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**PLEASE NOTE CURRENT ARRANGEMENTS  
FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO *DE NUMINE***

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



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*

Photographs supplied by

Christine Burns  
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## Editorial



The awarding of the Templeton prize to Rabbi Jonathan Sachs is a cause for celebration by all of us who are now members of the AHT as he is a patron and therefore one of our own so to speak. Sir Alister was of course awarded the prize in 1985. I am beginning to appreciate the possible advantages of being a member of the Trust, rather than of AHSSSE. I appreciate being part of the organisation, connected more directly to such illustrious persons, and seeing how the work of interfaith dialogue and the valuing of spiritual experience is increasing because of work such as that undertaken by the Trust and RERC. I have found editing this issue off *De Numine* heartening in the extreme.

I am relieved that the committee which will replace the former officers of AHSSSE will not, as was suggested, be called the corporate-sounding 'management committee' but will be a 'Membership and Activities Group' (MAG?). Sounds more approachable. We still have to cope with becoming a 'Charitable Incorporated Organisation' (CIO) under the umbrella of the Trust. It remains to be seen what these changes will amount to on the ground. In personal terms I'm glad Andy Burns is still with us in an official capacity as he has been such a great help to me as editor, rounding up the troops to submit news and events on time for printing. I am also delighted we will still have Dr David Greenwood and Marianne Rankin at the helm as the MAG members, and that they will be joined by Dr Sarah Boss.

The debate about spirituality and religion continues. We have Jonathan Robinson's article and several letters continuing the theme, and this year's Llantarnam gathering will also engage with the subject as 'boundaries and beyond'. I do hope the new life breathed into the letters page by this debate will continue. John Franklin's letter, from which we have drawn the question he would like members to think about and reply to, will I hope also generate more discussion in *De Numine*.

Kenneth Rees notes the virtual absence of women in the history of western esotericism, and Neil Hancox refers to the fact that in Kevin Treston's *Emergence for Life Not Fall from Grace*, in the context of environmental issues, the book does not deal with such matters as overpopulation, very much an issue concerning women. With the rise of women's studies and then feminist theology the way in which women have not been silent so much as silenced, or written out of history, has become increasingly clear. I hope we have redressed the balance somewhat by giving pride of place to Pamela Gaunt's review/experience about Mary and the goddess. I also hope it doesn't frighten the horses, or indeed the clerics as the subject has undoubtedly done through the ages.

For anyone who has missed the second instalments of Theolyn Cortens 'Natural History of Angels', and Part 2 of Daniel Craver's review of Richard Bohannon's *Religions and Environments*, these will appear in the Autumn issue. We also hope to print an engaging account of the visit to England from Japan by one of our patrons, the Supreme Primate Koken Monnyo Otani, sent in by Anne Watkins who was his guide throughout his tour. Unfortunately, through email error, the account arrived too late to be included in this issue. We have been able to print a short report this time, which appears under AHT news on page 28.

*Patricia Murphy*

## A Final View from the Chair

May I begin by wishing everyone a happy New Year with the hope that 2016 may bring peace and hope to many.

This will be my last report as Chair of the AHSSSE because the Society was formally dissolved in November, becoming fully part of the Alister Hardy Trust. I have prepared an update about the new status and this is included on page 13 of this issue.

We celebrated the formal retirement of John Franklin at Open Day and you will find reports about this and the two excellent lecturers given by Professor Bettina Schmidt and Dr Penny Sartori elsewhere in this issue. For my part I want to say a huge thank you to all those members who contributed to John's collection. The amount raised exceeded twelve hundred pounds which is fantastic and shows not only the high esteem in which John is held, but also the enormous generosity of our members.

I would like to draw your attention to this year's Members' Day\*. The date is Saturday 15th October 2016 and the venue will be once again the Oxford Quaker House in St Giles. [see events, page 50 for details]. I am pleased to announce that this year's Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture will be given by Professor Jeff Astley. More details to follow, but please note the date in your diaries.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to my fellow committee members and my Vice Chair (Mike Rush) who have supported me throughout my time in office and also to Professor Leslie Francis and Dr David Greenwood, who together with the other Trustees have offered wise council and guidance throughout. Last but not least I would like to thank our members for their goodwill, support and encouragement, not least in attending local group meetings and many other events.

In conclusion I want to say that it has been a huge privilege to chair the AHSSSE for the last four years and to be a part of some important changes. These have enabled the future of study into religious and spiritual experiences to continue, thereby ensuring that the legacy and vision of Sir Alister Hardy is kept firmly on the agenda and widely known.

*Andrew Burns, Former Chair, AHSSSE*

\* Now that we have changed to Trust status we are going to go with 'Members' Day' rather than 'Open Day' thus indicating a day for the Trust Members with speakers etc. No AGM is included now as this is planned to be held in Birmingham in December and all members invited to attend.

*See Andy's letter on page 33, continuing the discussion on religion and spirituality, of which the following article by Jonathan Robinson is a part (Ed.)*



## ARTICLES

### Religion or Spirituality?

There is nothing new in this debate, highlighted in the previous issue of *De Numine* [on pp. 23-27 in the Llantarnam report, and in correspondence on pp. 32-34].

Or is there? Before we jump to cast our vote, let us pause to reflect; this is a question of the different ways in which we experience our inner life, which is our primary experience, (since all knowledge of the outer world is mediated through our senses). There are and always have been different points of view. For example, is 'reality' that which can be weighed and measured, or is consciousness the primary fabric of the universe? Should we rely on reason or intuition? Is it reasonable to believe in 'God', or not? The answer, as is so often the case, is that there is truth in both, or in various, points of view, depending on one's perspective. It is not a question of either/or. To make such a judgement is to fall into the mistake which has beset the human race for so long, and has been the cause of so much division and violence. It is so easy, and essentially self-centred, to believe our particular point of view is right, and fail to empathise with and understand other people's position and feelings.

There is of course another side to this, the feeling that religion is confined to the 'externals' of life, and has nothing to do with experience. However, not everyone would agree, and we should respect this. The situation gets more complicated when we consider how the meaning of words and the association of words can change over time. What experiences inspired people to build great cathedrals or intimate country churches? What experiences carried people through tragedy and loss? What profound moments of joy have moved people to celebrate? In the past people would probably have said it was their religion, but history moves on. If today you ask people what the word 'religion' means for them, many would probably say that religion has little to do with experiences; rather they see it as a set of formulae for controlling and censoring people's lives, where the spirit is squeezed dry and all we are left with is an empty husk. But surely this understanding is too narrow.

So is religion itself at fault, or has religion failed to adapt its story to the reality of our 21<sup>st</sup> century lives? We still laugh and cry, and seek to fill the empty places of our lives with the intuitive feeling that we are part of something infinitely greater than ourselves. Change is part of life. Historically different religions have waxed and waned. Modes of expression have also changed as humankind seeks to give expression to those deeper feelings and experiences which lie beyond words. If the modes of expression don't change, the bones will indeed become dry, and the life will empty away. Diana Butler Bass in her book *Christianity After Religion* observes 'For much of Western history, the words 'religious' and 'spiritual' meant roughly the same thing ... however, the popular definitions of the words diverged throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the word *spiritual* gradually became associated with the private realm of thoughts and experience, while the word *religious* came to be associated with the public realm of membership of religious institutions, participation in formal ritual and adherence to official denominational doctrines.' (p. 67). She goes on to observe that the word *religion* has come to be associated with negative connotations of control and institutions, whereas *spirituality* assumes a positive connotation of authenticity and experience.

So where do we go from here? Can 'religion' let go of its present day negative associations of being undesirable egoism in disguise? Can it recover its guiding principal of love, or has the word *religion* served its purpose and is it now 'past its sell by date'? How can we recover the imagination, creativity and compassion that originally inspired us and united us in the depth of our humanity? I feel there is something essential here that we are in great danger of losing,

which is complementary to the individuality of spirituality and which allows us to engage with each other through the positive aspects of the culture we share. So I do believe we must avoid seeing this question of religion or spirituality as either/or. If we do this it misses the deeper point and becomes divisive and potentially disastrous, leading to terrible antagonisms and extremism. It is surely more important to seek to empathise with each other than to stay within our comfortable boundaries. There is a huge amount of work to be done on both sides, and both have so much to contribute in our search for human happiness and compassion, for deeper authenticity and meaning.

If we can approach this search in the right spirit, it will be intensely creative. Bede Griffiths, in his book *The Marriage of East and West*, observes 'All Oriental doctrine arises from an experience of God, or Ultimate Reality.' We can contrast this with the historically greater emphasis in the West on reason and regulation: the cerebral process in contrast to the heart process. Both surely have their value. (I write this at Shantivanam Ashram in South India, where Bede Griffiths is so much remembered.) Is another aspect of this debate that we in the West are becoming more aware of the spirituality of the East, as modern communication allows a more global consciousness to evolve, a consciousness which (in my experience) the mainstream Christian churches and Western religions have yet to discover?

What is surely true is that spirituality in the form of rampant individualism will not get us far. We need to work together if we are to be inspired to meet the challenges which life sets before us today. Change may well be necessary. We may need new words, and new associations with words. There will be much we may need to let go. Let us not be afraid of this. The Alister Hardy Trust values openness of mind, the enquiring spirit that asks what it is that is able to move us in the depth of our being. We respect the different pathways which people take in this pursuit, and we should not be afraid of exploring new possibilities. Let us keep it that way.

*Jonathan Robinson*

*Bede Griffiths OSB Cam, born Alan Richard Griffiths and also known by the end of his life as Swami Dayananda, was a British-born Benedictine monk and priest who lived in ashrams in South India and became a noted yogi. (Ed.)*

## **William James – philosopher, psychologist, mystic**

### **Part 2: The last 30 years of his life, from 1880 -1910**

We saw in Part 1 of this biography how William James introduced the world to the ideas of volition and attention in shaping the mind within the stream of consciousness. He laid the groundwork for the increased interest in intentionality as the route to shaping our lives, beyond the programme dictated by our genes. We shall see here that he was one of the earliest rationalists to take spiritual phenomena seriously and subject them to focused scrutiny. He documented the breadth of human religious experience – work that Alister Hardy was to continue half a century later – and he characterized mystical experiences in a way that has been exemplified in recent decades by records of out-of-body and near-death experiences.

Towards the end of 1882, James travelled to Prague and there met with Austrian physicist, physiologist, psychologist and philosopher Ernst Mach. Mach was looking for some underlying principle that would apply equally to all these areas of study. He found it in maintaining that we could regard as truth only that which could be experimentally verified with the senses. This principle, of truth arising out of empirical verification, was to become a cornerstone of the work of the Vienna Circle at the University in the 1920s. The Vienna Circle had no time for Plato and his theory of ideas, nor for Kant and his concept of the thing-in-itself and James – still more scientist than mystic – empathized with their views.

However, the following year he travelled to London and met up with a congenial group of psychologists and philosophers who called themselves the Scratch Eight. Included in this group was Edmund Gurney who, in 1882, had founded the British Society for Psychical Research with F.W.H. Myers and Henry Sidgwick: the American SPR came into being three years later and James was one of its founding members.

In June of 1885, his son Herman became ill with whooping cough that turned to bronchitis and proved rapidly fatal; he died the following month. As a result of this loss, William was persuaded by his mother-in-law and sister-in-law, Eliza Gibbens, to visit a medium called Leonora Piper. James paid several visits to séances conducted by Mrs Piper, which led him to believe that Mrs Piper, who was born in New England in 1859, had 'supernormal powers'. Though he was highly impressed with Mrs Piper's abilities – so much so that he called her by her esoteric name 'White Crow' – as a scientist and philosopher, James found these seemingly irrational abilities puzzling.

In his *Principles of Psychology*, published in 1892 by Henry Holt, James uses the life of a bird as a metaphor for the human stream of consciousness, comprising 'flights' and 'perchings'. Only the 'perchings', or substantive states of mind as James calls them, contribute to knowledge and memory. Many images are observed during the 'flights' but these are fleeting and make no impression on the conscious mind. James calls the two mental processes of reductionism and holism – regarding things in terms of their functioning parts or as integrated wholes – 'discrimination' and 'association' and he considered that both are necessary for us to make our way in the world. An abridged version of this key psychological text was published by Holt a few years later.

James devotes a whole chapter of his basic psychology text to the role of Will, or Volition as he calls it, as the initial step in our interaction with the world. Volition is the expression of those neuronal activities that constitute wishes or desires. Sometimes thoughts are provoked by other thoughts that precede them: these stimuli can arise externally through the five senses or internally from the constant activities of cerebral neurons. There are those we call mediums who receive stimuli removed in space and time from their immediate surroundings. James suggested that there might be a 'cosmic psychic reservoir', rather like the akashic field of eastern mysticism or, in modern terminology, Rupert Sheldrake's morphic field. Mediums might thus draw information from the past, though it is difficult to see how information from the future could be gleaned if one believes in the concept of free will unless in Spirit past, present and future form a timeless continuum.\*

The controversy over free will or determinism has raged in philosophy since the time of the ancient Greeks. Arthur Schopenhauer regarded it as the basis of our interaction with the world. Edmund Husserl regarded 'intentionality' as the foundation of each human experience of the world. This idea is perpetuated today with a wide variety of writings on the power of intention in shaping the direction of our lives.

In *The Principles of Psychology* James said: 'The greatest discovery of my generation is that a human being can alter his life by altering his attitudes of mind ... Through this attitude of mind, we can induce a state of well-being or inflict ill-health on ourselves. Believe that life is worth living and your belief will help create the fact ... The greatest weapon against stress is our ability to choose one thought over another.' This is another of the key visions of William James. In recent years, several 'self-help' books have been written (for example, those by Hay and Dyer) encouraging us to take control of our life and direct our thoughts positively towards wellness. Bruce Lipton gave us a biological interpretation of how our positive or negative thoughts could have corresponding impact upon our health and personality. Columnist Sharon Begley wrote an account of the 2004 Dharamsala Conference, at the Indian home of the fourteenth Dalai Lama, which presented evidence to show our extraordinary potential to transform ourselves. We have to wonder how physicians could ever have believed that the mind had no interaction with the physical body. For an experience to become imprinted on memory, 'intention' must be accompanied by 'attention' – directed concentration on the object of consciousness. Any objects or events that impinge meaningfully on the human body must begin with intention and concentrated attention. The mental processes associated with volition form one of the main subjects of *The Principles of Psychology*.

James points out that our recognition of our 'self' depends upon the success of our social relationships with others, particularly the esteem with which we are held in the minds of loved ones. In his theory of the nature of the individual mind, James envisioned a two-part division – the 'I', and a 'Me' that was further divided into three aspects. The 'I' was the thinking self and corresponded to Freud's 'ego'. Within the 'Me' was a material self that expressed its identity through our possessions; a social self which was the image we had of ourselves through our relationships with others; and the spiritual self or soul which represented who we are at the core.

In *The Principles* there are some interesting reflections on the mental continuity of the self, despite physical changes to the body: 'the Me of yesterday [is] judged to be in some peculiarly subtle sense the *same* with the I who now make the judgment'. Our bodies change to some extent from day to day – even during every day. Yet even with such traumas as loss of a limb or organ transplantation we still recognize our selves as the same.

In *The Varieties of Religious Experience* James described the qualities he believed characterized a mystical experience. The five defining qualities of mysticism James believed were: ineffability ('more like states of feeling than like states of intellect'); noetic quality ('insight into depths of truth'); transiency ('mystical states cannot be maintained for long'); passivity ('the mystic feels as if his own will were in abeyance, and indeed sometimes as if he were grasped by a superior power'); and metamorphosis ('they modify the inner life of the subject'). The experiences described by ordinary people as OBEs and NDEs share many of the features described by James in his definition of mystical experiences in their ineffability, their transience, their noetic quality, and their subsequent effect on personality of the percipient. Recent books by Raymond Moody and Pim van Lommel provide many instances of these phenomena which report such personal experiences.

William James died of heart failure in Quebec, Canada, on the 26 August, 1910. At the end, as might be expected of a continual depressive, and still unconvinced by Darwin's view of the redundancy of God in the scheme of things, he felt that civilization would ultimately come to an end through the 'heat death' proposed by William Thomson, dying on 'an earth that is only a wandering tomb, turning around a useless light and a barren heat'. Fortunately, his lifetime's work had a much more optimistic outlook.

In so many areas of academic study – philosophy, psychology, religion and spirituality – William James contributed massively to our understanding of the nature of human consciousness. Others have since taken up the challenge of developing his pioneering thoughts further.

*Howard Jones*

\* 'Erasmus scholar Taras Handziy, who came from the Ukraine last year to work with Professor Schmidt, is engaged in research involving shamanism, spirit embodiment and advanced mathematics. He says 'My shaman's work has included time slip experiments into the future'. See Issue 59 pp. 21-23 for a report of his presentation at Lampeter in 2015, particularly page 22. (Ed.)

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## EXPERIENCE

*This was sent in as a book review, but describes the reviewer's own experience in parallel with the author's in such personal terms that to me it qualifies as an experience. (Ed.)*

### **Alone of All her Sex** **The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary**

In my special room there is a small wooden wardrobe. Above it are pictures of a priestess filling a chalice in a sacred grove, making vows to her Goddess, dancing naked under the moonlight. A sign on the door, 'Goddess Within' is discreetly covered with a veil, which is lifted to open the door.

Inside hangs an array of costumes; purest white of Maiden Renewal, blood red of a Lovers passion, green of Mother Nature's fertility, darkest black of Death Mother, shining gold of Queenly majesty and wisdom. A splendid array of many robes which a priestess may wear to embody the richness and diversity of Sacred Mother, with accessories of feathers and jewels, stones and bones, gathered over tens of thousands of years of Goddess mythology all around the world. Reading Marina Warner's book 'Alone of Her Sex' was like opening a wardrobe door and at first finding it dark, dusty and empty except for a simple blue cloak – the young woman's costume traditionally worn by Virgin Mary.

In the introduction the author describes her own early life in a convent school: 'we celebrated Mary's feast days with masses, processions, – we were trained to feel her sorrows, her joys, her glories, as we recited the rosary – a myriad of images of her created a sense that Mary and the Christian doctrine were synonymous.' Warner's memories made me realise that my own Church of England schooling had no such powerful connections to Mary – a mother at Christmas was the only memorable role – and perhaps she had lurked somewhere as a shadowy grieving figure at the foot of the cross at Easter? As I continued to read however, I came across a forgotten and significant small costume at the back of my memories. Made from a modest blue tablecloth, I had worn it as a nine year old Mary (tenderly holding plastic dolly Baby Jesus) in the Christmas nativity. Brushing off the cobwebs, and taking out the mothballs, I held it up to the daylight of what had formed my own girlhood – reflecting that, like Marina Warner, I have moved a very long way from this early-life story.

*Alone of Her Sex* was originally published in 1976, when Marina was a young feminist writer (treading in the footsteps of Simone de Beauvoir, Germaine Greer, Betty Friedan, Kate Millett etc.). I discovered she had initially written an article on the sexual politics of her convent upbringing. To the writer's dismay, her editor wanted it expanded into a full length study. Marina describes how she protested: 'I had struggled hard against the grip of Mary and to condemn me to spend at least two or three years intimately and intensely, as a book would require, was too terrible to contemplate.' Her editor urged her to think about it. Think about it she did – to produce a remarkable and enlightening history of the changing symbolism and role of Mary over two thousand years, as different emphases changed with social and historical conditions and values.

Warner shows the inauspicious beginnings of Mary's story from the few lines found in our bible, described in her first chapter 'Mary in the Gospels'. From those few lines, however, it seems we have not been able to help but re-create and continue a Mary Goddess mythology over the past two thousand years. Divided into five sections, Virgin, Queen, Bride, Mother and Intercessor, I was catching glimpses of those earlier Goddess stories and costumes – though torn, tarnished, demonised, ex-communicated or simply burnt, they were becoming visible as Mary unfolded her protective blue cloak.

This book is filled with scholarship, imagery, and Marina Warner's own insightful commentary. There is an excellent chronology at the back of the book, spanning AD 100 up to 1974. This is arranged under three headings: 'Historical Background', 'Cult of Mary' and 'Arts and Letters', thus contextualising the story of the Virgin in historical, religious and cultural terms. The book is well worth buying if only to have this invaluable research so clearly ordered for quick reference and precise information.

Mary's own wardrobe and clothes-rail began to fill with the roles given to her over those years – I discovered feasts of Conception, Annunciation, Dormition, Purification, Nativity and Rosary, visions at Guadalupe, Lourdes and Fatima, and the black clad Mater Dolorosa in times of grief and national mourning. Her relatively recent (1950) Assumption named her the white robed Bride of Christ, Mother of God, and in 1954 she was declared golden Queen of Heaven. All this, as described by the author, when social and historical conditions and the politics of power have needed her to change. The simple blue cloak became overlaid with many other costumes.



Mary's wardrobe became as full as my own! My own analysis of this phenomenon was that our collective unconscious needed to take out the banned costumes of earlier Goddess religion mythology and have Mary wear them gloriously and fully.

I can see why a review at the time of its first publication said '*Alone of All her Sex* is an exciting book and is a very major contribution to feminist history'. The author wove both historical political analysis alongside her own personal statement, that of a young feminist's struggle to be free of the insidious power of a patriarchal religion controlling the image of what a 'good woman' was meant to be. As the writer shows, a sexless Mother Mary gave an impossible ideal for women to emulate, therefore leaving them open to condemnation as guilty, impure sinners. Back in the '70s when the first edition came out, the book was indeed condemned by the orthodox, but welcomed by many women and men sharing a similar struggle to liberate themselves from religious oppression.

My own interest in buying the new edition was to read Marina Warner's introduction and see her thoughts on her own book almost forty years later. In it she writes 'I am dismayed at my hubris at taking on such a vast subject. If I were to return to it now, I would write about different things. It's the work of a young woman absorbed in questions of sexuality, transgression and obedience, far less interested in motherhood, or in grieving and solitude, ageing and loss.'

I was particularly interested in the author's critique of her original conclusion. She says, 'My closing assertion that the cult of Mary would become, like the worship of Hera or Aphrodite or Artemis, a myth which no longer inspires belief, reads today as a hope at best and a major historical error at worst. It remains the case that nobody expected the return of religion in the twenty first century to the centre of social and political arenas.' She points to the rise of hardening Christian evangelising in the United States, and the politicising of Islam, with the resulting World Trade Centre attack, the ongoing conflict in Iraq etc., to show that the argument about religion is now still very much alive. In these modern and still warring times, she explains that 'Mary has consistently appeared to the poor, unlettered, down-trodden,

children, women, the overworked and underpaid, therefore an appropriate symbol within the Occupy movement – unlike the Fifties and Sixties, when she was carried in the processions of juntas.’

I discovered that, in the past forty years, Mary’s image has metamorphosed as the protectress of the oppressed, generally appearing without a baby (however much the doctrine commands the faithful to worship God through Mary and not Mary herself!). In our present time, ritual, pilgrimage, procession and ceremony is growing outside state religions; we are adapting old sacramental processes to secular and political purposes. Warner describes how Mary has been seized by the people as a counter-culture peace symbol, of Mother of Mercy and Love. She gives the example of the Russian all-female punk group ‘Pussy Riot’, who leapt onto an altar in Moscow’s Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, and appealed to the Virgin Mary to kick out Putin, and be their champion against the lies and corruption of the Russian Orthodox Church! Sadly, the women were harshly punished in prison camps, which could be said to prove the validity of their protest.

Warner surmises that ‘The seventies sexual feminist issues have become less urgently intertwined with her symbolism. Catholic worship and moral teaching no longer monopolize it or control its significance.’ My own interpretation is: you could take the Goddess away from Mary – but you couldn’t take Mary away from Goddess.

So now – over fifty years on – I will take the hand of the blue table-clothed nine-year-old Mary, show her my pictures of a priestess holding her chalice, making vows in the sacred grove, dancing naked in full moonlight. If it gets cold, I will wrap the girl in a warm protective cloak and lift the veil to open my wardrobe door so she may choose from the many colours of costume and play with the feathers and jewels, stones and bones, gathered over tens of thousands of years of Goddess mythology all around the world ... help her see that, through the people’s Mary, the ‘Goddess is Within’.

Thank you Marina Warner for helping me remember the girl and rediscover Mary.

*Pamela Gaunt*

Marina Warner, *Alone of All her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (new edition) Oxford, OUP, 2013 (1976). xii 430 pp. ISBN 978 0 19 963994 6 (hbk) £25.00



## REPORTS

### AHSSSE: Change of Status

I made reference in my final chair's report [page 4] to a change of status regarding the Society and I am keen to update members about this.

Following my last report (Autumn issue) things have moved along and at the Society's AGM, held on Open Day in October last year, members present accepted the resolution that the Society be dissolved and fully incorporated into the Alister Hardy Trust. This decision was ratified and at a meeting of the Trustees in November the new status of a 'Charitable Incorporated Organisation' was endorsed by the Trustees and formally accepted by the Charity Commission. The Society was dissolved and the committee, roles of Chair, Vice Chair and Honorary Secretary formally terminated.

In practical terms this means that the 'old AHS' members are now members of the 'Alister Hardy Trust' and the current Chair of the Trust (Professor Leslie Francis) now oversees all activities together with the other Trustees.

A new membership secretary was appointed to replace Marian MacPolin who stepped down last year. We welcome Dr Sarah Boss to this role and she will now be taking care of membership matters. The Trustees also appointed a small sub-committee referred to as the, *Membership and Activities Group* which will act as a liaison between members, local groups, the web site marshal and the Trustees. In addition, the group will arrange the annual Members' Day to be held in Oxford. The group consists of myself representing the Trust, Marianne Rankin, the current Director of Communications and Dr Sarah Boss, the new membership secretary.

The AGM will now be held in December, coinciding with a Trustees meeting in Birmingham. Members will be welcome to attend and have some voting rights in respect of the appointment of Trustees. In all other respects things remain the same and the day to day activities, local groups, website and journal remain as before, now coming under the auspices of the Alister Hardy Trust.

In summary, I believe the new fully incorporated organisation provides a sound future for the membership who remain an integral part of the whole.

*Andrew Burns, Former Chair, AHSSSE*



## **From the Director of Communications, Alister Hardy Trust**

You will probably be aware that John Franklin has retired as Honorary Secretary of the Alister Hardy Society for the Study of Spiritual Experience. That organisation has ceased to exist and we will now hold events under the name of the Alister Hardy Trust. Our web-address will remain unchanged. John is of course still a Trustee, and will continue to organise the AHT London Group events.

In future I will take over the publicity side of things, so please send details of events which you would like us to publicise to other members to me. As before, we will list your events in our journal *De Numine* and I will forward details to the editor.

*Marianne Rankin*



## **AHSSSE Annual General Meeting 2015**

**This was the last AGM of the AHSSSE, and the next Annual General Meeting will be that of the Alister Hardy Trust, to which all existing members of the former Society will be invited as members now of the AHT.**

The AGM [AHSSSE] was held at the Friends Meeting House, St. Giles, Oxford, on Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> October, and attended by some 28 members and guests. Andy Burns, Chair of the Society, welcomed all. Apologies were received from Professor Leslie Francis (Chair of Trustees); Professor Christopher Lewis (Director AHRERC, Glyndŵr University), Patricia Murphy (Editor, *De Numine*), Professor Jeff Astley; Revd Dr Marcus Braybrooke, Sheelah James, Mary Cook, Aled Thomas, Helen Jameson, Albert Penny and Anne-Marie Dawes.

The Minutes of the AGM of 2014 were agreed and signed. There were no Matters Arising.

Chair's Report: Andy Burns, in his Chair's Report, explained the position regarding a change of status, with the AHT becoming a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). He reported on the situation regarding the AHS Local Groups, the retirement of Marian MacPolin, the Hon. Membership Secretary, who stood down in September, mentioning that we had a new prospective Secretary willing to take over Marian's position. Finally he remarked on this year as being the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the award of the Templeton Prize to Sir Alister Hardy for his work in setting up the RERU. He also mentioned the retirement of John Franklin as Hon. Secretary, acknowledging his 30 years of sterling service.

The Chair and Vice-Chair of Trustees' Report, read by Dr David Greenwood in the absence of Professor Francis, referred to the commitment of the Trust to the two Research Centres at Trinity Saint David and Glyndŵr Universities, and outlined their separate, distinctive

developments. Reorganisation of the Trust as a CIO has the effect of absorbing the Society into the Trust. He thanked Andy Burns and John Franklin for the work they had done on behalf of the organisation, and welcomed the new membership secretary elect, Dr Sarah Boss. He assured members regarding publication of accounts, saying these would be available at future AGMs of the Trust, to which members would now be invited; acknowledged with thanks the donation by a past member of a large legacy to the Trust; and explained the position of Professor Jeff Astley at Glyndŵr University.

Directors' Reports: firstly Professor Bettina Schmidt outlined the work of the RERC at Trinity Saint David, Lampeter – this including student work, online access to the database, the launching of an online journal the first issue of which will be coming out in November, and research activities, including the arrival of the first Hon. Research Fellow of RERC Lampeter, Dr Jeff Leonardi, with whom she has organised a series of events around the topic health and spirituality. She affirmed that access to the University Library Catalogue online is available to members, along with access to the RERC database of accounts online subject to signing a Declaration of Confidentiality; and said that she would investigate a possible link with the USA Centre for Spirituality.

Secondly, Andy Burns read Professor Christopher Lewis's Director's report from Glyndŵr University -- this covering the present context and development during the past year in the areas of staffing, publications, research activity, teaching activity, and website development. This last included research, talks, publications, staff profiles and resources by the AHRERC at Glyndŵr University available online at <http://www.glyndwr.ac.uk/en/OurResearch/Researchcentres/AlisterHardyReligiousExperienceResearchCentre/>

Presenting the Hon. Treasurer's Report, Dr David Greenwood explained that (as always at this time of year) the accounts were with the Trust's accountants, but that the current account book statement stood at £90,285.03; a small bursary fund at £1,297.88; and a reserve general fund standing at £28,345.46. He spoke of the great value of legacies, which enabled the Trust to do much more than it would otherwise – mentioning in particular a legacy from the late Mrs Margaret Ann Fryer which, when settled by the end of December, should amount to around £150,000.

The Hon. Membership Secretary's report was presented by Marian MacPolin, who said that the membership figures remain fairly constant: currently 245 full Members and 35 Mailing List subscribers. She said that she thought that the time had come to see how the running of the membership scheme could be improved, noting some areas which she had not had time to address before her retirement. She finished by saying that, as this was her last report, she would like to thank all members of the Committee and the membership for their support during the past three years. Marian was warmly thanked and applauded for her work during her period as Hon. Membership Secretary.

In her Director of Communication's Report, Marianne Rankin outlined her activities during the year: she was continuing to speak to various groups and schools. She drew attention to the retreat she is planning to run on *Experiencing Spirituality* at Holland House from 5-7<sup>th</sup> April 2016, and reported that she was continuing to work on a new book looking at what has been achieved since the original RERU was set up in 1969. She had resigned as a Trustee of the Alister Hardy Trust, but will continue to attend Trustee meetings as Director of Communications, and participate in meetings with the RERC Directors and representatives of UWTSD and Glyndŵr University.

Regarding AHSSSE Committee elections this year, in the light of the pending changes in the organisation of the Alister Hardy Trust, it was proposed and agreed that the existing members of the AHSSSE Committee should remain as previously elected until dissolution of the AHSSSE, reported below.

Lastly, the Future of the AHSSSE was discussed. Andy Burns explained the position of the Society – that the Trust was faced by a necessary changeover from being a Charitable Organisation to a CIO. Of two possible options for the Society, becoming a fully independent organisation or merging with and become part of the Alister Hardy Trust, the latter was considered the only feasible alternative. On this being put to the meeting it was resolved that the AHSSSE be wound up and incorporated within the Alister Hardy Trust, with new name and rules and regulations to be determined by the Trust. The name of ‘Group’ was suggested by a member to replace the name ‘Society’, and it was agreed that this would be looked into.

Under Any Other Business, no specific matters were raised. Warm thanks were given to Jane Hay for the kind donation of all books and papers of her late husband, Dr David Hay to the Alister Hardy Trust; and a tribute of thanks given to Andy Burns for Chairing the Society’s business so ably.

It was noted that that this was the last AGM of the AHSSSE, and the next Annual General Meeting would be that of the Alister Hardy Trust, to which all existing members of the former Society would be invited as members now of the AHT.

*John Franklin, Hon. Secretary*

[Copies of the full Minutes of the AGM and written reports presented at the meeting can be obtained from: Marianne Rankin, Homer Lodge, Bredons Norton, Tewkesbury, GL20 7EZ – please send stamped and addressed C5 (162 x 229mm) size, or similar, envelope]



### **Fiona Bowie, AHT Trustee, has tendered her resignation**

‘I am regretfully standing down from my position as a trustee of the AHT. I’m aware that I have been unable to attend meetings and circumstances are such that it is difficult to make commitments to worthy projects such as this at present. I do not think it is useful to have absentee trustees, which is why I am tendering my resignation.’

## The Accounts for the Alister Hardy Trust for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> July 2015

As is usual for the Spring edition of *De Numine*, I write a brief summary of the financial situation of the Trust for the financial year which ended last July. This has been a year of much activity, largely owing to the generous bequests received over the past few years. At the time of writing, I am able to say that just before Christmas 2015 we received with much gratitude the bequest of £155,000 from the late Mrs. Margaret Fryer, a long standing supporter of the Society and Trust. We are, of course, very grateful for legacies as they provide our main source of income: it is of course sad that we were unable to thank these generous donors when they were alive.

I set out below a short summary of the accounts – a full set of accounts will be available on request for those who wish to receive them.

<u>Income</u> (including subscriptions £4,504 and gift aid receipts £506)	£14,583
<u>Expenditure</u> (including donation to UWTSD of £19,000, various honoraria, additional expenses associated with increased activity on the part of volunteers and trustees and a donation to Glyndŵr University of £12,000)	£44,202
<u>Net deficit</u>	<u>£29,932</u>
<u>Fixed Assets:</u> Tangible assets (mainly books and works of art)	£50,147
Current assets (Banks accounts and invested funds)	£334,759
<u>Total assets less current liabilities:</u>	£366,662

The accounts were unanimously approved by the Trustees at their AGM held on the 30<sup>th</sup> November, 2015.

*Dr David Greenwood, Honorary Treasurer, January 2016*



## AHSSSE Open Day 2015

### Report on Lectures:

For Open Day this year we returned to the refurbished Oxford Quaker Meeting House and were treated to two excellent presentations. Professor Bettina Schmidt, Director of the Religious Experience Research Centre at UWTSD Lampeter, gave the annual Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture on the subject of *Sensing is Believing? Spirit Possession and Other Forms of Religious Experience in Brazil* – a fascinating, illustrated account of her research.

Dr Dr Sartori Sartori described her work in an Intensive Care Unit in Swansea, both as a nurse and NDE researcher in her talk entitled *The Wisdom of Near-Death Experiences*. Her book of the same title sold out pre-publication after serialization in the *Daily Mail*.

### **The Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture ‘Sensing is Believing?’ presented by Professor Bettina Schmidt**

Professor Schmidt, described her field research in Brazil. She is a social anthropologist with a focus on religion and while her own empirical research focused on spirit possession, she considers it as just one specific type of religious experience. Her monograph *Spirit and Trance in Brazil: Anthropology of Religious Experiences* will be published in 2016.

Professor Schmidt maintains that the main challenge in studying religious experience is how to deal with what we cannot see or do not experience ourselves. The AHRERC archive, containing as it does accounts of experience from a wide range of people, has she says opened the way to broadening our understanding of anomalous events in people's lives. This wide range of experiences allows scholars like herself to defend the inclusion of other forms of experiences, such as spirit possession and trance, under the label religious experience.

She cited William James and Rudolf Otto as proponents of experience being considered the backbone of religious life rather than the doctrinal or institutional aspects. According to James, the original experiences of the founders of religious traditions are revalidated as followers have further personal experiences. Ann Taves, Professor of Religious Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, continued James' work and challenges scholars who overlook people's own interpretation of what they experience. Instead of disregarding these, Taves urges scholars to include them. She defines religious experience as including seemingly involuntary acts such as uncontrolled bodily movements, spontaneous vocalizations, unusual sensory experiences, and alterations of consciousness and/or memory.

Professor Schmidt then spoke about her work on spirit possession and trance in Brazil. Although a predominantly Christian country, many Brazilians also practise Afro-Brazilian religions or Spiritism. A common feature of such practices is the communication between human and spiritual beings. This communication is facilitated through a medium, perhaps through automatic writing or by their body being possessed and spoken through. For her fieldwork, Bettina attended various ceremonies involving spirit possession, and interviewed people from different religious traditions about their experiences. She stressed that it is important to understand that spirit possession was not regarded as demonic by her interviewees but as empowering. We were shown slides of Candomblé possession by *orixás* (African deities) and the Umbanda ritual, both involving mediums and trance, believed to link the human and the divine.

After exploring the similarities and differences between the two traditions, Professor Schmidt returned to the academic discussion of what it is that people experience. While empiricists argue that every ‘truth’ claim must be subject to empirical or scientific verification, some scholars claim that we have to overcome cultural bias by turning our attention towards the collective or ‘lived’ experience of a religious community. She explained that her aim is not to find an explanation for what happens during spirit possession, or whether spirit possession ‘really’ happens. She disagrees with the dichotomy of the Western rational civil religion and the irrational ‘other’. Instead, she suggests that if we discard any notion of a ‘correct belief’ or a ‘correct scientific explanation’, questions as to whether one believes in the spirits or in the *orixás* or in science become irrelevant. Spirit Possession relates to the relationship between human and non-human beings and not to whether the spirits, the *orixás*, or God exist. The corporeal experience during possession is a key aspect of how to maintain that relationship while the interpretation of it depends on the situation.

She concluded: 'If we focus on what people do, their practice, we can ignore questions of whether the spirits exist, whether we (as scholars) believe in them, or whether the spirit possession is sent by the devil or represents a deity. Important is how the relationship between human and non-human beings is maintained. It also shifts away from the individualised definition of religious experience and embraces the ritualistic, collective dimension.

'Hence, a focus on the practical dimension of religious experience (what devotees do) will help us to avoid the trap of well defined (and limited) academic categories. But the main point here is the importance of the local features of the experience. The performance, the embodiment of religious experience, demonstrates the interrelation – and interdependence – of body and mind. To a certain degree, therefore, the answer to my initial question "Sensing is Believing?" is yes.'

### **The Wisdom of NDEs, presented by Dr Penny Sartori**

Dr Penny Sartori explained that it was her nursing career, especially an encounter with a dying patient, that made her interested in death. She feels that as a society we tend not to consider death and don't talk about it.

The first part of her talk discussed the various anomalous experiences that occur as death approaches, such as death bed visions, where the dying gesture and talk to deceased loved ones not seen by those at the bedside with them. Empathic death experiences were also discussed, where those at the bedside of the dying person (or even separated at great distance) can sometimes share in a partial journey into the light with their loved ones, or manifest the symptoms of the dying person.

Dr Sartori mentioned cases where patients appear to have control of the time of their death even though they appear to be deeply unconscious. They may wait for an important family event to pass or an estranged family member to be present – in some cases patients died the moment their loved ones left the bedside. It's almost as if the love of the family is what keeps the dying person in this life, and influences when they leave. Many loved ones become upset at not being present, but this may be the greatest act they can do for their loved one as it allows them to make their transition into death.

There was also mention of terminal lucidity and how some people who have Alzheimer's disease suddenly become lucid and hold coherent conversations shortly before they die. After-death communications to the living have also been reported by many people. These can be very significant, such as seeing/feeling their loved ones or smelling their perfume, or they can be subtle or symbolic, such as seeing a butterfly out of season. She also talked about the positive effect on the grieving process that after death communications can have on those left behind.

The second part of the talk focused on NDEs and Dr Sartori's own hospital research, mentioning the (often neglected) incidences of distressing NDEs. She also reported on the case of Rajaa Benamour, whom Dr Sartori had met at a conference in Marseilles in 2013. Following an intense NDE, Rajaa appears to have acquired an in-depth knowledge of quantum physics – something she knew nothing about prior to her NDE.

In conclusion Dr Sartori suggested that often so much time is spent trying to pathologise NDEs and to find causes for them, that the very important message they have for us all is

overlooked: that we should treat others as we wish to be treated ourselves. This is the Golden Rule, which is also found at the heart of all of the wisdom traditions. It is time to stop ignoring what these people have to say. Rather, we should learn from their wisdom and insight, so that we too can benefit – without having to nearly die.

*Marianne Rankin*  
*Alister Hardy Trust Director of Communications*

*Dr Sartori's Golden Rule links the two lectures: both stress the authenticity of subjective experience as the key to understanding the phenomena of religion and spirituality, and 'anomalies' that don't fit the empirical paradigm. (Ed.)*



## **Celebrating John Franklin's long Term of Office with the Alister Hardy Society**

John Franklin stepped down as the Society's Honorary Secretary at last year's Open Day after some 30 years of continuous service, both to the Society and the Trust. By any definition this is a fantastic achievement and we were keen to celebrate properly with him and his charming wife, Andrée, at the conclusion of Open Day in Oxford.

A number of long time members and former Directors and Chairs offered to celebrate John's time in the role and it was especially nice to hear from Professor Ursula King about the early days of the Society and the first RERU at Manchester College. Peggy Morgan spoke with affection about John during her time as Director of the RERC, overseeing the archive move from Oxford to Lampeter, whilst Jane Winship brought some personal reminiscences from her own Hardy family background. Marianne Rankin and Tristram Jenkins spoke warmly of their time working with John in the roles of Chair and Vice Chair respectively.



At the conclusion of the tributes, I was privileged to make a presentation to John and the generosity of our members enabled us to present a 'Kindle' tablet device, a fountain pen and a substantial cheque. Andrée received a bouquet of flowers from Marianne Rankin on behalf of the members.

We were then treated to a most wonderful cake baked by Tanya Garland in honour of John which was accompanied by a toast. Altogether a most fitting tribute to a wonderful, dedicated and warm person whom it has been my privilege to work along-side during my time as Chair.

Thank you John!

*Andy Burns, former AHSSSE Chair (photographs courtesy of Christine Burns)*

*See John's letter, and 'Questions', page 31*

## **Recording of Lectures**

With the demise of the AHSSSE and retirement of John Franklin as Hon. Secretary of the Society, the recording of AHSSSE lectures has ceased. This leaves a gap which, in the case of the Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture, at least, it would be highly desirable to fill if at all possible. If any reader would like to volunteer to take over recording the annual Alister Hardy Memorial lecture, and/or would like all the equipment, described below, such can be obtained, free, from John Franklin at the address below, and would become the property of the volunteer for personal private use as well. The only stipulation is that the person volunteering to record lectures organised by the AHT must be a member of the AHT.

The equipment on offer comprises:

- Spirit Notepad audio mixer – mix-mic, mains operated,
- Audio Technic receiver – roving mic assembly, mains operated, complete with leads to the Spirit Notepad receiver and batteries for the roving mic.
- 1 x Monacore ECM 3005 tie-mic; plus 1 x CE tie-mic with plugs for the Spirit Notepad audio mixer,
- 1 x Panasonic ear-phone set; plus Sony ear-phone set,
- Box of Fuji 74 min I discs,
- Supply of audio CD and audio DVD cases.

Recordings can easily be transferred from the Sony portable mini-disc recorder onto computer via USB cable (provided) using 'Audacity' app – and from computer onto MP3 CD/audio DVD: tuition available.

If interested, please contact John Franklin at 21 Park Vista, Greenwich, London, SE10 9LZ. Telephone: 0208 858 4750. e-mail: [johnfranklin35@hotmail.com](mailto:johnfranklin35@hotmail.com) Thank you.



## Report from the AHT Director of Communications

Last year I was invited to speak to a wide range of groups interested in spirituality. We gained several new members on those occasions as well as additional accounts of spiritual experiences for the RERC archive. I gave several talks on *Near-Death Experiences*: to Sixth Forms at Cheltenham Ladies College and King's School in Gloucester, to a local parish group and to a local Rotary Club. I also led a Quiet Day at Stanton Guildhouse and took part in a weekend seminar run by the Scientific and Medical Network on *Being*. Alan Rainer and I participated in a dialogue on *Educating the Whole Person* for the AHSSSE London Group. The Churches Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies invited me as the guest speaker for their annual gathering at Launde Abbey. I feel that these engagements raise our profile and enable me to tell others about our work and the fascinating resource of our archive.



Marianne with  
granddaughter Emma

So far in 2016 I have spoken to Cheltenham Interfaith and have been invited to speak at a symposium celebrating the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the World Congress of Faiths; a conference on NDEs at Winchester University (as you will see on the flier in this journal); and at the annual conference of the Guild of Pastoral Psychology at Worcester College, Oxford in August. ([www.guildofpastoralpsychology.org.uk](http://www.guildofpastoralpsychology.org.uk)). I will also be speaking to the CFPSS in September and leading a weekend retreat at Ammerdown in November.

Last year at Holland House, a beautiful retreat centre near Evesham, I led a series of three Quiet Days plus a special day to consider *NDEs and what we can learn from them*. I will be doing another series this year on *Spirituality and the Arts*, looking at *Spirituality in Art, Literature and Music* in February, March and April, as well as another day on *NDEs* in May. ([enquiries@hollandhouse.org](mailto:enquiries@hollandhouse.org)).

Unfortunately, the retreat Jonathan Robinson and I had planned on *Experiencing Spirituality* at Holland House last year did not take place. Although Jonathan is unable to join me, the retreat programme has now been revised and rescheduled for 5<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> April 2016. I will now lead it with the warden of Holland House, Ian Spencer. In this issue of the journal you will find a flier for the retreat and I would warmly invite members (and non-members) to consider joining me in a lovely location – take a look at [www.hollandhouse.org](http://www.hollandhouse.org)

Marian MacPolin and I have begun to type up accounts of spiritual experiences collected by Emma Heathcote-James for her book *Seeing Angels*. These were donated to the RERC in Lampeter some years ago and will be added to the archive by Jean Matthews' successor, Jonathan Andrew.

Although the AHSSSE as such is no more, we will continue to run events in London, Oxford and Wales under the name of the Alister Hardy Trust. As I continue to join David Greenwood in meetings with RERC Directors and representatives of both UWTSD and Glyndŵr University, I am heartened by the scope and wide range of activities offered by our Directors, and the local groups.

We are certainly living in interesting times and changes have taken place in the organisation. However, as I begin to reflect on all that has been achieved since Sir Alister Hardy set up the RERU in Oxford, I feel that he would be pleased to see two research centres in two universities as well as a general recognition in schools, universities and amongst the general public of the importance of spiritual experience.

Information on events coming up in 2016 is available in *De Numine*, on our website [www.studyspiritualexperiences.org](http://www.studyspiritualexperiences.org) and on our Facebook page.

*Marianne Rankin,  
AHT Director of Communications*

### **Alister Hardy Trust Members' Day 2016**

Saturday 15th October 2016  
Oxford Quaker Meeting House  
St Giles, Oxford

10:30 Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture – Professor Jeff Astley. Title to be arranged

14:00 Open Panel Discussion with Professor Jeff Astley, Dr Mark Fox & Marianne Rankin. The discussion will examine what we have learnt from religious experiences and where future research might take us.

Details and booking form will be mailed out to members in due course.

Inquiries and bookings: Marianne Rankin: [mariannerankin@icloud.com](mailto:mariannerankin@icloud.com)  
01684 772417 or 077140 32643



## **The One Spirit Alliance [OSA] Day at The Abbey, Sutton Courtney**

In 2013 more than 100 individuals and organisations came together to discuss the fact that they were working for the same spiritual ideals without contact with each other, and without knowing what others were doing. Thus the OSA was formed to provide some sort of framework that would enable connections, where individuals and societies interested in spirituality could connect more deeply. The OSA has since created a website with an online calendar where events can be advertised by any of the groups. The website also has links to the websites of the other organisations for more sharing of information. The OSA adopted the image of a honeycomb as a symbol, as a honeycomb is made up of connected but unique cells; each cell for the OSA represents one of the unique member organisations or individuals, while the honeycomb as a symbol represents the One Spirit which unites us. The Alister

Hardy Society (now The Alister Hardy Trust) has one of these cells with its name on the OSA website, and links to the AHT website along with many other groups named on other cells. On Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> December 2014, members met at the Abbey in Sutton Courtney, to celebrate the past year and to share with others what had been happening within each of the organisations since we last met together. The OSA event in 2015 was called a 'Fireside Gathering – Cross Currents in Consciousness.'

For those who do not know the venue, The Abbey at Sutton Courtney is a beautiful grade 1 listed medieval building set in four acres of woodland. Although owned by the Benedictine order it was never the religious house itself, but served as a supply and administration centre for other Benedictine monasteries and Abbeys in the area. It has a lovely, peaceful atmosphere for such a gathering such as ours, and is well worth a visit for anyone who finds themselves in the vicinity.

### **'Cross Currents in Consciousness.' 5<sup>th</sup> December 2015**

The day started at 10.30 with registrations and a chance to make tea or coffee in the dining room which adjoins the main hall with its wonderful medieval open fireplace. Then we all sat in a large circle in the main hall, and after a short meditation led by Colum Hayward from the *White Lodge Organisation*, we were each asked to share what our organisation did, and what it had been doing over the last year. Just before we broke up for a bring-and-share lunch we had a very short collaborative Yoga session directed by Jenny Beeken from *Inner Yoga Trust*.

After lunch it was back to sitting in the circle again before choosing to join one of four smaller groups; I chose to join 'Aging and Dying in Society' along with Giorgina Long from *Brahma Kumaris*, a lovely lady all dressed in white. This group was led by Philip Marvin from *The Scientific and Medical Network*; Philip explained that he was giving a talk on the subject on the 29<sup>th</sup> January at Colet House, London and wanted ideas from us as what to include in his talk. Other groups were: 'Science and Consciousness' led by Martin Redfern from *Study Society*, 'Alternative Education' led by Aggie Forster from *Braziers* and 'Community Building' led by Kitty Lloyd-Jones from *The Abbey*. We then returned to the main circle and heard reports on what each group had discussed, which took us up to afternoon tea break.

After tea Clare McDonald spoke about the planned OSA Summit meeting planned for 17<sup>th</sup> September 2016 in London. She also asked those present to give ideas as to how to plan the day, who to invite to speak, what to include, how to help people meet each other and so on. She had prepared coloured petal-shaped pieces of card to write our ideas on, which we placed around a central card to form a large daisy on the floor. She called this a 'Take a Petal' flower building exercise to explore how our ideas can contribute towards planning the Summit. A large part of the day was taken up in planning this event and we were also all asked in what way we would contribute in the running of the Summit – we were asked to volunteer some work, whether it was taking tickets at the door or helping with seating etc. – we were asked by name what we could offer. The event being planned is called 'New Story – New Era – Responding Together to the call of the Spirit' [see events, page 50 for details].

On the Sunday a simple soup lunch was provided by the Abbey community. I enjoyed being in the Abbey again – it is a lovely environment – and enjoyed meeting the others present, but while I understand the need to plan the events of a group-centred 'alliance', and the logic of taking the opportunity on this day to seek each group's ideas and help, I was personally most appreciative of the one-to-one discussions I managed to have aside from the organised group activities. I talked with Sarah Maidlow, who introduced herself in the circle as representing the *Hildegard of Bingen Society*. I had previously known little about this most extraordinary

12<sup>th</sup> century woman, apart from her music, until I read up about her in books lent to me by Sarah. She was a tenth child who was given by her parents as a tithe to the monastery of Disibodenberg, in Germany. She was only eight years old and the anchoress, Jutte, who was to care for her, was only fourteen years old herself at the time!

I also had an interesting talk with Colum Hayward from *The White Lodge*, a meditation centre which was started by Grace Cooke after she was chosen to channel the teachings of White Eagle – an advanced spirit who appeared to her in the form of a wise Native American. Colum told me he was Grace Cook's grandson and remembered White Eagle joining them each Christmas at his grandmother's home, when he would give a Christmas message to the family.

These were meetings I valued and would not have had if I had not gone to the OSA Day. I think bringing people together and sharing a website and calendar of events is what the OSA has to offer and is very worthwhile. Examples of some of the other organisations represented were *The Wrekin Trust*, *The Rudolph Steiner Anthroposophy Society*, *British Teilhard Association*, *Society for Psychical Research*, *The Free Spirit Network Green Spirit* and of course *The Abbey*.

*Tanya Garland*



## Reports from the Local Groups

### London Group

At our September meeting, Andy Burns, Chair of the Society, told us about the Alister Hardy Trust changing its constitution to become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) – as part of which the AHSSSE would become amalgamated into the Trust. He emphasised that membership, and the various regional groups, would continue to operate seamlessly in practice, members of the Society now becoming members of the Trust – the exact mechanics remaining to be decided. Rowena Rudkin mentioned the work of the Alister Hardy Research Centres, going well at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Lampeter and at Glyndŵr University, Wrexham, and said there had been another successful conference of the Alister Hardy Society and the Scientific and Medical Network at Oxford in June 2015.

But the future of the London Group was another matter. Attendance at meetings had been falling off, and there was a real prospect of not being able to cover the costs of meetings at the Essex Unitarian Church, which had been our home for many years: the purpose of this meeting was to consider the future of the Group. It had become clear that if we were to continue we would need to find another venue – and the King and Queen public house in central London, which has a function room let on extremely beneficial terms, was suggested. Also, the idea of improved extended publicity was suggested. The focus of the London Group also came up and was discussed. A consensus began to emerge that two meetings a year was probably enough. It was broadly suggested that an evening meeting towards the end of Spring 2016 might be the best way forward, and agreed that this would be considered by the London Group Committee<sup>1</sup>.

We then enjoyed an illustrated talk by Rowena Rudkin with a slide show of photographs she had taken on a recent trip to the churches in Ethiopia. She talked about the buildings, the context and symbolism of the architecture and art of the area, and of some of the Church rituals she had observed. The talk was absolutely fascinating, and was much appreciated by all attending.

For our last meeting in 2015, Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> November, Revd Canon Dr Alan Race, Chair of the Worlds Congress of Faiths and Editor in Chief of the WCF journal *Interreligious Insight*, spoke to us on *Seeking the Sacred: World Faiths, Secularity and Religious Experience*. He said that any great religion worth its salt exists to offer its believers a comprehensive view of life – a vision of transcendent reality combined with an accompanying pathway of transformation for the human condition. His talk explored the presence of religious diversity as an expression of sacredness and as a challenge to imagining one's own faith as the most effective; he looked at terms 'spiritual' versus 'religious' and 'particularism' versus 'generality'. He said that the sacred is not so clearly defined as one might think – nor is the Holy. It is within the human that the experience occurs, and to illustrate this Canon Race showed some slides, images from nature and the physical universe, and said that the manifestation of the Sacred ontologically founds our world: when we think about religion, the 'God in the Sky' image is hard to shake off, but religion is wonderfully diverse. He looked at the contemporary situation and discussed what he said were two essential issues: how to discern the Spiritual and the Myth; and then what to do about the Plurality of the Spiritual and the Myth. He emphasised the value of asking the right questions to find the answers you want – and, in the exposition of religion, the need to look at 'particularism' and 'universality'. Each religion develops its own 'particularity' but at the mystical core of each was a 'universality' – the religious traditions are in touch with Ultimate Reality through their particular symbol systems and histories. He advocated 'dialogue' as a new way of thinking that stimulates not rivalry but communion, saying, 'any one community's apprehension of religious truth will be truth that exists for all, and is to be appropriated within a dialogical framework.' The talk stimulated much discussion; Canon Race, in finishing, said that much has been said about the plurality of the spiritual ... but what we needed was action, now!

*John Franklin*

<sup>1</sup> It was subsequently agreed to hold our first meeting at the King and Queen PH Function room, with this arranged for Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> March, 6.30 pm (see Events, page 50).

### **Oxford and Swindon AHT local group:**

**Members are invited to Open House with Tanya Garland, 1st Saturday of the month, for all who are interested in spiritual experiences and would like to meet with others.**

I have at last finished my book and I am feeling free enough to host the AHT local group, so I have recently become the Oxfordshire local group representative for the Alister Hardy Trust (taking over from Rhonda Riachi), and will have Open House at 37 Hill Top Road Oxford, OX4 1PD every 1st Saturday of each month for the next six months, as a trial to gauge interest. We will meet to have an opportunity to share with each other and to share experiences over coffee or tea. In my reading I discovered Hildegard of Bingen in more depth; I thought I would start with a morning or afternoon coffee gathering, and a short talk introducing Hildegard and the illuminations of her visions which I find fascinating, especially as they are from as long ago as the 12th Century. I can arrange talks on

Levitation, Spiritualism, Visions etc., but would like to have feedback on what is wanted. My hope is that some of you will bring your own special interests and will offer to give a short introductory talk on one of the Saturday mornings, but this is not necessary and all are welcome to just come and meet with others. I have made contact with one or two new people from the OSA who are in our area – one from the White Lodge living in Sandford (Laurine) and an academic, Sarah Maidlow – both will come to the house for meetings. We could also see a short DVD on a relevant subject for discussion.

**Contact details:** Tanya Garland, tel. 01865 244260 Email: [tanya.garland.37@gmail.com](mailto:tanya.garland.37@gmail.com)

## **South East Wales Group**

### **Meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> September 2015: *The Hunters' Moon***

The talk by our member Trudy Porter began with an account of a spiritual experience:\*

'On the morning of 23 October 2010 I had awoken to the most stunning event, a view of a most spectacular pre-dawn morning, spreading the stars and the moon out before me through my south-facing window. Orion (the Hunter) was high in the sky with the dog stars, Canis Major and Canis Minor following behind. Leading the group was a very full and beautiful moon – **the Hunters' Moon** ... I experienced a unity, a fusion of wholeness and of heightened sensation, maybe a sacred time. I was in tune with an event which had been occurring throughout time itself, an involvement with a long-lost tidal energy.'

Apart from, but linked in to her experience, Trudy pointed out to us that to our ancestors this October full moon was of vital importance because, preceding the onset of winter with its privations, people would be using the light of this moon to hunt through the night as well as the day; at night the game animals would be at their most active, and their most vulnerable. The Celtic festival of Samhain (Hallowe'en and All Saints' Day) also ties in with the hunting parties.

She went on to ask whether the Hunters' Moon might be the most important time of the year at Stonehenge: 'Mike Parker-Pearson believes that ... the celebrations were to mark the mid-winter solstice; but could he be in error, and the celebrations be marking the Rhythm of the Moon – specifically the Hunters' Moon?' Recent excavations at Blickmead, 1.5 miles from Stonehenge support this theory. Archaeologist, David Jacques has connected hunting and this time of year to the Stonehenge area. Animal bones from the aurochs, a giant cow, dating from around 4500BC (before Stonehenge) have been recently uncovered. Jacques believes that there is proof that a sacred hunting ground was present long before Neolithic monuments in the [area](#).

Trudy will send a more complete account of her spiritual experience to the archive where it may be read more widely.

### **26th November 2015: *The Tao***

The retreat, entitled 'The Way and its Signposts' was led by Jim Pym and held at the Claridge House, a Quaker centre of spiritual healing in Surrey. He explained that the Path to the Divine (truth, spirit) that leads to an awareness of the Oneness of all, is central to each mystical tradition. Spiritual healing is very much a central focus.

Val gave us a stimulating afternoon, talking firstly about her retreat, before leading us into a meditation. At Claridge House much use is made of meditation, for one's own healing and wholeness, and for the healing of others. Val during her time there cut her finger badly, and was amazed how quickly and completely it was to heal – as though *the building itself was a focus for the healing power*. She pointed out that 'we can't fully understand the infinite/eternal; maybe [we are graced with] glimpses sometimes'. There is the paradox here of needing to act, and yet not being *required* to act – the Taoist *wu-wei*. But we need to listen prayerfully nonetheless to recognise any nudgings indicating to us *when* to act. We must question ourselves before we commit to a path: is it right of itself for us? The abiding and central feature of the Path in whatever Faith, is love and compassion, opening up to the heart.

'Where's the Spirit/God in all the world's sufferings? – war/peace; wealth/poverty; hatred/love? For mystics the Spirit is in all of these phenomena and they are not seen as opposites'.

Over tea, there was much animated conversation, and input from us all; which was followed by a deep silence which none of us felt the need to draw to a close!

Mary Cook



## AHT News

### Patron wins Templeton Prize



One of our patrons, Lord Sacks, philosopher and scholar, has won the prestigious Templeton Prize which this year is worth £1.1 million. This is awarded to the person 'who has made an exceptional contribution to affirming life's spiritual dimension, whether through insight, discovery, or practical works'.

Established in 1972 by Sir John Templeton, the Prize aims, in his words, to identify 'entrepreneurs of the spirit' – outstanding individuals who have devoted their talents to expanding our vision of human purpose and ultimate reality. The Prize celebrates no particular faith tradition or notion of God, but rather the quest for progress in humanity's efforts to comprehend the many and diverse manifestations of the Divine.

Jennifer Simpson, Chair of the John Templeton Foundation Board of Trustees, notes that Rabbi Sacks epitomizes 'future-mindedness', a characteristic revered by her grandfather, Sir John Templeton and her father, the late Foundation president and chairman Dr Jack Templeton : 'After 9/11, Rabbi Sacks saw the need for a response to the challenge posed by radicalization and extremism and he did so with dignity and grace,' she said. 'He saw the

need for the strengthening of ethics in the marketplace long before the financial crisis ... He has always been ahead of his time and, thanks to his leadership, the world can look to the future with hope, something we are very much in need of right now.'

In nominating Rabbi Sacks for the Prize, former Archbishop of Canterbury Lord George Carey wrote: 'There are public intellectuals and religious leaders, but few who are both at the same time. There are academic scholars and popular communicators, but he is both, reaching out far beyond his own constituency through the spoken, written and broadcast word.' In a recent interview on Radio 4, Lord Sacks, who served as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth from 1991 to 2013, said this:

'Modern media is used to spread paranoia, feeding the politics of hate. Religions need to find a way to compete with this for good, to spread a message of respecting other faiths. There is a huge potential for this, but religious leaders tend to be conservative (small c); this has been true whenever a new means of communication has appeared, for instance printing; the radicals got there first, pamphlets versus pulpits, so the radical message is spread, but the mainstream, establishment message stays local. Religions do not, in general, spread the message of tolerance to counteract fundamentalism. We need to create an exciting, high impact technology to compete with messages of alienation.'

Lord Sacks intends spending the prize money on interfaith dialogue and relations. His most recent book, published in 2015, is *Not in God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence* [see list of books for review, page 49].

Members of the Alister Hardy Trust will of course know that Sir Alister Hardy was the winner of the Templeton Prize in 1985

*Compiled by Dr David Greenwood and Patricia Murphy*

## **World religious leader visits University**

THE leader of Japan's biggest Buddhist movement, another patron of the Alister Hardy Trust, recently visited the University of Chester, to share religious knowledge and discuss possible future partnerships.

His Eminence, the Supreme Primate, Ōtani Koken, is the Temple Master of Tokyo Higashi Honganji, which is one of the two main branches of Jōdo Shinshū, the dominant form of Buddhism in Japan. Jōdo Shinshū is a form of Pure Land Buddhism and Higashi Honganji-ha means 'the Eastern branch of the Temple of the Original Vow School'.

Adherents believe that humans are too prone to spiritual pride to progress to enlightenment through their own efforts, so they rely on the grace of the compassionate Buddha, Amida, to bring them to enlightenment in a 'realm of purification' – usually understood to be in the after-life. It became the dominant form of Buddhism in Japan during the Kamakura (medieval) period, when the wandering teacher Shinran (1173-1262) popularised it and made it available to lay people rather than monastic élites.



'Temple-mastership' passes from father to son. The Primate, Ōtani Koken (surname Ōtani, first name Koken) is the 26th generation descendant of Shinran himself. The Ōtani family is amongst the most aristocratic families of the Japanese nobility; the Primate's father was a cousin of the Emperor of Japan.

His Eminence was accompanied by priests from Tokyo Higashi Honganji Temple and from a British branch temple in London, called the Three Wheels Temple. His visit to the University included discussing the possibility of co-operation and exchange with Pro-Vice Chancellor and University Secretary Adrian Lee, and the Executive Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, Professor Rob Warner. The prospect of a deepening relationship between the Theology and Religious Studies department and temples in Tokyo, London and Fukuoka was also explored. He was also given a tour of the Cathedral, conducted by Canon Professor Elaine Graham and the Revd Canon Jane Brooke.

Dr Wendy Dossett, Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies at the University of Chester [formerly lecturer in TRIS at Lampeter], said, 'We are extremely honoured to have welcomed His Eminence to the University of Chester. As well as providing an opportunity for us to learn about aspects of Japanese Buddhism, His Eminence also discussed current areas of research amongst academics in the Theology and Religious Studies department, and shared his personal interest in interfaith dialogue.'

'For me personally, it was a wonderful opportunity to renew an old friendship, as I undertook my PhD fieldwork at Tokyo Higashi Honganji some twenty years ago.'

*Sent in by Anne Watkins*

*We have an account of this visit from Anne Watkins, former RERC Librarian, which for reasons of space we are unable to print in this issue. Anne was the Primate's guide throughout his visit and has written an engaging account of this which we will print in the autumn issue. We do hope his Eminence will enjoy this reminder of his visit. (Ed.)*

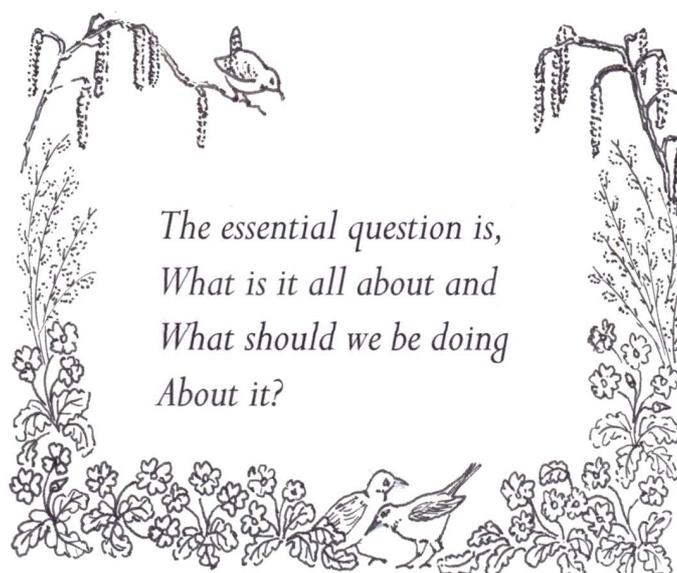


'Warm thanks were given to Jane Hay for the kind donation of all books and papers of her late husband, Dr David Hay, to the Alister Hardy Trust.' This brief mention appears in John Franklin's report on the last AHSSSE AGM [page 14] I would like to expand on this here.

In the last issue we said goodbye to Dr David Hay, with personal tributes from several key members, trustees and associates of the Alister Hardy Trust. These spoke of the remarkable and extensive contribution Dr Hay made to the study of religious experience, and specifically to the work of the Trust; sharing ideas and research with Sir Alister from the earliest days. He contributed enormously to the RERC from its inception as RERU (1969) and throughout its development, including a Directorship in the '80s. He was thus ideally placed to write the

seminal biography of Sir Alister, published in 2011. These recollections also demonstrated the affection and esteem in which he was held during his long association with us. I mention this again here as a tribute to both Dr and Mrs Hay; thank you so much.

And the work goes on ... below is a question, 2 in 1 really, sent to *De Numine* by John Franklin, who feels it encapsulates what we are about; so please respond, as John asks members to do in his letter below. Engaging with this question will also be a tribute to Dr Hay and Sir Alister and William James, and all the pioneers who have gone before. The work goes on and on ... Ed.



The perennial question  
submitted by John Franklin in his letter below  
and adorned by Juliet Greenwood

## Letters to the Editor

### Letter from former Hon. Secretary, AHSSSE

I write to express my sincere gratitude and thanks for the warm tributes and expressions of appreciation given to me on my retirement as Hon. Secretary of the AHSSSE at Open Day last October. I was quite overwhelmed and deeply touched by all the kind things that were said then, and expressed in the many cards I received from friends, colleagues and members and also for the extremely generous donations. It has been a great privilege for me to have met so many really nice people – and to have been in a position to read so many moving accounts of personal spiritual experiences that have been sent in to the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre, which greatly helped in my own spiritual journey ...

My period in office started at a time of great difficulty for the AHRERC in its early days, struggling with accommodation and financial difficulties; and it has encompassed many great changes, and a steady progressive improvement – from a small office in George Street, Oxford to Westminster College, Oxford to the University of Wales Lampeter to the, now, two Centres, at University of Wales Trinity Saint David and Glyndŵr University at Wrexham; and from the birth of the Alister Hardy Society in George Street to its absorption into the Alister Hardy Trust just completed at the end of last year. It has been my privilege to have witnessed its development, following the wonderful start, vision and achievements of our founder, Sir Alister Hardy, driven by succeeding Directors, in particular Edward Robinson, David Hay, Peggy Morgan and Paul Badham, to, now, Bettina Schmidt and Christopher Lewis. I have seen the early empirical work of Sir Alister Hardy's *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, reinforced by David Hay's later statistical work; and Sir Alister's vision of expansion of the study of spiritual experience as natural common human experience into other parts of the world and into different cultures achieved in Paul Badham's Global Project, where he, with others, extended the study into Russia, China, Turkey, Japan, India, America, Brazil and, later, Taiwan.

And, what now? I am pleased to stay on as a Trustee of the Alister Hardy Trust, and will continue to follow the development of the work of the two AHRERCs with particular interest. A wise and respected member of the Society once said to me, 'The essential question is, What's it all about? – and, What should we be doing about it?' Those questions seared into my mind as being of particular importance. What, indeed, *are* people's experiences telling us? That they are important and generally of great benefit for the individual concerned – and, so very often, for the benefit of society as a whole regardless of race or culture – is clear. But what, indeed, is this telling us – and what, indeed, should we be doing about it? It would be interesting to know what members might think about this. How important do you see it – how important were your own spiritual experiences to you? Do please write in to *De Numine* on this ...

It just remains for me to thank, once again, all those who gave me such generous support and help over the 29 years of my service as, first, Hon Membership Secretary and later Hon. Secretary of the former Society; and to wish my successors all the very best in taking the membership and members' interests forward in the future.

*John Franklin, January 2016*

Dear Paddy & Jean,

Just received the latest issue of *De Numine* and wanted to compliment you both on yet another bumper journal filled with interesting articles, reviews etc. I particularly enjoyed reading the report from the Annual Gathering which was comprehensive and really captured the tone of the event, warts and all, as they say!

Kind regards,

*Andy*

Dear Paddy,

### **Reflections on the Annual Gathering (2015)**

I firstly wanted to thank you for an open and honest appraisal of last year's Annual Gathering at Llantarnam Abbey. It is often difficult to summarise such an event, particularly one which runs over three days. As a participant I feel that you did a splendid job in capturing the mood of the event, 'warts and all' as they say.

May I just pick up on a couple of points made by Alan and Eilean in their letters to the autumn issue of the journal (No 59 pp. 32-34). I note the concerns that the event was either a) too religiously based and not sufficiently focused on the spiritual dimension, or b) not sufficiently grounded in those religious experiences of a personal nature. It is worth recalling that the original RERU was founded on asking about religious experiences, but Hardy always believed that this would expand across the faiths and include spiritual experiences too. The Society recognised this a number of years ago and changed its own name to include this wider dimension. Under the new CIO [Charitable Incorporated Organization] 'Alister Hardy Trust' the two RERCs continue to explore the various aspects of these experiences.

However, Alan raises some interesting questions in his letter which are worth further thought and discussion as we move forwards under the new organisation.

*Andy Burns, Former Chair, AHSSSE*

### **Letter from Ken Rees to Mary Cook**

I have been reading the Reflections on Llantarnam 2015 in the recent issue of *De Numine* with interest! I only wish I had been present to make at least some small contribution to the debate! Had I been I would have said something like the following:

I was brought up in a non-conformist household (father actually a pastor) with little or no ritual or liturgy – albeit very fine singing – without knowing what I was missing, i.e. could not articulate it at that stage. When I became an adult I became attracted to forms of worship which *did* involve ritual, even liturgies. These included both nature religion, e.g. Druidism and esoteric Christianity, e.g. The Order of the Cross. The key for me was that such forms got away from the passivity of worship and could involve the celebrant actually being a priest, priestess or ministrant for the duration of the event (service). So there was a fuller active participation than what is normally available to a Catholic or Anglican congregation for instance. Having said that, I also enjoy the beauty of a Greek/Eastern/Russian Orthodox mass/liturgy, all of which I have witnessed performed at the Theosophical Society here in London!

For me there is no necessary division between personal devotion (individual gnosis) and more public expression of ritual where this becomes both the expression and the vehicle for spiritual force and worship. So collective 'religious' orthopraxy and personal spiritual experience are not mutually exclusive. Rather they complement each other. For me to feel otherwise would be creating a *false* boundary where one does not need to exist.

Just my two pennyworth!

all good blessings,  
*Ken*

Dear Editor,

I found Mary Cook's letter in *De Numine* 59 quite amazing. I am amazed at her hostility towards those who go to church; at the intolerance of someone who apparently claims to have 'experienced the presence of the Spiritual'; and at her blanket, categorical statements: 'Church gets in the way', and '... those who know that the Spiritual exists avoid religion, and those who attend churches and religious societies are it seems, the doubters.' This might well be 'startling' if it were true.

The AH Archive contains many examples of wonderful experiences that take place in church or other worship situations. I was taken to church as a very unwilling adolescent; I always came out of the church feeling a lot better than I went in. A kind of infectious peace. This was certainly a spiritual experience.

There are of course also many examples of people with no spiritual or religious leanings who are suddenly shown another reality – suddenly 'see the light'.

Somebody once suggested to me that the people who have spiritual or religious experiences are those who *need* to have them. If the church groups originally targeted by Hardy through their magazines produced a mere 200 replies compared to the secular 'wealth of over 4,000', how about the possibility that the churchgoers didn't really need them?

*(name and address supplied)*

**From the pages of De Numine:**

Here are two aspects of religion and spirituality, on either side of the debate, which are also food for thought:

The first is from Howard Jones' review of Eben Alexander's *Map of Heaven* [this issue p. 43]. The last sentence in the review reads 'Dogmatic religion is not open to people having direct access to those higher realms because of course it undermines the power and control of its practitioners'. A valid comment; especially in the context of ultra-orthodoxy, which also admits of no other 'truth' than its own.

On the other hand, when I think of the Coptic cross and the sacred book brought to Calais by immigrants making the perilous journey from Africa to Europe [see back pages last issue], this to me is a manifestation of an ancient tradition. It demonstrates the power of sacred icons, objects, talismans, amulets, the rituals that surround them, and our enduring need for them. The Ark of the Covenant was carried through the desert from Egypt to Israel 4,000 years ago; the Christ child was carried to Bethlehem, in utero, then as a babe in arms on the flight into Egypt by Mary and Joseph 2,000 years ago. We still talk of following our star, as the Magi did with their rich, iconic gifts, to find the Christ child in a humble stable. We remember them.

And what else is our ceremony of the round table at Llantarnam than a ritual with sacred objects at its heart?

*The Editor*

## Springtime

The long nights of Winter cannot hold  
The lengthening days, the swelling grain.  
The face of earth's roundness  
Is scattered into ever-changing form.  
The sleep of Winter is the gathering place  
For new beginnings, where darkness kisses its sister, light.  
The tender shoots of our lives are full of hope  
Fragile amongst earth's clash of opposites  
The brute hand, the rise of warlike forces  
And fetid ignorance.  
For in their tenderness they sometimes see  
Beyond the extremity of outer things  
Into the heart of life,  
Into the beauty that haunts us with the presence  
That breathes our air, and loves us.  
So become the beauty. This is the only way,  
And walk with head held high amongst the furrows of the world,  
High in the highest heaven, to resist  
The tread of evil powers,  
The blindness, and the insolence of office  
That assumes such mantel of correctness  
That would freeze our frail humanity.  
Stand tall, and with wings outstretched  
Become the birdsong, music in the air  
A strand in the tapestry of love.  
Unfold, as Spring flowers unfold  
The awesomeness of unseen powers.  
Let the deliciousness of Spring become your symphony  
To carry you above the arteries of earthly power,  
That you may step aside from rough-hewn walls of separation  
Into joyous cries of liberation  
And become the vanguard of the coming dawn.  
Spring is the ceaseless flow of hidden energy  
That births new worlds, our life.  
Spring is our story, our reminder  
That the dancer and the dance,  
The mover and the moved, are One,  
And the One is an eternal rounding  
That moves through all things.

*Jonathan Robinson*



## Spring at Last

Naked trees, their fuzz on fire  
with the mounting sap of Spring.

the first tiny blossoms  
of this late Spring  
are caught in a silvery web  
like pearls in a bride's veil

A dead landscape,  
chalky ground and  
skeletal leaf cover.  
No sign of Spring  
until a secret glade of green  
offers up a dazzle  
of a thousand purple violets.



*Linda Lamont*

## BOOK REVIEWS

**George D Chryssides & Ron Geaves, *The Study of Religion: an Introduction to Key Ideas and Methods* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)**

**London, Bloomsbury, 2014. (viii) 384 pp. ISBN 978 1 78093 840 0 (pbk) £22.99**

The new edition of the course book *The Methodology of the Study of Religion*, first edition published in 2007, by Chryssides & Geaves, 2014, has been extended by three chapters, offering the reader an introduction to the wide and at times bewildering variety of methodologies and key ideas in the study of religion today. George D. Chryssides is Honorary Research Fellow in Contemporary Religion at the University of Birmingham, UK and Ron Geaves is Professor of the Contemporary Study of Religion at Liverpool Hope University. Both have years of experience in research and teaching in the field, and have braved the difficult task of giving a concise, yet manageable overview of the varieties of approaches and key concepts in the study of religion. The book is accessible to undergraduates and students from other areas of study as well as specialists in the field. Much can be gained by their insights into actual research in the field which flows into the text in anecdotal form.

The book is divided into 12 chapters, alternately written by one or both authors, each concerned with one key theme, for example: tools of the trade, methodologies, statistical research, key figures of the discipline, phenomenology, fieldwork, gender and authenticity issues, truth claims etc. Each chapter is subdivided into sub-headings with page numbers,

noted in a preceding outline. They have an internally balanced and independent structure, thus allowing the student to read one chapter on its own, and even access a specific theme within it. In addition many chapters include boxed key concepts and separate case studies clearly set apart from the main text. These allow for short examples in the application of an approach or methodology discussed in the main text, or the addition of further details on a key concept. Separate source references for these features add to the wide ranging bibliography provided by the authors, and are readily traceable in the index. Each chapter is concluded with a selection of 'discussion points': questions relating to the text which can be used in group/seminar work or as small essay tasks.

The added chapters in this edition consider the themes of colonialism & post-colonialism, the insider/outsider discussion and the internet as a resource for research on religious communities and their self-representation. These are subjects that certainly play an important role in the study of religion.

Of necessity the outline of the concepts and approaches introduced is kept relatively short which can lead to a feeling that certain aspects of the themes are being under-represented. However the wealth of material the authors have chosen is of such richness and depth that it can only be introduced without too much attention to detail. With every theme they are careful to address several points of view which exist in the discipline, offering the various methodologies as well as their most important critiques. The key authors cited range from the classical to the contemporary, and the student of religious experience within the context of the AHRERC will find many of the main founding authors in this field mentioned in several chapters. However, even though mention is made twice of the AHRERC (pp. 57 & 106-107), modern key figures in the study of religious experience, Alister Hardy and David Hay for example, are not to be found. The theme of religious experience is included in a short section in chapter 8, *Authenticity and Diversity* (pp. 229-230), and in chapter 11 (pp. 303-338) there is a discussion of truth claims, mainly in the shape of mystical experience. The fact that modern accounts of spiritual experiences, as collected in the AH archives, and the research done in this field are mentioned only marginally is certainly partly due to the enormity of ground covered, which does not allow for much detail. Further, the approaches and methodologies used to study religious experience are after all covered in this volume.

This book is certainly a very valuable introduction to the key concepts in the wide field of the study of religion, and provides the student with a broad range of starting points for further in-depth study. It is easy to read and its clear structure, including the thematically ordered bibliography in combination with an excellent index, offers the student the possibility of retracing the authors' sources, and thus gain a deeper knowledge of specific approaches by further reading.

If there is a certain disappointment with the lack of attention paid to the cutting edge research done by the AHRERC this may strengthen the will to push this frontier even more intensively. Reading this text book and freshening up on the main ideas and methods of the field in such a compact form has made me more aware again of the importance of the work carried out by the AHSSSE and RERC!

*Reviewed by Karen Asmuß-Wiggins*

**Andrew Newberg, *The Spiritual Brain: Science and Religious Experience*  
Chantilly, The Great Courses, 2012. 448 pp. ISBN 159803886-9 (pbk & DVDs). £54.99.**

Dr Andrew Newberg is Director of Research at the Myrna Brind Centre of Integrative Medicine at Thomas Jefferson Hospital. He has performed numerous studies investigating the brain physiology of religious experiences using neuroimaging technologies. His papers have been published in peer-reviewed journals, including *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*. He has also authored and co-authored a number of books on neuroscience and spiritual experience, including *The Mystical Mind: probing the biology of religious experience* with Eugene d'Aquili, *Why God Won't Go Away* with Eugene d'Aquili and Vince Rause, *Born To Believe*, and *Principles of Neurotheology*.

The Great Courses are a series of lectures on DVD or CD on many different topics by experts in their particular fields. The UK website can be found at [www.thegreatcourses.co.uk](http://www.thegreatcourses.co.uk) This particular course consists of 24 half-hour lectures on DVD accompanied by a course book that provides an overview of the main points, questions to consider, and suggested reading for each lecture. You can also purchase the lecture transcript book, which I would recommend as it makes the lectures easier to digest and refer back to. You may be relieved to know that there is no exam or test at the end of the course! The Great Courses website often puts selected courses on offer, so it may be possible to get hold of a copy more cheaply if you are patient.

Neuro-theology is the name given to the study of brain physiology as it relates to spiritual or religious experiences. Almost immediately Newberg demonstrates a similar view of religious experience to that of Sir Alister Hardy: 'Humans exhibit a persistent tendency to believe in things like God, the afterlife, and the soul. Maybe there's something in the way our brains are put together – the way we're wired – that makes us believe.' During the course of the lectures Newberg tells us about some of his own neuro-imaging studies, using MRI, PET, and SPECT technologies. Amongst other studies he has taken brain scans of Franciscan nuns during prayer, Buddhists whilst meditating, people speaking in tongues, atheists thinking about God, and people's perceptions of religious symbols. He has also undertaken an online survey of spiritual experiences that was completed by around 2,000 people in the U.S. Newberg also draws together the work of other scientists studying spiritual experience and reviews studies on the 'God gene', Transcendental Meditation, yoga, heart disease, mortality, schizophrenia, psychedelics, altruism, empathy, and NDEs.

So what does Newberg conclude from all of these studies about the neuroscience of spiritual experience? Studies such as these run the risk of becoming a two-edged sword; they can help us understand spiritual experience *from the perspective* of brain science, but they could also be used to reduce spiritual experience *to* brain science. Interestingly, Newberg emphasises a feature of mystical experiences that, for him at least, suggests that *correlation* of brain states with spiritual experiences does not mean *causation* of those experiences by the brain. This is the observation that mystics, and often NDErs, frequently state that their experience felt *more real* than normal consciousness, not only during the experience, but on returning to normal consciousness again afterwards. Newberg argues that ultimately there is no way for us to determine what is real other than the subjective, first-person, felt-sense of reality. Such experiences, therefore, point to a state of being that is somehow more real than our normal, everyday consciousness.

The delivery style of the lectures (on the DVD) is fairly low key, with Dr Newberg simply standing in a studio in a pretend office talking to camera. Some visuals break this potentially

monotonous view to illustrate what he is explaining, however they are not the over-the-top special effects used by most modern documentaries. The experience is more realistically lecture-like and sustained concentration is required. However, the science is delivered at a level that can be understood by viewers who have not had a scientific training themselves. Those who are more familiar with the scientific ideas Newberg refers to may find themselves wanting more depth. One slightly frustrating aspect of the transcript book is the lack of proper referencing, although many of the sources are cited in the bibliography at the back.

I found this course, both the DVDs and the accompanying transcript book, to be very interesting and worthwhile. They cover a lot of ground and provide an excellent overview of scientific enquiry into religious and spiritual experience. Newberg's work is also an excellent example of how science can be sensitively applied to spirituality without invoking the polarised positions that are often seen amongst both militant materialists and staunch believers. Newberg's website can be found at [www.andrewnewberg.com](http://www.andrewnewberg.com)

*Reviewed by Michael J. Rush*  
[www.talkaboutspiritualcrisis.uk](http://www.talkaboutspiritualcrisis.uk)

**Michele Saracino, *Christian Anthropology; An Introduction to the Human Person***  
New York, Paulist Press, 2015. 240 pp. ISBN 978 0809149254 (pbk). £16.99

This is a primer in Catholic Christian theology, which pays serious attention to our complex 21<sup>st</sup> century life, including other species. It does not look specifically at spiritual experience, but does value experiences of life as ways of doing theology. It defines experience as 'The feelings, thoughts, actions, events and relationships that inform our lives on a day to day basis' (p. 20). It includes the recognition that 'there is little one can prove about religious belief using the scientific method' (p. 21).

The first chapter introduces the reader to the sources and methods of Christian theology; scripture, tradition and experience. The second explores the problem of a perfect god. The idea can either make us depressed because we can never attain that perfection, or it can make us assume that we too are perfect and all powerful, and can impose our will on the rest of creation, instead of recognising our dependence on other life forms.

Chapter 3 by contrast explores our dependency and need, which we feel despite our sense of guilt at being dependent. She draws on the work and lived experience of Jean Vanier, who set up communities of disabled people, sharing with so-called able bodied/minded people, where each member could admit their need and receive help from others. She suggests that it is neediness that opens up possibilities for relationships with each other and with creation.

Chapter 4 explores the concept of freedom, which theologian Karl Rahner had defined as 'the freedom to accept or reject God'. She extends this freedom to the whole of creation. She quotes the Jesuit priest Fr. Lonergan, who defined conversion as 'a lifetime of attempting to understand the world around us'.

She spends several chapters exploring dualism; the simplification of reality into two contrasting possibilities, rather than recognising the complexity between the poles of body-mind, male-female, human-animal, friend-enemy. She suggests that we break free of the

polarisation, and treasure the 'other'. The Sexism chapter ends with an exploration of how people could mother the earth, so it can in turn continue to nourish all life.

She then explores how what is broken in us can be made whole, in a generous chapter on sin, then on forgiveness. She explores our common vocation to move towards God in our everyday lives, and contrasts juggling competing demands with composing our life by ordering it around a purpose. She recommends throughout that we seek to understand the world we live in, exploring the complex interlock between individual people and all other life forms, both intellectually and experientially: 'Feel part of the weather', for that is where God is.

The final full chapter explores ideas about life after death, and the full re-creation of all life; salvation for individuals and for the shared life of our planet.

The epilogue suggests that 'being human involves paying attention to the plight of all species'. She summarises her book: be vulnerable, enact freedom, overcome dualism, be open to conversion, forgive and love, embrace life as a journey both here and now, and in the hereafter.

She provides a full bibliography, as is right in a book that purports also to be the basis for a study course lasting 'one semester' (13 sessions). There are individual and group exercises at the end of each chapter.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading Saracino's work, although she did not consider alternative philosophies in any depth. She maintained the Christian emphasis on progress throughout, which therefore permitted no engagement with for example Taoism with its pursuit of a way of living that keeps balance rather than seeking to achieve, let alone arrive at, any destination.

Some articles in *De Numine* have shown that members are suspicious of Religion. This book might re-open the dialogue.

*Reviewed by Philip Tyers.*

**Roger Haight, *Spirituality Seeking Theology***

**Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, 2013. xiv 194 pp. ISBN 978 1 62698 077 8 (pbk) £17.99**

Our society for the study of spiritual experience starts with those moments when an individual has an experience. We collect, compare and follow from the experience to the way of life that ensues, reflecting on the meaning of the experience for people. Were we to define spirituality, we might mean 'spiritual experiences and the life that promotes them and is congruent with them'.\*

This book defines spirituality as 'faith in action' (p. 1). Which faith? The full Christian faith of the church through the ages and in all places. What actions? Daily life, but never in focus.

It assumes people, particularly the young, are leaving the Western churches because the doctrines are irrelevant to them. It proposes turning from the exploration of doctrine, to the articulation of doctrine as the outworking of spirituality. However it does not start from

experience as we would, but from the doctrines of the church. The book is structured around those doctrines, following topics through. It gives roughly equal thirds to the world as it is, to the life of Jesus, and to further developments after Jesus. It is the Alpha course for graduates from ivory towers: well written, cogent, and with many pithy sentences. It rightly recognises science as part of experience, and says that science too contributes to spirituality. However because Haight starts neither from daily life nor spiritual experience, I do not think it will give the Christian faith the 'traction' it desires. Right question, good ambition, well written, but starting from too far away. Would-be passengers cannot climb aboard this bus.

*Reviewed by Philip Tyers*

\* My reading of experiences in the archive leads me to question the definition of spirituality as 'spiritual experiences and the life that promotes them and is congruent with them' (line 4 above). Congruence on some level must I suppose be present, but a life that promotes them? So many people who have sent in accounts to the Archive tell of complete surprise, even shock, that the experience should happen to them. The quote offers a precise, specific, but by no means universal definition of spirituality; the archive, to my mind, offers evidence that spirituality, even if latent, is an integral and universal part of the human psyche.

'Humans exhibit a persistent tendency to believe in things like God, the afterlife, and the soul. Maybe there's something in the way our brains are put together – the way we're wired – that makes us believe.' Alister Hardy

Saul/Paul's epiphany on the road to Damascus is of course the iconic example – of the unexpected.  
(Ed.)

**Kevin Treston, *Emergence for Life Not Fall from Grace: making sense of the Jesus story in the light of evolution***

**Preston, Vic, Australia, Mosaic Press, 2013. 133 pp. ISBN 978 1 74324 043 4 (pbk) £14.00**

The Bible is arguably the most widely read book in the world. It has been, and still is, the basis for Christian ethics and thinking. Overall the Bible tries to show us how to deal with the real world, as it is and not as we would wish it to be, in other words how to live the lives we have. Sadly men (rarely women) have taken selected parts of the Christian message and turned them into dogmas; these have and are defended with fervour, and in the past a great deal of bloodshed! The author puts it very well when he says that the danger is to identify religious faith with the external form of religious practice rather than the centre of being – the mystical centre.

The Old Testament is a mixture of myth/story, history and practical observations compiled over an extended period of time well over 2,000 years ago. To understand much of the writing, it is necessary to view the record through the culture and mind-set of the times when it was composed. As human understanding/explanation of many aspects of the world and society has developed, our ability to account for certain events is much improved and our attitude to different situations has changed, often markedly. Some parts of the Bible are as relevant today as ever because they deal with perennial concerns of people, such as the problem of evil, why we are here and our place in the universe. Other parts need a critical re-examination in the light of modern knowledge. It is one of these, the first part of Genesis – the story of the Garden of Eden and the Fall, that concerns the author.

Many people have interpreted the early chapters of Genesis as a story to explain both where man/woman came from and the often unpleasant/evil nature of people. St Augustine in the fifth century combined the Fall, caused according to Genesis by man's sinfulness or disobedience to the will of God (original sin), with the sacrificial death of Jesus to produce one of the cornerstones of the Christian Faith, the doctrine of the Atonement. He regarded original sin as transmitted from generation to generation and thus began, arguably, the churches' obsession with, and ambivalence to, sex and sexuality and the demonization of women, problems which still trouble **it** so much today.

I have long puzzled over how or when consciousness and the soul appeared in humans; was it a slow process as the species developed from more 'primitive' life forms, or did it happen quickly – in a flash? Kevin Treston, a theologian with wide academic and practical experience, considers the early part of Genesis from the point of view of evolutionary theory and opts for the slow emergence of consciousness, or awareness, as humans developed mentally and physically. He suggests that self consciousness developed around 120,000 years ago, though without some specific evidence this timing must be speculation. It is sometimes argued that the idea of 'emergence' implies that God is a human construct. I do not believe that invalidates the idea of God at all – perhaps this is the way that he wishes to reveal himself! Cosmic Consciousness (the realisation that humans are in the process of evolution) began rather later and allows us to make sensible choices about the ecological health of the whole planet. The early part of the Bible uses metaphor to express human thoughts about the Divine, and for this reason doctrines need re-examining and possibly reformulation in terms of contemporary culture.

Removing the concept of original sin (though not the flawed nature of all human beings which can have appalling consequences) requires a different understanding of the role of Jesus. The author points out that the Christ of the gospels, and indeed the whole of the Bible, have been filtered through several different languages – Aramaic, Greek, Latin – and that the gospel writers are steeped in the assumptions of Judaism while St Paul's writings have a background of Greek philosophy. All these facts influence the picture we have of Jesus and the explanations of his death. According to the author's approach, the dilemma for Christians now is reconciling the sacrificial language of the New Testament as an explanation for the death of Jesus with Genesis as a story of emergence, not the Fall. This does not do away with the sinfulness of human nature; rather it says that sinfulness is an inherent aspect of human nature which is not caused by disobedience to God. The story of Jesus must be told within the present cultural environment.

Language changes with time, as do attitudes, and even our acceptance of certain phenomena. Beliefs are expressed in different ways as time goes by, though changes can be difficult for the older generation to accept. In discussing some of these changes, particularly with reference to women and gender I was disappointed to find no mention of family size, child survival and contraception. These are important areas with a vital bearing on population, the environment and the ability of the earth to survive our presence. Jesus taught a way, not a creed, and from a background of ordinariness. His death showed solidarity with all the suffering in the world. We cannot escape the vagaries of life; everything in creation is part of the recurring cycle of birth and death and rebirth. At the resurrection Jesus moved beyond historical time into eternal time. Christians and Christianity must travel a dynamic evolutionary journey which is flexible and open to change.

In the latter part of the book I thought the author was less concise; he raised many issues but I had the impression at times that he tended to leave them in the air. He mentions many of the present problems facing people and communities, and indeed the whole earth, but failed to address the most crucial – over-population and the effect that this has on our environment – but that is another story.

There were a few errors such as 'Kirabti', not 'Kiribati', and David Bohm was not an early 20<sup>th</sup> century physicist (his work spanned the mid to late century). However these are very minor points. The book is short (always to be welcomed), easy to read and it describes an exciting and original way of looking at Christianity. The basic idea is not new – I have read other books which grope towards the same conclusion, and the letters pages of 'The Tablet' for mid October 2015 have aired similar views. Above all this book acts as a catalyst for ideas on Christianity and its interpretation; it is well worth reading.

*Reviewed by Neil Hancox*

**Eben Alexander MD, with Ptolemy Tompkins, *The Map of Heaven: How Science, Religion and Ordinary People are Proving the Afterlife***  
**New York, Simon & Schuster, 2014. xxxvi 167 pp. ISBN 978 1 4767 6639 3 (hbk) \$21.99**

This book may be regarded as the sequel to *Proof of Heaven* by the same author [see review in Issue 57, page 45]. Dr Alexander is a neurosurgeon of twenty-five years' experience. In his earlier book he described his own near-death experience, which exhibited many features in common with those of other people, and with visions of the spiritual domain described by sages and mystics. In this book he gives us what the jacket-copy tells us is 'an awe-inspiring account of a profound encounter with spiritual reality'. He shows us how scientific materialism alone may make us more comfortable, but denies us that most important component of our humanity – soul. Quoting Sir John Eccles, he says 'We have to recognise that we are spiritual beings with souls existing in a spiritual world, as well as material beings with bodies and brains existing in a material world'.

Dr Alexander begins his story with two pivotal points drawn from the world of the Greek philosophers: from Plato, described by the author as the father of religion and philosophy, and his vision of the eternal realm of Forms or Ideas; and from Aristotle, the father of science, who constructed a treatise on the natural world based on observation, and who thereby led to the focus on materialism in the world of science today: 'What we need today is a combination of the best of the Platonic and the Aristotelian spirit.'

This book is punctuated throughout with NDEs or other spiritual experiences described by patients or readers of the author's earlier book. There are references to the Christian Bible, but this is not in any way a book that calls upon formal religion: 'Dogmatic religion is not open to people having direct access to those higher realms', because of course it undermines the power and control of its practitioners. The author applauds the fact that we have left behind in the Middle Ages the 'huge mass of biblical, mythological and folkloric associations' people used to attach to perfectly natural events. Rather this book is about the spiritual domain of the afterlife and what those who have experienced it are telling us about the way we should lead our lives.

There is a whole chapter devoted to recounting some of the spiritual experiences recorded by Sir Alister Hardy and summarized in his book *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, and letters relating spiritual experiences appear in other chapters too. This is an excellent feature as it draws in a wider readership to this primary resource for the study of spiritual experience that is not as easily accessible or perhaps as well-known as some others.

This is an uplifting book for those whose minds are open to the possibility of other realms, other times and places, that are available to us on the Earth plane only fleetingly. But this is the destination to which we all will eventually come and from which we originally came.

There is a reading list and an index at the end of the book.

*Reviewed by Howard Jones*

**L. C. Danby, *The Certainty of Eternity: The Story of Australia's Greatest Medium* Guildford, White Crow Books, 2013. 206 pp. ISBN 978 1 910121 34 4 (pbk). £10.99**

This book is a biography of Stan Walsh, one of Australia's most respected and talented physical mediums of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, who was 'just an ordinary carpenter'. The story of his life is told by L. C. Danby, one of the sitters in the séances that Walsh held in Melbourne in the 1920s and 1930s. In the Foreword by Danby's daughter, Jo, she tells us that Danby himself held séances at his home in the 1940s.

Jo expresses some reservations about many religions because of the human distortions added to them but she says: 'I especially like the spiritual teachings of the Native Americans who treat the forests, waterways and the air we breathe with the same reverence as they treat the life force of humans and animals.' How often have we read similar comments from those who have lived and worked with indigenous 'primitive' tribes who, in their everyday lives, express a greater respect for Nature as part of the Great Cosmic Spirit than many westerners who declare their adherence to one of the western religions. We have however read of similar concerns for the environment and for the welfare of children addicted to video and computer games from the holistic Catholic priest Fr. Thomas Berry, who died in 2009. Many of the events recorded here are expressed in language that reflects that of the Bible, though this is a book about spiritualism, not about Christianity or Judaism.

Walsh, a lifelong bachelor, was born in 1891 in the small township of Ararat in Victoria, Australia. He spent his adult life in Melbourne with his parents and a sister, and left his earthly body in 1939. He called himself a spiritualist at first but later, guided by Spirit, abandoned this description because there were an increasing number of dubious practitioners.

Early in the story, Danby describes how a sceptical Walsh was introduced to spiritualism by one of his friends, a Welsh bread-carrier called Herbert Jones and his favourite (inspirational) medium, Mrs Beames. At his first full home séance with Mrs Beames, Walsh found himself the recipient of a series of automatic writings. I found this inauspicious and humble introduction of Walsh's new powers quite captivating and intriguing.

At a subsequent meeting, Walsh was introduced to his spirit guide – an Amerindian called Malocca. Walsh was now set to become a deep-trance medium. Danby is keen to emphasize the difference between mediumship dealing with spiritual matters and materialistic fortune-telling. Walsh, young and inexperienced, at first used his powers for material gain and was rebuked by Malocca for doing so. There is also an interesting incident described that illustrates the ‘speaking in tongues’ referred to in the Bible when another of Walsh’s spirit guides spoke to a group of strangers, through Walsh, in their native tongue. Despite the Church’s opposition to spiritualism in any form, it is incidents like these that give credence to some of the Bible stories. There is a whole chapter here given over to ‘the power of thought’ – a subject of great current interest with the number of books describing healing by prayer and intention – and others on apports and materializations, and on inspiration.

It is clear that many people found the information Walsh brought through from so many spirits inspiring and comforting, as it will be to readers of this book who have an open mind. This is an excellent and uplifting book. My only reservation would be concerning the denial of the possibility of reincarnation – contrary to a huge amount of physical evidence from the researches of Ian Stevenson and others that this does indeed occur. But as a heart-warming story of a humble and gifted man, and in its reassuring insights into the afterworld, this book makes fascinating reading. The book has a very human approach to Walsh’s biographical details, which helps the reader to take seriously the sometimes bizarre events in which he was involved. Presented as an engaging biography, this book provides reassurance of our continuing discarnate existence.

*Reviewed by Howard Jones*

**Marcus Braybrooke, *Peace in Our Hearts, Peace in Our World, A meditation for everyday* Braybrooke Press, 2015. 320 pp. ISBN 978 1 326 31527 6. £12.95**

The name Marcus Braybrooke is a familiar one to readers of *De Numine* and it is once again a pleasure to review his latest book [see issue 58, Page39]. This one is rather different, however: in *Peace in Our Hearts, Peace in Our World, A meditation for everyday*, we are offered a year of readings on which to reflect. The theme of peace – in our hearts, lives, homes, community, between faiths, in the world and ultimately in the universe – is reflected in the chapter headings, which were taken from a prayer by George Appleton. The book contains numbered sections, 365 of them in total, each with its own title. For every day of the year there is ‘a quotation, a thought for meditation and reflection and a practical suggestion ...’. In his introduction, Marcus stresses that outer peace can only come about once we have attained inner peace, ‘A peaceful heart is one without regret about the past or fear for the future. You are free to live wholly in the present – at peace with yourself and at one with life.’

As one would expect from Marcus, known for his interfaith work, insights from different traditions are juxtaposed in many meditations, showing a similar message at their heart. The range is vast, beginning with Lao Tsu, Soren Kierkegaard, George Macdonald and Father Keating, a Trappist Monk, in the first three sections. In the fourth section, the quotation is by Blaise Pascal, and the reflection on ‘peak experiences’ is illustrated by the mystical experience in Tibet of Francis Younghusband, founder of the World Congress of Faiths, of which Marcus is President.

Marcus teaches peace in mind and body (including references to T'ai-chi and yoga) which then leads to mindful behaviour and an appreciation of each moment. Challenges in life are addressed, including illness and death. Family relationships and living in the community are made easier if undertaken in a spirit of peace. Part Five addresses 'Peace between Faiths', stressing that 'All religions teach the way to peace and justice, the relief of suffering, and the protection of the environment.' In the face of religious extremism, dialogue and working together are advised to bring about a more peaceful world. As we contemplate the beauty of nature, we are led to an understanding of the interconnectedness of all life and are moved to contribute to the preservation of the planet and to bring harmony to the world around us. This may seem an impossible task but we are reassured, 'You cannot do everything. But everyone can do something. Your most important contribution is not what you do but who you are – a person with a peaceful heart.'

I cheated by looking at section 365 to see how the book would end – and was not disappointed. You could read the book from start to finish or dip into subjects or people of interest – it is clearly indexed. Best of all though, would be to keep the book by your bedside. If you use it daily, you will begin the day calmly, reflectively and in peace. It also has a beautiful cover photo and would make a most wonderful and uplifting gift.

*Reviewed by Marianne Rankin*

**Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Western Esotericism: a Guide for the Perplexed*  
London, Bloomsbury, 2013. viii 211 pp. ISBN 978 1 4411 3646 6 (pbk) £16.99 (£13.89 online)**

Wouter J. Hanegraaff is professor of History and Hermetic Philosophy at the University of Amsterdam and also president of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism. This text comes with extensive footnotes (including 62 references to his own works consisting of articles, books or volumes he has edited), a subject index, a name index and, in lieu of a bibliography, a superb final chapter (9) where he gives 'sources and resources' for all categories of the subject 'esotericism' that he has discussed in the previous 8 chapters.

This book is a follow up to the author's earlier *Esotericism and the Academy: rejected knowledge in western culture* (2012) and it continues the theme of esotericism being either marginalized or actually ignored by scholarly disciplines. He feels that this is very unfortunate and suggests that what is required are new methodologies and a multi-disciplinary endeavour to do the area justice.

In chapter 1 (and elsewhere) he points out the complexities involved in the study of esotericism and proposes three classificatory models, *viz* – early modern enchantment, the (post) modern occult and, finally, inner traditions. However, these effectively only function as 'straw men' if they are used to force a huge mass of historical, geographical and culturally relevant data into conceptual straitjackets. It is therefore a relief, at least to this reviewer, that they are rapidly dispensed with in favour of a history of ideas, running from late antiquity, through the early modern and Enlightenment periods right up to present day contemporary and secular culture.

In chapter 2 we find 'a very short history' provided to elucidate the subject under various section heads including 'gnosis in Hellenistic culture', 'the secrets of nature: magic, astrology, alchemy', 'the Renaissance', '*naturphilosophie* and Christian theosophy', 'initiatic societies', and 'the modernist occult'. This is tightly written, clear, comprehensive and to the point like the volume as a whole.

In chapter, 3, the author's themes are the dualities of apologetics and critique, reaction and counter-reaction to the varieties of esoteric philosophy, contextualised largely within differing shades of Christianity. This points up the multi-layered and often controversial nature of the phenomena under review, as exemplified by a large number of instances and names of relevant individuals (with one exception, all male).

Esoteric philosophy is made the central topic of chapter 4 on World Views. He stresses especially what he calls Platonic and Alchemical mediation as being the main carriers of such metaphysics. This chapter cannot be separated easily from the next (Knowledge) where the trinity of reason, faith and gnosis is expounded. As so often referred to elsewhere, the Hermetic writings are used as examples to demonstrate a point. It is in this chapter (p. 97) that he finds the phrase 'altered states of consciousness' problematic and prefers to substitute for it 'alterations of consciousness'.

Such largely theoretical and somewhat abstract discussion gives way to an exposition of Practice in chapter 6, but readers will be disappointed if they are looking for, or expecting, any rituals or instruction of a 'how to' nature here. Instead the writer gives us 8 headings under which he feels all practices can be grouped. They are: control; knowledge; amplification; healing; progress; contact; unity; pleasure. Each heading is subsequently developed via a section of its own. It is in this chapter that he argues the case for throwing out the category of 'magic' altogether as being not useful for (academic) discourse (pps. 104-105).

While this exercise has been essentially historical we are brought more up to date with considerations of Modernisation in chapter 7. In it Hanegraaff makes a relatively rare value-judgement (given that he has previously criticised for this those he labels as 'religionists', among them Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, Arthur Versluis and Mircea Eliade) condemning some who adhere to a belief in a universal, underlying Tradition epitomized by such thinkers as Rene Guenon, Julius Evola and Huston Smith.

Esoteric Christianity has been one of the main threads and reference points that the author has used to weave his patchwork quilt of the many movements highlighted throughout his narrative. This, in fact, is unavoidable and inevitable, and in the penultimate chapter 8 Emanuel Swedenborg makes (for me) a welcome appearance where the ideas of correspondences and of causality are debated. This is followed by nods to Sheldrake's 'morphic resonance', Jung's theory of 'synchronicity', parapsychology, Blavatsky's Theosophy, American Transcendentalism, shamanism, the star Sirius and the constellation, the Pleiades.

Hanegraaff usefully ties in such developments with the growth of modern evolutionary models, the German Romantic tradition and rise of psychology as an independent discipline. He concludes the chapter with a valuable distinction between 'religion', 'religions' and 'spiritualities', underlining the preponderance of the latter among esotericists and the eclectic nature of contemporary esoteric expression in both its organisation and individual/personal forms. The current situation is signified by a market place for symbolic commodities of all kinds, both sacred and profane, mystical and secular. Through transformation, autonomisation

and individualisation of such esoteric spiritualities we are given the 'heretical imperative' as coined by the ex-Jesuit sociologist, Peter L. Berger. We are nowadays all forced to *choose*.

In summing up this work I would recommend it to lay person, student and academic colleague alike. It is lucid, wide-ranging and extremely well researched. It is the kind of book that would head up my reading lists for the magical consciousness courses I've conducted in the London adult education sector. It encourages me to look at further volumes in Bloomsbury's series, 'Guide to the Perplexed', all appearing relevant to anyone interested in concise overviews of spiritual and religious matters.

But just because this volume is so succinct there can be a tendency for the author to over-generalise occasionally. He also may conclude a paragraph in a particular direction where another direction/conclusion could be just as valid. To take just one example from page 99: here a few examples are given of 17<sup>th</sup> century groups presenting trance-like conditions and manifestations of 'enthusiasm'. He suggests that such expressions of ecstatic religion culminated in 'hysteria' as studied by Freud and his mentor, Breuer. An alternative and more positive view would point to the continuity that later 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Pentecostal and charismatic movements have had with such outpourings of the Spirit.

He mentions very few women as being involved in the esoteric world. This, up to a point, is a fair reflection on how history (of the many different subject areas) has been written over the centuries. But I would like to have seen some acknowledgement of the existence of such individuals as Lady Anne Conway, Mary Sidney, Queen Christina of Sweden or Mary Anne Atwood. A mere cursory mention is made for Anna Kingsford, Dion Fortune and Annie Besant.

I have noted above that the professor wants to jettison the term 'magic' (and also seems to hold the view that the label 'Gnosticism' should be discarded too, p. 20). But, amazingly, in my view he does not seem to appreciate that it is the *intention* behind an action that makes it magical, scientific or religious. In fact, magic throughout the ages has often been a hybrid of science and religion (*vide* Alchemy) and indeed, of art (cf. Aleister Crowley's famous definition\*). The term can, of course, be used in many different ways including the colloquial, but when the vocabularies of its many practitioners, both past and present, are examined it is difficult see what name could be utilised to replace it.

Lastly, I feel a sociology of knowledge perspective could have complemented his (admirable) history of ideas approach. More stress could have been given to the rise and fall of the occult arts as their status moved up and down the hierarchy of established and respectable knowledge according to geographical area, funding (or not) and politico-cultural tides. But all in all this text is a must for those who are merely curious, those who are studious and those alternative philosophers of nature, and esoteric (dare I say magical?!) practitioners themselves.

*Reviewed by Kenneth Rees*

\* 'Magick is the Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will'.

## Books Received for Review

Please see below 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 **Marian MacPolin** – [mmacpolin@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:mmacpolin@yahoo.co.uk) who will arrange for a copy to be sent to you. When we receive your review, the book will become yours. If you would like to review a book that is not on this list, please contact the Editor – [theotokos66@gmail.com](mailto:theotokos66@gmail.com)

**Please send completed reviews to the Editor**

David W. Baker (ed)	<i>Biblical Faith and Other Religions; an Evangelical Assessment</i> (Kregel 2014)
Colin Blakely	<i>Great Christian Thinkers: A Beginner's Guide to over Seventy Leading Theologians through the Ages.</i> (Hendrickson 2014)
Stephen Bullivant	<i>The Trinity: How not to be a Heretic</i> (Paulist Press 2014)
Daniel P. Horan OFM	<i>The Franciscan Heart of Thomas Merton: a New Look at the Spiritual Inspiration of his Life, Thought and Writing</i> (Ave Maria Press 2014)
Patrick F. O'Connell (ed.)	<i>Thomas Merton: Selected Essays</i> (Orbis 2014)
R. Panniker	<i>Mysticism and Spirituality.</i> (Orbis 2014)
T. A. Perry	<i>Wisdom in the Hebrew Bible: Exploring God's Twilight Zone.</i> (Hendrickson 2014)
Philip Sheldrake	<i>Spirituality: A Guide for the Perplexed.</i> (Bloomsbury 2014)
C. H. Spurgeon	<i>Sermons on Women of the Old Testament</i> (Hendrickson 2014)
Pamela J. Steward & Andrew Strathern	<i>Ritual: Key Concepts in Religion</i> (Bloomsbury 2014)
Peter Brown	<i>The Cult of the Saints</i> (University of Chicago Press 2015)
John Dear	<i>Thomas Merton, Peacemaker</i> (Orbis 2015)
Anselm K. Min (ed)	<i>The Task of Theology: Leading Theologians on the Most Compelling Questions for today.</i> (Orbis 2015)
Kelly, Crabtree & P. Marshall (ed)	<i>Beyond Physicalism: Towards reconciliation of Science and Spirituality</i> (Rowman & Littlefield 2015)
E. P. Lachence & P. Brunette	<i>The Earliest Franciscans</i> (Paulist Press 2015)
J. Sachs	<i>Not in God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence</i> (Hodder and Stoughton 2015)
Mary Bowmaker	<i>The Reality of the Unbelievable</i> (Courtenbede 2016)
C. Coats & M. M. Emerich (eds.)	<i>Practical Spiritualities in a Media Age.</i> (Bloomsbury 2016)



## AHT Events, March 2016 to October 2016

### Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016

3.00 pm London Group: Talk: *Evolving Our Life as Members of Our Common Home: A contemplation on spiritual-ecological life in light of Hardy and Teilhard*, by Paul Maiteny.

Venue: Function room, the King & Queen P.H. 1 Foley Street, London W1W 6DL  
Nearest underground station, Goodge Street on the Northern line  
(Contact: John Franklin, e-mail: johnfranklin35@hotmail.com)

### Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2016

10.30 am Oxford/Cotswold Group: Short talk on the variety of Spiritual Experiences with discussion.

Venue: 37 Hill Top Road, Oxford. OX4 1PD.  
(Contact, Tanya Garland, e-mail: [tanya.garland.37@gmail.com](mailto:tanya.garland.37@gmail.com))

### Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> April 2016

5.00-6.00pm Religious Experience Research Centre (UWTSD): Spirituality and Health Research Seminar Series: *Community* With Heather Fish, lecturer at UWTSD Carmarthen and Mindfulness teacher, and Dr David Morgans, Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at UWTSD and an ordained Zen Buddhist Priest and Monk.

Venue: Old Hall, UWTSD Lampeter Campus, Ceredigion, SA48 7ED.  
(For further information email: [RERC@uwtsd.ac.uk](mailto:RERC@uwtsd.ac.uk))

### Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> May 2016

10.30 am Oxford/Cotswold Group: open to suggestions for a talk subject and offers to give a talk.

Venue: 37 Hill Top Road, Oxford. OX4 1PD  
(Contact, Tanya Garland, e-mail: [tanya.garland.37@gmail.com](mailto:tanya.garland.37@gmail.com))

### Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> June 2016

10.30 am Oxford/Cotswold Group: open to suggestions for a talk subject and offers to give a talk.

Venue: 37 Hill Top Road, Oxford. OX4 1PD  
(Contact, Tanya Garland, e-mail: [tanya.garland.37@gmail.com](mailto:tanya.garland.37@gmail.com))

### Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> June 2016

10.30 am AHT/SMN joint one-day Conference – Theme: *Health and Spirituality*. Speakers:  
to Dr Jeff Leonardi, *Counselling, Health and Spirituality*; and Dr Peter Fenwick,  
4.00 pm *The Significance of Meditation Practices in our Understanding of Spirituality: a new thrust towards health*. Followed by a panel discussion.

Venue: Essex Unitarian Church, 112 Palace Gardens Terrace, London W8 4RT  
(Cost: AHT/SMN £35.00; non-members £40.00; Students £15  
Contact: John Franklin, e-mail: johnfranklin35@hotmail.com)

### Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2016

2.00-4.00 pm South-East Wales Group: *Near Death Experiences*, DVD and discussion

Venue: 12 Wood Close, Llanfrechfa, Cwmbran NP44 8UR  
(Contact: Mary Cook, e-mail: maryfrechfa@yahoo.co.uk)

**Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2016**

10.00 am to Religious Experience Research Centre (UWTSD): One-Day Conference. Topic:  
4.30 pm *Spirituality & Wellbeing*  
Venue: Founders Library, UWTSD, Lampeter Campus, Ceredigion, SA48 7ED  
(For further information email: RERC@uwtsd.ac.uk)

**Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2016**

10.30 am Oxford/Cotswold Group: open to suggestions for a talk subject and offers to  
give a talk.  
Venue: 37 Hill Top Road, Oxford. OX4 1PD  
(Contact, Tanya Garland, e-mail: tanya.garland.37@gmail.com)

**Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2016**

2-4.00 pm South-East Wales Group: *Reunions*, DVD and discussion.  
Venue: 12 Wood Close, Llanfrechfa, Cwmbran NP44 8UR  
(Contact: Mary Cook, e-mail: maryfrechfa@yahoo.co.uk)

**Friday 7<sup>th</sup> October to Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> October 2016**

4.00 pm AHT 7<sup>th</sup> Llantarnam Abbey Annual Gathering  
to Theme: *Boundaries and Beyond*  
2.00 pm Cost: £115.00 (£105.00 for AHSSSE members)  
Venue: Ty Croeso Centre, Llantarnam Abbey, Llantarnam, Cwmbran, NP44 3YJ.  
(Contact: Mary Cook, e-mail: maryfrechfa@yahoo.co.uk)

**Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> October 2016**

AHT Members' Day 2016  
10.30 am The 2016 Alister Hardy Memorial  
Lecture by Professor Jeff Astley. Title: TBA  
14.00 pm Open Panel Discussion with Professor Jeff Astley, Dr Mark Fox & Marianne  
Rankin. The discussion will examine what we have learnt from REs and where  
future research might take us.  
Venue: Oxford Quaker Meeting House, St. Giles, Oxford, OX1 3LW  
Inquiries and bookings: Marianne Rankin: [mariannerankin@icloud.com](mailto:mariannerankin@icloud.com)  
01684 772417 or 077140 32643

## Other Events

### Tuesday 5th April to Thursday 7th April 2016

- Holland House: Retreat in the theme *Experiencing Spirituality*, led by Marianne Rankin with Revd Ian Spencer, warden of Holland House
- Venue: Holland House, Main Street, Cropthorne, Pershore, WR10 3NB.  
Cost: £170, Monday arrival available at extra cost.  
(For further information contact enquiries@hollandhouse.org)

### Friday 15th April to Sunday 17th April 2016

- Scientific & Medical Network: Mystics & Scientists Conference 39: *Non-locality and the Oneness of Mind*. Speakers: Dr Larry Dossey, Dr Helen Ford, Vera Hellemann, Professor Tom Mcleish
- Venue: Horsley Park, East Horsley, Surrey, KT24 6DT.  
(For further information, and booking, see SMN website  
<https://www.scimednet.org/content/mystics-and-scientists-2016>)

### Saturday 14th May 2016

- 10.30 am Modern Church: One-Day Conference, Theme: *Grounded: Finding God in the World – A Spiritual Revolution*, led by Diana Butler Bass
- Venue: The Church at Carrs Lane, Birmingham B4 7SX  
(Further details; Booking Secretary: Revd Ruth Fitter, 84 Frampton Park, Gloucester GL1 5QB. e-mail: conference@modernchurch.org.uk)

### Saturday 28th May 2016

- Churches' Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies with the Unitarian Society for Psychical Studies and the Quaker Fellowship for Afterlife Studies: joint one-day Conference; Theme: *'Pushing the Boundaries'*. Speakers: Dr Roger Straughan and the Revd. Feargus O'Connor.
- Venue: Christ Church Hall, Avenue Road, Malvern, Worcestershire WR14 3AY  
(Further information from: Davina Thomas Tel: 01989 720403. e-mail: [davina.thomas11@btinternet.com](mailto:davina.thomas11@btinternet.com))

### Sunday 10th July 2016

- World Congress of Faiths: Summer Garden Party – informal celebration forming part of WCF's 80th Anniversary for WCF members, their guests and other interfaith supporters – guest speaker, Harmander Singh
- Venue: Royal Foundation of St Katherine, London, 2 Butcher Row, London E14 8DS' #  
(For your invitation, contact Jenny Kartupelis: [jenny@worldfaiths.org](mailto:jenny@worldfaiths.org): it is essential to book a place as numbers will be limited.)

### Monday 11th July to Wednesday 13th July 2016

- 1.00 pm Modern Church in association with WCF: Annual Conference, Theme: *Performing the Faith: Shakespeare in the World – Shakespeare, the Theatre and Theology Today*. Keynote speaker: The Most Revd and Rt Hon Lord Rowan Williams of Oystermouth. Conference Chair: Revd Dr Alison Milbank.
- 3.30 pm
- Venue: High Leigh Conference Centre, Hoddesdon, Herts.  
(Conference fees: £220 (ensuite), £165 (standard). Further details; Booking Secretary: Revd Ruth Fitter, 84 Frampton Park, Gloucester GL1 5QB. e-mail: conference@modernchurch.org.uk)

**Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> July to Friday 31<sup>st</sup> July 2016**

University of Winchester: Conference, theme: *Is Heaven for Real?*  
Speakers: Pim van Lommel, Professor Paul Badham, Dr Peter Fenwick, Dr Penny Sartori and Marianne Rankin.

Venue: The University of Winchester, Sparkford Road, Winchester, SO22 4NR

**Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> September to Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> September 2016**

Churches' Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies: 2016 Annual Conference. Theme: *Messengers and Messages*. Speakers: Dr Santha Bhattacharji, Marianne Rankin and Tricia Robertson

Venue: The Hotel Royale, 16 Gervis Road, Bournemouth, BH1 3EQ  
(Further information from: Julian Drewett, Churches' Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies, The Rural Workshop, South Road, North Somercotes LN11 7PT. gensec@churchesfellowship.co.uk. Tel/fax: 01507 358845 website: www.churchesfellowship.co.uk)

**Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> September to Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> September 2016**

Wrekin Trust: Weekend Retreat. Theme: *Eternal Wisdom*, with Ravi Ravindra.

Venue: Hawkwood College, Painswick Old Road, Stroud, Glos., GL6 7QW  
(For further information, contact: [office@wrekintrust.org](mailto:office@wrekintrust.org))

**Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> September 2016**

One Spirit Alliance Summit meeting: *New Story – New Era – Responding Together to the call of the Spirit*.

Venue: Global Co-operative House, 65 – 69 Pound Lane, London NW10 2HH.  
Generously hosted by *Brahma Kumaris* who are also providing refreshments.  
No charge, but donations (suggested £25) welcome

**Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> October 2016**

7.00 pm Society for Psychical Research: Gwen Tate memorial lecture: *The Inconsistencies in Survival Evidence*, by Dr Sophia Weaver

Venue: Lecture Hall of the Kensington Central Library, Campden Hill Road, Kensington, London, W8 7RX.  
(Contact: Peter Johnson, [secretary@spr.ac.uk](mailto:secretary@spr.ac.uk))

