, some of whom regarded him as the embodiment of 'pernicious atheism' and 'horrible heresies'. Christian theologians were usually equally hostile, since in their eyes Spinoza's 'godnature' philosophy represented an extreme form of pantheism. This would have been seen as potentially subversive and a threat to the hierarchical power structure of the traditional western Christian Church.

Spinoza was a scientist as well as a philosopher. He wrote a book on optics and earned his living as an optical craftsman, grinding and polishing lenses. He was offered a professorship at Heidelberg University, but declined the offer. He did not want to attract the attention of the authorities, knowing that his work was seen as highly controversial. Spinoza completed the *Ethics* in 1675 and died in 1677. He had made arrangements to have his *magnum opus* published posthumously.

Visionary

Spinoza was essentially a visionary. His vision of oneness stands as an open invitation for us to see things afresh, via both temporal and timeless lenses, thereby re-enchanting the world. In our timeless moments we sometimes see more clearly that oneness is not just an abstract

philosophical concept called 'monism', but a completely natural and normal part of human experience.

Spinoza lived his philosophy of the simple life of non-attachment. His vision of seeing the world under the form of eternity is in itself mythic, timeless and universal. It overflows philosophy and, like common land, 'belongs' to everybody and nobody.

In his biography of Spinoza, Michael Della Rocca observes that most philosophers expect explanations to run out. But not Spinoza, whose philosophy is characterised by what Della Rocca regards as 'Perhaps the boldest and most thoroughgoing commitment ever to appear in the history of philosophy to the intelligibility of everything. For Spinoza, no why-question is off limits.' [6]

'godnature'

We live at a time of increasingly critical threats to the environment and we could do with a new yet timeless way of seeing, where no why-questions are off limits. Spinoza's 'godnature' vision is about as eco-friendly an outlook as you can imagine, since people are far more likely to care for the environment if their mythical goddesses, gods and lesser deities are perceived as being an integral part of the natural world, not alienated and detached from it.

John Berger describes how from the age of about 14 onwards, two main themes coexisted within him. On the one hand, a form of materialism, which came to include the Marxist view of history. On the other hand, a sense of the sacred. 'This duality never felt contradictory to me', writes Berger. 'But most other people thought it was. It is beautifully resolved by Spinoza, who shows that it is not a duality, but in fact an essential unity'. [7]

Spinoza must have been endowed with great inner serenity to have been able to offer us such a beautiful way of seeing the world. This is all the more remarkable when you consider the turbulence around him at the time. Seventeenth-century Europe was anything but peaceful, with wars and civil wars raging. The English Civil War started in 1642 and Charles I was executed in 1649. The second Anglo-Dutch War began in 1665. There was a lot of fear and suspicion in the air, with plots, counter plots and warring factions.

The politics of fear

Spinoza understood how the politics of fear, which underlies all wars and rumours of wars, is rooted in alienation at a deep level. If people feel cut off from their own creative, positive potential, they are likely to feel alienated at other levels – politically, economically, psychologically, morally and spiritually.

In his *Political Tract* (1675), Spinoza pointed out that when fear rules, all you get between wars is an absence of war, not a presence of peace: 'A commonwealth whose subjects are restrained from revolting by fear must be said to be free from war rather than to enjoy peace. For peace is not the mere absence of war, but a virtue based on strength of mind'. (*Ex animi fortitudine* – from a soul of fortitude, inner moral strength.)

Throughout the cold war, policymakers who subscribed to the doctrine of deterrence argued that nuclear weapons 'kept the peace' via the 'balance of terror'. This was an illusion, since one side would always come up with the latest in military technology, triggering a response from the other side. And so the arms race went on escalating and many wars were fought by proxy on behalf of the superpowers. Ultra-repressive regimes practising torture were kept in power throughout the cold war and well beyond.

The cold war was a form of collective alienation on a massive scale. We just weren't ourselves. Fear ruled supreme.

Towards the end of the cold war, in the dying days of Brezhnev, those of us who went on citizen diplomacy trips to Russia were surprised to find a species remarkably similar to our own. This perception had been buried under primitive hate propaganda for so long that we had almost lost sight of our common humanity. [8]

The arrival in the Kremlin of a statesman of global vision, in the form of Mikhail Gorbachev, took western policymakers completely by surprise. For decades, the cold warriors had never thought in terms of going beyond the old simplistic dualism of good guys (the west) versus the evil empire in the east.

Primacy of universal values

In his 1988 address to the United Nations, Gorbachev spoke in terms of a new global situation now faced by everybody, regardless of country. He argued that in this new political reality, any kind of genuine progress would have to be shaped by universal human interests. He went on to stress that awareness of this fact 'Dictates that world politics too should be guided by the primacy of universal values.'

Next year (1989), the Berlin Wall was dismantled. Our inner eyes then had a glimpse of a far more inspiring and imaginative kind of peace than that provided by the politics of fear that had driven the cold war for forty years or more.

If western leaders and policymakers had responded more enthusiastically to the Gorbachev initiative on the need to be guided by the primacy of universal human values, by now peace would have been redefined in a far more connected way, indissolubly linked with justice.

A more globally aware western foreign policy, with justice at the top of the list of priorities, would soon have had positive effects throughout the world, especially in the Middle East. Instead of increasing extremism and Islamophobia, the new justice-cum-peace process would have made significant progress by now.

With a pre-existing cooperative atmosphere, without all the negative stereotyping and boringly repetitive blame games, the ground would have been prepared for many more grass-roots initiatives, such as citizen diplomacy and peace group exchange visits. With all this as a positive background, any high level meetings and/or summits would have had a far greater chance of success.

'Be realistic: demand the impossible!'

Many years ago, Eisenhower predicted that the time would come when people would want peace so much that governments had better get out of their way and let them have it. That is what happened in Eastern Europe in the late 1980's, when Gorbachev refused to send in the tanks to quell the insurrections. The impossible happened and the wall came down. Even the most optimistic dreamers could hardly believe that this is what had actually happened, in reality, on the ground.

Suddenly, almost overnight, the internal dynamic of the collective energy changed from deep fear of limitless destructive capacity, to greater awareness of our limitless creative potential. There was certainly something of the spirit of 1968 in the air, the main difference being that the slogan 'Be realistic: demand the impossible!' was now being turned into reality before our eyes.

In a paper on *The Repeal of Disillusion*, given at the Royal College of Art in 1979, Christopher Cornford summarised the spirit of '68 thus: 'The slogan *l'imagination au pouvoir* that appeared on the walls of the Sorbonne in May 1968, along with its corollary *soyez réalistes: demandez l'impossible*, mean that the world has been run up to now by hard-headed "conventional wisdom", by the shibboleths of power and money – and look where it's got us! More of the

same can only aggravate the disease, not cure it. Why not, for a change, try doing the humane and generous thing just because it is humane and generous?'[9]

When the wall came down, the main question that seemed to be moving from the back of our minds to somewhere nearer the front was: what is actually stopping us from demanding a more humane and generous way of conducting our affairs? The main blockage, of course, was and still is inflexibility – sticking obstinately to old ways of thinking simply because they're familiar, even though we know perfectly well they don't work. There are countless examples to choose from and some are even to be found in the arts world, which one would normally think of as leading the way in any kind of creative and imaginative expression of the human spirit. One keeps hoping that Dostoevski was right in having one of his characters say that beauty will save the world.

Beauty will save the world

Roy Strong, who was director of the Victoria and Albert Museum and the National Portrait Gallery, believes that there's currently a real fear in the art world of being controversial beyond narrowly defined limits. Strong went on to say that he always saw his role as director as 'Primarily to lift people to paradise and to give them information and delight – and then, at another moment, claw them so they were absolutely shocked and made to think about what was going on around them.'[10]

Christopher Cornford makes it clear that the disillusion he is referring to is part of the same old reductionist way of seeing things: 'It is the experience of the world as a machine without spirit, a gritty "nothing but".' Cornford concludes that this sense of 'nothing-butness' lies at the heart of disillusion. So the repeal of disillusion and the repeal of either/or dualism go together.

John-Francis Phipps

© J. F. Phipps. Published 2013 by the author
Copies are obtainable from: Publications, 12a Meadow Prospect, Wolvercote, Oxford OX2 8PP

Notes

1 P. Davies, *The Guardian*, 21 December 2012

2 M. Midgley, review article of Sheldrake's *The Science Delusion* (2012)

3 J. Burnside, review article, *The Guardian*, February 2012

4 J. Berger, *Hold Everything Dear* (2007)

5 G. Santayana, 'On Immortality', *The Hibbert Journal*, 1963

6 M. Della Rocca, *Spinoza* (2008), p.1

7 J. Berger, *Bento's Sketchbook* (2011), *The Guardian* 23 April 2011

8 J. Garrison, J-F. Phipps & P. Shivpuri, *The New Diplomats* (1989)

9 C. Cornford, 'The Repeal of Disillusion', RCA lecture (1979)

10 R. Strong, *The Observer*, 2013

The Cheshire Cat's Smile

It started, as dementia often does, with words. In her late seventies, my mother began to hit speed bumps in her bedtime reading and was unable to recognize words she once knew. Less than a year later, this former social dynamo was a shrunken wraith, sitting at my side with a plush toy duck in her lap. 'So, darling,' she said, patting the duck on the head and gazing into its fabric eyes. 'So, darling,' she repeated, unable to say much else. She turned to me and laughed and I, her middle-aged son, laughed too. And it *was* kind of funny; she had attached her earrings to the duck's head.

The prognosis was not good and there was nothing science could do for Mary Elizabeth Olson other than alleviate her anxiety through medication. The doctors diagnosed her condition as frontal-temporal lobe dementia, which progressed very quickly. It appeared a cascade of small strokes was responsible for her cognitive decline.

My parents had saved a modest amount of money and were living mortgage-free. However, my father had been in poor health for almost 10 years and my mother had been his caregiver. Their roles had now reversed. My dad was something of a control freak and this was the ultimate out-of-control situation.

Within a year, my mother's self-awareness had evaporated. She stayed home, where her confusion deepened and shaded into an extended reverie, punctuated by compulsive actions and episodes of testiness. I came to dread her phone calls, which would start with prolonged silence and invariably end in stammered words and confusion. She kept asking me for assurance that 'they' were not going to put her in a 'fill.' No, of course not, I'd reply. Later on, we figured out she meant a long-term care 'facility.'

My mother was the glue that kept our fractious family together, and as she came apart we struggled to find our own binding force. We wrestled with 'momspeak,' trying to decode the ingredients that went into her word salad. She would tell us in halting words about some blonde woman who would look directly at her but say nothing. We later figured she was talking about a weathercaster on a local news channel. Delusional thinking, which often accompanies dementia, had joined her creeping aphasia. Anxiety made it a threesome. For a time, these were my mother's daily companions after the absence of her bridge partners.

For a man to lose control – emotionally, economically or any which way – was seen as weakness or failure by my father's generation. My father was now doing the minimal chores my mother could no longer perform, and doing them poorly. He was experiencing chronic pain from osteoarthritis and he was in deep denial, refusing to accept that his wife was losing it. As one benchmark of domestic self-sufficiency fell after another, we broached the subject of home care. But my ex-Air Force father was tilting at windmills all the way, his judgment clouded by heavy medication. 'You're getting away with murder!' he roared, after my sister and I insisted on paying for extra help. He reluctantly agreed to this, but then changed his mind, instructing home care workers arriving at the apartment to leave. There was no need for extra help, he insisted, even though my mother was now incapable of preparing their meals and my father's culinary skills went no further than the can opener.

This is where I drew the line. I told my father this wasn't about him, it was about his wife and our mother. The home care workers settled in for their shifts and my mother adapted well to their support, but now she was terrified of visits to the doctor. Even a simple eye test agitated her greatly. We no longer saw the point of taking her for an eye exam, or anything else minor, since her first impulse was to bolt from scary medical equipment. The only thing that hadn't

changed was my mother's joy at recognizing us and her ever-present smile. As the rest of her began to fade away, the smile lingered on, like Lewis Carroll's Cheshire Cat.

I discovered another companion for my mother – music. In his book, *Musicophilia*,[1] Dr. Oliver Sacks notes the well-known health benefits of melody and harmony for both the healthy and the sick. 'It is a remarkable thing that even in the worst cases of dementia, there is still a self to be called upon, even if music, and only music, can do the calling,' writes Sacks. My mother always appreciated the CDs I made for her and I took to making more of them. 'Isn't that lovely,' she'd say, sitting on the couch with her duck, listening to the soprano voices weave through the Flower Drum Song. She would sometimes lose herself in music, taking halting steps around the living room, lightly clapping her hands together.

Mom descended further into silence. The hide-a-bed in the living room was pulled out in the daytime for her to rest. When I dropped by for a visit, I would sometimes lie next to her, while my father watched TV in the den. I'd hold her hand and try not to cry so I wouldn't upset her.

My father, shuffling around the apartment in his pajamas and narcotized by a television blaring CNN newscasts, continued to tilt at windmills. 'Dad Quixote' could be generous, but only on his terms, when it suited him. His wife's dementia did not suit him. Twenty-four-hour home care was not an option, he informed us, though we went ahead with plans anyway. One night, he slipped and fell in the bedroom and broke his hip. When the home care worker arrived at the front door in the morning, there was no response to their knocks. (The door was locked with a chain on the inside so my mother could not wander off.) Firefighters arrived and forced a window to get in. My mother stood in the kitchen clapping her hands together as the men tumbled through the jimmied window. Apparently, she thought it was a party. 'Your mother just ignored my calls for help,' my father told my sisters later in the hospital. To the very end, he was unable to fully accept his wife's condition, and not just because his default setting was denial. He loved my mother with a passion and couldn't live with the truth of her condition.

My father was himself a skeptical sort for most of his life. He lived in an intellectual Missouri (the 'show me' state) and didn't go in much for fringe ideas. Then, sometime soon after he had fallen sick in the late nineties, his beloved older brother Allen – dead for half a decade – reportedly walked in to the bedroom, big as life and real as day. Unmedicated at the time, my wide-awake father could see the sheets crumpled from where the high-res, 3D figure sat at the edge of the bed. His brother told him 'everything is going to be all right' and then vanished. After hearing this story from my sister, I had my dad confirm it for me. He didn't like to talk about the vision all that much, even though it obviously gave him comfort. It did not conform to his mental picture of the world in any way, shape or form.

The hip injury landed my father in the hospital, his final port of call. I was with him in his final moments, when he was beset with overpowering stomach pains. I left the room while a nurse performed some procedure to deal with his gastric distress, and when I returned minutes later he was gone (most likely from a pulmonary embolism). A deeply taciturn yet honest man who loved his children, he was at peace at last.

At the time of my father's death, my wife Erin was with my mother at their condominium. My mother kept pointing to her midriff, saying 'it's the stomach, it's the stomach.' It seemed like the usual word salad to my wife; neither of them knew of my father's condition. She got up and wandered over to the front hallway where there were pictures of the family. She

struggled to say something, but then turned in the direction the bedroom. 'Oh, oh,' she said, seemingly startled, entering the bedroom where my father slept. 'Goodbye, goodbye,' she said, waving at the bed. 'It was totally abnormal behaviour for her,' my wife said later. 'It made the hair on the back of my neck stand up.' After her mysterious goodbye, my mother went over to the plate glass windows in the bedroom, and silently stared up into the sky.

Could my father's vision have been nothing more than that, and my mother's odd behaviour a coincidence? Misfiring neurons and random chance? I cannot prove there was anything more to these anecdotes than that, of course. All I have is my personal conviction that there was a thinning of the worlds between life and death, allowing both my parents a glimpse of … something.

One of the of the central themes in the medical case histories of Dr. Oliver Sacks is that cognitive or perceptual losses are not always absolute deficits; they can sometimes introduce strange new skills or capabilities, like a man with a severe brain injury who suddenly becomes a talented painter. In any case, I'm with the great American philosopher William James when he said that our normal waking consciousness 'is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different.' Alister Hardy, a great admirer of James, upped the ante with his carefully-worded insistence that there is scientific evidence for 'psychic' phenomena, and that these bear some connection to human spirituality.

In 1950, a distraught father who had lost his young son wrote to Albert Einstein, asking for some comforting words. Einstein's response: 'A human being is a part of the whole, called by us "Universe", a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separate from the rest – a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness.' We are part of something much greater than our ego-bound conceptions, Einstein insisted. And there are times when the veil drops, often during moments of transformation, trauma or illness – and even joy or ecstasy. At these times, there are hints that a human being may be something more than just a quivering bag of protoplasm with a best-before date.

In my last visits with my mother in an extended care home, I held her hand with its paper-thin skin. Each week, she grew more insubstantial. Her toy duck sat by her in the bed, untouched. An iPod on her bedside table played her favourite music, but there was no indication the melodies were reaching her. My sisters and I played the music anyway, unsure of what she could and could not perceive. When I brought flowers for her, I would hold them close to her face. 'Ohhh,' she once said with a swoon. Inhaling the aroma, she momentarily reconnected to the world with all its fragrant, tactile particulars.

It took only two years for this transformation, from her fumbled bedtime reading to her purgatorial state in extended care. She had been off all medication in her final weeks and seemed calm and at peace. Family members could detect no agitation. Her expressionless face had softened her wrinkles, making for a strangely youthful appearance. When I sat next to her, it was like looking into the eyes of an infant.

And if I waited long enough, the Cheshire Cat smile returned. I was not certain she recognized me in the final days; likely not. Everything in her life had been burned away, her memories of an active life gone like cinders in the breeze, along with any coherent sense of self. Yet her adoring countenance flickered away, like a glowing ember. After all the miseries, fear and confusion of the final two years, this seemed to be her remaining essence, unmediated and unmedicated.

One of the last times my mother spoke, just a few months before her death, was on a bright sunny day. She was hunched in her wheelchair and I went over to open the drapes. A shaft of light fell upon her and she responded in a quiet, awestruck voice, 'How beautiful.' I believe it was a moment of recognition. Like a survivor stepping through the rubble of war, the light within her had made its way across broken neural pathways to express kinship with the light outside her. In a transparent moment of lucidity, that final spark was mirrored in my mother's radiant face.

Geoff Olson

Adapted from an article originally in Common Ground *magazine.*

[1] Oliver Sacks, *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain.* Alfred A. Knopf, 2007; Vintage Books, 2008 (revised & expanded)

*Geoff Olson (*www.geoffolson.com*) is a Vancouver-based journalist currently working on a natural history of light, ranging, he says, 'from physics to philosophy to psychology and religion'. He became interested in the Alister Hardy archives after reading Mark Fox's book,* Spiritual Encounters with Unusual Light Phenomena: Lightforms*, and visited Lampeter to research them in person. In the course of conversation he told Jean Matthews, the archive supervisor, this story about his mother and his father, and she asked him to write it for De Numine; we are delighted to print it here. Whether it should be called an article, an experience or a personal story is, I think, unimportant; maybe it is all three. It certainly contains an account of spiritual experience. Ed*

Reports

From *Spirituality for a World in Crisis* to *One Spirit Alliance*

On June 8th 2013 about a hundred people came together at Kensington Unitarian Church for a gathering to seek a co-creative approach to a new era. *Spirituality for a World in Crisis, Working towards a Spiritual Alliance* drew together members of a dozen core groups, who had been involved in the planning and they, together with a number of other spiritual organizations were given a platform to explain how they would address the theme of the day.

The groups involved in organizing the event were AHSSSE; Anthroposophical Movement; British Teilhard Association; Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University; Churches' Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies; EnlightenNext; International Association for Religious Freedom, British Chapter; Scientific and Medical Network; Society for Psychical Research; The Study Society; Wrekin Trust; World Congress of Faiths. Janice Dolley, Development Director of the Wrekin Trust and Marianne Rankin, Director of Communications for the Alister Hardy Trust and SSSE organized and chaired the event.

The two keynote speakers were David Lorimer, President of the Wrekin Trust; Programme Director of the Scientific and Medical Network; Chief Executive of Character Scotland and Vice-President of the Swedenborg Society, and Dr Greg Barker, Commissioning Editor, VoiceCouncil Magazine and Visiting Research Fellow, The University of Winchester. Sister

Maureen of the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University opened and closed the day with meditation. In the afternoon, others such as Spiritual England; Phiroz Mehta Trust; White Eagle Lodge; CANA; Oracle; School of Economic Science, One Spirit Interfaith Foundation and Community of the Holy Fire were also able to speak about their work.

Rarely, if ever, is such a wide range of spiritual organizations brought together and everyone present was aware of a special energy and enjoyed a unique opportunity for connection. The sun shone enough for people to spill outside during the lunch break with plenty of time to meet new people and to catch up with old friends.

The speakers provided a focus for the day. In the morning, David Lorimer gave a very wide-ranging talk *Towards a Culture of Love and Wisdom,* stressing the importance for the future of humanity of harnessing spirituality and love to technological progress. He focused on the essential unity of humanity and the planet, quoting a large number of visionaries such as Huxley, Toynbee, Al Gore, Albert Schweitzer and the Prince of Wales on the need for a new approach. He said that the way forward is clear, expounded by many and now essential for the survival of our world – as expressed by William Ewart Gladstone: 'We look forward to the time when the power to love will replace the love of power. Then will our world know the blessings of peace.'

In the afternoon, Greg Barker recounted his conversations with representatives of the main participating groups prior to the gathering. He had asked them:

1. What conviction lies at the heart of your organisation?
2. What challenges are you facing as you look to your future?
3. How can you best meet those challenges?

He stressed the need for spiritual groups to rethink how they operate in order to survive. This is likely to involve engagement in social media. Groups will need to value intangible support by offering something to followers, giving them the chance to get involved before expecting membership. He challenged the organizations to meet young people in particular 'where they are at'.

This suggestion of a radical rethink for the future of the organizations involved in the gathering prompted much lively discussion later in the afternoon. We split up into small groups, each with a note-taker to consider:

1. How can we engage to meet the challenges of a world in crisis?
2. What are the next steps we can take?

Before the end of the meeting Cat Catalyst formed a Facebook group called *Spiritual Regeneration* for people to keep in touch in the future. At the time of writing this has 24 members and has already advertised events by various spiritual groups.

At the end of the afternoon, at the suggestion of Revd Feargus O'Connor, a collection was made for the Red Cross Syria Appeal as a practical spiritual response to a humanitarian crisis. People put their £££s where their hearts and minds were and £343.05 was raised. In a knock-on effect, a member of Feargus' congregation added £500, making a total of £843.05. So not only did we have an inspiring gathering on June 8th, we also raised funds to help the helpless. This marked a beginning of putting our vision for offering 'Spirituality for a World in Crisis' into action.

[*This report has been printed in SMN Network Review No 112, 'Network News'*]

A follow-up meeting was held on July 16th at Colet House. The June gathering had been deemed a success and this meeting was to discuss how to move forward and to build on the wonderful atmosphere generated. Greater co-operation between groups and sharing on many different levels, particularly locally, was suggested, such as sharing venues and co-operating on a project of mapping spiritual organisations throughout the UK.

Richard Brinton summarized the feedback from the afternoon groups in a paper *Coming together – moving forward*. He stressed the need to avoid spiritual consumerism and suggested that the initial impulse needed to be distilled and deepened through dialogue, nurturing, building community, meditation and giving.

Inspired by this event, a conference entitled *Deeper Dimensions in Education* is to be held in Sheffield on March 15th 2014. It will be organized by Anthroposophist Robert Chamberlain, assisted by Marianne Rankin of the Alister Hardy Trust. They will also work with the Wrekin Trust and perhaps the CFPSS. Confirmed speakers are Dr Greg Barker, Marianne Rankin and Aonghus Gordon, founder of the Ruskin Mill Colleges of specialist further education and the Field Centre, a higher education institute.

Further information from Robert Chamberlain: robertchamberlain43@outlook.com

A follow-up conference in London will be held on June 28th 2014 at Colet House by kind invitation of The Study Society.

It was then decided to build on this momentum of collaboration and to form a **One Spirit Alliance**: spiritually-minded people and organizations coming together. A small group will meet in Gloucestershire to plan the next stages, bearing in mind the advice from the discussion groups held on June 8th to maintain a loose and flexible approach while providing a focus for the spirit of co-creation that is emerging.

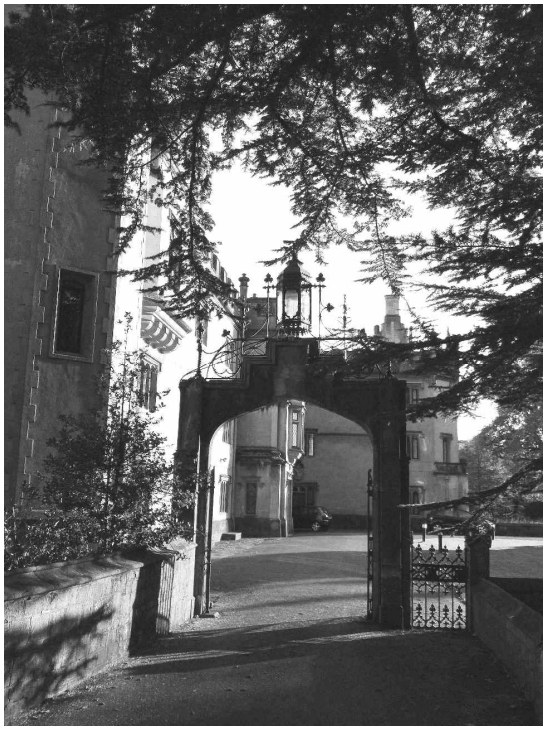
For the more detailed reports of the day by Marianne, Janice and Richard or for details of how to receive CDs of the talks please contact: Marianne Rankin: mariannerankin@icloud.com or Janice Dolley: info@wrekintrust.org

Marianne Rankin

Detailed Notes of David Lorimer's talk, and Dr Greg Barker's talk (£1.50, incl. p&p), and CDs of the two talks (£6.00 each incl. p&p), are available from, John Franklin, 21 Park Vista, London SE10 9LZ. Cheques payable to 'The Wrekin Trust'.

The Llantarnam Gathering 2013

Thanks to detailed reports coming in from all sides I can confine my own report to an introduction for these, and a mention of possible ways forward for the annual gathering in the future.



Llantarnam Abbey

Although still small (this is the first year the gathering has been extended from Wales to include the national Society) it is thriving and I see a bright future ahead. A provisional date, 25-27 July, has been booked at the Abbey for 2014. If the event proves ever more popular this will mean changing the venue – the Abbey can only accommodate 17 people. Llantarnam Abbey has become a special place for those of us who have been coming to the Gathering since it started, but I do know that a residential event has been suggested and discussed for some time among Society members, so I can only welcome the possibility that this annual gathering will fulfill this wish, and so change and grow. [See Events, page 54, for details]

Below are the reports sent in after the gathering held at Llantarnam this July; the theme was 'Celtic Spirituality Then and Now':

From **Mary Cook:**
After a good meal, while the mead was being handed round, Arthur would say, 'Well, what wonders have you to tell us all?' Thus, stories from ancient folk-memory, accounts of Noble Deeds and startling personal attributes were aired, to entertain, to inspire, but above all to wonder at.

From the East Coast to the West Coast we were 'gathered' to share something of the past and the present to be experienced within the wide world of Celtic spirituality. On the Friday evening we were to view some wondrous aspects through the eyes and ears of a scribe of the *Mabinogion* describing scenes from the time and place of Arthur and his knights. He was concerned to make a record of folk memory before the population was too decimated by the Black Death, which was to take 90% of the British population. What is more, the scribe writing about these wonders in the *Mabinogion*, in *British* (which is now thought of as 'Welsh'), was doing so in the very place we were at – the Cistercian Abbey that stood on the site of the present Llantarnam Abbey.

Saturday began with a presentation by Sr Breda, a nun resident at the Abbey. Sr Breda had recently spent time in Ireland immersing herself in Celtic Spirituality. She was reminding us of the fundamental importance of the world of nature to each of us, and introduced the four Celtic seasons with their inner meaning. She sent us outside to enjoy the beautiful weather we were blessed with, and to listen for two sounds, one reminding us of the 'inner', one of the 'outer', marrying the two diverse sounds and extracting meaning from their connecting. She left us with some poems and some spiritual guidance – a path and map, so to speak, for our lives. She also left a very beautiful display on and around our central table, which we retained while we were there.

During the weekend Mary acquainted us with some of the legendary characters of Arthur's court. We were encouraged to look at the world through *their* eyes, before relating what we had gleaned to the present day, and to see how the connections we could draw might lead us into *our* future. A trip to nearby Caerleon on Saturday afternoon revealed an extensive Roman barracks and the amphitheatre, and with the newly gained evidence from 'geo-phys', we learned that Caerleon could have been the largest Roman settlement in Britain. Arthur is said to have considered Caerleon to be central to his 'Empire' so would spend more time at Caerleon than at any of his courts.

The group at Caerleon

Saturday evening really inspired many of us, when we were led into the labyrinth and encouraged to help our Selves to grow in our awareness of what we need to overcome the problems of life. There was guidance available from the team (Helene, Paddy, Louis and Alan) which set up and organised the event. Not all of us joined in the experience. The orchard and the labyrinth were illuminated in a magical way, which grew more vivid as night closed in around us.

On Sunday morning, Alan focussed our attention on 'Paths and Maps' in yet another inspiring session, getting us to make a connection between the outer (ordnance survey) map and the multitudinous inner layers (geological map), especially with relation to our Selves. Thinking of our 'path' through life as needing its 'map' made us examine our lives in a different way.

At the close of our time there, we felt we had learnt something more about ourselves and had gained from each others' extensive knowledge and experience. There was the feeling that each of us had positively contributed to the success of the Gathering, that each of us was of equal value: in fact it had been everybody's event, leaving us with the hope and promise of meeting again in 2014 at this remarkable and beautiful place.

From **Ken Rees**:
One of the best retreats I have been on for a number of reasons:

1. The openness of the participants and the general positive spirit of enquiry present. This contrasts, for instance, with my experiences of Buddhist retreats (FWBO) where, by definition, one is surrounded by people practicing a particular *path*; or Neo-Platonic, mystical retreats (Fintry*) which often feel too abstract and impersonal; or, again,

theosophical retreats or conferences where there is a tendency to elevate a guru-type figure and their teachings exclusively (Arcane School).

2. Linked to the above point was the diversity of spiritual views encountered – all, seemingly, treated equally and with respect.
3. A very well planned programme. A balanced timetable incorporating different presentations of Celtic Spirituality (in creative, interactive ways), music and dancing, talks, field trip and ritual.
4. Culinary satisfaction, the kitchen being generous with its food allocations; while the accommodation at such a low price was first class.

Overall, the weekend felt aspirational, helping all members to further their growth and no doubt would benefit from a repeat.

* http://www.thefintrytrust.org.uk/

From **John Selby:**
Well, we never imagined that such a place as this existed. How wonderful – and to be able to conduct Western Rites (which can dovetail nicely into the wider Christian tradition) in this hallowed Abbey. The availability here is probably the major blessing.

We know that that amorphous collection of myth and practices known nowadays as the Celtic tradition derives from very deep and wide sources, gathering the best of world-wide traditions on its way via the collective unconscious. I feel it is particularly important that the Western Esoteric Tradition is seen as part of the Christian experience (or vice-versa), because at source, all is One. The opportunity to place our spiritual object on the 'round, multicoloured table' and to speak of it was very welcome and introduced a rainbow of experiences to which we could all relate. I enjoyed Sr. Breda's account of her pilgrimage that opened up new horizons for her, and wonder if we should do the same

I found it quite difficult to fathom out the energies associated with the Roman remains. I appreciated them at the physical level, and learned a little more of the amphitheatre, and was glad that there was a break at the harbour for refreshment. We all love our cuppa! I felt that the wooden sculptures beside the cafe were a significant part of our visit.

Before the evening session we rehearsed the mythology of the Labyrinth before venturing out into the liminal dimensions of a real live labyrinth (on many levels). There was time for reflection while negotiating the stones, and real spiritual gifts at the four quarters. I felt that there was a corresponding opening up inside me, but at the Centre forgot to look in the box at first, but chuckled when I finally did. I was really quite surprised at my special concluding message, which my wife helped me to fathom out.

Alister Hardy would have been very proud to know that this meeting was one of the fruits of his work.

From **Helene McMurtrie:**
The weather was perfect and the accommodation was superb. Good food, and Sisters Alice and Colette's wonderful welcome at Ty Croeso, combined to make sure that the guesthouse certainly lives up to its Welsh name [in English, House of Welcome].

We started the weekend with light-hearted fun when Mary Cook described the wonder and magic to be found in the *Mabinogion* and what it must have been like to hear of this from the bards, and in Arthur's court. After this she taught us a simple but effective circle dance from Naxos, along with a more complicated one which lost its name in my memory due to requirements of concentration. Mary then handed out to each of us cards with a character from the *Mabinogion* on one side and questions on the other. We were told to pair off and take on the character we had been given and ask the person we were with, who was of course another *Mabinogion* character, the questions that were on the back. Mine was *Pwyll,* the Legendary Prince of Dyfed and *Pen Annwn*. Great fun was had by all; we left Llantarnam with a sheet of questions devised by Mary, on a more serious note. [*These questions asked what we had discovered during the weekend about 'Celtic Sprituality, then and now'. It is hoped that a report on our answers will be forthcoming in the next issue. Ed.*]

Saturday started with the group talking about personal spiritual experiences. Then we had Sister Breda's introduction to her own transformative experience of taking a sabbatical from her convent to go on Celtic pilgrimage in Ireland. She introduced us to the four directions or four winds and their correspondences, and also to what she called the 'Thin places' and 'Thresholds': places of spiritual significance where the veil is very thin, and one can connect with the otherworld and other forms of consciousness. The beauty of her talk was that one could tell she had really lived and experienced this tradition and, refreshingly, was not just speaking from book knowledge. She gave us a simple exercise in meditation: we all went out into the Abbey's gardens to sit on our own and connect with a sound, then listen for another and hear the two together etc. I found myself experiencing the sound of the bees, which took me to the sound of birds in a nearby field. After a very short time it somehow put all the hustle and bustle of a nearby town and dual carriageway into perspective. This is an exercise I highly recommend anyone trying, so simple yet very effective.

In the afternoon we followed Mary down a winding country lane to Caerleon to see its Roman amphitheatre and remains. It was a lovely hot bright sunlit afternoon; Caerleon's Roman archaeology was interesting to see, but I really didn't like the atmosphere in the

amphitheatre. Somehow it made the film *The Gladiator* quite real once one walked into the arena. The atmosphere of fear was almost tangible when one imagined the shouting crowds above you and the loneliness of the arena where people and poor animals were possibly expected to die a painful death. It made me realise I don't think I like the ancient Romans.

Thankfully we then went off for a very refreshing tea (thank you John Franklin for your generosity) in the afternoon heat, in a shady arcade in Caerleon. One of our party, who lives locally, gave us some fascinating facts about the immense size of the Romano-Celtic communities that once lived in this area. There is evidence of international trade and of the residence of a very wealthy powerful person; legend has it that this may have been King Arthur.

In the late afternoon I did a presentation on the Labyrinth, taking all of us through the possible uses and beliefs about labyrinths from prehistory up until the present day. The Abbey's labyrinth, reached through an apple orchard, was a perfect setting. We walked in under a warm fading evening sunset, and ended as the first stars were appearing in the night sky. There were lanterns in the orchard and candles in the labyrinth, which created a magical effect as the evening grew dark. In the Labyrinth itself we used the directions in a similar way to that described by Sister Brida, with someone at each direction to challenge or greet the labyrinth walkers. Reaching the centre the walkers in turn opened a box to see the mystery within (A secret for now I'm afraid!) We exchanged with each other a single word that we had written to sum up the Labyrinth Experience for each of us, then ended the ceremony with two lovely blessings, the final one spoken in Irish Gaelic by Sister Alice.

The next day we listened to Alan's session 'Where the Map Ends'. Alan first asked us all to imagine the seas and oceans drained, to envisage how the separate land masses are joined under the surface. This was to demonstrate Jung's concept of the collective unconscious. He gave us the history of maps, and then showed us, from his point of view as a geologist and also a very experienced dream recorder, how we all have internal maps of different sorts and different levels of consciousness, just like we have maps for different purposes using different symbols in the outside world. We compared a complicated road map with a geological map of the rocks under the earth to illustrate surface levels of consciousness as compared to the layers underneath.

Finally, in the afternoon before we left, we debriefed and discussed where we wanted to go from here. All agreed they would like the Gathering to continue at Llantarnam Abbey next year, with a possible subject being spiritual maps of consciousness and the use of inner paths.

As can be seen above, people's experience of Celtic spirituality was very different – two members of the group for instance were at opposite ends, one not feeling able to enter the Labyrinth Experience, the other surprised and pleased to be offered the opportunity to engage in this ceremony. How far this is useful/appropriate/enlightening is up for discussion. I will just say that the Society's stated aim is the study of spiritual experience, that the weekend was about Celtic spirituality, and as all organised religions have long understood, collective experience, if authentic, can take the personal to another level. The labyrinth has of course been used by many cultures and spiritual traditions, and has stood the test of time, so no wonder this was a powerful experience for the group. We each wrote one word when we reached the centre, which we exchanged with each other. I received the word 'freedom'; what the word means to me, especially as one of our number had the courage to trust her own feelings and step back, is that whatever the ceremony, ritual or service taking place in a

religious setting, there should NEVER be coercion to take part. Another participant, who has asked not to be named, wrote the word 'hokum'; informal comments indicate that this group member was not completely out on a limb … but it seems that the majority found the ceremony moving and enlightening.

It was clear from Sisters Breda's presentation that she and Sister Alice are both exploring themes similar to those that arose for us in considering Celtic spirituality – this helped our group with its eclectic mix of spiritualities to feel in tune with the spirit of Llantarnam Abbey, despite its grounding in an orthodox Christian tradition. I have been amazed by the openness and the genuine spirit of enquiry displayed by the Sisters we have met at Llantarnam. It's broken down all my stereotypes of Catholic nuns! Sister Breda's presentation was a delight not only for the content but the all-embracing manner in which it was delivered.

End Note: These questions were posed at the plenary session: Are rituals discovered or invented? Do we need maps, metaphorical or otherwise? History as map? What is the nature of truth? What is Spiritual Experience? How do beliefs fit in? How important is freedom to participate, or not, in ritual/ceremony with a spiritual intent? Fun (make-believe): is there a place for magic and mystery in the spiritual quest today?

Report compiled by Patricia Murphy

Alister Hardy Trust: The Financial Situation

This report on the Alister Hardy Trust finances was sent out as a letter to members recently as it missed being printed in the Spring 2013 issue. It was however felt that a copy should appear in print in this issue so that it is to hand if any Society members wish for clarification, or have any queries. Ed.

To all members of the AHSSSE May 2013

Dear Member,
At the last AGM of the Alister Hardy Society, I was asked if I would set out the financial situation of the Alister Hardy Trust and indicate where the income from subscriptions to the Society is actually spent. The following article was prepared for the recent edition of *De Numine* but unfortunately, owing to an electronic glitch, it failed to gain entry. However, in order to undertake the commitment given at the AGM it is considered that it should now be sent as a letter to all members.

I would emphasise that if any member would like to have a copy of the accounts for the year ended 31st July 2012 which were approved by the Trustees at their December meeting, then I should be pleased to send them a copy.

Yours sincerely,

David Greenwood

Note for *De Numine* on the AHT Finances

At the AGM of the Society, it was suggested that I write an article for *De Numine* setting out the situation regarding the financial position of the Trust and indicating the uses to which we put the Society members' annual subscriptions – a request with which I am very happy to comply.

The past financial year has been especially good for the Trust as we received a major advance from the bequest of Mr. Buckmaster – a past member of the Alister Hardy Society. The inflow of funds has made a tremendous difference to our situation, transforming the position from one where we were required to fund our core activity from our capital reserve, to one where we are now in a position to fund further research into religious experience.

In summary the results for the year ending 31st July 2012 were as follows:-
Income: £139,827 including first tranche from the Buckmaster Estate of £120,000 and subscription income of £5,393 (including Gift Aid repayment).
Expenditure: £15,377 including a donation of £9,000 to the University of Wales Trinity Saint David which enables the Archive of Religious and Spiritual Experiences to be kept fully up to date, and approximately £2,000 for the production and distribution of *De Numine*.
Total assets less current liabilities: £264,979

Looking to the future, the improved financial position will enable us to fund a qualified librarian to catalogue and organise the archive of the Alister Hardy Society and Trust – documents which have until now been kept, but not in a formal catalogued manner suitable for ready accessibility. In addition we are able to reward our volunteers with small honoraria where appropriate in recognition of the invaluable work that they undertake, as well as, of course, being able fully to pay for the out-of-pocket expenses incurred by the officers and volunteers of the Society and Trust. In addition the improved financial position has enabled us to improve the educational aspect of the organisation by funding additional talks to schools and small conferences.

Finally, to answer the question – where does the income from the payment of subscriptions go? – I would say first of all to help enable the Society and Trust to achieve its primary objective of promoting and supporting research into religious experience, the most important aspect of which being the maintenance of the archive of religious and spiritual experiences. The Trust is a registered charity and its charitable status arises from this primary objective. In addition to this, the subscription income helps to fund the production and distribution of *De Numine* – a journal which not only keeps the membership informed of the organisation's activities, but also acts as a very useful publicity publication to bring the subject of religious and spiritual experience to a wider audience. Thirdly, when funds permit we are able to keep up to date the records of the activities of the organisation as highlighted in the paragraph above.

The above is, of course, a short summary of the financial position – a copy of the annual financial statement can be obtained on application to me at the address given on the inside cover of the journal.

David Greenwood,
Hon.Treasurer and Vice Chair, Alister Hardy Trust, January 2013

Reports from the Local Groups

AHSSSE Chesterfield Group

The Chesterfield group has been meeting every two months or so during 2013. We have had part two of Rodney Ward's talk on the philosopher Wittgenstein and how his ideas relate to religion, and watched and discussed part two of Jonathan Stedall's documentary about Rudolf Steiner. In April we also made a group outing to places of historical and religious interest in the local area, including Southwell Minster.

Still to come this year is my seminar on religious and spiritual experience, a DVD on the Egyptian Book of the Dead, and a showing of Darren Aronofsky's movie *Pi*. Next year will see the Chesterfield group return to its previous monthly format with further religious experience seminars, another talk by Rodney Ward, and DVDs on figures from Western Esotericism including Madame Blavatsky, Emanuel Swedenborg, and Aleister Crowley.

If anyone is interested in the AHSSSE Chesterfield group please contact me at the e-mail address below. The programme can be found on the 'AHSSSE Group' page of my website or the main Society website under 'Events'.

The AHSSSE Chesterfield Group programme is available online at
www.esoteric-experience.org.uk
For any further info please contact me at mike@esoteric-experience.org.uk or on 07790 757955

Mike Rush
AHSSSE Chesterfield Group

London Group

On 29th November 2012 Dr. Chris Clarke gave us a talk on *Cosmology and Consciousness: are we co-partners in creationing?* In his talk Chris Clarke looked at the link between the physics of cosmology and questions of consciousness, referring to quantum theory and discussing the origins of the universe in which very tiny variations from otherwise uniformity led to the formation of galaxies and that 'galaxies are quantum fluctuations'. Inquiring what 'quantum fluctuations' are, it is found that they arise from the process of observation, leading to the questions: who is observing and what is 'quantum'? This led to discussion of Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, and Kochen-Specker's theorem, where the most relevant principles of physics are to be found. Developments after Heisenberg suggested that the choice of an observer to observe aspect A rather than aspect B influenced what was to be measured, and the thought came to him that there seemed no satisfactory alternative but to regard consciousness as the factor explaining the impossibilities which arise, and that there must be a link between physics and consciousness. Various models of consciousness have been attempted, including the postulate of two ways of knowing: the propositional – handling logical, verbal cognitive, language based aspects, and the implicational/relational – handling meaning, significance, value and the sense of self. Questions remain as to how far consciousness extends.

This year's programme commenced on 7th February with a talk by John Gaynor on *Experiences and Implications of One-ness and Gone-ness*. First, he discussed the ways of 'knowing' and 'knowledge' and implications of human experience. These included the basic knowing and knowledge achieved through the five senses, plus the mental or cognitive capacity of thinking, and the other kind of 'foreknowing' and 'knowledge' coming from spiritual

experience, which give rise to another form of perception. Ordinary knowledge comes from observation – of observer and the observed, of difference and separation. The 'other' knowledge points to an 'other' dimension characterised by many different forms of experience, one of which is that of 'one-ness' – an experience and perception that all matter and spirit is interconnected. Conceptually, 'one-ness' is an experience of no-separation, which is boundless, with emotional associations of joy, gratitude and peace. ('Gone-ness', he defined, by contrast, is associated with tears, release and sense of freedom – and a loss of self and a sense of complete emptiness.) This dimension gives a sense of another, truer, reality than the ordinary reality of material day-to-day experience – and can be practised in meditation, and in this way feed into the ordinary action of our lives, and have an effect on others; the main attribute of this state being a sense of unconditional love.

On 17th April Professor Eileen Barker spoke to us on *New Religious Movements and the New Spirituality*. She explained that since World War II traditional religion had continued on a steady, slightly declining path, but secularism had not increased. Fundamentalism continued, as did various traditional expressions of spirituality such as meditation and religious dance – but the most significant change lay in the expansion of new religious movements (NRMs). She defined NRMs, outlined her work in keeping in touch with these movements, running regular seminars about them and promoting mutual understanding. She does this through the organisation she has set up and runs, the Information Network on New Religious Movements (INFORM) at the London School of Economics. She described the characteristics of these movements, their forms of membership, leadership and organisation, and she said that their number has fallen since their high point in the 1970s but they now have a better public image, are less isolationist and arouse less antagonism. She then went on to discuss what has become known as 'the new spirituality', which is to be found within and outside organised religion. She suggested a series of characteristics that might be taken to typify religion and spirituality, summarising approaches to a number of concepts, such as Divinity, seen by Religion as 'transcendent, particular' and by Spirituality as 'immanent, cosmic pluralist'; and Organisation, seen by Religion as 'institutional' and by Spirituality as 'individual/networking'.

John Franklin

[Full Notes and CDs of these talks are available, from John Franklin, 21 Park Vista, Greenwich, London, SE10 9LZ, Notes price £1.50; CDs price £6.50 incl. p&p for talk only – £8.00 for 2 CDs with talk and following discussion or for an audio DVD of both talks and discussions – cheques payable to 'AHS London Group'.]

Midlands Group

September 21st 2012. Guest speaker, Dr N Sutton: War, violence and the spiritual path

This was a scholarly yet lively talk. Nick began with an overview of the connections between war and religion, pointing out that religion, often perceived as supporting wars, was not a primary causal factor, but was used to justify aggression such as in Northern Ireland and Islamist terrorist actions in India. Politicians justified the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Non-violence, *ahimsa*, in the Indic religions, influenced Gandhi's political style as well as his personal life. Nick referred to the Indian epic *Mahabharata*, and in particular the *Bhagavad Gita* within this colossal work. The concept of *dharma* as moral order is seen as the very foundation of the world, in Nick's words, '*dharma* promotes the welfare of living things.' In considering

the concept of 'a just war' as one in which there appeared to be legitimacy, he admitted he could not find a single example in history of a war that was truly just.

In the discussion, issues raised included the guidance in the writings of Devi Maa, soteriology, allegory in the *Bhagavad Gita*, and the challenges of practising non-violence in everyday life. The *Golden Rule* was mentioned as an ideal.

October 19th Himsa: *The Deleterious Effect of Violence on the Soul*: *presented by Harry Houghton and Rodney Reeves*
Introductory sound meditation by Clement Jewitt with Tibetan bowls. We then listened to a recording from the BBC radio 4 programme, 'The Kill Factor', in which soldiers recently returned from Iraq and Afghanistan described their battlefield experiences and the psychological aftermath, and academics and commanding officers expressed opinions. In our discussion we noted how the 'enemy' is often demeaned, even de-humanised in war, how soldiers face adjustment problems in returning to civilian life, and how killing and other forms of violence damage the soul. Rodney gave detailed hand-outs on Hindu and Jain teachings on *Himsa*, and Harry emphasised the necessity of avoiding all forms of violence in order to promote 'soul growth'.

November 16th The Golden Sutra; Aphorisms of Spiritual Feeling: *presentation by Harry Houghton and Rodney Reeves*
This was the third talk in a series exploring themes in the insights expressed by Harry. It is difficult to summarise the talk without recourse to diagrams. Harry has produced some inspired material, worthy of a much wider audience. We had two diagrams, one 'illustrating the birth of the soul from inception to the ever-expanding eternal moment' and the 'birth-path to universal life, its nature caused by soul health and time', and we also had Harry's amazing three-dimensional model of the Inner World [mentioned in *De Numine* No.49, p.25]
Rodney played short improvised pieces on flute. Discussion ranged from the effect of violent music, personal material requests in prayers [unanimous rejection], and a moving observation that 'we need to be drenched in God's love'. This comment was reminiscent of Harry's aphorism 61, which illustrated 'God's permeation through all space and time.'

December 8th Visit to Buddhist Temple
Seven of us went to Karma Ling in Birmingham, where we were met by Simon Romer, 'Faith Leader' for Birmingham in the Tibetan Kagyu tradition. Outwardly it is a Victorian terraced house, but within there is a beautiful shrine room, with Tibetan wall hangings above the many images in gold of Buddha and Bodhisattvas. The floor is thickly carpeted and there are large cushions, and even [thankfully?] some chairs. Simon gave an introduction to the history and philosophy of Buddhism; that all beings have the potential for enlightenment but sense-gratification causes suffering and obscures our true nature. Buddhism teaches methods to remove these mental 'clouds'. The faith arrived in Tibet from India a thousand years after Buddha's death and was preserved and enriched by Lamas for a further thousand years until 1959 when China's 'Cultural Revolution' destroyed many of the monasteries.

Simon came to Karma Ling in 1987, having undertaken an intensive course of study in the Tibetan language, Buddhist texts and spiritual disciplines over four years. He described how meditation could last 18 hours a day. After lunch break in the kitchen we returned to the Shrine room for meditation introduced by Clement sounding the Tibetan bowls. We hope that Simon will speak at one of our meetings and we also hope to make another visit to this very beautiful place.

April 19th 2013 A Personal View: *Tim Houlding*

This meeting was the fourth anniversary of the group. Rodney had prepared a wealth of information on the special significance of the number four in many spiritual traditions. Clement gave a sound meditation with Tibetan bowls, and then Tim gave his talk. He began with the passage of time, saying that his topic was to be 'the features and story-lines' in his 57 years. Admitting to an enquiring attitude to life and its association with suffering, he spoke of his awareness of the complexity of the Universe in its contrast of beauty and evil, citing the recent bomb explosions at the Boston marathon. He read a passage from Peter Hoeg's novel, *Borderliners*, examining human relationships in the presence of suffering. 'Religions', Tim suggested, 'provide narratives to compensate for the negative, and display beauty and trauma.' He gave examples from ancient Egyptian and Minoan mythologies which display 'human resilience in the face of adversity', serving as a guide even in modern times. He commented on the 'constant demands of ego', listing power, prestige, possession and permanence, and the ego seeking purpose in daily pursuits; he admits that losing the ego-purpose is uncomfortable. He was inspired by Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers from Prison*, enabling Tim to realise that 'God suffers and is vulnerable in this world'. Tim then read from Teilhard de Chardin's *Hymn of the Universe*, and ended by expressing his feeling of the 'vibrancy and individuality' along with the 'group enrichment' in our sessions. Rodney closed the presentation with a flute meditation. During the lively discussion we included Harry's tape of a recent radio interview with violinist Nigel Kennedy in which the violinist describes an out of body experience while performing.

May 17th Energy Traditions of the Q'ero People of the High Altiplano, Peru: a presentation by Clement Jewitt, PhD

Clement has read widely on this topic and also attended a course on Andean energy traditions. We began with him playing Tibetan bowls, and he suggested we go into the garden to try some experiential exercises to understand some of the Q'ero beliefs. These beliefs are about the heavy energy from earth and the light energy from the cosmos, and how we could imagine drawing the former in through our feet and the latter into the crown of the head. We worked with a partner first facing and then back to back. Unfortunately midges sabotaged this exercise and we adjourned inside. Clement explained the Q'ero concept of being in an energy bubble that allows a person to commune on a spiritual level with natural forces. The Q'ero perceive 'complementary opposites' that can work together whereas Europeans tend to focus on difference and being in competition. Time is viewed as cyclical rather than linear. There are no sacred texts, the teachings being transmitted orally, and there is an emphasis on attunement with Nature as well as being in harmony with ourselves. The concept of seven *nawis* is similar to that of the Eastern *chakras.* It has been observed that the Q'ero practice is 'much more mystical than it is shamanistic' (Joan P Wilcox, *Masters of the Living Energy*, p.296).

My thanks to the group for all the support and some great discussions, and to Rodney for not only taking notes but also providing bibliographies and references. These are available for *De Numine* readers on request.

Sheelah James
sheelahjames@aol.com

Oxford & Cotswold Group

Healing Weekend – our first residential event

The Oxford & Cotswold Group held an enjoyable and inspirational Healing Weekend at Easter, 30 and 31 March 2013, in Minster Lovell. On Saturday evening we gathered for the first of several delicious meals by Brian Mills. After dinner we meditated by candle light and shared prayers for healing for people who we were keeping in mind. On Sunday morning Patrick Walter led us in a meditation and discussion on reincarnation and forgiveness. After a lovely lunch, James D'Angelo treated us to some beautiful and inspiring pieces on the grand piano, and our hostess, Ann Mills, gave a *lectio divina* on 'The Lord Is My Shepherd'.

All the money raised from the weekend went to Mind, the Mental Health Charity, Ann's chosen charity. We are grateful to all who came for helping us raise £400 for such a good cause. Our thanks again go to Ann, Patrick, and James for giving their time and talents for free, and to Brian and Ann for welcoming us into their lovely home and providing delicious food.

A slight pause for the autumn …

As I am in the middle of writing a dissertation, I have not had time to organise an event for the autumn. However, I will be speaking with the Oxford Group of the Scientific and Medical Network about the possibility of working on events jointly in future. I would also encourage members to attend their local Café Spirituel if they can, which the Wrekin Forum organises all over the country (contact connect@wrekinforum.org for details).

For more information on future Oxford Group events please send me a message so I can include you on the email list (and you need not live in the Oxford & Cotswold Area to join us). I also include news of events organised by cognate associations, such as the Wrekin Forum.

Rhonda Riachi e-mail: ahs@riachi.free-online.co.uk

SE Wales group meeting, 21st June

Time, divination, eternity

Following on from our last meeting on Coincidences, the conception of time was explored with particular reference to coincidence, divination/prophesy and eternity.

Coincidences opened the following **Time** question: if Something, somewhere knows what will (not *may)* happen – if there really are prophets and prophesies, what does that tell us about time & events?

We considered Willis Harman's 'Thinking Beyond the Brain' essay concerning Jung's use of the term *synchronicity* 'to refer to two or more events, separated by time or space where there appears to be no possibility of physical connection, in any known sense, and yet there seems to be a *meaningful* connection.' This, Harman felt, comes from a source beyond man's consciousness. In our last meeting we had come across the feeling of being in a 'time matrix' where *all time* seems to exist *at any one time.*

One member described not *knowing* the future, but *acting as though she did!* She lived alone and had a ticket for the opera. On the way to the theatre, she suddenly decided not to go, and went home. Once home, she absentmindedly made a meal for two and laid the table

accordingly! At that moment, a friend of hers who she knew to be 300 miles away, appeared at her door. He needed that meal! Another member told of one of her experiences of seeing people from the past. They exchanged glances – they saw her, too! Then they passed on down their path that wasn't a path, and was as though they were walking a few feet under the ground! It occurred to me that as she was seeing the something of the *past,* when they apparently exchanged looks, *they were seeing her in the future!*

Why should the future be known? Where does that leave common sense?
What are these 'amazing resonances' we talked about last time?
If our futures are known, where does that leave free-will?

Divination

We heard quotes from the Oxford group's report on Divination and the *I Ching*, printed in the Spring *De Numine*. These are some of the thoughts and experiences relating to divination that were revealed:

The pendulum definitely has a life of its own, independent of the person holding it – as does the water diviner's hazel twig. These 'tools' usually respond to what direction they are given by their holder, but not always; they can stubbornly refuse to work, even when held by an experienced diviner. With me, there is an increase of electricity felt within the body, and this can be suddenly cut off, almost as if another hand is intervening to stop the process.

Through an acquaintance, my husband and I were encouraged to use a pendulum. When I *did* use the pendulum, I spent some time in silent prayer to tune myself in. I found the pendulum very receptive. I had left it alone for some time, but on 22nd March I was due to go to N. Wales for the final meeting of a group I belonged to. There was a strong doubt in both of our minds about the outcome of the journey. At the station, we found out that the trains were not running on the North Wales coast due to severe snow conditions, and buses would be laid on. I had already asked the pendulum the day before, and had a very positive response that all would be well. Nevertheless, I decided not to go. The weekend was a success. The only person expected who didn't get there was me, and I heard I was much missed. It left me feeling guilty, yet happy that I had not upset my husband by going.

Eternity

We seem to be able to experience a 'micro-eternity' and something of the 'macro-eternity'.
The micro being the 'eternal moment', which many have described, when in a *moment* of time we connect with everything, and all time – we feel anything and everything can be experienced. The macro, the forever – cosmos, which is very physical, yet remains completely incomprehensible even though we keep striving for understanding.

How do we – life – fit into all this?
In the micro, the Now moment, we, as individual experiencers, are all important …
In the macro, we are of no importance – absolutely none.
The lesson to be learnt from this fact is to live our moment of eternity, of the NOW as though it really IS eternal.

Mary Cook

WebNews

The website **discussion forum** for members of the AHSSSE is now online!

There are already a number of topics to get discussion started including: book reviews, definitions of terms, the 'core' experience, empiricism and experientialism, Perennialism, and science. You can also leave comments on aspects of the Society such as the website, local groups, the AGM, and *De Numine*. You can post your comments or start new threads on topics of interest.

The forum is only accessible by members of the AHSSSE. After registration please be patient whilst your membership status is verified. All posts are also moderated and any inappropriate comments will be removed and the offending member banned from the forum. As a guideline please don't post any personal information that you do not want in the public domain. Please also treat all other members with respect and sensitivity at all times.

The forum can be found by going to the AHSSSE website at www.studyspiritualexperiences.org then pointing to 'The Society' menu and clicking on the Membership' link.

Hope to see you there!

Mike Rush,
AHSSSE Vice-Chair

Abstracts

From the Editor: Below are the first two abstracts/summaries of longer articles which will appear on the website. See the home page for links.

Kundalini Awakening, Kundalini Awareness
Martin Lockley (University of Colorado, Denver)

Summary:
The Kundalini Awakening is a type of religious, spiritual or mystical experience that has traditionally been associated with spontaneous, enlightening shifts in consciousness. Such experiences typically involve intense physical experience associated with the spine and nervous system, and evidently occur most frequently in midlife (modal age ~30-35). They have been referred to as 'cosmic consciousness' experiences inducing long-lasting, life-changing shifts in intellectual and spiritual sensibilities. The experience may be more common than thought in the west because subjects reporting it may not use the term Kundalini. Nevertheless the term is becoming more widely known in western culture. Many consider the Kundalini awakening phenomenon a natural, evolutionary, developmental phenomenon. Vedantic and Tantric traditions have long recognized Kundalini as a universal force (energy or *prana*) that manifests in humans with remarkable physical, psychological and spiritual effects.

[This article makes extensive use of the Alister Hardy Archive. Ed.]

Jenny Jones, ***Healing with the Feminine Principle: bringing life back into balance***

Abstract:
This article is based on a talk I gave in March 2013 to the Alister Hardy Society for the Study of Spiritual Experience (AHSSE) at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Lampeter, Wales. The Title was 'The Importance of relationships'. I begin with a general overview of the masculine and feminine principles that I have highlighted in my book *Healing with the Feminine Principle.* In the chapter on Our Authentic Soul, I touch fairly briefly on building true relationships. This talk was an expansion of that section of the book. The purpose of the talk (and therefore of this article) was to offer ideas for us to think about and build on as part of our soul's spiritual development.

As always, with anything I talk or write about, the content is significantly practical because it is the practical that creates space for the spiritual within us. The material and the practical are the vehicles for the spirit to learn and experience, which is what we are here for. The material or physical, emotional and spiritual are all inextricably linked. I believe there is no purpose for the material other than as a vehicle for us to progress spiritually as a result of living our practical lives. There is a common misconception which leads us to put too great an emphasis on the material and this seems to be where our current difficulties in the world arise.

The article is also on Jenny's website: www.spiritofoneness.co.uk

Letter to the Editor

Dear Paddy,

Reading 'The AHSSSE in Wales: final report' [*De Numine* Spring 2013, p. 27], I was disturbed by two points made in the 'Mandala Project' paragraph.

Firstly, I am not at all sure that the three surviving groups survived because they are 'in areas of higher population'. I wouldn't call Lampeter a high-density area. The South East Wales group, loosely speaking, includes the greatest area of population in Wales, but this is hardly relevant to the growth of our group. Though based in Cwmbrân, our members are drawn from far and wide, and some travel some distance to our meetings. I think that we have a vibrant group and the wealth of any group lies in the quality of the input from each of its members. I think too, being a small 'house group' is essential for our 'grassroots' sharing from personal experiences, which has formed the basis for our work together.

Secondly, to suggest that our group's format of one subject a year has any connection with the 'Mandala Project' is totally off the mark. It came about because one of our first talks was from Alan Underwood, on his Dream project. This, it was felt, would spark a second meeting with input from all of our dream experiences. We originally had three meetings a year, so it made

sense to link them together. We took the format into our second and third year, feeling that in depth study was really productive. Whether we continue in this ilk depends on how the members feel.

Talking of members, I think I am not alone in regretting the passing of the AHS. AHSSSE is so cumbersome. Basically we are involved in studying and feeding back our spiritual experience to aid the research, and I hope Hardy would approve. So we are the Alister Hardy Society – pure, and simple.
And should still be the AHS.

Mary Cook

Remembering Friends

Edward Armitage Robinson (1921-2013)
Researcher at the Religious Experience Research Unit 1970-1985; Director 1976 – 1985

I am beginning this piece on Edward Robinson with some broader historical background because I am aware that there may be members who are unfamiliar with these details. I moved to Oxford from Lancaster in 1976 and already knew of the work of the Religious Experience Research Unit (as it then was) because Alister Hardy had visited Lancaster University to lecture on its research. One of my early memories once in Oxford was seeing Edward Robinson through a large window working away in the house at the corner of Holywell Street and Mansfield Road (now a tuck shop). This property is owned by Manchester (now Harris Manchester) College and it was there that the Unit began. The link with this college was Alister Hardy's Unitarian membership and Hardy is honoured with a plaque at the back of the college chapel. Another plaque on a side door names the corner property 'Alister Hardy House'.

The new courses at Westminster College (now Oxford Brookes University), set up for my first year undergraduates included the study of religious experience in the work of Rudolf Otto (*The Idea of the Holy*) and William James (*The Varieties of Religious Experience*), and the work of the first ten years of the RERU (from Alister Hardy's *The Spiritual Nature of Man*). At my invitation Edward would come to talk with the undergraduates. What I particularly liked was his provocative style of asking questions, of presenting ideas and arguing. He never gave a boring standard presentation, but always tried to make them think 'outside the box'. This continued to be a quality in him that I liked in all subsequent contacts. I much enjoyed breaking my long Oxford-Lampeter journeys at 'The Forge', the home in Herefordshire to which he and Wendy had moved when leaving Oxford, and which was not far off the A40. Refreshment was a not only a cup of coffee, sometimes a light lunch with salad collected from

the garden and a look at the latest creations in his studio, but in addition there would be challenging questions ('where is your memory?' was one) and informed conversation.

Further contacts with Edward and his work which made me appreciate the breadth of his talents, both academic and artistic, are summarised in my introduction to the video of him that I made at Westminster College (a copy of which is lodged in the archives) and in the summary at the back of his occasional paper (number 10) *Religious Experience: Beginning The Research*.

Edward came from a distinguished family. His maternal grandfather had been principal of St Edmund's Hall, Oxford and his father a canon of Canterbury Cathedral where he and his older brother, the controversial theologian John Robinson, were born, Edward in 1921. Two years later their sister Cecilia was born, whose rivalry with her brothers blossomed into her becoming a player in the All England Women's Cricket Team. Edward read Classical Mods and Greats at Oxford and maintained a lively interest in this area, as I experienced when I called on him with my older daughter, who is a Classics fellow at Oriel College. On meeting her he immediately began an informed conversation about her interests and his knowledge of classical literature and philosophy.

After his Oxford degree Edward held a variety of educational posts in England and Africa. In the course of some 15 years of botanical exploration in the lesser known parts of Zambia and other central African countries, he published a number of studies and monographs on the tropical African *Cyperaceae*, and subsequently worked on the *Flora of Tropical East Africa* as a senior scientific officer at the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew. He met his wife, Wendy, a pastoral counsellor and psychotherapist, aboard ship from Southampton to Cape Town when he was returning for his fifth stay in Zambia and she was going out to set up a Teachers' Training College in Bechuanaland (today's Botswana). They had three sons, two born in Africa and one in England. Whilst in Africa Edward collected several thousand plants and described several new species as well as having several named after him, and in The Forge I still remember seeing botanical illustrations of plants with the name *Robinsoniensis* after them.

Apart from these scientific studies, he contributed some 30 articles in British, Dutch and American journals on a wide range of topics relating to education, religion and the arts, ranging from *The Authority of Religious Experience* to *The Apophatic Art of Kasmir Malevich*.

In 1970 Edward was invited by Alister Hardy to work at RERU. Hardy was particularly interested in the possibility of Edward making a 'scientific' taxonomy of collected experiences, though later it became apparent that Edward was more interested in the qualitative, interview based style of research. In 1976 he became RERU's Director. He was also involved with projects such as *Religion and Values at Sixteen Plus* with the Christian Education Movement (Report published 1987) and with the initial support of CEM he set up at the West London Institute of Education, a centre for the study of spirituality and the arts. It is this collection of distinguished works of art which, on the closure of WLIE, Edward generously lodged at Lampeter after I moved the centre there in 2000*. I wrote a catalogue for this collection in collaboration with Edward, using the interviews he had completed with many of the artists.

Subsequently Edward worked in Canada as tutor at the Arthur Turner Training School (an Anglican centre for training Inuit theological students) at Pangnirtung, Baffin Island; in India with Jyoti Sahi at Silvepura Art Ashram near Bangalore; and in the USA as resident scholar at *The Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research* at Collegeville, Minnesota.

Edward Robinson had a lifelong interest in the visual arts, first as a painter and later as a sculptor and writer. He had many one-man shows of his work, the latest, entitled *Forms of*

Silence, and accompanied by a book of the same name, was at St Margaret's Church, Westminster Abbey, London in the spring this year. Examples of his sculpture can be seen in Southwark (a memorial to his brother Bishop John A.T. Robinson) Portsmouth and Exeter Cathedrals and at Kirkbridge Conference Centre, Pennsylvania as well as in private collections in India, Poland, Canada and the USA (see www.formsofsilence.co.uk).

As Director of RERU he wrote *The Original Vision* (a very significant contribution to the understanding of childhood experiences); *Living The Questions* and *This Time-Bound Ladder*. With the Christian Education movement he wrote (with Brenda Lealman) the illustrated *Image of Life*; *Knowing and Unknowing* and *The Mystery of Creation*. Also on art are *The Language of Mystery*; and *Icons of the Present: Some Reflections on Art, the Sacred and The Holy.*

Aging and the end of life bring us all challenges and Edward's loss of mobility and eyesight, though not of intellectual capacity, after a stroke were severe disabilities, though he was able to go to the reception which opened his retrospective exhibition at St Margaret's, Westminster. During his last years, he had family close by in Exeter and friends (in the formal and informal sense) read to him and took him regularly to a Quaker meeting where his funeral was also held. The funeral details include a quotation from Augustine:

> Nobis absentibus non ruit domus nostra, aeternitas tua.
> While we are away our house does not fall down, our home which is your eternity.

And this theme of eternity and infinity is visually expressed in examples of Edward's works of art which my family are privileged to own: the single infinite edge of both a bronze moebius ring and of the germination pieces and the open and closed example of a tryptich showing a diva lamp and hiding a lotus.

Mystery and silence were important to Edward, but so also was the living of the questions, a phrase which he used as a title of one of his books.

> Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer. Perhaps you do carry within you the possibility of creating and forming, as an especially blessed and pure way of living; train yourself for that – but take whatever comes, with great trust, and as long as it comes out of your will, out of some need of your innermost self, then take it upon yourself.
>
> (Rainer Maria Rilke, from *Letters to a Young Poet*)

My thanks to Wendy Robinson for her help in the final draft of this obituary. Any final flaws are my own.

Peggy Morgan: June 2013
Director, Religious Experience Research Centre 1996 – 2002
Currently Lecturer in the Study of Religions, Mansfield College, Oxford

* Its beginning in Lampeter was not in 2002, as Paul Badham records on p. 3 of his *Introduction* to *Religious Experience in Contemporary China*

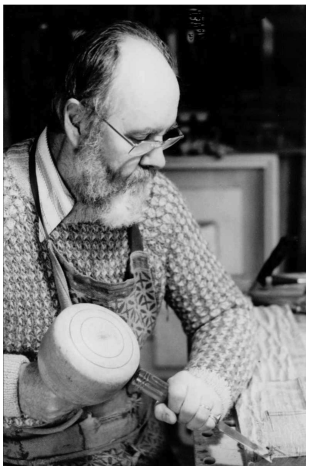
Edward Armitage Robinson (1921-2013), Director AHRERU 1976 – 1985.

It was with great sadness that we learnt of the death of Edward Robinson. Edward quietly passed away at on 30th May 2013, aged 92; his funeral taking place at the Quaker Friends Meeting House in Exeter on Thursday 13th June. Tributes and letters of condolence were sent to Edward's widow, Wendy, on behalf of both the Trust and the Society.

Edward, younger brother of John Robinson, Bishop of Woolwich, a botanist and educationalist, had made contact with Sir Alister Hardy in 1969 and, in 1970, was invited to join the work of the Religious Experience Research Unit at the then Manchester College Oxford, with the possibility of right of succession as Director of the Unit. He eventually took over from Sir Alister as Director of RERU on Alister's retirement in February 1976.

Early under his Directorship Edward produced a series of manuscripts under the general heading '*Studies in Religious Experience*'. These including, in 1977, *The Original Vision* by Edward himself, a study of the religious experiences of childhood, based on personal accounts in the AHREREC archive and the use of a questionnaire, *This Time-Bound Ladder: Ten Dialogues on Religious Experience*, which he edited and, in 1978, *Living the Questions: Studies in the Childhood of Religious Experience* in 1978. Later, in 1987, working with the Christian Education Movement, he published, in collaboration with Michael Jackson, *Religion and Values at Sixteen Plus* (AHRC and CEM). Edward retired as Director of the Research Centre in 1986, 'to take up a third career', as he put it, as a full-time artist. He had had a lifelong interest in the visual arts, first as a painter and later as a sculptor and, during his time as Director, also worked on some woodcarvings of triptychs, a few exquisite examples of which he displayed at the Centre's office in Holywell Street, Oxford. He was much appreciated as Director, and in July 1986, a sherry party was given in his honour, and a presentation made in appreciation of his services.

In 2000, Edward Robinson placed in the care of the Alister Hardy Trust a gift of a collection of ten original works of art which were collected for the Centre for the Study of Spirituality and the Arts at The Regional Religious Education Centre at West London Institute from 1985 onwards. These including one of his own works, a triptych made from disused railway sleepers in elm wood, titled *Resurrection XXXIII*. These are on permanent display at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David at Lampeter.



Edward Robinson at Ross on Wye, working on a sculpture for an exhibition, April 1994

Edward restoring art exhibits in the Archive room at the University of Wales, Lampeter, 16 April 2002

As an artist, Edward had had one-man shows of his work in London, Oxford and other galleries in Britain. Examples of his sculpture are to be seen at the Department of Theology & Religious Studies, University of Wales, Lampeter, in Portsmouth and Southwark Cathedrals and at Kirkbridge Conference Centre, Pennsylvania, as well as in various collections in India, Canada and the USA. A retrospective exhibition of his work over the past 30 years of triptychs, reliefs and other sculptural forms in wood and bronze was mounted at St. Margaret's Church, Westminster Abbey, which ran from 13th February to 25th March this year; a fitting memorial to his work as an artist.

I met Edward in October 1984 shortly after hearing about the AHRERC (the title Edward himself had initiated after becoming Director) and learning of many other people who had had spiritual experiences similar to mine. After replying to many questions with great kindness and very promptly, in letters sent to him, he invited me to come and meet him at the then RERU offices in Holywell Street, Oxford. I found him there surrounded by books, and a number of splendid wooden triptychs he had carved. He greatly impressed me, and set me on course to myself coming, two years later, shortly after he had retired, to work for the Centre.

Edward was a gentle and courteous man, much loved, and distinguished both as an artist and as a scholar where he was both forthright and challenging – he will be greatly missed.

John Franklin, Secretary, AHSSSE.

From Anne Watkins:

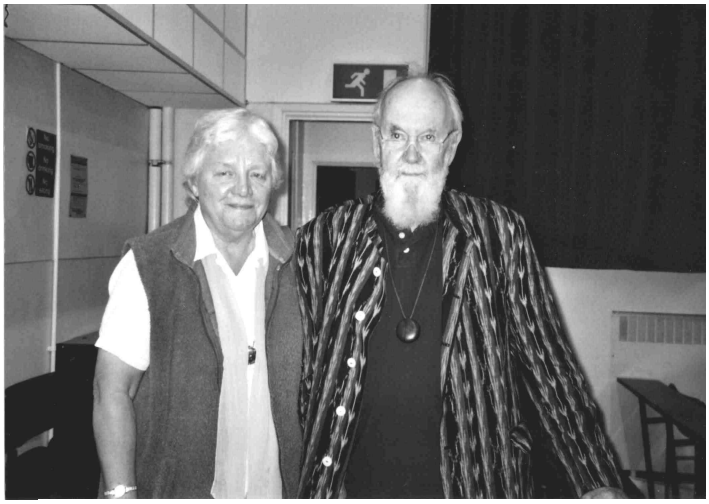
Dear Peggy,

Thank you for (as always) remembering the importance of relationships, and those who have made huge contributions of time and energy to RERC.

I suppose my most endearing memories of Edward Robinson are of when he came to Lampeter with you, soon after the transfer of RERC from Oxford. Then, together with Wendy Dossett, the four of us restored the artwork. Finally, the friendly and helpful maintenance staff at UWL hung the large and heavy exhibits on the stairway of TRS. I recall an associated incident which was a bit naughty but also very comical. Enthused by Edward about the renovated works and display, and having watched the video where Peggy interviewed Edward as he explained the meaning of the pieces, Wendy put up a little poster with the history of the collection and a notebook for comments from our' intellectual' postgraduate students who had to pass that way to reach their offices. One of them cheekily remarked, 'It's art Scott, but not as we know it' (imitating a pop song making fun of the TV series *Star Trek*) It was probably at that stage that Peggy Morgan realised the need for, and produced, a catalogue of the works, so that passers-by could understand the meaningful 'experiences' that had inspired the creations. [The catalogue is lodged in the RERC office at Lampeter.]

I think it was John Franklin and I talking about the history of RERC that made me realise we had to get as much information as possible from our oldest members about those early days at the Unit. Edward was very obliging and invited me to visit him and his wife Wendy at their Forge home for me to record his recollections.

Their move to Exeter meant we did not see as much of the Robinsons but it enabled them to attend the AH Conference that was held in Exeter in 2006. That was the last time I saw Edward, but not the end of communication. For some years it had been the practice to send copies of new Occasional Papers to ex Directors – as a sort of 'thank you' for all the Directors had done up to that point on a voluntary basis. Edward always responded with a notelet showing one of his various triptychs, explaining that Wendy would read it to him as his sight was failing.



Wendy and Edward Robinson, Exeter Conference, 2006

Of course Edward, when Wendy Dossett and I met him, was already a little bit old (although I realise that 'old' gets older, as we age ourselves). My memories are of a kindly, older man who was keen to share his love of art and the subject of Religious Experience with us 'youngsters' who were really just moving into that area of interest.

With happy memories of times with friends and sincere condolences to Wendy Robinson

Anne Veronica Watkins

From Dr Wendy Dossett:

My thanks to Anne for including me in this, and Peggy for contacting me later.

I share many of Anne's happy memories of Edward – and the wonderful pieces of art that he helped us to hang in TRS. The whole experience was hilarious. He wanted some gob-stoppers to replace some that had fallen off a spectacular cross made of rubbish by Aube Taylor that we were hanging in the Sheikh Khalifa Building [TRS]. He thought me unbearably practical when I insisted that gobstoppers would eventually go off and we should use marbles instead. We wondered around Lampeter together both grumbling good-naturedly in search of either gob-stoppers or marbles. Eventually I won, and we ate the gobstoppers we'd got from Mr Conti.

I love what he had to say about children's religious experiences, which has always struck me as true about them. And I'll never forget a seemingly throw-away comment he made. 'Theology is Pornography.' 'Why do you say that Edward?' 'The experience of God is intimate and personal. These theologians want to pore over it in a public setting. Pornography.'

He'll be missed.

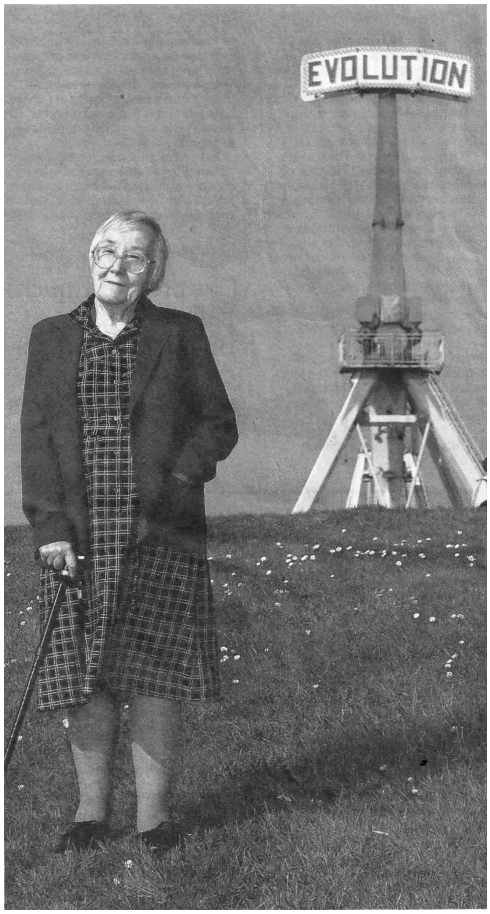
Wendy

Elaine Morgan, born November 7 1920, died July 12 2013

Elaine Morgan, who has died aged 92, rose from a poverty-stricken upbringing in the Welsh valleys to become an award-winning television writer and, more controversially, a proponent of a feminist theory of evolution, when in 1972 she scored an unexpected success with *The Descent of Woman*. The book, welcomed by feminists, created controversy in the scientific community because of its original approach to evolution. She was an avid reader of popular science books, and found herself growing increasingly irritated by theories, propounded by writers such as Robert Ardrey and Desmond Morris, which painted a picture of human evolution based around the needs of males chasing game on the savannah.

'The theme … was that people are different from apes because apes' ancestors stayed in the trees and our own ancestors went out onto the plain and became hunters,' she recalled. 'They stood up on two legs to run faster, they became naked because the running overheated them. Females were regarded chiefly as one of the scarce resources for the males to fight over. If they differed from the males in any way, that was to make themselves more sexually attractive.'

Why, Elaine Morgan wondered, did human females alone have to evolve special features to coax the males to desire them, when 'in every other species … the males take what they are offered in the way of pulchritude, and they like it'. And if males lost their body hair to allow them to cool down, why did the females become even more hairless when they would have needed to keep warm looking after the children during the chilly tropical nights?



Elaine Morgan at Barry Island, South Wales
Photograph: David Sillitoe for the Guardian

Though her own scientific studies had not progressed beyond O-level, Elaine Morgan decided to take on the scientific consensus after reading a 1960 article by the marine biologist Sir Alister Hardy, propounding an 'Aquatic Ape Hypothesis' for human evolution.

Hardy argued that our ancestors' physiology changed dramatically when a population of woodland apes became isolated on a large island around what is now Ethiopia and were forced to adapt to a marine environment: they lost the bulk of their body hair, the remaining strands helping to streamline their bodies as they swam; they developed a more upright posture, supported by the water; their fingertips grew more sensitive as they felt around for food; they grew a layer of subcutaneous fat – found only in other aquatic mammals – to keep themselves insulated. Their remains were swept out to sea, explaining the lack of fossils.

While it initially raised a few eyebrows, Hardy's hypothesis had been largely forgotten when it re-emerged in Elaine Morgan's *The Descent of Woman*. Coming hot on the heels of Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch*, The *Descent of Woman* chimed perfectly with the feminist narrative of the time. Elaine Morgan was not surprised when her book was rubbished by scientists,

admitting that 'The impulse to write was purely politically motivated'. But the positive response from feminists persuaded her to attempt to give the theory a more scientific gloss, and she went on to publish several more books on evolutionary theory, including *The Aquatic Ape* (1982); *The Scars of Evolution* (1990); *The Descent of the Child* (1994); *The Aquatic Ape Hypothesis* (1997) and *The Naked Darwinist* (2008).

On the title page of the last of these she featured a quotation from the philosopher Daniel Dennett: 'During the last few years, when I have found myself in the company of distinguished biologists, evolutionary theorists, palaeoanthropologists and other experts, I have often asked them just to tell me, please, exactly why Elaine Morgan must be wrong about the aquatic theory. I haven't yet had a reply worth mentioning.'

Indeed, the Aquatic Ape Hypothesis has acquired some scientific currency in recent years following the discovery of fossils which suggest that humans became bipedal before the savannah developed. Desmond Morris has said that he believes an aquatic phase of human development is 'highly likely'.

But most scientists remain sceptical, pointing out that despite the fact that aquatic margins provide almost perfect conditions for fossil formation, there is no fossil evidence to support the theory.

Elaine Morgan was appointed OBE in 2009 and the same year was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. She gave her last public lecture to the Alister Hardy Society in the Cliff Tucker theatre at Lampeter in May 2007.

Adapted from the Telegraph 5th August 2013

Book Reviews

Colm Keane, *We'll Meet Again: Irish Deathbed Visions – Who You Meet When You Die*
Co. Wicklow, Capel Island Press, 2013. 224 pp. ISBN 978 0 9559133 4 1

Death was once a social event and the dying person died at home surrounded by family and friends. Throughout the literature there have been reports of people gesturing or trying to speak to unseen people as they approached death. These experiences are called deathbed visions and they are commonly witnessed by others, especially nurses who attend to the dying in hospital. For many years the subject of deathbed visions has been overlooked or dismissed as aberrations of a dying brain. However, recent research is showing that these experiences can no longer be dismissed as mere hallucinations.

This book is a lovely collection of 70 cases of Irish deathbed visions. Journalist Colm Keane has interviewed many people who have described very interesting experiences around the time of death. Chapters include joyous reunions, death bed visions, near-death experiences, and other interesting phenomena that occur around the time of death, such as premonitions of death. There is also a discussion of the previous research in this field.

There are many first hand witness accounts where the actions of dying people, communicating with deceased others that cannot be seen, have been observed by those at their bedside. Being present and observing the actions of the dying person left many of the witnesses at the bedside with a renewed sense of comfort regarding death. Keane's conclusion is that we do not die alone. This interesting book will be of great comfort to those who have lost loved ones and indeed to anyone who is afraid of dying.

Reviewed by Dr Penny Sartori, author of The Wisdom of Near-Death Experiences

Dr Sam Parnia with Josh Young, *The Lazarus Effect: The science that is erasing the boundaries between life and death*
London, Rider Books, 2013. 352 pp. ISBN 978 1 84604 307 9 (pbk) £12.99

In this book Dr Parnia looks at the latest research in resuscitation science. This is a very important book as he rightly argues for the standardisation of resuscitation protocol worldwide. This will ensure that every patient is given the best possible chance to reverse 'death' from sudden cardiac arrest. He draws attention to the latest research of cooling down patients, which has demonstrated that likelihood of survival can be increased even after several hours of cardiac arrest. Unfortunately, not all hospitals follow the same protocol, so not every patient in cardiac arrest is given optimal opportunity for a good recovery [see below*].

Dr Parnia provides a comprehensive overview of the physiological process of death in the varying degrees of disease and cell death. There is a good explanation of the heart, the physiology of what happens when it stops and the effects of cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR). He also discusses the prevention of long term brain injury which can result from lack of oxygen sustained during cardiac arrest. There is an in-depth look at the progress of resuscitation techniques, and the history of ventilation of patients and CPR which has led to current resuscitation procedures, along with a discussion of the latest technological development of the equipment used.

There is a discussion of cases where patients have been found in cardiac arrest for many hours out of doors, but because they were hypothermic they were successfully resuscitated

and did not sustain any brain damage. Consequently, new techniques have been developed using various different cooling methods to slow down metabolism and cell death. This is revolutionary as these cooling methods can reverse cell death due to lack of oxygen, therefore greatly reducing the possibility of brain damage following the cardiac arrest.

* There are currently shortfalls in resuscitation procedures as not all hospitals follow the same cardiac arrest protocols, therefore survival outcomes vary greatly between hospitals and indeed various countries. Information and instructions on current standard procedures are not detailed enough; it was found that when staff who had been trained in those methods were retested a month later, they had forgotten the procedures. When resuscitation protocols are published they are not systematically disseminated to all hospitals, therefore new guidelines are not always followed because doctors are not notified of these advances in practice.

In the treatment of cardiac arrest patients Dr Parnia argues that the emphasis should be on the 24-72 hours post-resuscitation phase, and in appropriate cases certain procedures should be routinely performed. He emphasises his point by comparing two high profile cases of football players who had a cardiac arrest on the playing field – one survived, the other did not. [This can of course be attributed to different protocols for treatment in the immediate aftermath of cardiac arrest, as described above.]

Later in the book he questions what it is like to die and discusses NDEs, including the cases of NDErs he met on TV shows and those who have written to him. He also briefly considers philosophical concepts of the soul which arose from Plato and Aristotle, and discusses Crick's discovery of DNA, the views of Sir John Eccles, David Chalmers and the latest brain scanning technology. Despite all of the current knowledge there is still no explanation as to how consciousness can arise from the physiological processes that occur in the brain.

He highlights the fact that NDEs can't be explained by one theory, and argues that NDEs in cardiac arrest should be considered as actual death experiences (ADE). However, I'm not sure I agree. To argue that NDEs which occur during cardiac arrest are an actual death experience seems to be a contradiction to the main point of his book – that death is a process, and in some circumstances by undertaking techniques such as cooling the body, this process can be slowed down and even reversed. The fact that 'death' can be reversed, and a person can be successfully resuscitated, implies that the person is not truly dead as the cells have not died.

It is important to distinguish between NDEs in the context of cardiac arrest, and NDEs that occur under other life threatening circumstances, because during cardiac arrest there is no brain activity whereas there is some degree of brain activity during other circumstances. However, to completely separate the two, and ignore the NDEs that occur in other life threatening circumstances could be detrimental to our further understanding of consciousness.

The AWARE study was set up by Dr Parnia and his colleagues five years ago in several different hospitals throughout the UK, USA and Europe to study patients who survived cardiac arrest. This in itself is a huge achievement, especially in ensuring the same protocols are strictly adhered to and co-ordinating data collection and analysis of data between multiple sites.

This study is important for three reasons; first it will provide useful physiological information that will result in further improvement of resuscitation techniques and favourable outcomes for future patients. Secondly, it considers all aspects of the human experience as it is also investigating the subjective experiences reported by some patients who survive cardiac arrest. This will ensure positive outcomes for patients in the post resuscitation phase where medical techniques can lead to improved physiological outcomes, and by addressing the possibility of

a NDE occurring, will ensure that important psychological and spiritual aspects of patient care are fully addressed and further support given if necessary. Thirdly, researching how the physiological and subjective states which were occurring simultaneously could be correlated can lead to a greater understanding of consciousness.

Part of the study incorporated protocol from previous research studies where attempts have been made to verify the out-of-body component using hidden targets that can only be viewed from an out-of-body perspective. The book mentions only one case where some veridical aspects were reported. It may appear that surprisingly little data is reported in this book considering the scope of the project. However, Dr Parnia has pointed out that follow-up of patients was very difficult due to the unpredictability of the NDEs occurring. Many cardiac arrests occur out of hours and at weekends when people on the research team are not on duty, or cardiac arrests occur when the research team are addressing their usual work duties. This finding has led to some modification of the research. Patient follow-up is now being undertaken retrospectively, after patients have been discharged from hospital in some cases. This unfortunately does introduce extra factors such as fallibility of memory, and less likelihood of verifying any OBE reports with staff present at the time. These obstacles highlight how much perseverance is required to set up and maintain an important study of such magnitude. I'm sure the long term results of the AWARE study will be both interesting and very beneficial to future patient care.

This book is very useful for those interested in the physiology of death and cardiac arrest. It also succeeds in highlighting the evolution of the resuscitation science and how much our science and understanding of cardiac arrest is advancing. Dr Parnia argues well for a much needed standardisation of resuscitation protocol which could lead to even greater survival rates and positive outcomes. A most interesting book with pertinent recommendations for improving resuscitation protocols. A welcome addition to the literature.

Reviewed by Dr Penny Sartori, author of The Wisdom of Near-Death Experiences

Charles M. Murphy, *Eucharistic Adoration: Holy Hour Meditations on the Seven Last Words of Christ*
Notre Dame, Indiana, Ave Maria Press, 2012. 112 pp. ISBN 978 1 59471 308 8 (pbk) £8.99

When I saw this book for review in *De Numine* my first thought was that it was a book to be prayed not just read, and one of the endorsers also states 'Do not read this book: pray this book'. I hope that I have been able to do that. The specific purpose of the book is, however, that it be prayed in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament; unfortunately I was not often able to do this as my best time to pray is early morning, before any churches are open. This was my loss, as *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches 'Jesus Christ is present in the Eucharist in a unique and incomparable way. He is present in a true, real and substantial way, with his Body and his Blood, with his Soul and his Divinity. In the Eucharist, therefore, there is present in a sacramental way that is, under the Eucharistic species of bread and wine, Christ whole and entire, God and man.'[1] It is also important to understand that in the Roman Catholic Church, the consecrated hosts that are not consumed during the Mass are retained for the sick and for solemn adoration by the faithful.

The author, Monsignor Charles Murphy, is a priest in the Roman Catholic Church and is former academic dean and rector of the Pontifical North American College in Rome. He also served as part of the editorial group under the then Cardinal Ratzinger on the third draft of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which became the fourth and final version.

This book is divided into nine main sections. The Introduction explains, with reference to Blessed Pope John Paul II, the importance of spending time in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament in a holy hour, and that it is a personal response to the challenge posed by Jesus to Peter and his apostles during his agony in the garden of Gethsemane before his death.

In the gospels of Mathew, Luke and John, Jesus speaks in total seven times as he hangs on the cross, and the following seven sections each begin with one of these scriptural quotations. These are titled The First Word, The Second Word and so on. Each section is in two parts with the first part being a meditation and reflection on the words of Jesus. For example The First Word is 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Mt 27:46) and the author explains that Jesus' lament is believed to be addressed to God and taken from Psalm 22, where the psalmist goes through a gamut of emotions but ultimately ends with praise and trust in God. At the end of the reflection the author suggests two dialogue points with the Eucharistic Lord whereby he encourages the reader to listen to what Jesus is saying in the silence of their own heart, and to share with Jesus the crosses and sorrows from their own lives.

The second part of each chapter is called 'Witness' and gives a short biography of people who the author believes have lived out in their lives the words of Jesus previously reflected on. They include Simone Weil, St Teresa Blessed by the Cross (Edith Stein), Dorothy Day, Blessed John XXIII, Blessed John Paul II, Blessed Teresa of Calcutta and St Margaret Mary Alacoque. These are all inspiring people and each account left me wanting to know more about them, and how they lived out so beautifully in the suffering of their own lives the words spoken by Jesus from the cross. At the end of each witness story there are once again two points encouraging dialogue with Jesus in the Eucharist. Each chapter ends with a prayer. The final section of the book is a selection of hymns of the passion and Eucharist for use during a Holy Hour. These would, I believe, be most useful for adoration in common with other people.

I enjoyed this book very much and I think it is relevant to all people regardless of their academic background or faith who wish to meditate on the passion of Jesus. I strongly recommend the book, and I think it would be particularly beneficial for use on a retreat or during Lent. I found it helpful to use a Bible when reading the book as it enabled me to read each of Jesus' Words in its context, and also to read the psalms and other scripture quotations in their entirety, as the author only gives certain verses. I will certainly go back to this book again and again in my prayer and in my search to understand and find Jesus in the sufferings in my own life and in the world.

Reviewed by Karen Anne Govaerts

Reference

[1] *The Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Catholic Truth Society 2006

Marcus Braybrooke, *Widening Vision, The World Congress of Faiths and the Growing Interfaith Movement*

Braybrooke Press, 2013, 345pp. ISBN 978 1 291 36232 9 (pbk) £15.00 from www.lulu.com or www.worldfaiths.org eBook, Amazon Kindle £5.71

This book is available in both electronic and paperback form and is Marcus Braybrooke's update of *A Wider Vision, A History of the World Congress of Faiths,* which was published in 1996 to mark the 60th anniversary of the WCF. Now it includes two appendices of interfaith liturgies (one used before the 2012 London Olympics and Paralympics) and brings the story right up to date.

From time to time a visionary feels moved to work towards fostering understanding and co-operation between the religions and to support the acceptance of a universal ethic. One such was Sir Francis Younghusband, the founder of the WCF, and another is Marcus Braybrooke. Both men, through their life's work, have contributed enormously to interreligious harmony. Here Marcus Braybrooke, now WCF President, gives a personal view of the history of the organisation and an overview of the growing interfaith movement worldwide, frequently describing events in which he and his wife Mary took part.

Marcus Braybrooke traces the roots of the WCF to the Chicago World Parliament of Religions in 1893, the Religions of Empire Conference in 1924, and the moves to revive the World Parliament spirit in 1933 with the Second World Fair, also in Chicago. However, the main root is taken to be Younghusband's spiritual experiences of a 'mighty joy-giving Power … at work in every living thing' which transformed the widely-travelled military man into a mystic. As with many who have had such experiences, Younghusband did not often refer to them. However, as he grew older, he owned that his deep awareness of the spiritual unity of all people and all religions was the inspiration for the WCF.

The early days are described, and various gatherings are summarised, in particular the poignant congresses before and even during World War II. Younghusband's original vision of an international body eventually developed into a British-based organisation as Britain itself changed from being the centre of a worldwide Empire to a multicultural society. The need for harmony and peaceful co-existence between religions has remained paramount, and much WCF and interfaith work has been done through people working together in the community, and by sharing in meditation and prayer. Throughout the period, groups formed, meetings, conferences and Parliaments were held, and many outstanding people became involved in the WCF and the interfaith movement. All find a place in this encyclopaedic work.

The Annual Younghusband Lectures are recorded, particularly the significant one given by Dr Robert Runcie, then Archbishop of Canterbury, in 1986 for the 50th Anniversary of the WCF. He described the world religions as different gifts of the spirit to humanity, saying, 'In the depth of every living religion there is a point at which religion itself loses its importance, and that to which it points breaks through its particularity, elevating it to spiritual freedom and to a vision of the spiritual presence in other expressions of the ultimate meaning of man's existence'. This is the vision of many engaged in the interfaith enterprise, inspiring initiatives and organisations in the UK and worldwide.

It is important to appreciate just how far we have come. The Memorial Service in 1942 for Sir Francis Younghusband was the first where many faiths were included. At the time this was somewhat disapproved of by *The Church Times.* These days, national multi-faith services are fully accepted.

In view of the growing necessity for global co-operation, we need a spiritual outlook which is shared by the religious traditions of the world. Such was the vision which underlay the founding of the WCF and the interfaith movement, and continues to inspire its work today. This book captures that rich history and describes its present evolution. It is a volume to be treasured.

Reviewed by Marianne Rankin.
Director of Communications, Alister Hardy Trust and Society for the Study of Spiritual Experience

This review has also appeared in *Interreligious Insight*, Volume 11 Number 1 July 2013 (published by World Congress of Faiths)

Howard A Jones, *Evolution of Consciousness: Progressing towards universal holism*
Whitland, Fairhill Publishing, 2012. 294 pp. ISBN 978 0 9568153 4 7 (pbk) £12.50

This is a good book, a wide-ranging survey of human achievement in thought in that word's widest sense, which, of course, is, at least approximately, a pragmatic definition of consciousness. Nonetheless, it surprised me, as I read the book for the first time, for, having written something on the same very broad subject myself (in Dr Lockhart's book on the subtle body[1]) I found that Dr Jones had approached the matter from a very different direction.

I had attempted to empathise with the mind of early man, and so discern how humans thought, what pleased them, what frightened them, what problems arose and prompted them to cogitate, what understandings dawned as a result of that thinking, what myths they invented to explain the world they found themselves living in. One might say that throughout his book Dr Jones covers approximately this same ground, but he begins with the resulting understandings rather than in the ignorance out of which they gradually developed, and he thus produces a retrospective survey of thought and culture which is an excellent account of what has developed from the operation of the human mind, rather than an attempt at an imaginative empathy with the stages and states of consciousness *per se*. That would be a very speculative endeavour, and perhaps impossible to achieve, though Jean Gebser attempted it.[2] Dr Jones chooses his own approach, and always, in reading his book, one is made aware of the historical development – actual historical facts – and any such historical development is, and signifies, a deepening of the conscious mind in which the expanding fund of understanding is accumulating. Just imagine the difficulty, indeed, the impossibility, of explaining physics to the early medieval mind, and one sees at once that the history of discovery is also the history of the evolution of human consciousness.

The author sets this endeavour out quite clearly in his Preface, where he says:

> All the ideas that are derived from science and philosophy, all the creative inspiration of the arts and humanities, the practical innovations of medicine and engineering, and the unfolding events of history – all these are developments that emerge from mind, and they represent facets of the evolution of consciousness.

With this initial premise no-one could disagree, and I believe Dr Jones chooses this way to survey his material because it is natural for anyone with his quite outstanding grasp of the history of the distinct schools of philosophical thought, an aspect of the book which certainly places into proper relation with each other the many philosophical discourses which, with my lesser familiarity with philosophy, I had not previously succeeded in arranging into an harmonious, self-interrelating whole. Here then is one aspect of the usefulness of this book. It is a superb exploratory survey, for the intelligent general reader, of the human ascent from barely-conscious animal, dreaming its way through life, to the strongly-self-aware sophisticate of today. Indeed, and Jones does not fail to point this out, one of the problems of our age is the overbearing pervasiveness of that small-mindedness which is the Ego-personality, a small-mindedness which endangers what he stresses, time and again throughout his book, is essential for human survival: the integration of the whole contents of modern consciousness. When this integration is sincerely achieved, it expands consciousness into that world in which it will be a hideous affront to everyone's personal conscience if any other being is deliberately harmed. As yet, we are some way from this, as inharmonious personal experience shows us all, but this book will prompt many to strive in that direction.

In the context of religious myths which cannot possibly be factually correct, Dr Jones expresses this very same general notion, but in his own personal way: '. . . we need to look forward and envision what we can be in a new cooperative, spiritual, holistic world-view

developing fully the enormous resource we have of human potential. Reductionism takes no account of human *being* and *becoming.'* (p. 64)

Dr Jones practises the comprehensiveness of approach that he preaches, for on page 100 he has this: 'We can look on the unity of the subatomic quantum world as a metaphor for the idea that each of us interacts with everyone else on the planet through universal love and beneficence, conveyed on a cosmic energy field.' For me, too, this passage illustrates and confirms the relevance of holism itself, for the relation between ourselves as Beings and the fundamental world of quantum physics in which we live is a topic on which I have also written, but, as before, from a quite different angle. The point on which all authors and all readers will agree, is, surely, that every angle of view gives us some truth, but all angles of view are necessary, and must now be combined into a living whole which more nearly approaches the whole truth than any schema we have yet achieved. That greater wholeness will be a creature new to evolution, the fully-human human being, harmonious in thought, word and deed. This is surely the main goal of the new broader and deeper consciousness now developing. There is, necessarily, just one wholeness at which we must aim, but there are many perspectives within it. Howard Jones's book is an important part of the exposition of that wholeness, and therefore an important part of the evolution of holistic consciousness itself.

Reviewed by Eric Franklin

References

[1] Lockhart, M., *The Subtle Energy Body* Inner traditions Vermont USA, 2010
[2] Gebser, Jean. *The Ever-present Origin,* Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985

Don MacGregor, *Blue Sky God: The evolution of science and Christianity*
Circle Books (John Hunt Publishing), 2012, 286 pp. ISBN 978-1846949371 (pbk) £14.99

The author of this book was formerly a teacher of science at secondary level in high school. His on-line biography tells us that he studied various eastern and esoteric faiths before taking up with Christianity in 1983. He subsequently trained for the ministry, and now practises in a parish in Pembrokeshire, Wales. He is thus in a position to give us as readers insights from various religious practices, focusing on Christianity, and show how these are compatible with modern science. MacGregor's background is important because, at first sight, the subtitle of this book would seem to suggest that it deals with two disparate subjects.

The Preface to the book tells us something of the author's spiritual journey and how he travelled from science to faith. The strength of this book is that his interpretation of the Christian religion is modern but still orthodox – if those two descriptions are not incompatible! He writes of the 'straightjacket of doctrine and liturgy' within the Christian Church and admits that biblical stories of creation are outdated and need to take account of modern scientific discoveries, but in an Appendix he presents a very cogent and modern interpretation of the so-called 'virgin birth'. It is that portrayal of the numinous within the faith – the message of Jesus – that MacGregor clings to and sees as not only his inspiration but as a potential source of hope for others in a clearly troubled world. He maintains that 'our understanding of theology and the nature of God has to change. Christianity has to evolve to be credible for every new generation as the worldview evolves'.

There are four fundamental issues on the basis of which MacGregor presents his New Age Christianity. First, he acknowledges the new paradigm emerging in physics about the Primacy of Consciousness and its role in Creation, and how this critically influences the concept of God. Secondly, the anthropomorphic image of God is no longer relevant or

tenable, and while 'God may be unchanging' our image of God needs to be refined. Thirdly, the mystical powers of human beings that are continually being studied and verified by science are leading to the definition of what Sir Alister Hardy called in *The Living Stream* a 'group mind'[1], or that which Jung described as a 'collective unconscious'[2]. This is producing a much greater global humanitarian awareness and concern for our earthly environment. The final point that MacGregor makes concerns the effectiveness of spiritual healing and complementary therapies; while such practices owe nothing directly to religious beliefs, they do involve interaction with a cosmic spiritual energy that many people are embracing as a vision of their God. Such beliefs have long been condemned by orthodox Christian religion and MacGregor is urging a much greater open-mindedness within his religion.

Chapter One outlines in simple terms the quantum world view that leads to the vision of God as Universal Mind. The author stresses the metaphorical nature of God as a Trinity, which many have criticized as a rationally unacceptable concept. Chapter Two describes the relevance of modern studies of epigenetics and the influence of healing and prayer – a subject written about in depth by Larry Dossey.[3] Chapter Three gives us a resumé of Rupert Sheldrake's work on morphic resonance, and interprets it as having 'profound implications for the death and resurrection of Jesus and the theology of atonement'. Chapter Four elaborates on this with examples taken from the writings of Lynne McTaggart.[4]

With Chapter Five we enter Part Two of the book that discusses Christianity's evolution and interweaves Christian theology and terminology with the scientific concepts discussed earlier. MacGregor begins by contradicting the notion of Jesus as God: 'he was a real, living, fully human *being* … not God disguising himself as human'. As MacGregor points out, following Ehrman[5], the New Testament on which modern Christianity is based was not even established until several centuries after the time of Jesus. The Jesus portrayed in this book is a paragon and exemplar of virtue, as divine in spirit as it is possible for any wholly spiritual person to be – the 'God in us'. The next two chapters re-interpret the Kingdom of Heaven and the Christian notion of Salvation in more rationally believable terminology. The following two chapters give us an interpretation of what 'spiritual' and 'religious' mean in these terms, and the final chapter gives us the author's view of the New Breed of Christian.

This is an excellent book if you are a Christian, which I am not, and a rationalist, which I am, and it charts an often convincing way in which the two belief systems can be reconciled. The book concludes with Appendixes on the Virgin Birth, a Service of Prayers for Healing, and a Consciousness Eucharist. There are also Notes, References and a good Index.

Reviewed by Dr Howard Jones

References

1. Hardy, Alister, *The Living Stream*, Collins, 1965.
2. Jung, Carl G. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Collected Works, Vol. 9, Part 1, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959.
3. Dossey, Larry, *Healing Words*, Harper, San Francisco, 1993; *Healing Beyond the Body*, Time Warner, 2002; Piatkus, London, 2009.
4. McTaggart, Lynne, *The Field*, Element (HarperCollins), London, 2001.
5. Ehrman, Bart D. *Whose Word Is It?* Continuum, London, 2006.

Please see below for the list of books we have received for review. If any of our current reviewers, or other interested readers, would like to write a review of any of these, please contact Jean Matthews (j.matthews@tsd.ac.uk), who will arrange for a copy to be sent to you. When we receive your review, the book will become yours. Anyone who would like to review a book on the list can contact Jean for more information about titles they think look interesting. We will always consider reviews of books not on the list, and suggestions for review copies we could ask for are also welcome.

We are very pleased to have received new publications by Professor Paul Badham, and Dr Robert Govaerts, which appear on the list of books for review below:

Paul Badham, *Making Sense of Death and Immortality* (SPCK, 2013)

Robert Govaerts, *Cosmic Prayer and Guided Transformation: Key Elements of the Emergent Christian Cosmology* (Pickwick Publications, 2012)

Books Received for Review

Mary Christine Athans	*In Quest of the Jewish Mary: The Mother of Jesus in History, Theology, and Spirituality* (Orbis 2013)
Paul Badham	*Making Sense of Death and Immortality* (SPCK, 2013)
A A Boesak & C P DeYoung	*Radical Reconciliation: Beyond Political Pietism and Christian Quietism* (foreword by Archbishop Desmond Tutu) (Orbis, 2012)
Dr Peter J Colyer	*The Prescientific Bible: a study of cultural influences on the biblical writers, and how these affect our reading of the Bible today* (Circle Books, 2013)
Don H Compier	*Listening to Popular Music* (Fortress, 2013)
Kent Crockett	*Slaying Your Giants: Biblical Solutions to Everyday Problems* (Hendrickson, 2013)
Ilia Delio OSF	*The Unbearable Wholeness of Being: God, Evolution, and the Power of Love* (Orbis, 2013)
James W Douglass	*Gandhi and the Unspeakable: his final experiment with truth* (Orbis, 2012)
D M Doyle, T J Furry, & P D Bazzell (eds.)	*Ecclesiology and Exclusion: Boundaries of Being and Belonging in Postmodern Times* (Orbis, 2012)
J Daryl Charles (ed.)	*Reading Genesis 1-2: An Evangelical Conversation* (Hendrickson, 2013)

Luke Eastwood	*The Druid's Primer*	(Moon Books, 2012)
Carol O. Eckerman	*Lessons in Simply Being: Finding the Peace within Tumult*	(Circle Books, 2012)
Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza	*Changing Horizons: Explorations in Feminist Interpretation*	(Fortress, 2013)
David E Fredrickson	*Eros and the Christ: Longing and Envy in Paul's Christology*	(Fortress, 2013)
Robert Govaerts	*Cosmic Prayer and Guided Transformation: Key Elements of the Emergent Christian Cosmology*	(Pickwick Publications, 2012)
R. D. Hecht & V. F. Biondo III (eds.),	*Religion and Culture: Contemporary Practices and Perspectives*,	(Fortress Press, 2012)
Ivy A Helman	*Women and the Vatican: an exploration of official documents*	(Orbis, 2012)
Kenneth R Himes	*Christianity and the Political Order: Conflict, Cooptation, and Cooperation* (Orbis, 2013)	
Barbara A. Holmes	*Dreaming* (Compass Series Christian Exploration of Daily Living)	(Fortress Press, 2012)
Jonas Jonson	*Wounded Visions: Unity, Justice, and Peace in the World Church after 1968*	(Eerdmans, 2013)
Joseph A Marchal (ed.)	*Studying Paul's Letters: Contemporary Perspectives and Methods*	(Fortress Press, 2012)
Sallie McFague	*Blessed are the Consumers: Climate Change and the Practice of Restraint*	(Fortress Press, 2013)
John Morris	*Contemporary Creed: Reasonable pathways through the problems of Christian beliefs and ethics*	(O Books, 2012)
Charles M Murphy	*Eucharistic Adoration: Holy Hour Meditations on the Seven Last Words of Christ*	(Ave Maria Press, 2012)
D R Nelson, J M Moritz & T Peters (eds.),	*Theologians in Their Own Words*	(Fortress, 2013)
Patrick F O'Connell (ed.)	*Thomas Merton Selected Essays*	(Orbis, 2013)
Diarmuid O'Murchu	*In the Beginning was the Spirit: Science, Religion, and Indigenous Spirituality*	(Orbis, 2012)
Sandra Percy	*Christian Women Writers through the Ages*	(Mosaic Press 2012)
Cheryl M Peterson	*Who is the Church?: an Ecclesiology for the Twenty-First Century*	(Fortress, 2013)
Gabriel Said Reynolds	*The Emergence of Islam: Classical Traditions in Contemporary Perspective*	(Fortress, 2012)
Jim Ryan	*The Spiritual Mind: a journey into awareness*	(Brahma Kumaris, 2011)
Elizabeth Scalia	*Strange Gods: Unmasking the Idols in Everyday Life*	(Ave Maria Press, 2013)

Klaus Schwarzwäller	Cross and Resurrection: God's Wonder and Mystery	(Fortress, 2012)
Robert B Stewart (ed.)	*Can Only One Religion be True: Paul Knitter & Harold Netland in Dialogue*	(Fortress, 2013)
Stivers, Gudorf, & Martin-Schramm	*Christian Ethics: a case method approach*	(Orbis, 2012)
Dick Sullivan	*Gideon's God* [novel]	(Coracle, 2012)
Connie Ann Valenti	*Stories of Jesus: a Gospel of Faith and Imagination*.	(Orbis, 2012)
Joseph R Veneroso	*Honoring the Void: Meditations on the Meaning of Life*	(Orbis, 2013)

Autumn ectoplasm

AHSSSE Events September 2013 to September 2014

Friday 20th September 2013

7.30 pm AHSSSE Midlands Group: Topic: *The Divine Feminine*.
Venue: 1 Woodcroft Close, Blackwell, Bromsgrove, B60 1DA
(Contact: Sheelah James, e-mail: sheelahjames@aol.com)

Monday 23rd September 2013

AHSSSE South-East Wales Group: Outing to Partrishow old chapel and well. (For information about where to meet and at what time, please contact Mary Cook Tel: 07794 294432)

Saturday 5th October 2013

Alister Hardy Society for the Study of Spiritual Experience Open Day 2013

10.00 am	Registration
10.30 am	Welcome and Introductions
10.45.am	2013 Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture: *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn* by Professor Leslie Francis
12.00 pm	Alister Hardy Society AGM
1.15 pm	Lunch (bring packed lunch; tea/coffee provided)
2.15 pm	*Can the Numinous be expressed through Landscape Painting?* An exploration of aesthetics at the dawn of Romanticism, examining some of the works by Blake, Palmer, Runge and Friedrich, by David Greenwood
3.45pm	*Caspar David Friedrich, Landscape as Icon,* by Marianne Rankin
4.15 pm	Finish
Venue:	Newman Room (OU Chaplaincy), Rose Place, St. Aldates, Oxford (Inquiries and bookings: Marianne Rankin Tel: 07714 032643 or email: mariannerankin@icloud.com)

Friday 11th October 2013

7.30 pm	AHSSSE Midlands Group: Topic to be announced.
Venue:	1 Woodcroft Close, Blackwell, Bromsgrove, B60 1DA (Contact: Sheelah James, e-mail: sheelahjames@aol.com)

Friday 1st November 2013

7.30 pm	AHSSSE Chesterfield Group: *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* (DVD)
Venue:	Whittington Moor, Chesterfield. (Contact: Mike Rush, e-mail: mikerush@virginmedia.com).

Friday 15th November 2013

7.30 pm	AHSSSE Midlands Group: Topic to be announced.
Venue:	1 Woodcroft Close, Blackwell, Bromsgrove, B60 1DA (Contact: Sheelah James, e-mail: sheelahjames@aol.com)

Thursday 28th November 2013

3.00 pm	AHSSSE London Group: Talk: *Spiritual Experience and Naturalism: Perspectives from the Current Science-Religion dialogue,* by Dr. Christopher Knight.
5.00 pm	Shared supper (bring a little finger food, tea/coffee provided);
5.45 pm	Evening discussion.
Venue:	Essex Unitarian Church, 112 Palace Gardens Terrace, London, W8. (Contact: John Franklin, e-mail: johnfranklin35@hotmail.com)

Sunday 1st December 2013

1.00 pm	AHSSSE Midlands Group: Bring and share vegetarian lunch, video on *Rumi and Sufi mysticism*, planning session for 2014.
Venue:	1 Woodcroft Close, Blackwell, Bromsgrove, B60 1DA (Contact: Sheelah James, e-mail: sheelahjames@aol.com).

Friday 6th December 2013

7.30 pm AHSSSE Chesterfield Group: *Pi* (DVD movie)
Venue: Whittington Moor, Chesterfield. (Contact: Mike Rush, e-mail: mikerush@virginmedia.com).

Tuesday 10th December 2013

2.30 pm AHSSSE South-East Wales Group: Discussion: *What do we learn from the past? What do we seek in the future?*
Venue: 12 Wood Close, Llanfrechfa, Cwmbran NP44 8UR.
(Contact: Mary Cook, tel: 07794 294432)

Friday 3rd January 2014

7.30 pm AHSSSE Chesterfield Group: *Emmanuel Swedenborg* (DVD)
Venue: Whittington Moor, Chesterfield. (Contact: Mike Rush, e-mail: mikerush@virginmedia.com).

Friday 24th January 2014

7.30 pm AHSSSE Midlands Group: Topic to be announced.
Venue: 1 Woodcroft Close, Blackwell, Bromsgrove, B60 1DA
(Contact: Sheelah James, e-mail: sheelahjames@aol.com).

Thursday 6th February 2014

3.00 pm AHSSSE London Group: Talk: *Near-Death Experiences: Life after Death,* by Revd. Feargus O'Connor
Venue: Essex Unitarian Church, 112 Palace Gardens Terrace, London, W8.
(Contact: John Franklin, e-mail: johnfranklin35@hotmail.com)

Friday 7th February 2014

7.30 pm AHSSSE Chesterfield Group: *In Search of The Great Beast 666* (DVD docudrama about Aleister Crowley)
Venue: Whittington Moor, Chesterfield
(Contact: Mike Rush, e-mail: mikerush@virginmedia.com).

Friday 7th March 2014

7.30 pm AHSSSE Chesterfield Group: RE Seminar #2: *Sir Alister Hardy & the Religious Experience Research Centre* (Mike Rush)
Venue: Whittington Moor, Chesterfield
(Contact: Mike Rush, e-mail: mikerush@virginmedia.com).

Saturday 15th March 2014

Joint AHSSSE/Wrekin Trust/Anthroposophical Society Conference: *Deeper Dimensions in Education*. Speakers: Dr. Greg Barker, Marianne Rankin and Aonghus Gordon, founder of the Ruskin Mill Colleges of specialist further education and the Field Centre, a higher education institute.
Venue: Sheffield
(Contact: Robert Chamberlain: robertchamberlain43@outlook.com)

Thursday 20th March 2013

2.30 pm AHSSSE South-East Wales Group: Discussion: *The Four Elements – Earth (linking with the Mystical)*
Venue: 12 Wood Close, Llanfrechfa, Cwmbran NP44 8UR
(Contact: Mary Cook, tel: 07794 294432)

Friday 21st March 2014

7.30 pm AHSSSE Midlands Group: Theme: *The Tao of Neuroscience*

Venue: 1 Woodcroft Close, Blackwell, Bromsgrove, B60 1DA
(Contact: Sheelah James, e-mail: sheelahjames@aol.com)

Friday 4th April 2014

7.30 pm AHSSSE Chesterfield Group: *The Tarot* (DVD)
Venue: Whittington Moor, Chesterfield
(Contact: Mike Rush, e-mail: mikerush@virginmedia.com)

Thursday 10th April 2014

3.00 pm AHSSSE London Group: Talk: *Valuing Our Heritage: The place of RERU/RERC in the History of Research into Religious Experience*, by Peggy Morgan
Venue: Essex Unitarian Church, 112 Palace Gardens Terrace, London, W8
(Contact: John Franklin, e-mail: johnfranklin35@hotmail.com)

Friday 18th April 2014

7.30 pm AHSSSE Midlands Group: Topic to be announced.
Venue: 1 Woodcroft Close, Blackwell, Bromsgrove, B60 1DA
(Contact: Sheelah James, e-mail: sheelahjames@aol.com)

Friday 2nd May 2014

7.30 pm AHSSSE Chesterfield Group: *The Lady in the Old Testament* (talk by Rodney Ward)
Venue: Whittington Moor, Chesterfield
(Contact: Mike Rush, e-mail: mikerush@virginmedia.com)

Friday 16th May 2014

7.30 pm AHSSSE Midlands Group: Topic to be announced.
Venue: 1 Woodcroft Close, Blackwell, Bromsgrove, B60 1DA
(Contact: Sheelah James, e-mail: sheelahjames@aol.com)

Saturday 28th June 2014

One Spirit Alliance: Conference (a follow-up to the conference held in London on 8th June 2013 – details to follow)
Venue: The Study Centre, Colet House, 151 Talgarth Road, London W14 9DA
(For further details contact: Marianne Rankin 01684 772417 or 07714032643 or email: mariannerankin@icloud.com)

Friday 6th June 2014

7.30 pm AHSSSE Chesterfield Group: *Psychology & Buddhism*
Venue: Whittington Moor, Chesterfield
(Contact: Mike Rush, e-mail: mikerush@virginmedia.com)

Monday 23rd June 2014

2.30 pm AHSSSE South-East Wales Group: Discussion: *The Four Elements – Air*
Venue: 12 Wood Close, Llanfrechfa, Cwmbran NP44 8UR
(Contact: Mary Cook, tel: 07794 294432)

Friday 25th July to Sunday 27th July 2014

AHSSSE Annual Gathering:
Residential weekend: *Pilgrim Paths*: *the spiritual journey across time and traditions*
Venue: Llantarnam Abbey, Cwmbran, nr. Newport NP44 3YJ
(Llantarnam Abbey is just 4 miles north from Junction 26 (Newport) on the M4.
For further information, and booking, Contact: Mary Cook, Tel: 07794 294432
e-mail: maryfrechfa@yahoo.co.uk)

Friday 1st August 2014

7.30 pm — AHSSSE Chesterfield Group: *Madame Blavatsky* (DVD)
Venue: Whittington Moor, Chesterfield
(Contact: Mike Rush, e-mail: mikerush@virginmedia.com)

Sunday 28th September 2014

2.30 pm — AHSSSE South-East Wales Group: Discussion: *The Four Elements – Fire*
Venue: 12 Wood Close, Llanfrechfa, Cwmbran NP44 8UR
(Contact: Mary Cook: Tel: 07794 294432)

Other Events

Saturday 21st September 2013

10.30 am to 4.00 pm — Unitarian Society for Psychical Studies: One-day Conference: *Exploring Psychic Experiences*.
Speakers: Rhonda Riachi; John Hanson; Anthony Peake
Venue: Warwick Unitarian Chapel, 31 High Street, Warwick, CV34 4AX
(Cost: £18 (£16 USPS members). For further details contact David Taylor on: 07505 323443 or email: editorusps@yahoo.co.uk

Thursday 10th October 2013

6.30 pm — Society for Psychical Research: Gwen Tate Memorial Lecture – speaker to be confirmed
Venue: The Lecture Hall of the Kensington Central Library, Campden Hill Road, London, W8 7RX
(Cost: Members and Associates: Free / Non-Members: £5 / Students, Over 60s or Unwaged: £2. Contact: Peter Johnson, Secretary, SPR, 49 Marloes Road, London W8 6LA Tel: 0207 9378984 e-mail: secretary@spr.ac.uk)

Saturday 26th October 2013

10.00 am — Society for Psychical Research: Study Day; theme: *the life and work of Archie Roy* (final title and speakers to be confirmed)
Venue: St Philip's Church, Earls Court Rd, London W8 6QH.
(For further information, contact Peter Johnson, Secretary, SPR, 49 Marloes Road, London W8 6LA Tel: 0207 9378984 e-mail: secretary@spr.ac.uk)

Saturday 9th November 2013

9.30 am to 5.45 pm — Scientific & Medical Network: Joint Anniversary Conference with British Holistic Medical Association, *Sustainable Medicine: the rebirth of wisdom and compassion in healthcare*. Speakers: Dr. Penny Campling, Dr. Alistair Dobbin, Dr. Chris Irons, Dr. Margaret Hannah
Venue: University of Westminster, 115 New Cavendish Street, London, W1W 6UW
(Cost: £80; £70 SMN & BHMA members. Contact/bookings: Conference Administrator, Scientific and Medical Network, PO Box 11, Moreton-in-Marsh, Glos GL56 0ZF. Tel: +44 (0) 1608 652000, e-mail: info@scimednet.org, web site www.scimednet.org)

Friday 4th April to Sunday 6th April 2014

Churches Fellowship for Psychical & Spiritual Studies: *Spring Conference.*
Theme: *1914 – 1918: Prophets of hope amidst the darkness*

Venue: The Hotel Royale, Gervis Road, Bournemouth
(Further information from: Julian Drewett, Churches' Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies, The Rural Workshop, South Road,
North Somercotes, Lincs LN11 7PT. Tel/fax: 01507 358845
e-mail: gensec@churchesfellowship.co.uk)

Friday 4th April to Sunday 6th April 2014

Scientific & Medical Network Mystics & Scientists Conference 37: *Consciousness and the Experience of Time*. Speakers: Prof. Bernard Carr, Dr. Natalie Depraz (France), Dr. David Luke, Dr. Barbara Magnani (Italy) Prof. Jacob Needleman (US)

Venue: Warwick University, Coventry, CV4 7AL.
(For further information contact: Conference Administrator, Tel: 01608 652001
e-mail: info@scimednet.org)

Photographs of Autumn by Jean Matthews

Rosh Hashanah: *Turning*

As far south as Israel, now **is** the time of year
when leaves are turning. Olives and grain
are siloed, and our hemisphere
begins its elliptic voyage from the sun.
The Jews have set aside these darker days
for *teshuvah* - the bending of our gaze
inward and rearward. To move ahead
the only way is back. We must confront
the mess we left on land, the wrong we did.
To be forgiven, we must first repent.

Below deck, something shifts its viscid weight,
burdens the sea, drags us out of true,
We tanker-navigators of the North
prefer to forge straight lines, forget
that we must follow the curve of earth.
Unwilling to change course, we argue
such manoeuvres are too costly, and too late.
Soon we will admit we are askew.
Soon we will stand and watch as our disgrace
pumps by the tonne across the water's face.

It may be so, it may already be too late
to go about – beneath our keel the lane
is narrowing like the light. And yet
the earth renews its circle round the sun,
and Rosh Hashanah comes unfailingly
as days begin to dwindle. A New Year:
another chance to choose a better way,
repair the ravaged land, reclaim old error,
change breaches to bridges on that holy Day
of Atonement when neighbour joins with neighbour.

Stevie Krayer

Previously printed in Stevie Krayer's anthology, *Questioning the Comet* (Gomer Press, 2004)

Rosh Hashanah – Jewish New Year – precedes *Yom Kippur,* the Day of Atonement, in the autumn. These are celebrated during the Jewish month of *Tishrei.* ***At*** *Yom Kippur,* the aim is the restoration of peaceful co-existence between God and human beings and, primarily, among human beings.