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

*The Editor*

We do apologise for the lateness of this issue, but hope that readers will find it worth waiting for. First, I must apologise as editor for turning my attention to *De Numine* much later than usual after an accident while on holiday in Rome. Further, the inevitable upheaval during the merger of Trinity with Lampeter resulted in some technical and logistical difficulties, which caused more delays. Normal service will, we hope and trust, be resumed in 2011.

*The Editor*

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

We start this issue of *De Numine* with a message from Professor Paul Badham, outgoing Director of RERC, and introductions to Dr Greg Barker and Sally Wilkinson, the two new Directors. There are major changes within RERC and AHS which reflect, and are part of, those created by the merger of the University of Wales Lampeter with Trinity College Carmarthen. This new institution, Trinity Saint Davids, has incorporated the RERC, and the AHS library. Integration into a major academic institution was always an aspiration of Sir Alister’s, and we hope that the new enhanced association will benefit both the University and the Research Centre and Society. Reading the Directors’ messages which follow gives us every indication that this will be so.

*De Numine* will continue to appear twice a year, the only change will be that next Spring’s colour insert may, regrettably, be the last; economies must be made here as everywhere in the current economic climate. We expect some tributes to, and recollections of Professor Badham’s ten years as Director of RERC from his colleagues, and I look forward to accompanying these with photographs of some of the many AHS events in which he took part. I would like to extend every good wish to Dr Wendy Dossett and Professor Andrew Prescott, Paul’s fellow outgoing Directors, who have both left Lampeter to take up new posts. Wendy will be very much missed on every level by all of us who knew her during her years in Lampeter, and Professor Prescott, although in post for a short time, contributed greatly to the fortunes of the RERC and AHS by recognising the unique value of the Alister Hardy Archive and Library, thus paving the way for their incorporation into the University library.

So on to the other many and various contributions to this Issue of *De Numine*; usually I can discern a theme, but not this time, unless it is a plea for love and unity, manifesting very differently throughout. The clue is in the title of Thierry Vissac’s article called ‘What is Love?’ (p.19). I found this theme, to my surprise, in Dr Hussain’s piece on Ramadan (p.13); I expected a description of suffering (albeit uplifting) and found instead that the experience is full of love, spiritual fulfilment and satisfaction, and unity in the special meals that precede and break the fasts. I found a covert plea for love and unity in the amazing poem by Hissa Hilal, echoed by the two poems from the past which follow hers, and by Jonathan Robinson’s exploration of religious/spiritual experience. All these writings raise questions about the role of religion in personal spiritual experience, and about the validity of religion that does not foster love and unity.

I would like to use the rest of the space I have on this page to congratulate the local group organisers and members on the excellence of the programmes reflected in their reports. As always I am frustrated by the logistical impossibility of attending group events out of my area, as there have been so many meetings I would have found fascinating and enlightening. The newest group, in the Midlands, seems to be going from strength to strength, and I would like to give a special mention to AHS Wales. Roger Coward as the new Chair of this organisation (it’s really too big to be called a local group) has done a splendid job of facilitating local ‘mini’ groups – I believe there are now seven – and the Mandala project, which has been the year’s common theme, has produced some fascinating and varied results. These are touched upon in the group report Roger has compiled (pp.28–32) and to me the range of approaches and activity in the different groups is inspiring – varieties of religious experience in action! This project will be reported in more detail in the Spring issue, and there will be stunning colour pictures of the AHS Wales Mandala retreat at Llantarnam Abbey. Watch this space …

*Patricia Murphy*
Looking to the future in Trinity Saint David
Professor Paul Badham, the outgoing Director of RERC

It has been a tremendous privilege to serve as a Director of RERC for the past eight years. I hope our successors will find the work as fascinating as Dr. Wendy Dossett and I have done. The merger between Carmarthen and Lampeter, and the move of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at Bangor to Lampeter have greatly added to the resources available to the Centre. In particular I am delighted that Dr. Greg Barker, formerly Head of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies in Carmarthen, will be succeeding me as Director for research, and Sally Wilkinson, the new Head of Learning Resources at Trinity Saint David, will succeed Professor Andrew Prescott as the Director responsible for the Hardy Library Archive and database. Dr. Bettina Schmidt, formerly Senior Lecturer in the Study of Religions at Bangor and Secretary of the British Association for the Study of Religions, will be succeeding Wendy as Director of the MA in the Study of Religious Experience. This is an extremely powerful team and I am delighted that RERC will be in such good hands.

The Vice Chancellor of the new University hosted a dinner for our trustees last July and made it very clear how much he values the work of the Centre and its contribution to Trinity Saint David. These are exciting times for the Study of Religious Experience. The subject is a key component of the new ‘A’ level in Religious Studies, examined for the first time this year. In Trinity Saint David, Religious Experience will be an important part of the new undergraduate degree in Religion, Ethics and Philosophy, and will be taught by Dr. Robert Pope. This means that the Study of Religious Experience will now be available at BA as well as MA level and at the level of doctoral research.

Arising from these developments a decision has been made to merge the Hardy Library into the University Library. This means that all books from the Alister Hardy Collection will be shelved in accordance with the Dewey Decimal Classification system, and will be looked after by the staff of the University Library. This will enable University students to have access to the classic works on religious experience in the Hardy Collection, as well as giving Alister Hardy Society members access to the newer books on religious experience in the University collection. It has been agreed that the Hardy collection is on long term loan to the University while remaining the property of the Trust. Our books are labelled and catalogued as belonging to Alister Hardy Trust, so if in the future the Trustees thought it necessary to move the Research Centre from Lampeter, the books, the database and the archive which constitute the Centre would all move. However the present arrangement fulfils Sir Alister Hardy’s vision of seeing the study of religious experience integrated into the life of a University as an important area of study which has great significance to our understanding of what it means to be human.

Paul Badham

Letter from Dr Gregory A Barker, the new Director of Research, RERC

Dear De Numine Readers,

I feel privileged to have been asked to be the Director of Research at the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre. For years I have followed the work of the Centre, having first been introduced to it at the beginning of my doctoral studies. You are aware, I’m sure, that the Centre has had a rich and distinguished history of Directors. Their passion for the role of religious experiencing in understanding the phenomenon of religion is truly
inspiring – and humbling to one who is new to this position! I hope that I will be able to make a contribution to further the excellent work that has preceded me.

My own research is in the area of perceptions of Jesus in the world’s religious traditions. I come from Canada, though, like many Canadians, my roots are in England and Wales. My family and I live in the Falcondale woods near Lampeter and I am Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies across both of our campuses in Lampeter and Carmarthen.

I am pleased to say that the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, where the Centre is located, is bursting at the seams! This year the department of Theology, Religion and Islamic studies has accepted over 90 first year students! Many of these will be staying on to undertake an MA – and we are happy that both the Centre and the MA in Religious Experience is there for them.

I’ve already received many enquiries about the archives and we look forward to a special event later this month when we welcome two Taiwanese professors to the Centre to share their cutting-edge research in religious experiencing and comparative observations between Taiwan and the United Kingdom.

A warm welcome also awaits you, should you wish to visit us here at the University.

Gregory A. Barker.

An Introduction to Sally Wilkinson, the New Director in charge of the Alister Hardy Archive and Library

Hello, I’m a new Director of the Religious Experience Research Centre (RERC) and also Head of Learning Resources at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. Within the RERC I have an overview of the Library and Archives and my professional background in libraries ensures that these facilities will be developed and managed in an effective and efficient manner. I am a chartered member of CILIP (the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals) and am also a mentor for newly qualified librarians. Within the University I manage the libraries on both the Lampeter and Carmarthen campuses, and also have management responsibility for technology enhanced learning. I have worked in libraries since 1986.

The Alister Hardy Library is a vital part of the library resources of the University, and enriches the collections considerably. We are incorporating the Alister Hardy Library into the main Library collection, and this will bring a much wider collection of books and material to both members of the Alister Hardy Society and staff, students and researchers at the University. It will still be possible to have a full list of all the Alister Hardy Library books. The Archive is now housed in a dedicated room in the Library and I look forward to finding out more about its contents – it is an intriguing archive and a valuable and unique research resource.

I understand that it was always Sir Alister Hardy’s intention that the Religious Experience Research Centre, Library and Archives should be fully incorporated in an academic institution and we are very pleased that the University is able to accommodate this wish: it is a valuable asset. I look forward to continuing to help to plan and develop the unique strengths that the Library and Archives bring to this institution.

Sally Wilkinson
Recognising Religious/Spiritual Experience  
Jonathan Robinson, AHS Chair

Spirituality is important. We may be uneasy, reticent or embarrassed to talk about it, but research indicates that for many people it is the most important subject in their lives, a conclusion supported by the findings of David Hay following his surveys carried out in 1987 and 2000. Spirituality, we may say, is the dimension of our lives that makes us human, that makes us who we are as living beings. There will, of course, always be those who deny this, and prefer a reductionist approach, believing that the solid, objective world ‘out there’ is the only reality. Personally, I believe that it is the reductionists who are burying their heads in the sands!

Many of us like to make a distinction between ‘spirituality’ and ‘religion’. ‘Spirituality is, and has always been, more central to human experience than religion, a fact that is borne out in the growing body of knowledge accumulated by cultural anthropology and the history of religious ideas.’ (Diarmuid O’Murchu, Reclaiming Spirituality, Gill & Macmillan 1997, p.vii.)

Spirituality is an essential dimension of who we are. It is empirical. It just ‘is’, and, like consciousness, you cannot reduce or explain it as the product of certain material substances, whereas religion, many of us would say, is largely a human construction which has evolved to fulfill specific roles and needs within society and for the individual.

Our interest at RERC, and in the AHS, is in ‘experience’, an impossible word to define, and again, it just ‘is’. Some would say that it is not possible to engage in the academic study of experience. You can only study its effects! Others would say that this is the only place where academic study can truly begin, because it is the only thing which is truly real for us. All else is consequence.

This, of course, begs the question of what we mean by religious/spiritual experience, and how it differs from other types of experience. Alister Hardy’s well-known question attempts to make the necessary distinction: ‘Have you ever been aware of or influenced by a presence or a power, whether you call it God or not, that is different from your everyday self?’ The problem here is surely what we mean by ‘different from our everyday self’. There are those people who feel constantly in touch with ‘a presence or power, whether or not they call it God’, which is very much about their ‘everyday self’. So this question depends on people's ability to interpret and make sense of their experiences in something like the way we intend, with, perhaps, a dose of intuition. It does indeed seem impossible to refer to ‘the other’ without using ambiguous language. Another attempt could be ‘Have you ever felt that your experiences of life have been shaped by an influence or power, whether or not you call it God, which is of a spiritual nature?’ But here again, what do we mean by spiritual? There is a subjective element here, and 100 different people may give 100 different answers, all of which may be real to them. Surely what is real and authentic to the individual is what matters.

The accounts we have in our archives, and the accounts which tend to get recorded, are usually, but not necessarily, of a more significant, memorable and sometimes life-changing character. But what about those less significant moments, those ‘whispers of the other’, those events which, taken in isolation, may be nothing more than coincidence, yet, at least to the one who experiences them, when added up have a ‘more than’ character, providing convincing evidence to that person that life is more than ‘the sum of its parts’? What about those moments when we find ourselves sharing with others, or maybe listening to a talk, reading, going for a walk, carrying some grief, difficulty or pain – and – something happens? Something happens which has the nature of ‘otherness’. Only we ourselves can be the judge of its reality and authenticity. Maybe something ‘clicks’ which enables us to recognise a
dimension of an experience which we had not noticed before. You realise the experience is significant. Maybe only a small matter, but, given space, we realise it is a matter that matters! Perhaps simply the mystery of the experience of being alive!

David Hay, in his book *Something There* (Darton Longman & Todd 2005) reports that the most commonly reported spiritual/religious experience recorded in Britain in both his 1987 study and also in his 2000 study is a *Patterning of Events/ Syncronicity*. ‘... the recognition of a transcendent providence: a patterning of events in a person's life that convinces them that in some strange way those events were meant to happen.’ I myself can so much identify with that. So often I have tried to make plans to do something on a particular day, and those intentions prove impossible. But when I do get the opportunity to follow through those intentions it works out much better. It fits into a larger tapestry, and it is as if I am a co-creator in something larger than myself. Perhaps this is about ‘going with the flow’, where we have to learn to consciously cooperate. And then there are those times when things seem to just ‘fit into place’, and the timing is perfect – you meet a particular person – and the event screams out as more than coincidence. It's not far to go from here to ‘answers to prayer’, another category of response that figures very strongly in religious/spiritual experiences research. Interestingly, the most commonly recorded experience in my research in South India was that of a power experienced beyond and more than the power of the individual, often happening at a time of religious festival.

When I started thinking about this a few months ago, I hoped I would be able to come up with a simple ‘check list’ for recognising spiritual experiences. However, I now realise that this is not so simple. I did compose a list of 32 questions which might act as ‘triggers’ to help people recognise any such experiences which they may have had in their lives, but of course it does depend so much on the individual's ability for awareness and discernment. I found myself wondering whether these experiences happen completely spontaneously and haphazardly, or do they depend, to some extent, on the quality of our spiritual lives, practices and disciplines. The opinion of the spiritual masters favours this latter view, and that we should not seek to obtain spiritual experiences for their own sake, but rather accept them with gratitude as ‘given’, as an act of grace, facilitated, perhaps, but not caused by, our spiritual commitment. Spiritual commitment shows its fruits surely in the first instance in the form of love, compassion, kindness, generosity, honesty ... if we can get that right, the probability is that other things will follow. Spiritual experience does not happen to order. It always has an element of surprise, and indeed, if our lives are too ordered, they do not leave space for surprise!

I believe C. G. Jung said ‘The only real adventure remaining for the individual is the exploration of the hidden levels of his inner world – and the goal is a harmonious and balanced relationship with the (Greater) Self.’ (I cannot trace the context.) Karen Armstrong in *The Case for God* (p.313) says ‘Instead of seeking out exotic raptures, Schleiermacher, Bultman, Rahner and Lonergan have all suggested that we should explore the normal workings of our mind and notice how frequently these propel us quite naturally into transcendence.’ Sogyal Rinpoche in his book *Glimpse after Glimpse*, (Rider, 1995) for his reading for June 16th (he gives a different reading for each day of the year – an excellent resource book) says: ‘Those of us who undertake a spiritual discipline, meditation, for example – come to discover many things about our minds that we did not know before ... we begin to realise a completely different dimension, one in which all our assumptions about our identity and reality ... start to dissolve ...’

I think the evidence is that most people today, although not necessarily comfortable with religious language, have some sort of awareness of ‘the other’, however rudimentary. They
have an awareness of ‘something more’, and maybe feel that we are all part of something greater than what we commonly perceive as ourselves, with our sense of separate identity. This is vague language, but how often is it a cover for hidden depths? May we respect and nurture that recognition and awareness, and through our Society help people to bring it to a greater fruition.

Jonathan Robinson

What is love?

The recurring question is often that of the reality of personal love: ‘What is loving someone?’.

We’ve gotten used to looking at what drives us from an angle which suits us so as to justify our tendencies. So, when we speak of the couple or even of maternal love, what we’re inclined to find there (or expect from it) is purity or altruism.

If we ask two individuals who are attached to one another whether they love each other, they generally say ‘yes’, without hesitating, but without being able to comment upon such a feeling. If we insist, we can often hear the personal effort to give a ‘clean’ appearance to the relationship. And yet, a more candid look would shed some beneficial light on the notion of love, not to soil it but to enable greater discernment so as to recognize the Truth often hiding behind other more practical and comfortable truths.

The couple is a notion that has been built up by the ego. The vision of the ego leads it to the race to fulfilment, to avoid the feeling of separation or the lack of unity. Two individuals get together in the hope of filling a void. To that are added sexual needs, always supposing they weren’t the primary reason for getting together in the first place, because being an official couple is an opportunity for fulfilment.

So, nobody loves anybody. We get together with someone for ourselves, even if a certain idea of morality leads us to say or think that this is a good thing for the other person. In reality, personal need is the sole driving force of both affection and the sexual act and the fact that this may satisfy the other person is completely by the way, even if it gives us a good conscience. The couple is a personal arrangement to which we’ve tried to give an image that is more spiritually or socially correct.

No one ever loves anyone is the ego’s reality. But such a reality is unbearable and you may feel this after reading these words if you have never dared look at things this way. The love we say we experience for another person betrays a personal interest, a need which, if it’s no longer satisfied, can quickly turn into hostility. We have to see this if we are to recognize what Love really is, beyond any personal arrangement and other spiritualized egocentricities. We have the right to ‘seek’ love but it’s to our advantage if we don’t give ourselves replies too quickly, since these short-cuts finally take us further away from love.

Love is not an emotion. It’s not linked to a person and it links us to no one. Love is the very substance of Life. We recognize the experience of Love by the fact that it reveals for us the essential Nature of Life. Love is a Communion. It’s not even a feeling, even if we can translate communion in these terms. The object, situation or being we come across is the support or the target of Love, that moment when personal existence recognizes itself as being Unique and Infinite. In this case, there is no longer anyone to love another person.
In what we commonly call ‘love’, we find affection. Affection has a physical support which requires contact. It is nurtured by ‘cuddles’ or ‘kisses’. Affection is frustrated when there is less contact or none. This sensation has little to do with Love. This affection requires no judgment, it is the reality of the couple, the reality of the ‘little man or woman’ pursuing his or her quest.

Communion doesn’t require contact, even if it doesn’t prohibit it either. Someone crosses our field of vision and there’s a recognition of Unity, opening up of the heart, welcoming of the Presence in a new, unknown form which we celebrate within. There’s no personal interest or future in this encounter which is fleeting. But recognition is eternal. What has been recognized in this fleeting encounter is not linked to it. It’s not sensory recognition. And the next object, being or situation reveals to us, in new attire, another opportunity to recognize the essential nature of Life, which is Love.

This disinterested, ‘unconditional’ love is the only one which leads to the appropriate action vis-à-vis the other person. The quest for affection veils what may be transmitted or received from one to the other because there is a lack which has to be filled, an expectation. Without that, the flow is free and uninterrupted. Where there is expectation, even if this is spiritual in nature, need intervenes and separation is perpetuated. It’s not a question of ceasing all relationships but of illuminating them with the right look. We won’t recognize Love if, out of fear, we strive to find it in places where it isn’t present. We don’t encounter truth by dressing it up as falsehood.

We accept that the couple is a personal arrangement, that the fact of receiving what we expect of it guarantees its survival and that Love is generally absent from it, unless the ego’s empire in this almost impenetrable fortress ceases. Our dreams of a soul mate are resurgences of the Call of Unity which is denied by the ego’s act of separation, by its expectation, its exclusivity.

The intensity of a relationship is not the ‘proof’ of Love. A passion can carry us into ecstasies and sometimes even fleeting openings but, outside of these fleeting moments that are special for ‘the little man or woman’, expectation reclaims its rights and the potential of Communion is more often than not altered by the pressure of expectation. This is also the reason why the ‘beginnings’ of an affective relationship are often more open, because expectation has not fully asserted itself. It’s also why the ego which does not temper itself rationally, instinctively likes to change partners because he knows how relationships are weighed down by expectation (for which it itself is responsible).

Wherever the ego is, Love will be somewhere else. Wherever there is ‘someone’, there is ‘another’, wherever there is ‘another’, there is an expectation to be fulfilled, a potential enemy, and Love is already far away.

We can simply recognize that we sustain ourselves with affection within the personal relationship, (this is also true of a mother and her child), but we must also recognize that such sustenance is fleeting. Communion and Love tolerate physical distance because it has been seen that the substance of Love does not reside in the ‘contact’ with the ‘other’ but that it can be indifferently recognized at any moment, in any person, regardless of distance, interest or lack of interest that the ego may find in it.

Love is not a relationship but Life in Unity. This, of course, is both going too far and at the same time not far enough.

Thierry Vissac [see also page 19]
http://www.istenqs.org/English/Englindex.htm
Religious Experience, Jesus and Modern Research – an appraisal of the Jesus Seminar findings.

Convened in 1985, the Jesus Seminar was established in North America to encourage international debate about the ‘historical Jesus’ and evaluate the historical significance of evidence about Jesus from antiquity onwards. (Ed.)

As a religious experience researcher for the past 20 years, I have long asserted that the religious/transpersonal/mystical experiences of Jesus related in the New Testament Gospels were no different than those of the rest of us, except in degree. While most of us feel blessed to have received the light of a lone ‘candle’ and others describe a more impressive ‘incandescent bulb,’ Jesus perceived a ‘beacon’! The most consistent finding about all religious experiences is that they change people’s lives.

Modern scholarship has devised some methods to separate myth from reality regarding Jesus. In The Five Gospels and Acts of Jesus, the Jesus Seminar attempted to uncover what is authentic about Jesus, including his mystical experiences and healings, as well as the visionary experiences of him following his death. Throughout this paper, I will cite their conclusions to provide a current theological perspective.

Religious Experience and Aftermath

There are two ways to sound profound about God. One is to study religion, and the other is to have a religious experience. Jesus would have learned something of Hebrew Scripture during his Jewish childhood; later, he witnessed the inspired preaching of John the Baptist. But this secondary kind of knowledge paled in comparison to what must have been a profound spiritual experience of God that transformed his own life and, unknowingly, affected the course of history for the next 2000 years! The Jesus Seminar members were sceptical that Jesus’ primary religious experience occurred at his baptism by John, but they did acknowledge that Jesus, ‘had visionary experiences on occasion’ and they did not rule out the possibility that his ‘baptismal experience involved a vision of some kind.’

The Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre (RERC) files contain ample evidence of the life-changing effects of religious experience. For example, in The Spiritual Nature of Man, Sir Alister Hardy cites the life-changing effects of Rev. Leslie Weatherhead’s religious experience at age 19 that sealed his commitment to a life in ministry (case 385). Neuropsychiatrist Richard Bucke had a profound spiritual experience at age 35 which led him to research and write a major book on mystical experience, Cosmic Consciousness. Additionally, Bucke continued the path of service, becoming the head of a psychiatric hospital in London, Ontario, Canada. Mary Austin was a prolific author of the late 19th and early 20th centuries who wrote about the plight of women and American Indians. In her book Experiences Facing Death, she not only describes her spiritual experience of the presence of God at age 5 or 6, but also that it was ‘the one abiding reality’ of her life and that she would recall it throughout her life as a source of comfort.

In An Introduction to Religious and Spiritual Experience, Marianne Rankin tells the story of St. Thomas Aquinas, who stopped writing theology altogether following his profound mystical experience: ‘He proclaimed his theology mere straw in comparison to what had been revealed to him.’

When people have a profound spiritual experience, they characteristically require some time to process its meaning and implications. The Gospels tell us that Jesus went into the wilderness for 40 days (which is ‘Bible talk’ for ‘a long time’). Following his spiritual
experience of Jesus, St. Paul spent three years in reflection before deciding how his life’s work should proceed (Gal 1:18). In his book, *The Power of Now*, modern-day mystic Eckhart Tolle tells that after his spiritual experience, ‘For the next five months, I lived in a state of uninterrupted deep peace and bliss … I knew, of course, that something profoundly significant had happened to me, but I didn’t understand it at all.’ He goes on to tell how it took years of reflection and study to make sense of it.

Religious experiences are usually positive, but many are not. Jesus quoted Scripture to counter the proposals of Satan (Mt 4:1-11). The Jesus Seminar was evenly divided as to whether Jesus was tested in the wilderness. Nevertheless, 4% of the first 3,000 cases gathered by the RERC were negative, and in *Negative Spiritual Experiences*, Merete Jakobsen notes that religious ‘rituals are the only protection against horror and darkness of the soul.’ In other words, what worked for Jesus works for the rest of us?

Similarly, modern people are often puzzled about who they can trust to share their profound experience. Fear of being thought mentally ill by friends or family is nothing new. When Jesus starts to preach, his family thinks he is ‘out of his mind, and went to restrain him’ (Mk 3:21 NRSV). In *Something There*, David Hay notes a 1985 study that found 40% of those who had religious experience never told anyone of their experience. In *Seeing the Invisible*, Meg Maxwell and Verena Tschulin note that, in addition to fear of being thought insane, modern spiritual experiencers often relate being rebuffed when they shared their experiences. This was especially distressing when the rejection was by their minister.

**Faith Healer (Placebo Effect)**

We know Jesus was a faith healer because his cures were contingent on the person’s ‘belief’ or ‘unbelief’ (Mt 13:54-58). Also, the Gospels tell plainly that some of his exorcisms were not permanent (Mt 12:43-55). The Jesus Seminar acknowledged that Jesus was a faith healer and an exorcist and considered some of his cures genuine; of course, examples of the supernatural healing, such as Jesus’ reattaching a severed ear (Lk 22: 50-51), were dismissed. Unlike the descriptions detailing the crude resuscitation techniques of Old Testament prophets Elisha and Elijah (2Kgs 4:32-35, 1Kgs 17:17-23), the Gospels do not describe Jesus’ method of resuscitation (Lk 7:11-17, Mt 9:18-26, Jn 11:38-44). The Jesus Seminar did not consider any of his resuscitations genuine.

Today, there is a large body of literature demonstrating the effectiveness of the placebo effect/faith healing. In *Timeless Healing*, Hubert Benson lists a variety of physical ailments receptive to the placebo effect. In *Irreducible Mind*, Edward Kelly and Emily Williams Kelly et. al., devote 124 pages to psycho-physiological influences, including religious practices like prayer, faith healing, and voodoo.

**Separating the Super from the Natural**

St. Paul is one of the few ancients who left his own first-hand account of his religious experiences. Most significantly, he describes his after-death communication with Jesus (I Cor 15:8) and states frankly that the Gospel he preaches did not come from humans but was communicated to him by Jesus from beyond the grave (Gal 1:11-12, 15-17). Paul both acknowledges and encourages the religious experiences of others (I Cor 12:8-11; 14:26-33). He describes an out-of-body experience in which he is taken to the third level of Heaven (II Cor 12:2-4). While he says that others have the ability to heal (I Cor 12:9), his letters do not tell of healings; in fact, Paul writes that he was not even able to heal himself (II Cor 12:7-9). Contrast Paul’s own words with the stories about him in the Acts of the Apostles in which it is claimed that he performed miracles and even raised the dead (Acts 20:9-12)! Unfortunately, Jesus was not so lucky as to have his own writings to verify his experiences.
Transfiguration
The ‘transfiguration’ (Mt. 17:1-8, Mk 9:2-8, Lk 9:28-36) is pregnant with theological symbolism; part of modern religious experience includes reports of two or more individuals seeing an apparition of a dead person or religious figure at the same time. A 1970s study in Los Angeles, California, USA, found 2% of the 434 respondents had reported a vision of a dead person that was part of the reality of another person.¹ In Seeing the Invisible, a male and female both share a vision of light and then Jesus (case 3015). In Spiritual Encounters with Unusual Light Phenomena: Lightforms, Mark Fox notes that 10 of his 400 cases were shared experiences, including two soldiers in Northern Ireland seeing a light that gradually took the form of the Virgin Mary (case 3008). At the transfiguration, Jesus’ face was, ‘shown like the sun and his clothes became dazzling white.’ In another of Mark Fox’s examples, a woman reports, ‘suddenly I was filled with a wonderful light, and I felt my face streaming with light. My mother said afterward that she would never forget my face’ (case 1160).

Psychic Ability
The Gospels relate several episodes in which Jesus exhibits psychic powers, namely, his telepathic ability with the ‘woman at the well’ (Jn 4:4-42), and two cases of pre-cognition, one regarding the miraculous catch of fish (Lk 5:4-7) and the other, the fish with the coin in its mouth to pay the Temple tax (Mt 17:24-27). In A Measure of Heaven, Vince Miglione analyzes 787 reports sent to the International Association of Near Death Studies (IANDS) website, of which 24% were individuals who did not have a life-threatening condition. In other words, they had religious experiences similar to a near-death experience, but they were not dead or near death. One of the after-effects reported was an increase in psychic ability. While 75.5% of the clinical death group reported the development of healing and psychic abilities, the non-life-threatening spiritual experience group reported a 61.9% increase. The existence of reported psychic abilities is not proof of psychic powers which are notoriously hard to validate. Nevertheless, Ralph Hood, Peter Hill, and Bernard Spilka note that inevitably, surveys of paranormal experience and mystical experience are highly correlated.²

Resurrection
Most modern liberal theologians hold with St. Paul (I Cor 15) that the resurrection of Jesus was a visionary experience (Jesus raised up by God in a spiritual body rather than a physical body). The empty tomb does not solve the dilemma, since no one saw Jesus’ body rise spontaneously or removed by others. A treasure-trove of after-death communications from ancient times to the present RERC files can be produced that resemble the post-crucifixion appearances of Jesus in the Gospels, but this topic is too huge to cover here.

Conclusion
The Gospels are not ‘pure Jesus.’ Instead, they are a mixture of mythic lore and supernatural miracles, intermingled with his genuine words and religious experiences. Nevertheless, as a liberal Christian, I take comfort in the continuity of religious experience from Jesus’ time to the present. Jesus knew God, and my belief is that the difference between Jesus and the rest of us is not one of difference but one of degree.

Dr. Ken R. Vincent, AHS member.

References not listed in the text:
Ramadan, The Blessed Month, 1431 A.H (2010 C.E.)

Muslims refer to Ramadan as, ‘the blessed month’. The Arabic word for fasting in Islam during Ramadan is, ‘siyam’. Ramadan is often referred to by its adherents as the ‘training’ month – a month of 29 or 30 days during which fasting is observed in order to encounter a ‘religious experience’, which is known in Arabic as, ‘taqwa-God consciousness’.

Muslims fast from dawn until sunset every day during Ramadan, the ninth month in the Islamic calendar. The Islamic calendar is a lunar calendar and each month begins with the sighting of the new moon. It is important to note the spiritual importance of the lunar calendar for traditional Islam; it gives the Muslims a feeling of flexibility and movement throughout the year without experiencing the solidification of time which accompanies the Gregorian calendar. For example, Easter is always in spring and Christmas is always in winter, whereas Ramadan travels through all seasons, belonging to all seasons, and at the same time is affiliated to none. It is closely connected to creation, specifically the moon. Muslims in traditional settings are taught early on in life to observe the day and month of the lunar calendar by simply looking at the cycle of the moon. In the same manner, traditionally, Muslims were able to perceive the time of prayer by looking at the location of the sun in the sky, thereby making both prayers and fasting associated to the creation of God. Hence, it is not a wonder that both the sun, the moon, their cycles and creation are continuously spoken of as the signs of God in the Qur’an. While the Gregorian calendar is 365 or 366 days long, the lunar calendar is shorter since it is comprised of 12 lunar months, amounting to 354 or 355 days. Due to this Ramadan falls 11 days earlier in each Gregorian year, therefore, over a period of 33 years Ramadan moves through all the seasons of the year and returns to the point where it commenced.

The spiritual training during Ramadan of what is initially the ‘self’, does not simply constitute not eating and drinking during the daylight hours, but goes much deeper. The spiritual meaning behind refraining from any kind of food or drink, and marital sexual relations between dawn and sunset, highlights the need for human beings to be able to control their basic animal instincts. However, it is also a spiritual training for the rest of what constitutes the human being, i.e. the mind and the soul. It is argued that fasting includes not intentionally participating in all that harms one’s soul and mind. For example, the fasting of the tongue includes refraining from lying, swearing, speaking ill of others; this attitude applies to every part of the human body. The most important part of the fast is the fasting of the ‘heart’ of the human being. The heart is the centre of the human being in Islamic theology and it does not refer merely to the physical organ that has certain biological functions. Al-Ghazali (d. 1111), the renowned Muslim Sufi theologian, explained this term as ‘other-worldly’. Sometimes alluded to as the spirit or the soul, the heart carries the ability of the human being to recognize the Reality, i.e. God. According to Al-Ghazali fasting produces a semblance of the divine quality of, ‘samadiyyah’ (freedom from want) within a human being. Imam Ibn Al-Qayyim (d. 1350) viewed fasting as a means of releasing the human spirit from the clutches of desire, thus allowing moderation to prevail in the carnal self. Imam Shah Waliullah (d. 1762.) viewed fasting as a means of weakening the bestial and reinforcing the angelic elements in human beings.

Each Muslim’s experience of Ramadan is ‘personal’ and is based upon their individual spiritual growth. Nevertheless, it seems that they all may be able to relate to the experience of Suhur, Iftar and the Taraweeh night prayers. Each morning for the last 29 or 30 days this Ramadan, Muslims have been waking up across the world just before dawn to join together for the suhur, a special pre-dawn meal. This meal is the lesser known of the two meals that Muslims consume every day during the month of Ramadan. Suhur plays an important practical and spiritual role within the Muslim family. In the United Kingdom, Muslim
families have been rising to a tranquil pre-dawn at around 3 a.m. and even children who may not be observing the fast are happy to join in this meal. This meal is practical in that it helps to maintain and nourish those who are fasting throughout the long summer day, but it is also recognised as a spiritual act. According to the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) nights and early mornings are the ideal times for worship. He advised Muslims to partake in suhur which is seen as a blessed time, and the emphasis placed on suhur by many Muslims is ultimately based upon emulating their Prophet so as to live according to the Sunnah (The way of Muhammad), especially in the month of Ramadan. The pre-dawn meal ends with the call to the Morning Prayer.

After a day of fasting with prayers, reciting of the Qur’an, school, work and play, the Iftar meal is welcomed at sunset. Muslims generally break their fast with dates, water, or milk; if they are in the mosque the call to prayers i.e. the azaan, announces the Sunset prayer time. After the sunset prayer Muslims typically sit down for the main Iftar meal. Many mosques across the United Kingdom provide food for those Muslims who wish to break their fast in the mosque. This meal may be provided by the mosque, the neighbourhood families or the numerous Muslim ‘Indian’ and ethnic restaurants across the United Kingdom. It is a tradition of the Prophet Muhammad that providing Iftar brings blessings and forgiveness from God.

After the Iftar it is time for the daily night prayers and in addition, the taraweeh prayers; the taraweeh prayers are only held daily in Ramadan after the night prayers. They are formal prayers and can be observed individually or in congregations in mosques. Although the fasting and prayers during these 29 or 30 days is experienced differently by each Muslim, the end of Ramadan leaves many Muslims feeling extremely sorrowful that such a blessed time has come to a closure; it is an experience that has brought the community together and made them focus on God in prayers and fasting.

This spirit is mostly captured during the last ten days of Ramadan when many Muslims devote themselves to I’tikaf, a unique reclusive act of worship. A Muslim gives up all his usual activities and enters a mosque for a specific period, be that for one night, a day or the full ten last days of Ramadan. During this period the Muslim devotes himself/herself to spirituality by prayers, reciting of the Qur’an and reflection. The suhur and the iftar for those performing the I’tikaf are provided for in the mosque. After the 29 or 30 days of fasting Muslims reluctantly say their farewells to Ramadan, but equally rejoice at their spiritual and religious achievements by celebrating the Eid festival!

Dr Amjad Hussain, Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies & Islamic Studies, School of Theology, Religion & Islamic Studies, University of Wales Trinity Saint David

Reminiscences of Uncle Alister

What a lovely opportunity to be invited to reminisce about Uncle Alister. Whilst he is known as Sir Alister Hardy, or to give him his full name, Sir Alister Clavering Hardy, to the worlds of science and religion, he has always been Uncle Alister to me and that is how I always think of him!

We are here today because in October 40 years ago, the Religious Experience Research Unit, now based at the University of Wales, was founded right here at Manchester College Oxford. I am sure he would be so delighted by the success of the unit that he founded and very excited about the remarkable study of religious experience undertaken in China, funded by a grant from the Templeton Foundation.
I know there will be much talk from others here about Uncle Alister the scientist of which much has been written, but before that I’d like to share a little about Uncle Alister the warm, loving and enthusiastic person. I know too that he would have been so pleased to see the family members here today – we have Belinda Farley, his daughter with us and his grandson Tom Farley, and his granddaughter Julia Latimer, the daughter of his son Michael Hardy, who unfortunately cannot be with us today. I am his great niece, his brother Vernon Clavering Hardy was my grandfather. I spent many happy times with Uncle Alister and Aunt Sylvia, his wonderful wife who supported him behind the scenes for 58 years.

Dr. Desmond Morris in an obituary in the Oxford Times in 1985 described Uncle Alister’s death as ‘robbing Oxford of one of its great scientific personalities.’ I also loved the way he described him saying ‘even though he was only nine months short of his 90th birthday, he was far too young to die. His body was the only part of him that had aged. His enthusiasm, his humour, his curiosity and his intellect were as youthful as ever.’ This so captures my enduring memories of Uncle Alister – his bubbling enthusiasm and curiosity were ever present; he was always so interested in people and what they had to say. He was visiting my flat one day and I had a coffee table that I had constructed, it was rather like a display cabinet or table, and had various pieces of scrap metal attached to a board let into the bottom of the table, joined together with string and all sprayed with copper paint, with a table top of plate glass. He knelt down on the floor and examined it through the glass and said with great enthusiasm ‘how does it work?’ I think he was quite disappointed that it didn’t actually do anything.

My experiences with him accord with Desmond Morris when he says ‘maintaining a child-like curiosity about the world in which he lived was far more important to him than fussing over critics and reputations.’ He then goes on to relate a story that I know Belinda also loves about a time when Desmond Morris and others were invited to take tea with Uncle Alister at his North Oxford House. They were regaled with amazing anecdotes, full of impish humour culminating in his famous ‘mermaid story’. This began with a description of a stuffed mermaid which an old sailor had brought to England from some faraway island, and continued with details of how this sailor and all subsequent owners of the mermaid had suffered terrible and inexplicable misfortunes. Then, with a melodramatic flourish, a beaming Uncle Alister plunged his arm behind his chair and held the mummified mermaid aloft in front of them. ‘Now it is in my hands’, he cried, defying the fates to do him harm. It was apparently a fascinating object, fashioned long ago from the front end of a monkey and the rear end of a large fish, and it was said to be curiously symbolic of one of Hardy’s most controversial theories, namely that our ancient ancestors went through a semi-aquatic phase of evolution before they took to hunting large animals on dry land.)*

Although he made his scientific reputation as a brilliant marine biologist, he was at heart a wide ranging Victorian naturalist fascinated by a much broader spectrum. Uncle Alister really enjoyed the simple pleasures in life. He loved the seasons and got very excited about the first aconites, snowdrops and daffodils followed by the prunus blossom in spring. Looking for orange tipped butterflies was an essential part of his recognition of spring arriving. He loved his home and when he was working in the zoology department in Oxford he would usually come home for lunch, always riding his huge bicycle! When retired from the department he would enjoy tea in the garden – weather permitting. At week-ends he would walk by the Thames at Port Meadow and visit Binsey where he would often worship alone in the little Church there. I had some lovely walks with him by the river culminating in a beer together at The Trout, a pub on the river, and much enthusiastic chat about so many different aspects of life.
Early in his life Uncle Alister became interested in balloons, airships and flying. Flight remained a strong interest throughout his life. He loved kite flying and he was a balloonist as a young man for a short time. One of his lesser known books, *A Weekend with Willows* describes his true adventure in an old-fashioned gas balloon in the clouds above London in 1924.

He was not a good driver and Belinda describes him as a ‘rather erratic driver not helped by his eyesight.’ He rode everywhere on his huge bicycle and he would travel by train a lot when he was visiting universities round the country for lecturing and examining. He related a story to me of one of such train travels soon after the war. He explained that it was before the buffet cars were returned to the trains and Aunt Sylvia used to pack him a lunch to have on the train to London from Oxford. His lunch was generally the same each journey – a boiled egg, some bread and butter and a couple of tomatoes. He told me how he always used to tap his egg on his knee to crack the shell, and on this particular occasion he was on his way to lecture in London, dressed in his pin striped suit; he cracked his egg on his knee to find to his utter surprise that Aunt Sylvia had forgotten to boil it. Catastrophe. His bubbling sense of humour could not be suppressed as he related the story and went on to say how he had to go to Moss Bros on Paddington Station to hire some new trousers before he went on to lecture.
He would also take his bicycle with him on many occasions when travelling by train ‘in those wonderful days when the railways ran everywhere, setting one down at little stations in convenient parts of the Cotswold country.’ He wrote about this particularly in relation to his times of sketching in the Cotswolds. Aunt Sylvia, to whom he dedicated his beautiful book _A Cotswold Sketchbook_, referred to this sketching time as Uncle Alister’s ‘bottle of medicine’. He found his various visits to the Cotswolds, if only for a day’s sketching, a wonderful break from his intensive scientific work. His drawing and water-colour painting was always an important part of his life, and although he never had a technical art school training, he refers to the importance of a remarkable art mistress who taught him at prep. school. One of my most treasured possessions is a water colour of farmyard animals that Uncle Alister painted for my mother’s nursery when she was born, and she was 85 this week! Apart from his Cotswold sketching he of course has over 50 water colour paintings and nearly 500 black and white drawings illustrating his earlier books in natural history. He took such delight on one of my visits, sharing all his most recent water colours of places that he and Aunt Sylvia had visited and telling me how much more fun it was recording their visits in sketch rather than taking photographs.

In the introduction to his Cotswold Sketchbook Uncle Alister refers to the book as being another step in the sequence of his studies endeavouuring to show another aspect of this all important spiritual side to man. He continues, saying ‘I am playing the part of a naturalist looking at the different phenomena that make up man’s spiritual nature and art is certainly one of them.’

Uncle Alister and Aunt Sylvia loved Italy where they holidayed a lot, and many of Uncle Alister’s paintings reflect this with wonderful water colours in and around Naples and the Amalfi Coast, together with others from visits to Sicily, Corfu, Crete, Corsica, the South of France, Normandy and Brittany. He was never short of things to do on holiday, and once, holidaying in Norfolk, he was painting a jelly fish for one of his book illustrations when the light began to recede, so to prevent the colours fading in the jelly fish he popped it in the fridge alongside the butter and the milk! Aunt Sylvia was incredibly tolerant in her support of Uncle Alister’s endeavours.

Celebrating birthdays and Christmas was very important to Uncle Alister and he produced his own Christmas cards each year, one for his friends and colleagues and a different one for his cycling battalion comrades. I still have all the Christmas cards he sent me which still give me great pleasure and memories. He loved to decorate the Christmas tree and Belinda relates how he would rush out on Christmas Eve to choose last minute presents with Aunt Sylvia saying ‘You’ve left it far too late, you won’t find anything.’ However he would always come back with the right presents. This was apparently quite an annual ritual, as was his love of Christmas pantomime and music hall. This was evident in his recording of Desert Island Discs in the 70’s with his choice of music and his talking of memories of his mother taking him to the music hall and theatre when he was a child. He knew a lot of the old music hall songs and remembered the words right up to the end of his life. Uncle Alister just loved fun and had such a zest for life and humour and he once told Belinda that he would have liked to have been a magician as he loved conjuring tricks and firework displays and at Christmas and other celebrations he so enjoyed little indoor fireworks. He also loved the fun fair and very often visited St. Giles fair, where he took enormous delight in both the big wheel and the roller coaster rides.

I hope I have managed to convey Uncle Alister’s great sense of fun and humour which provided such a balance with his brilliant mind and ability to concentrate on several projects.
at the same time; he never seemed to waste a minute of his time. He took his work very seriously and was a devout Christian, whose sense of humour could not be suppressed even when discussing God. Here I'm reminded of another of Uncle Alister’s stories. When he was being driven to Jerusalem by taxi, it broke down a mile or two from the city and could only travel backwards as all the forward gears had broken – he thought it rather significant entering Jerusalem backwards!

Uncle Alister reached the top of his scientific profession and was known to generations of scientists as one of the world’s foremost marine biologists and a great teacher and advocate of Darwinism. Indeed his knighthood was awarded for his outstanding services to biological science. (He said his main concern in relation to that splendid occasion was that in kneeling in front of the Queen he was incredibly worried in case his lumbago prevented him standing up again!) However over the years his passionate interest in man’s spiritual nature had not abated, and in 1969 he founded the Religious Experience Research Unit which is where I began. The purpose of the Unit was to begin a scientific study of religious experience by collecting and classifying accounts of experience much as the Victorian naturalists collected specimens and classified them to form the basis of modern biology. Accounts were initially collected via advertisements in the media [there are now about 6,000 and they are still being sent in]. In initiating this program Uncle Alister played a central role in the development of a new field of science which takes seriously the spiritual dimension of the human. This work presents the case for a new understanding of the relationship of science and religion. It was for this that he was honoured in 1985 with the award of the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion. The award crowned a lifetime’s achievement for Uncle Alister who had, whilst a young man, a vivid awareness of the presence of God in nature and had vowed, in his own words ‘to devote his life to reconciling science and religion’.

Sadly Uncle Alister suffered a stroke the day before he was due to go to Buckingham Palace for the presentation of the prize by the Duke of Edinburgh. The £170,000 prize was accepted on his behalf by his daughter, Belinda Farley. He knew about the award and said that he regarded the prize as the culmination of a long career, and that the prize money would go to the RERU to help continue the work which he had begun. In his speech, read for him by Mr. Crawford Knox, Uncle Alister said that he was not suggesting that an attempt should be made to bring about a universal form of religious practice, but he did hope that the work of the RERU might lead to better understanding of the nature and importance of man’s religious experience in the interpretation of the living world, and that it might eventually lead to setting the world free from the ‘terrible passions’ of spiritual disagreement. I found this very moving to listen to on that very special day in the Guildhall, and especially as he was still with us and not actually able to be there to deliver his speech himself.

I know he would be so delighted by the further award from the Templeton Foundation that funded the Chinese study and to know about the Centre’s association with parallel projects in Taiwan, India and Turkey. As David Hay, a former director of the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Centre says ‘This research policy responds to a plea made increasingly by Hardy towards the end of his life. He urged the necessity of testing the universal applicability of his hypothesis by enlarging the range of research beyond the Jewish/Christian cultural nexus within which almost all previous investigations had been confined.’ He would be so thrilled with all that is blossoming from his original work. And as he firmly believed that there is some kind of afterlife, I am sure that it must be a much livelier, happier place now that he has arrived there.

E. Jane Winship
*This theory was also presented by Elaine Morgan in her book *The Aquatic Ape Hypothesis*, 1997, who gave her last public lecture to the Alister Hardy Society at the University of Wales Lampeter in May 2007. Ed

Published References


David Hay, ‘On the origins of the spiritual’, *The Tablet*, 26 September 2009, pp. 10-11


The above was the text of a presentation at the Alister Hardy Society Open Day November 2009 celebrating the 40th Anniversary of the Founding of The Religious Experience Research Centre. Jane Winship is Sir Alister’s great niece and is a Trustee of the Alister Hardy Trust.

Experiences

What is Love?

After 15 years of a committed spiritual quest, regular meditation sessions and training courses, I experienced a surprising and salutary collapse. I ‘woke up’ quite literally by falling out of bed. Although the fall didn’t immediately reveal its secret, what I can say today is that I straightaway sensed what it contained. The thousands of hours spent in fervent meditation, my calls never to wander from the straight and narrow, the insistent hope of ‘someone other than me’ and all the artful tricks of the quest vanished into thin air in the batting of an eyelid and were consumed, leaving but ashes and silence. While it seemed at the time that I had lost everything, down to the very meaning of life, I had in fact suddenly gained the freedom to be what I am. It was from this moment of being brutally stripped that the spiritual awakening, which I had previously thought to be made up of pathetic masks, unveiled itself in all its pure splendour. The tension which had been my constant road companion gave way to a vibrant open space from which emerged a book-free, mind-free ‘knowledge’ of my genuine nature and, as a result, an awareness of how the infernal dance of our painful strategies continues, despite ourselves, to keep us remote from what we are. The desire to testify came naturally, unconfined by reassuring boundaries or traditional landmarks. This is what I am doing daily now, because I am not driven by any impulse other than that of sharing the miracle of simply being alive.

*Thierry Vissac [see also page 8]*

Religious Incident

Monday 1st February dawned and I set out to meet Eric Gladwin at 10.30 am when I would collect the books he was donating to the Alister Hardy Library. However, within ten minutes of beginning the journey I knew I would be late – the traffic news was reporting dozens of accidents resulting from the icy conditions on the roads and warned drivers to slow down.

I was so ashamed of arriving an hour late that I determined to be early the next morning for our continued sorting of Eric’s Library; and so I did, arriving twenty minutes early. Considering the possible inconvenience this might have caused, I parked the car and popped
into Saint Mary’s Anglican Church. The Church in Wales is promoting the value of keeping rural churches open for visitors (which apparently actually reduces crime, and insurance). I was delighted that England had the same policy, and wandered into the building.

I could see the backs of two youngish women in a side chapel who seemed to be praying, so I crept around the sides of the church looking at the memorials and stained glass windows, the leaflets and the children’s corner. There was a Prayer Meeting going on, which finished as I approached the modern part of the Sanctuary with the choir stalls, so I felt free to pass the half a dozen parishioners and to go to the rear of the sanctuary with its alabaster tomb, brasses and altar. Having reflectively absorbed the peace of the place my mind returned to business and I retraced my steps.

To my amazement I found I had been locked in the church! I momentarily puzzled over the paradox of my seeing people praying but they not noticing me, and then seriously set about trying to get out. The Parish had carefully labelled its fire exits and displayed notices about what to do in an emergency, but all doors were securely locked and no alarms were visible. It was only the tranquillity of and knowledge that I was in ‘God’s House’ that contained the rising panic: that Eric would not know where to enquire about my apparently lazy attitude to work, and that I was likely to be enclosed for 24 hours.

I attempted to ring the church bell, and recalling comic scenes with bell ringers being lifted into the air, felt sure it would require strength. It clearly required skill too, not one chime issued forth. Peering through an ornately carved screen I could see on the other side a sort of office – with a phone! I moved the organ stool to a cupboard and carefully eased myself up and over – recognising that I am not as young and agile as I was. The descent of the other side was not easy.

I made my 999 call. It was not very long before two police officers appeared, in fluorescent yellow jackets, to let me out. The women officers were concerned for my well being; congratulated me on my initiative and observed it was the first time they had been called out to an incident of this kind. It was after my release that the shock set in, but Eric helped me recover and now the Alister Hardy Library has benefited from an interesting selection of his volumes. Thank you Eric.

Anne Veronica Watkins MA
Reports

Reception at Lambeth Palace

On Thursday 22nd April 2010 the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams invited about a hundred representatives from organizations of which he is Patron to a Reception in the Palace Guard Room of Lambeth Palace.

Professor Paul Badham, Dr Jonathan Wooding, Revd Jonathan Robinson and Marianne Rankin attended the event, representing the Alister Hardy Trust.

The Archbishop spoke to each person individually, albeit briefly and was particularly interested to hear about the changes at Lampeter and the research in China. Paul presented the Archbishop with a copy of 'Religious Experience in Contemporary China', Jonathan gave him his updated Grail Liturgy and Marianne her ‘Introduction to Religious and Spiritual Experience’.

Marianne Rankin

Report on the 10th Anniversary Commemoration of the Alister Hardy
Religious Experience Research Centre at the University of Wales, Lampeter

The Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre, with its archive of accounts of spiritual/religious experiences and library, moved to the University of Wales, Lampeter, from Westminster College, Oxford in August 2000. On 7th July 2010, the 10th anniversary of the coming of the AHRERC to the University of Wales was celebrated at Lampeter with an event kindly organised by Dr. Jonathan Wooding, Joint Acting Head of the Theology and Religious Studies Department at the University, and David Greenwood, Administrator of the Alister Hardy Trust and Society.
Guests attending included AH Trustees, John Franklin, Marianne Rankin and her husband John, Revd. Jonathan Robinson, Chair of AHS, Sir Alister’s great-niece Jane Winship and her partner Nancy Lawing, and Dr. Jonathan Wooding; together with retiring Director, Professor Paul Badham, new Directors Sally Wilkinson and Dr. Greg Barker; past Director Dr. David Hay with his wife Jane; and staff members David Greenwood, Administrator, Anne Watkins, Librarian and Jean Matthews, Archive Supervisor.

Following lunch in the Dining Hall, Paul Badham gave a short talk on *Comparative Religious Experience – the Taiwan Findings*, and Marianne Rankin a talk on *Writing and Working with ‘An Introduction to Religious and Spiritual Experience’*. Jonathan Wooding and Greg Barker spoke on *The Future of the AHRERC at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David*, and a warm word of welcome was kindly given by the University’s Vice-Chancellor Dr. Medwin Hughes. After a general discussion, there was time to visit the University’s Roderic Bowen Library and the AHRERC Library and office, and the Centre’s Archives there.

In the evening, a celebratory dinner with wine was given in the Private Dining Room of the University. During the dinner, David Hay kindly presented to the Centre a pencil sketch of Sir Alister Hardy, given to him by a friend of the well-known portrait painter, Hans Schwarz (1922-2003). The sketch, David told us, was drawn in preparation for a painting of three eminent biologists who had spent most of their working lives in the Zoology Department in Oxford. The finished portrait, which was completed in 1972, shows Sir Alister accompanied by the histologist John Baker and E. B. (‘Henry’) Ford, the renowned entomologist. This painting of ‘The Three Greats’, as they were informally known, is on permanent display in the University of Oxford Department of Zoology. [The sketch is now displayed in the Learning Resources Centre (Library) at Lampeter.] David was warmly thanked for his generous gift and warm thanks were also given to the University staff for their hospitality and for making the occasion both pleasant and memorable.

*John Franklin*

**Report on the British Teilhard Association/Alister Hardy Society one-day Conference**

The Alister Hardy Society came together with the British Teilhard Association (BTA) in a one-day conference in London on Saturday 24th April on the theme *Future of Humanity: A Cosmological Vision*. The event, organised under the auspices of the BTA, and held at the Essex Unitarian Church, in Kensington, was well attended. The principal speakers included Ursula King, Professor Emerita, Theology & Religious Studies, Bristol University, Dr. Christopher Knight, scientist and Priest of the Eastern Orthodox Church, and Prof. Bernard Carr, Professor of Mathematics & Astronomy, Queen Mary, University of London.

Under the title, *The Future Evolution of Humanity on Earth: A Gigantic Task, a Dream or a Nightmare?*, Professor Ursula King spoke of Teilhard de Chardin’s reflections on the future evolution of humanity; how he saw a new threshold in the development of human life and consciousness, but feared that the world might refuse to accept this; how he felt a passionate sense of common destiny but saw that this could not be realised without development of the spiritual dimension of life; and how he saw the development of the capacity for love and compassion as the most powerful force available, but recognised the great resistance to this force.
Dr. Christopher Knight, under the title *Evolution and Spiritual Experience – an Eastern Christian Perspective*, spoke of how religious experience is differently regarded in the different religious traditions; on the different approaches to theology of the eastern and western traditions; and the need for dialogue between science and religion. In an attempt at synthesis, he had derived a model based on five theses, this being a teleology that does not compete with the laws of modern science. Choosing between the rationales of an atheistic and a theistic belief, the atheistic choice, he said, seems to induce despair, but the theistic one gives hope.

Professor Bernard Carr gave an illustrated talk on *Cosmos, Creation and the Culmination of Consciousness*, which took us through the history of cosmological exploration from earliest times to the latest superstring and M-theory (10 and 11 dimensional universes respectively), and asked where does this leave us as human beings? Of less and less significance in the order of things, it seems; nevertheless the greatest observable complexity, he said, appears to arise in human brains. Development of complexity is one of the remarkable features of the universe, increasing on planet Earth from the microscopic to living beings and beyond living organisms to higher forms such as consciousness, mind and spirit. Cosmic consciousness, he thought, seems to be comparable to what theologians call God. From the viewpoint of physics, he argued, mental experience can be accommodated through the use of the additional spatial dimensions and multiverse theory.

*John Franklin*

*Notes of the talks are available, price £2.00 for the set, and a DVD containing all three talks is also available, price £8.00 incl. p&p, from John Franklin, 21 Park Vista, Greenwich, London, SE10 9LZ, cheques payable to ‘AHS London Group’.*

**Report on the Alister Hardy Society/Wrekin Trust one-day Conference**

Continuing the now growing tradition of holding an annual event in June with an associated organisation, this year the London and Oxford/Cotswold Groups joined together with the Wrekin Trust in mounting a one-day conference in Oxford on the topic *Finding the Spirit in a Secular Age*. Held at St. Columba’s United Reform Church in Alfred Street on Saturday, 19th June, the event included two talks in the morning, with a third talk and discussions in small groups with the speakers in the afternoon. The speakers were Martin Palmer, Secretary General of the Alliance of Religions & Conservation, Prof. Lord Harries of Pentregarth, former Bishop of Oxford, and David Lorimer, Programme Director of the Scientific & Medical Network.

Speaking on *The Ethos of Spirituality*, Martin Palmer talked of a move now by secular organisations to want to work with religion, because of a lack of belief in the ability of national governments to deliver what is needed. Considering that we have passed the roadblock of secularism, and that pluralism is to be taken seriously, he mentioned Ministers in China now wanting to partner Taoist and Buddhists to create a spiritual culture of harmony. Spirituality is no longer seen as the province of fables but is now returning to centre stage. A coming together of religions at Assisi led to the setting up of a world conservation strategy group in 1998, and the aim is to create a global ethic. He stressed the role of spirituality in creating an ethos to enable working with what is and bringing the best out of it; working with nature rather than exploiting it; working with ‘ethos’ rather than ‘beliefs’.
Lord Harries, speaking on Spirituality and the Arts, suggested that spirituality is about experiencing life in its depth – he said many people now find this experience through the arts rather than through religion. Art, in often focussing on the bleak side of things, helps us face the tragic dimension of life, helps develop courage and the spirit to know ‘all shall be well’. The visual arts help us see life truthfully, and give us examples of integrity – and music is a common trigger to spiritual/religious experience. He felt that genuine art changes the way we see the world, and often introduces us to moral imperatives that we would not otherwise face. The arts help us see into the depths of things; and that the spark of creativity flows from love – love as the soul of genius.

David Lorimer, under the title Beyond Secularism – Science, Consciousness and Spirituality, touched on a number of topics, the main theme being universal mind and our relationship to this. Questioning our secular age and media culture, and noting the confusion between science and scientism and scientific materialism, he deplored the scientific community’s avoidance of the paranormal, psychic phenomena and spiritual experience. Regarding the problem of the relationship between the mind and the brain, he questioned the scientific view that it is the brain that produces consciousness, as this involves a search for a materialist explanation for something that cannot be explained entirely in material terms.

Whilst socially a great success, the event was marred by the entry of a sneak-thief at the end of the day who stole much of the takings. Whilst the expenses of the speakers and venue were able to be covered, unfortunately a loss was made with regard to the organisers’ own expenses, and a hoped-for contribution to the Alister Hardy Trust and Wrekin Trust was unable to be realised.

John Franklin

[Notes of the talks are available, price £2.00 for the set, and a DVD containing all three talks is also available, price £8.00 incl. p&p, from John Franklin, 21 Park Vista, Greenwich, London, SE10 9LZ, cheques payable to ‘AHS London Group’.]

Reports from the Local Groups

Chesterfield Group
Since the last report, we have had a talk on the history of Unitarianism and Upper Chapel in Sheffield by Rev. Geoff Usher. Sadly, Geoff has now left us to return to Australia and enjoy his well-earned retirement. Geoff received his ordination certificate from Sir Alister Hardy when he became a Unitarian minister. A Sheffield Telegraph news article about Geoff’s retirement can be found at:
http://www.sheffieldtelegraph.co.uk/news/Curtain-falls-for-minister-Geoff.6213015.jp

In May, group member Joe Revill gave a talk on path-working, or guided visualisation, followed by a short experiential session for those who wanted to try it for themselves. The following month saw us go on a group outing to Birchover to visit places of historical and religious interest. Vicky Wade guided us around the Neolithic cave art at Rowtor Rocks, All Saints Church, the standing stones near Robin Hood’s Stride, the hermit’s cave at Cratcliffe Rocks, and Darley Dale church. AHS member Christopher Gilmore visited us in July to give an interactive talk on ‘Sacred Secrets, Healing Sounds’. Christopher’s website can be found at:
http://souleducator.blogspot.com and we hope that he will be giving a second talk to the group next year. We also discussed a few DVDs, notably some highlights from the TV series *Around the World in 80 Faiths* and an interview with C. G. Jung.

The new programme will include another group trip, this time to Garway, Kilpeck, and Worcester Cathedral; a movie night with a showing of *The Crucible*, the film adaptation of Arthur Miller’s play, and a talk by myself entitled ‘If God is a Delusion – Why Bother?’, which is also available online at: http://www.skeptic.org.uk/magazine/competitions/596-rush-god-why-bother

The AHS Chesterfield Group programme, and photographs from the Birchover trip, are available online at: www.esoteric-experience.org.uk. For any further info please contact me at mike@mikerush.mail1.co.uk or on 07790 757955.

Mike Rush

**Midlands Group**

This is a small, informal and friendly group enjoying not only a programme of speakers on various spiritual topics but also outings to sites of interest, and these latter events are often arranged as opportunities present and so we are unable to list these in advance in *De Numine*.

On September 11th 2009 we had the great pleasure of Marianne Rankin speaking to us on ‘Writing “An Introduction to Religious and Spiritual Experience”.’

A musical meditation on a South Indian wind instrument, the *nadaswaram*, on the theme of inflorescence was given by the composer Rodney Reeves, and illustrated by some of Harry Houghton’s diagrams prior to the introduction of the speaker by Karl Gibbs. For the benefit of non-members of the AHS, Marianne began with a brief account of her own spiritual journey leading her to the AHS, and the influence of having lived for many years in Singapore where she found various religious groups living in harmony with each other and secularism. She also spoke about Sir Alister Hardy and his interest in human beings as spiritual animals. and his work on the nature of religious/spiritual experience. Marianne gave details of some of the accounts of spiritual experience submitted to the Alister Hardy Religious Research Unit archives and some she was given when people became aware of her research interest and her book. Questions and lively discussion followed and we agreed that the AHS, and Marianne’s recent book, were valued responses to this secular age as it struggled to find answers to current problems. The group would love to have Marianne as a guest speaker again.

On November 27th 2009 Harry Houghton presented ‘The Inner World’. Rodney Reeves gave a sound meditation on a renaissance flute and then Harry demonstrated his intriguing 3-D model of the environment of the Soul; it is a light within a tunnel of what appears to be roughly woven, almost barbed, darkness and when viewed in a darkened room evoked various images and emotions; light at the end of a tunnel, the near-death experience, the memorial to the children of the holocaust.

On December 12th 2009 we had a pre-Christmas social and planning meeting

A meeting on the topic of Spiritual Poetry was scheduled for February but was cancelled due to bad weather and illness, but as several members expressed a keen interest it was held on
March 19th 2010. A sound meditation with guitar and drone preceded the readings, which included members’ own compositions [some have been published] along with our personal favourites.

On May 21st Clement Jewitt PhD [music] gave us an amazing audio presentation ‘Soundings for Body and Spirit in the Contemporary World.’ He played excerpts from CDs including ones merging nature’s sounds with human voice or instruments, Zen meditation music with Japanese koto and shakuhachi, Sanskrit mantras as healing sounds rendered by a Canadian vocalist, and one based on the sound of the central nervous system.

On July 16th Druid Gary Cousins gave a talk on Modern Paganism. Gary trained as a Druid and as a Shaman and is a priest in the Western Mystery Tradition. He reminded us of the derivation of ‘pagan’ from paganus [village/country dweller] and that a reverence for Nature and for the seasonal cycle was common to the various ‘pagan’ groups such as Wicca and Druidry. Gary emphasised the pagan concept of the interconnectedness of all Life and the Earth and indeed the Cosmos, and we realised how this resonated very much with our own spiritual paths. Discussion ranging from the question of good and evil, the role of myths, poetry and art in pagan tradition, went on until the witching hour!

We have had two group outings this year:

On July 2nd Clement had arranged for our group to visit the Martineau Gardens to see the Medicine Wheel after the gardens were closed to the public and also for a friend, Simon Foster, who was very knowledgeable on Native American spiritual traditions, to give us a short talk about the significance of Medicine Wheels symbolising the cycle of the year, one’s life, and our spiritual journey. In North America a buffalo skull would be buried at the centre of the Wheel but for this one in a leafy suburb of Birmingham a fox skull had been chosen. The site was in a very quiet part of the Gardens and one could feel the magical atmosphere.

On July 6th at the invitation of Revd Theresa Jones we went to see the Garments of Gethsemane on exhibition at Holy Trinity Church in Stourbridge. Theresa a member of AHS and of our local group was on duty at the exhibition in her colleague’s church that day. Information on the Garments can be found on www.westhillendowment.org/gethsemane.html. Briefly they are four larger than life sized robes, made by an Anglican minister, Peter Privett: the red garment symbolises the pain and suffering in the world and has rents like wounds or separations, a sackcloth robe evokes the feelings of the suffering, a green robe, more delicate than the others suggests hope and the last one in the display, representing resurrection, is a white one, open at the front, so could contain all the others. It has a womb/tomb cavity, and a scarf decorated with nails. Words cannot convey the intense emotions aroused by viewing this exhibition--- visitors are encouraged to handle the robes and explore the textures and read the painted and embroidered Biblical texts covering parts of the garments. We spent some time in meditation and Rodney played a brief flute recital before we left.

Sheelah James

*Revd Colin Jones, also a member of our group.
Oxford and Cotswold Group

The Oxford and Cotswold Group continues to enjoy lively meetings and has settled into a pattern of one large and one smaller meeting each year, plus a combined meeting with the London group in the summer. As the only organiser is Rhonda Riachi, it is impossible to do more at present. Like other groups it struggles to get younger people involved, even in a student town!

In February the group enjoyed a screening of the film, *The Scole Experiment*, attended by 30 people, which engendered a lively discussion concerning the extraordinary range of psychic and spiritual phenomena that were witnessed in a series of controlled ‘experiments’ in the village of Scole in Norfolk over five years in the 1990s. The film we saw was an early version of a DVD which is shortly to be available for sale. The film features interviews with many of the scientists who witnessed the phenomena (voices, apports, spirit lights, spontaneous photographic images, inter alia) including Dr Rupert Sheldrake, Prof David Fontana and the late Prof Montague Keen. Many of us were amazed that the Scole experiment is not more widely known. The new film version will include more recent occurrences and interviews. For more information go to http://www.thescoleexperiment.com/index.htm.

In June we co-organised a highly successful joint meeting in Oxford with the London AHS Group and the Wrekin Trust, entitled *Finding the Spirit in a Secular Age*, attended by 75 people (see separate report by John Franklin).

On 4 December we will welcome back Marianne Rankin and Dr Marcus Braybrooke, who will speak about their latest books (see the AHS events listing). We also hope to hold another study group at a member’s house, possibly on the popular topic of healing. As always, I welcome suggestions for future meetings and any offers to help with organising them!

As it is costly to post items to all the members of this widely spread group, I need to use email to communicate efficiently. Please send me a message so I can include you on the list (and you need not live in the Oxford & Cotswold Area to join us).  ahs@riachi.free-online.co.uk

Rhonda Riachi

London Group

The London Group meetings this year continued with a talk on 23rd March by Revd. Graeme Watson, a practitioner, teacher and writer on Christian meditation, on *The Cloud of Unknowing as a Basis for Spiritual Development*. Graeme Watson spoke of the origins of the book and how it had become popular through making contemplation accessible – and discussed its central theme, which is to give up thinking and hold on only to love, ‘by love He can be caught and held but by thinking never.’ The focus of The Cloud, he said, was on what might be called the journey from the head to the heart: it was a journey of contemplation that engages the whole person, body, mind and soul. Theologically, it came from the apophatic prayer tradition turning away from the ordinary senses, God being incomprehensible by our ordinary faculties. We could not stand outside God and view Him as an object because He was pure subject: He could be participated in directly and entirely by love, but never imagined. The Cloud’s author, unknown but probably a priest, and possibly a Cistercian monk, was chary of language which inevitably got in the way of what he wanted to say, but accepted it as the best form of communication open to us.
In the evening we shared personal spiritual/religious experiences. None of these had been confined to sensory perceptions, although what was experienced was felt to be objective in seeming to come somehow from ‘outside’ the person. This ‘something’ experienced was described as bigger and more engulfing than ordinary day-to-day experiences. One member said it was as if something other than one’s physical sensory apparatus had been involved. All spoke of having their lives changed by the experience, with discussion on how these experiences could be had by anybody and were unitive in effect – and the pity that they could not be shared more widely.

For our May evening talk this year, Harvey Gillman, outreach secretary for British Quakers and author, spoke on *Mysticism and the Search for the Authentic*. To the words ‘spirituality’ and ‘religion’, he said, he wanted to add the word ‘mysticism’. As a linguist, words are important, but they cannot describe the ineffable. He invited our associations with the words ‘religion’ and ‘spirituality’ – the outcome being a general feeling that ‘religion’ tends to be associated with structure, rigidity and power – the outward; ‘spirituality’ with flexibility and flow – the inner. In contemporary society the interior life can often be lonely: it is difficult to engage with people in a manner of ‘soul to soul’, as opposed to the more common communication which is ‘head to head’. He said he used the word ‘mysticism’ to bring together religion and spirituality with the force that can come from people, living or dead, musicians, artists or from any other walk of life or belief, or from music, art, poetry and nature, in a way that touches on the depths of reality as far as it can. He discussed the numerous ways of playing with words such as theology, religion, spirituality, prayer, contemplation and love, saying that a belief system and careful attention to language are helpful but in the end description of experience is not experience itself. The need was to still the mind to open up to the reception of grace, he himself finding that this approach leads towards joy, serenity and contentment, where all striving ceases – holding this not to be a form of escapism, but giving him the energy to go back into the world.

*John Franklin*

[CDs of these talks are available, from *John Franklin*, 21 Park Vista, Greenwich, London, SE10 9LZ, price £6.00 incl. p&p, cheques payable to *AHS London Group*.]

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**AHS Wales**

We have now had two All Wales Group events, and at the time of writing we are approaching our first Residential Retreat ‘The Centre Point’, to be held at at Llantarnam Abbey, Cwmbran from 17th to 19th September. The AHS Wales Autumn lecture by Dr James Roose-Evans, which was to be held on October 27th in Lampeter, has now been re-scheduled for Spring. See AHS Events list for details. Mini Groups have also been meeting in Bangor, Lampeter, Mid-Wales, Newcastle Emlyn and Swansea, with a new group starting in Pembrokeshire in September. Convenors contact details and Reports from these groups are below.

The most recent All Wales event was held at the Hermitage at Llandewi Brefi on 30th June. During this Day of Meditation and Mandala-making each person experienced, subjectively, a Mandala-like image through Guided Visualisation. We shared our drawings and some quick
improvised research is being done about the experiences. The day started with Roger Coward sharing his discoveries about Tibetan Mandalas and ended with a meditative making of a Group Mandala in the afternoon. Feedback Sheets show the day was very much appreciated.

Mandala-making at the Hermitage at Llandewi Brefi

The Spring Lecture on 25th May, held in Old Hall at Lampeter, was ‘How to become Enlightened with Mandala Practice’ by Dr Tadeusz Skorupski, Director of the Centre of, and Reader in, Buddhist Studies at SOAS, London University, was attended by 34 people, at least half of whom were new to the AHS. The Lecture was clearly based on a huge amount of knowledge and was very well argued. He kept the audience riveted for one and a quarter hours, followed by an extended question time during which he spoke at length about enlightenment. Alas, he said very little about Mandala Practice! CDs (2) of this lecture are available from the AH Library or may be purchased from Roger Coward £7.50 incl. p&p. (address at end of report). Also there is an excellent summary of the lecture by Sheelah James which can be read at:  http://alisterhardysociety.weebly.com/index.html or available on request from Roger Coward.

Local Mandala Mini Group Reports (in alphabetical order):
In general ‘Where one or two are gathered together ...’ makes for an experience of high quality and of friendly intellectual exchange. Numbers may be small but groups are persisting.

Bangor
On July 14th the AHS North Wales group joined together with BUTT (Bangor University Transcending Thought) and SMN (Scientific & Medical Network) to welcome Leanne Halyburton, a medium and life-guide from Holyhead. Under the title ‘Which Came first, Physics or Metaphysics?’ she gave a wide ranging, thought provoking and much appreciated talk. By sharing her own background and experiences Leanne encouraged us all to recognise psychic abilities as being normal and natural, rather than as a gift possessed by only a few. In describing how using our sixth, intuitive, sense gives life more depth (rather than making life easier), Leanne emphasised the potential we all have to utilise the full power of our many levels of consciousness: but in doing so, she says, we do have to accept responsibility for our lives.

As for which did come first, the meeting was concluded with a rephrased question: Which came first, matter or anti-matter? To which the answer came, with a smile, ‘It doesn’t matter’.
The meeting was attended by both students at Bangor University and local people with an interest in matters transcendent and as such it provided a good opportunity to share information about on-going research.

**Mid-Wales**

*Each meeting has included a meditation and a presentation or activity led by one of us and including contributions from members.*

On 24th March 2010 ‘Oneness’ was our theme:

Jonathan Robinson convened and introduced his Grail Celebrations, in particular ‘The Oneness Celebration’ – Celebrating the unity of life and the essential oneness of all that is:

‘We come to celebrate the unity of life:
  life beyond the divisions of the world,
  life beyond the separations of the world,
  life in the fullness and wholeness of the Spirit’

Dr Graham Wilson, who was visiting us, said: ‘I was thinking of “oneness” as a spiritual experience, as described in the AH Archive, and in the questionnaires done by David Hay in 1987 and 2000, showing it to be relatively common. Experiences can be “spontaneous”, or “cultivated” through some form of spiritual practice.’

Roger Coward presented the Alchemical ideas of the Unus Mundus as written about by C. G. Jung. In the *Collected Works* (1963), Volume 14 (‘Mysterium Conjunctionis’) has the most references to this – the Mystery of conjunction, connection and union. Subtitled ‘an inquiry into the separation and synthesis of psychic opposites.’ Jung defines ‘unus mundus’ as ‘the original, non differentiated unity of the world or of Being, the *agnosia* of the Gnostics’ the primordial unconsciousness – the collective unconscious.’ In this Volume he describes the stages in the achievement of psychological Oneness, and says this about the Mandala: ‘The mandala symbolizes, by its central point, the ultimate unity of all archetypes as well as of the multiplicty of the phenomenal world, and is therefore the empirical equivalent of the metaphysical concept of a *unus mundus.*’ (661)

On 2nd May 2010 it was ‘Making our own Mandala’. Roger Coward convened and, after a meditation, led a guided visualization in which we approached our sacred place – up to the door and remaining outside. Bob Murrin had bought some art paper on which we then drew our impression and afterwards shared our work. We then did a second visualization in which we entered our Sacred Place and went through to the Holy of Holies, being aware of any guides and also of personal hindrances. Again, we drew and shared our experiences.

There was a meeting on August 25th – after *De Numine* press date!

**Newcastle Emlyn**

Our mandala meditation sessions could be called ‘Applied Meditation’. Called ‘Thoughtpower’ initially, they were a response to the general feeling of protest and powerlessness in the town, notably about the proposed huge supermarket which put the high street under threat. We invited people to join us in a ‘positive thought experiment’ i.e. to
visualise the positive rather than concentrating on the negative. We felt this was in tune with AHS Mandala project …

(At the latest supermarket protest group before we started, powerlessness was very evident, no one could think what to do next in the face of vested interests.)

Theolyn Cortens introduced the first meeting: ‘… meditation is not just for your personal spiritual development – it will have a ripple effect in the collective consciousness. If you can meditate with a group of like-minded souls, you will experience how much more powerful your divine connection becomes. A group coherence develops that allows the group to use mind power to manifest positive results for the local or global community. Creating a local group, focussed on local change, is a great way to start, as this allows you all to notice the results and get feedback – it really does work.’

We meditated in a room in the middle of town, with kids coming and going in the Smoothie bar downstairs. We were a disparate group, from traditions which included Buddhists, pagans, people who believe in angels, others who visualised dragons. There’s no room here to give a detailed report on our meetings, although we did debrief after meditating together. I hope to present in more detail later on.

It really does appear to work; after our third meeting, ARUP rode into town, commissioned by the County Council to run a workshop, asking the townspeople to come up with ideas of how to spend half a million quid in Newcastle Emlyn! We were given 10 days notice, so this all happened after we started meditating, and we were one of 4 towns chosen from the whole of the county. ARUP then presented our ideas at an exhibition and are applying on behalf of the Council to the Welsh Assembly for money to spend on improving access to the river, clearing and creating river walks etc. People at the ARUP workshop had voted for this; the river, which virtually encircles the town, had been a major presence during our meditations …

Meanwhile the Audit Commission swooped on the CCC planning department, so consent for the monster supermarket project has been delayed …

Can’t prove the connections, but serendipity at least.

**Pembrokeshire**
Will have its first meeting on Wednesday 22nd September at Glanafon, Trecwm. Details from Jennie Annis (Contact cf below)

**Swansea Group**
After a preliminary meeting with Penny Sartori on 26th February, the Swansea Group first started meeting on May 14th in Starbucks Coffee Shop, Morfa, provoking banter about Edwin Starbuck and Moby Dick! Four people attended and three sent apologies and expressions of interest. The meeting was one where acquaintances were made and interests expressed. The hope was expressed that the group would provide fellowship and encouragement in the exchange of ideas, a forum for the exchange of views and that each person could bring something of interest to the meeting to share from a variety of different areas, such as; art, philosophy, dreams, personal experiences, medical/biological research, religious experience research, phenomenology and psychic phenomena. These ideas could be discussed and a record kept to chart development.
Two further meetings were held, on Friday 18th June in Taliesin Coffee bar in the Swansea University, and on September 3rd at Tranquillity House in Brynmawr, Swansea.

Contacts:

Carmarthenshire, Newcastle Emlyn: Patricia Murphy otpaddy@yahoo.co.uk
Cwmbran area: Mary Cook, 07794 294432 maryfrechfa@yahoo.co.uk
Lampeter: Marian MacPolin, 31 Penbryn, Lampeter, SA48 7EU 01570 423799 mmacpolin@yahoo.co.uk
Mid-Wales: Abbeycwmhir, Powys: Roger Coward (see below)
North Wales, Bangor: Keith Beasley University of Wales, Bangor 07760 305636 keith.beasley@bangor.ac.uk
Pembroke: Jennie Annis, Glanafon, Trecwm, Pembs. SA62 5XT 01348 840689 jennie.annis@btinternet.com
Swansea: Patrick Walters, 07598 926560 p.walters@swansea.ac.uk

General Co-Ordinator: Roger Coward (Chair AHS, Wales) Cwm Bedw, Abbeycwmhir, Llandrindod Wells, Powys LD1 6PH. 01597 851929 roger.coward@smartemail.co.uk

Letters to the Editor

Dear Paddy

First, thankyou for including my reviews in the current De Numine. My material aside, I think it’s an excellent issue with so much interesting stuff.

I’ve read Russell’s Global Brain that David reviewed. My only reservation was that I didn’t think it had anything profoundly deep or new to contribute. The idea of Earth as a cooperative physical organism has been well told by Lovelock in his three books on Gaia – which again Dawkins dismisses as nonsense. The idea of collaboration and cooperation being more important than competition in biology is well expressed by Mary Midgley’s Evolution as a Religion (Midgley is a philosopher) and Brian Goodwin’s How the Leopard Changed its Spots (Goodwin, recently deceased, was a biologist).

The idea of collaboration between minds is well covered by Dossey, Radin, Harman, Skolimowski, and many others using different approaches. Having read and been impressed by his early book The Awakening Earth, I was rather disappointed in Russell’s Global Brain. Rather better in my opinion is the collaborative discussion volume The Consciousness Revolution by Laszlo, Grof and Russell.

The books by Bob Murrin and Marianne Rankin look very promising – two more for my reading list I think. I already have a dozen books here waiting for me to read and review. But seeing this pile on my desk I don’t feel in the least intimidated – on the contrary, I feel a frisson of excitement at how much there is sitting there waiting for me to discover and think about.
Apropos synchronicity, which provoked my writing to you specifically, you may already know of the book by physicist David Peat on the subject: *Synchronicity – The bridge between matter and mind*. Not a lot on religion in it specifically, but all about synchronicity and spirituality, in the sense of Hardy’s *Spiritual Nature of Man*. My review is included on Amazon; there was only one other review but with a very different approach from mine.

Then there’s the pot-boiler *Coincidence, A Matter of Chance or Synchronicity* by Brian Inglis from the Arthur Koestler Foundation. I read it when it came out (1990) but I haven’t reviewed it. I think I should. It’s still very relevant.

I don’t have a copy of Jung’s volume of *Synchronicity*, otherwise I could review it for you. I do have two short essays by Jung on synchronicity included in volumes of readings. These have been my sources of Jung’s concept and its interpretation but not much good for you I suspect.

With all good wishes

Howard Jones

Dear Editor (Paddy),

I thank you and the entire team of the Alister Hardy Society for the continuous support you have given me over the past years of my study on ‘cosmic prayer’. In fact, and sadly so, it has been the only positive element of my experience at the University of Wales, Lampeter. It is sad that such is the case because my theme is a timely one. For it envisages a more positive and more spiritual approach in our relationship with the wider creation.

Thank you for publishing my article on ‘A Dying Blackbird and Participation in Cosmic Prayer’. I was sorry you could not print the footnotes, but I understand that this would have occupied some more space. I want to indicate, however, that in my quotation of Matthew 12:6, I myself did not wish to add the verb ‘knowing’. Grammatically the citation does not require it, even though admittedly some extra word seems needed. I try to envisage God as being present, and not as at a distance and knowing about things. As far as I am concerned, there is a greater immediacy to God’s presence than is conveyed by the word ‘knowing’ in its contemporary sense. Christian tradition at its best envisages that there is an abyss that separates God and creation, yet, that there is not the finest (physical) line one would be able to draw between them. Immanence and transcendence, or as the Hindus put it, ‘advaita’, non-duality. Further, I realize you may find it perhaps scandalous, but I did actually stand on top of that overgrown altar near the abbey of Leffe at Dinant. Staying in front of it would have been insufficient. For my prayer did not simply involve my brain, but me entirely, and the wider creation as well (even though off the altar I was closer to the thistles).

With sincerest thanks and best wishes to you all.

Robert Govaerts
Hi Paddy,

Thanks for publishing the Rolling Wave Insights review by Howard Jones in the Spring 2010 issue of *De Numine*. Our website was free when Howard reviewed it, is free now and will continue to be free in the future.

However, from June 17, 2010 to July 3, 2010, we ran an experiment to see what would happen if we charged visitors a fee for entering the website. As we needed to satisfy our website designer, we tried charging visitors, then decided against it. We hope readers who invited new visitors who jumped off the site because of facing a charge will ask them to reconsider. We have a special interest in inviting UK people to check out our site. During each visit, UK people consistently study our website more than twice as long as their US counterparts.

With best regards,

*Ben Korgen*

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To the Editor:

In response to letter from Anne Watkins re possible sexism, *De Numine* Spring 2010 [page 30]:

**Gender**

In every hu-man heart  
from the very start  
Soul’s fire has no fender

Returning to Its start  
pure Soul has no gender  
like God some people say

No hu-man’s built one way  
being both tough and tender  
morphing through many lives  
till husbands make good wives.  
Whether as man or as maid  
love’s laws must be obeyed.  
So make each mistake the mender  
karma soon sent back to sender  
role-play God’s most loving blender

Thanx for all the loving service to the Cause!

*Christopher Gilmore*
Dear Editor,

In response to Anne Watkins’ letter in De Numine of Spring 2010, please let others live their lives and express themselves as they wish. The word ‘mankind’ is not offensive; what is offensive is being told how we should write, talk, and even think. A little tolerance and people-inclusiveness as opposed to gender-inclusiveness, please!

yours sincerely,
A woman, glad and proud to be
(name and address supplied)

Dear Patricia

Thank you for sending me the Spring edition of De Numine. There are many interesting items, but the various contributions on definitions of religion in WebNews reminded me of a poem I discovered during research into religious studies¹. The poem was written by an eighteenth-century Welsh bishop of the Moravian Church, John Gambold. For me, it says it all on the subject of religion. [See page 36 for the poem.]

Yours sincerely
Anne Drysdale.
Lochwinnoch, Renfrewshire


Endnote:

Paul the Octopus v. Richard Dawkins
Paul the Octopus hit the media in a big way when he successfully predicted the result of all seven of Germany’s matches in the World Cup competition in South Africa this year, with wins for Germany in both qualifying matches and play-offs until they lost against Uruguay in the semi-final. Paul also correctly predicted that Germany would win in the play-off for 3rd place in the competition.

So what did Paul predict for the final of the Netherlands against Spain? At the time I was in South India. The Indian national newspaper carried a report before the match was played that Paul had predicted that Spain would win, so I had advance information. Paul was correct! Thank you, Paul.

For those of you who like statistics, the odds, I am told, are 256 to 1 against chance. Clever to choose the World Cup Football Competition to give humankind a message!

Jonathan Robinson
The Chaos of Fatwas,

I have seen evil in the eyes of the subversive fatwas in a time when what is lawful is confused with what is not lawful;

When I unveil the truth, a savage monster comes out of his hiding place; barbaric in thought and action, angry and blind; wearing death as a robe with a belt over it;

He preaches from the platform, with powerful and official authority, terrorizing everyone and targeting those seeking peace; the voice of courage has run for cover: Truth is cornered and silent

Self-preservation prevents us from speaking out.

Hissa Hilal, finalist, Pan Arab poetry competition, April 2010. Translation of complete poem at www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice

... I'm apt to think the man
That could surround the sum of this, and spy
The heart of God and secrets of His Empire,
Would speak but love – with him the bright result
Would change the hue of intermediate scenes
And make one thing of all theology

John Gambold, 18th Century Welsh Bishop

The Great Religions

The
Great religions are the
Ships,
Poets the life
Boats.
Every sane person I know has jumped
Overboard.
That is good for business
Isn’t it
Hafiz?

Hafiz, Persian Sufi poet, 14th Century
(free translation by Daniel Ladinsky)
The Anointing

I lay down the tool of my reason,
watch seasons turn,
and the eagle swoop.

I watch confusion in my mind,
await its silence;
await its clarity.

At the sand-union of earth and sea,
incoming waves anoint my feet.

_Dennis Evans_

Vintage

This is the season of the last fruit,
the harvest that comes at the end.
And last of all the wine.
At its best from the old stem, the oldest vineyards.
Juice of the past.
Dark in the chalice.
With the taste of God’s power,
from the start of time,
given into our veins.
Making the end a beginning.

_Susan Glyn, FRSA_

Remembering Friends:

We would like to extend our sympathy to Professor Ian Parrott, internationally renowned composer and AHS member, on the loss of his wife Jeanne in July this year. Jeanne, also an AHS member, was a talented painter who had exhibited widely and one of her pictures can be seen in the National Library of Wales. She is also represented in the Museum of Modern Art in Machynlleth.
Professor Parrott has made several contributions to _De Numine_, notably copies of correspondence between himself and Sir Alister, and a personal reminiscence.
Jonathan Stedall, Where on Earth is Heaven?

The intriguing question used as the title of this book was first posed more than twenty years ago by the author’s son, then seven years old. To answer it, Jonathan Stedall takes us on a long, meandering journey that explores burning issues of spiritual and earthly existence through an unusually perceptive lens, revealing a profoundly curious mind and a deeply compassionate human being. Stedall’s long career as a distinguished documentary film director who worked for 27 years for the BBC, but also independently, has provided him with a rich store of extraordinary tales of outer and inner adventures, linked to some of the most original minds of the twentieth century. At the same time he is genuinely moved by the humble joys and sufferings of many so-called ordinary people in their daily efforts to find meaning in their lives.

It is essentially an autobiography, but a most unusual one. A chronological thread runs through the book in terms of the author’s outer and inner experiences, his work and travels, encounters and friendships, from his youth to his advancing years, marked by growing insight, inner balance and quiet wisdom. But the primary focus is always more on the people he encountered than on himself, informed by his deeply searching questions and his impressively wide reading, supplemented by a large bibliography.

‘It was spirituality, not religion, which interested me’ (234), he candidly writes, and it is this question of how a spiritual dimension of life manifests itself in the world around us which underlies the whole book. This is a question of great urgency and much resonance for many today, even though England is described as neither secular nor particularly religious.

Stedall admits to an early reading of demanding books, whether by Jung, Steiner, Nietzsche, Tolstoy, Teilhard de Chardin or others. He speaks of Steiner and Jung as two great ‘scientists of the invisible’ (194) and takes us through a maze of questions from philosophy, psychology, spirituality and mysticism to poetry and prose, while also sharing a rich collection of photographs related to the subjects under discussion. The first chapter is woven around a quotation from Gerard Manley Hopkins’s poem ‘As kingfishers catch fire’, and the last chapter concludes with some words from The Cherubinic Wanderer by the German medieval mystic, Angelus Silesius.

It is this deeply spiritual and mystical vision that holds the many parts of this extraordinarily rich and wide-ranging book together. It is about seeing more deeply and more fully into the mysteries of life and the working of the Spirit, whether encountered in nature, people, communities, children, artists, scientists, philosophers, poets and other fellow human beings.

We learn about the author’s early experience in theatre, film and TV, and especially his work for the BBC from 1963 onwards. This gave him wonderful opportunities for making pioneering documentary films, which are discussed in great detail. As a young film maker Stedall was fortunate in meeting John Betjeman whose friendship, help and encouragement he enjoyed for many years. He made several early films with Betjeman, later followed by documentaries on C. J. Jung with Laurens van der Post, on Gandhi, Tolstoy, on the visionary painter Cecil Collins, and later again, on Alan Bennett and the astronomer Bernard Lovell. To each of these personalities and the making of their films he gives one or more vividly written chapters. Several others deal with the life and work of Rudolf Steiner whose
anthroposophical vision has deeply influenced Stedall’s understanding of the universe, of life and human destiny. Chapter 18 is devoted to Steiner’s book *Mysticism at the Dawn of the Modern Age* which deals with well known European mystics; another chapter looks at Steiner’s early work *Christianity as a Mystical Fact*.

Stedall was closely involved with the filming for Ron Eyre’s series *The Long Search* and other documentary series such as *Seven Ages* and *Inner Journeys*, all of them tapping into the mystical traditions of one or the other of the world’s religious traditions. These rich inner journeys were followed by equally rich and diverse outer journeys: by rail, filmed with Mark Tully travelling across Pakistan, with Michael Portillo across Spain, and with Ben Okri travelling from London to Greece. Especially well known is Stedall’s trilogy of films, *Candle on the Hill*, dealing with children in need of care, and also a special village community in North Yorkshire. We learn much about the making of these films, for one of which he won an early British Film Academy Award.

It is impossible to distil the multi-layered, scintillating richness of this book in a brief review. The few glimpses given here must suffice. Hopefully, they will provide readers with a taste of this remarkable example of creative writing, beautifully produced and superbly illustrated, including colour plates of the highest order. It is a massive book of nearly 600 pages which requires much time for reading and reflective thought since it is meant to stimulate the reader’s own inner search and dialogue. I know no other book of such wonderful, lively stories that encompasses a similar depth of personal engagement with a soaring vision, appealing to both young and old. Some may find it too long, but it is never dull or dreary. Moreover, each chapter stands on its own and can be read as an independent essay. Several chapters could be effectively used for teaching and group discussion. While independent, they are also beautifully interconnected since the deeper questions about life’s meaning and the spiritual reality of heaven run through all the chapters like a golden thread.

Apart from its intrinsic narrative quality and historical value with regard to the making of religious and spiritually sensitive films, and its literary appeal to individual readers, this weighty tome possesses considerable general importance since it raises so many fundamental questions about the meaning, purpose and direction of human life, both individually and collectively. Written with much spiritual insight and sensitivity, it eschews all spiritual elitism; in fact, it argues against it since the author firmly believes ‘that if there is a spiritual, as well as physical, evolutionary process at work, then absolutely everyone is part of it’ (340). But will humanity be moving forwards, and what are the considerable obstacles in its path? Considering earlier conflicts between religion and reason, Rudolf Steiner is quoted as seeing a still greater conflict to come, where humanity might have to struggle against the sub-human elements in modern technological developments. Stedall wonders therefore ‘how are we to live with modern technology in a way that prevents it undermining our essential humanity?’ (235). He contemplates the pattern and signature of human life as it unfolds, the ‘enduring melody’ in Michael Mayne’s aptly turned phrase, embedded in continuous questing in our inner and outer lives, and in the questioning of ourselves.

This pattern of questing runs right to the end of the book. The last two chapters deal with ‘Dying and Becoming’, and ‘Heaven and Earth’, discussing among others the search for a global humanitarian movement, compassion and eternal life, love as harmony made conscious, the meaning of Christ’s sacrifice as interpreted by Rudolf Steiner, and the need for a profound cultural shift to counteract the spiritual and moral bankruptcies of our age. The ultimate challenge is the choice between either harmony or conflict. To stay connected we
must urgently give more thought to matters of spiritual existence and ‘harness the energies of love’ of which Teilhard de Chardin speaks.

This is a book of hope, of vision and encouragement. The richness of its texture, the sharpness of its questions and its search for meaning and interconnections can inspire all of us, but especially the young, to search and find a sense of purpose, of dedication and concern for others.

Reviewed by Professor Ursula King
(previously published in The Tablet)

Scott Wright, *Oscar Romero and the Communion of the Saints*

This is a book that lets one focus on the core values of Christian faith and living: namely, faith, hope, love, and justice. The cover design shows Archbishop Romero dressed in a white garment, against a plain white background. Although it is not spelled out by the author, it brings immediately to mind the vision described in the Book of Revelation, of a great multitude standing in front of the throne of God and the Lamb, clothed in white garments, who have come out of the great tribulation and washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 7:9-14). This book has been very welcome to me in a time when the media discloses revelations of another sort, namely of numerous priests and bishops that have, as it were, stained their garments and priesthood with the suffering inflicted on others.

The author has a personal experience of El Salvador and its people during the years of the war. My impression is that he has been able to give a reliable account of Romero’s life and of his significance, locally and globally. It is thereby not a soulless account, but written with a great love for Romero and the countless Salvadoran martyrs. The book consists of several small chapters, with many photographs. It contains many eye-witness accounts of various people, including those of the liberation theologians Jon Sobrino and Gustavo Gutiérrez, and lets Romero speak himself through his sermons and his four Pastoral Letters.

Romero was himself from a poor background, yet, he managed to enter the seminary and he was sent to study in Rome. He became a priest with a very traditional outlook who kept wearing his black cassock. Back in El Salvador, he aimed to keep both the rich and the poor as friends. His first episcopal appointment was as a secretary to the other bishops, which kept him to some extent distanced from the reality of the poor. As Romero described later himself, in his next appointment as bishop of the Diocese of Santiago de María that included his hometown Ciudad Barrios, he was confronted anew with the undeniable fact of the extreme poverty of the peasants, exploited by the rich landowners and by the military dictatorship. Romero was taking all this in, yet he was still not ready to make a commitment to the poor. Testimony from a priest who helped organize catechetical training centres for the oppressed when they began to organize themselves, states: ‘[Monseñor Romero] couldn’t just take a stand and move on it. … any time that I or anyone else mentioned Medellín to him, the man would get so nervous … the corner of his lip would start trembling.’ (Medellín in Colombia was the place where the Latin American bishops’ meeting took place in 1968. Two key words at Medellín were ‘liberation’ and ‘participation’.) Another witness describes that when Rome was searching for a new Archbishop of San Salvador, the papal nuncio ‘consulted with the
government, the military, the business sector, and the ladies of society. They asked the rich, and the rich gave their complete backing to Romero’s appointment.’

The event that sealed Romero’s change of heart was the murder of the Jesuit priest Rutilio Grande, whom he had admired, and who had worked for the creation of grassroots church communities. This event happened just a few weeks after Romero became archbishop, and it is generally believed that in front of the corpse of Grande, Romero’s eyes were opened, not unlike the experience of Paul on the way to Damascus. The new archbishop, at 59, became as a new person. He chose resolutely and courageously to side with the poor. He would only be archbishop for three years, but during that time he became an inspiration throughout the world for his life and preaching in accordance with the teachings of Vatican II and Medellin.

The day before his murder was the fifth Sunday of Lent. Romero ended his sermon that day with an appeal to the military: ‘I beseech you, I beg you, I command you in the name of God: ‘Stop the repression!’’ Romero was shot during Mass on 24 March 1980. At his funeral over 200,000 people attended, who gathered in front of the cathedral. The military and the police fired shots into the crowds and several were killed thereby as well as in the panic that ensued.

Many of the photographs I find very impressive. The book is worth it for these alone, though some are quite distressing. A good number of the pictures are by Octavio Duran, a Salvadoran Franciscan who accompanied Romero on many travels. I mention here just two pictures. One is taken during the funeral mass of Father Rutilio Grande. A huge crowd is gathered in the cathedral; Archbishop Romero is in the midst of it, a few meters behind the altar, surrounded by his clergy. A priest is reading from the altar. Romero stares in front of him. As he said later to the Jesuit provincial: ‘When I saw Rutilio dead, I thought, ‘If they killed him for what he was doing, it’s my job to go down that same road…” So yes, I changed. But I also came home again.’ The other picture is that of Romero sitting in his humble dwelling in a white cassock a few weeks before his martyrdom. The picture shows serenity, yet also conviction, determination, awareness of what is to come, and faith.

Unreservedly recommended.

Reviewed by Robert Govaerts

Michael Meacher, Destination of the Species: The riddle of human existence

This book is an exploration of often mutually exclusive and even contradictory opinions as to the purpose of human existence – explanations offered by religion and humanism, and by scientific rationalism or ideological belief. The author will already be known to most readers in Britain as someone who served as a junior minister under Prime Ministers Harold Wilson and James Callaghan.

As the author says at the outset, there is really only one fundamental question: is human existence just the result of fortuitous and meaningless random interactions of totally disinterested chemical molecules, or is it part of an overarching plan generated by some cosmic force that many regard as deity, and of which humankind is an essential and integral part? Most scientists, though with many exceptions, would subscribe to the former worldview. Followers of one of the world’s many religions, though again with some exceptions, would believe in the alternative. Chapter 1 tells us that, either way, our worldview is likely
to be no more than an emotional belief that we hold from social indoctrination rather than rational assessment, and so is philosophically suspect as ‘truth’.

Chapter 2 explores systematically several models for the origins of the universe: the infinite eternal universe of Bondi and Gold; the finite, eternal (?) universe of Hartle and Hawking; a finite but meaningless universe as postulated by David Hume; the finite but necessary universe of Steven Weinberg; the finite, created universe of Alexandr Friedmann and Georges Lemaître that originated in the Big Bang; and finally, the universe designed and created by God such that humankind would eventually be able to emerge – the Anthropic Principle of Brandon Carter – and that’s quite a comprehensive overview. Chapter 3 examines how our environment is fine-tuned for human life. There are many physical parameters that define our environment, some of which are called the ‘natural constants’. If any of these had taken even slightly different values, human life as we know it could not have evolved, though some conditions might permit other kinds of life forms. These, and all following chapters, conclude with a helpful short section on implications of the material discussed in the chapter.

Chapter 4, ‘The Evolution of the Universe’, takes up the theme of the last chapter. Meacher explores how the laws of physics come to be as they are, and we get into some substantial, but quite readable, cosmology. However, some familiarity with developments in physics and cosmology over the past few decades is a decided advantage here to ease the reader through, for this leads on to an examination of the hypotheses concerning ‘The Origin of Life’ (Chapter 5) and ‘The Evolution of Life Forms’ (Chapter 6). I was glad to see that these chapters include a mention of some possible, but not widely held theories, such as the idea that the origin of life was enhanced by the catalytic role of inorganic silicate clay minerals like montmorillonite, originally suggested by A.G. Cairns-Smith in Glasgow in the 1960s.

The experiments of J. B. S. Haldane in 1929 and of Harold Urey and colleagues in the 1950s (though the latter is not mentioned by name) are described, as is the complexity theory of contemporary biologist Stuart Kauffman. This last has become the dominant theory amongst biologists like Richard Dawkins. It is suggested that molecules have the propensity within themselves to organize into larger molecules that may, given sufficient eons of time, grow themselves into polymers like proteins and nucleic acids. Haldane and Urey succeeded in creating amino acids, the building blocks of proteins, from simple inorganic molecules that were believed to be constituents of Earth’s early atmosphere. It’s still a very long way from creating a few amino acids to building them into a complex protein. However, the current view is that such an improbable sequence of events as the origin of life need only have happened just once, and that all living forms have continually evolved from this ever since, a view that Meacher describes here.

Following on logically from the evolution of life, we are then presented with ‘The Advent of the Human Species’ (Chapter 7) and, in the following two chapters, a discussion of our unique propensity for thought and spirituality. There’s a good summary of hominid evolution here. The classification of geological and biological evolution follows the ideas of dinosaur palaeontologist Robert Bakker using Megadynasties; interestingly, the highly speculative suggestion by Canadian researchers Dale Russell and Ron Seguin of the possibility of ‘intelligent dinosaurs’ is also mentioned here. The author suggests that convergence towards intelligent life-forms was quite probably inevitable, but seems to attach perhaps rather too much importance to the ‘intelligent dinosaurs’ hypothesis. There is no suggestion however that evolution was planned or designed, and Meacher clearly endorses the idea of the emergence of biological complexity by wholly natural processes. I’m not convinced by the argument in this section that Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle has to do
with our difficulties in understanding the complexities of consciousness; Bohr and de Broglie’s wave-particle complementarity may be more relevant. Gödel’s Incompleteness Theorem – essentially, that we cannot fully understand any system from within – may also be relevant here: we are using our consciousness to try to understand our consciousness!

I liked the author’s emphasis on the importance of the Axial Age, as Karl Jaspers calls it, when the mystical prophets of eastern and middle-eastern religion and the rationalists of ancient Greece came to emphasize that the most important focus of human life should be, not on ritual, but on living morally for oneself and others.

The final part of the book assesses this wealth of information. Chapter 11 ‘The Issue of Purpose’ presents arguments, in a very professional philosophical way, for and against teleology in human evolution. The late appearance of humankind in Earth’s history and the near extinction of life-forms more than once weigh against design. On the other hand, we have the fine tuning of the natural constants, the organic network of the Earth as Gaia, and cooperation being apparently more important in evolution than competition as factors favouring design.

Many of the more popular theories that I am familiar with on these subjects seem to be mentioned in this wide-ranging book. The final chapter ‘Who Then Are We?’ does not solve the riddle of human existence, but the wealth of material presented here makes a strong case that the most probable scenario must embrace something from both of the extreme positions of religious fundamentalism and scientism. As for the destination of the species, the author’s view is as logical a possibility as many others. The book concludes with a Glossary of technical terms and a list of References relevant to each chapter.

Dr Howard A. Jones

Three Reviews on Near-death Experiences and Afterlife Beliefs:


*Evidence of the Afterlife* is a break-through book in the area of afterlife research in general and near-death studies in particular. Not only is Jeffrey Long a careful scholar, but he and Jody Long have amassed the largest collection of near-death experiences (NDEs) ever. Their collection also includes the largest group of non-English-speaking NDEs ever.

When it comes to research, there is no substitute for data! My own near-death book, *Visions of God from the Near Death Experience*, is fairly typical with 75 of my own cases plus accounts from other sources. Near-death books generally range from one case study to a little over 100 cases, but Dr. Long’s book is based on over 1,300 cases from the www.nderf.org website. His book especially focuses on 613 respondents who completed the most current edition of the Near-Death Research Foundation survey, in addition to giving their personal account of their near-death experience. Dr. Long’s scale included questions to detect fraudulent accounts, but over the past 10 years, he reported less than 10 false accounts.

Based on his research, Dr. Long concludes, ‘NDEs provide such powerful scientific evidence that it is reasonable to accept the existence of an afterlife.’ He goes on to offer nine ‘proofs’ of
afterlife, including 1) Lucid Death (respondents report increased alertness and consciousness), 2) Out-of-Body Experiences (respondents provide evidence from verifiable experiences), 3) Blind Sight (respondents blind from birth report a form of ‘vision’ during their NDEs), 4) Impossibly Conscious (respondents report experiences while under anesthesia), 5) Perfect Play-back (respondents report life reviews that include experiencing the feelings of others), 6) Family Reunion (respondents report seeing dead relatives, including people unknown to them who were identified to them later by viewing family photographs), 7) From the Mouths of Babes (respondents who are children have every NDE element of older respondents, and this is true whether the account is told during childhood or from an adult who had the experience in childhood), 8) Worldwide Consistency (respondents who are non-English-speakers from Dr. Long’s database form the largest collection of cross-cultural NDEs and provide evidence that NDEs are the same all over the world), and 9) Changed Lives (respondents report that their lives are changed as a result of their NDE, and the majority report a change for the better).

Dr. Long concludes that the evidence convinces him that afterlife exists. I think the general population will agree with him, but my personal opinion is that most skeptics will require proof from physics on how God communicates with us, how consciousness survives death, and where the dimension of reality that is afterlife is located. Nevertheless, the evidence for afterlife is much stronger because of Dr. Long’s massive amount of data and his analysis of it. This book is a ‘must-read’ for all who are interested in the scientific study of afterlife.

This review previously appeared on the Amazon website


This book commemorates research into near-death experience (NDE) since the publication of Raymond Moody’s classic book *Life After Life* in 1975. Its content is based on material presented at the International Association of Near-Death Studies (IANDS) Conference at M. D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, Texas, in 2006.

The editors, who form a near-death studies’ ‘dream team’ are: Bruce Greyson, M.D., professor of psychiatry and Director of the University of Virginia Medical School’s Division of Perceptual Studies (the premiere center for scientific research into life after death); Jan Holden, Ed.D., Professor of Counselling at the University of North Texas and Interim Chair of the Department of Counseling and Higher Education and an expert in all research done on NDEs since 1877; Debbie James, R. N., Senior Instructor of Nursing at the University of Texas; M. D. Anderson Nursing Education Department who has orchestrated almost all of the IANDS conferences ever held.

Normally a book that is based on a conference is simply a collection of the papers presented. However, this handbook of NDEs is much more cohesive and coherent due to the extensive editing and consolidation of the topics. The editors have successfully presented the exhaustive data in a logical and smooth, readable style.

The first chapter covers scientific NDE research for the past 150 years. The second chapter is a presentation of pleasurable adult NDEs, followed by a chapter on after-effects of pleasurable NDEs.
In my opinion, Chapter 4 on distressing NDEs is one of the most important in the book. Its author, Nancy Evans Bush, is the world’s foremost expert on the ‘dark side’ of NDE, and she has data! In her analysis of 21 studies (N = 1,828), 9 of the studies had no distressing NDEs, but the other 12 had a 23% rate of distressing NDEs. One of her blockbuster findings is that—not just ‘evil’ people—but anyone can face a ‘time of trial.’ In this sense, the distressing NDE mimics the ordeals mentioned in the afterlife and mystical experiences of the world’s religions.

Chapter 5 deals with NDEs of Western children and teenagers. This is followed by Chapter 6 on Western NDE characteristics.

In Chapter 7 on non-Western NDEs, Allan Kellehear argues that the ‘tunnel’ sensation and ‘life review’ are not universal, although encountering deceased and/or supernatural beings is. The main problem with this material is that (with the exception of the Chinese and Indian data that do include a ‘life review’), the numbers for hunter-gatherer societies are miniscule and, in some instances, whole cultures are represented by a single case study.

Chapter 8 on world religions and the NDE is a treasure with its author, Farnaz Masumian, comparing the NDE with seven of the world’s religions. Masumian quotes chapter and verse from the Holy Books of these religions to show their similarity and, occasionally, minor differences regarding afterlife and the NDE.

Chapter 9 covers veridical perception and NDEs. Jan Holden reviews the modern literature on apparently non-physical veridical perception (AVP). Holden notes that attempts to place targets in hospitals for NDErs to see during their out-of-body experiences have, to date, been unsuccessful; however, the sheer volume of AVP anecdotes described by a number of authors over the last 150 years suggests that the AVP is real (p. 197).

Chapter 10 deals with explanatory models of NDEs and is written by Bruce Greyson, Emily Williams Kelly, and Edward Kelly. They offer a mountain of data to counter the claims of skeptics. They also point out that, in many cases, the skeptics have only ‘explanations.’ In virtually all cases, the authors counter with data.

The final chapter deals with practical applications of research on NDEs and is written with medical personnel, mental health personnel, and chaplains in mind.

This book is a ‘must-read’ for anyone who is interested in the facts about research into NDEs.


This book introduces after-life beliefs and after-life experiences from a variety of Indian tribes in the United States and Canada. In his well-written collection of anecdotes, folktales, and first-hand accounts, Jefferson finds a recurring belief in reincarnation. Like Hinduism and Buddhism, these reincarnation accounts describe an intermediate state that exists between death and re-birth. Interestingly, Jefferson also includes an important contrast between the North American and Eastern views: where the ultimate goal of Eastern religions is to escape the cycle of death and re-birth, the American Indian stories illustrate an eagerness to be reincarnated, especially within one’s own tribe or family.
Jefferson draws parallels with the religions of the world, including accounts of paradise and punishment, as well as reunions with dead loved-ones and stories which resemble the Orpheus myth.

In gathering this material from a diverse collection of tribes, Jefferson has made a rare and valuable contribution to the fields of comparative religion, afterlife research, and religious experience.

Reviewed by Ken R. Vincent, Ed.D.

Michael Berman, *Shamanic Journeys Through the Caucasus*

This is an account of a journey through the troubled and fascinating region of the Caucasus written on the basis of papers and books, mostly published in the last ten years. The area is a crossroads between Asia and Europe. Circa 300AD, the countries embraced Christianity. The populations are still clannish, today maybe Orthodox Christian, Muslim or Jewish, and all suffered a period under the Soviets when every attempt was made to eradicate any sort of religion. Since they have become independent states again some have been embroiled in bitter wars and territorial disputes in which the Russians have again shown their muscle.

The author examines the possible shamanic origins of beliefs in the region through the medium of folk tales, selecting one from each country. Folk tales may have been thought of as true when they first appeared or they may not. We don’t know. The style of the stories is magical realism.

Scattered throughout the book are comments and observations, drawn from the tales, illustrating different aspects of shamanic thought. In Armenia nature worship may have developed into polytheism. In the folk tale for this country the author says that the shaman deconstructs the polarity of life and death and that shamanism was a pre-scientific form of psychotherapy. The numbers three and seven frequently appear and are sacred. The former immediately made me think of the Trinity.

In Chechnya and Ingushetia the people are now mainly Muslim. There is an extended family system – like the mafia – and a great emphasis on hospitality. Their story shows that if we attack our fears in non-ordinary reality we are better able to cope with them. Azerbaijan still contains a few Zoroastrians. This country’s story illustrates the shaman acting as a bridge or link between parties facilitating the changing of conditions without violent social disruption and also as a diviner who believes that the whole universe is interconnected.

Georgia and Abkhazia think of themselves as European, and were probably originally matriarchial societies. Shape shifting appears in their folklore as well as, again, emphasis on the numbers three and seven. North Ossetia is Christian with a large Muslim minority and Daghestan, Muslim. There is Zoroastrian influence in the folk tales analysed for these regions, while the number seven may refer to the seven planets that were originally known.

In conclusion the author says that though apparently the populations are all now mainstream monotheists, pagan practices are still very widespread and their folklore shows the influence of shamanic ideas.
This was an interesting read though I would have preferred the observations and comments on shamanism to be described more fully in one chapter, as well as throughout the book, and an attempt made to define shamanism more concisely. A map of the region would have also been helpful.

Reviewed by Neil Hancox


This book is an interesting read. It explores questions such as: ‘What is healing?’ ‘What is the nature of God?’ ‘What is our relationship to the world?’ And ‘How should we act within it?’ By drawing on his personal experience and that of those who tried the hallucinogenic brew San Pedro, the author unfolds some of the mystery around its sacred use among a group of shamans in Peru who have known and used this visionary cactus for millennia.

San Pedro is described here as a ‘plant teacher’ (a term used also to describe the effects of other psychotropic plants such as ayahuasca) because it can not only heal a variety of adverse diseases, but also ‘teach’ spiritual seekers how to find their path in life. Very little research work has been done on this until now and scientific evidence on the healing potential of San Pedro is still very limited.

The book is structured in a way that helps the reader to gradually move away from a Western framework and gain new insights on Andean understanding of health and well-being. Fundamental to the latter is a more comprehensive view of embodiment. The body is considered here ‘not as a discrete and self-contained system but that we are made of, and respond to, emotional, psychological, and social factors as well as physical processes’. The importance of a more spiritual attitude towards life is also well emphasized throughout the book. Chapter 8, in particular, deals with psychosomatic medicine. It analyses in a virtually unique way how the mind-body connection works from a San Pedro healing perspective. It explains how this powerful hallucinogenic drug (or ‘plant of the Gods’, as Juan Navarro, an Andean shaman, likes to call it) heals by changing the ‘mind’ (intended as ‘world view’) of those attending the shamanic ceremony.

The mythology around the hummingbird, which also gives the title to this book, is also quite fascinating. The little bird is represented as a symbol of love, beauty, and sweetness, and ultimately a manifestation of God. The hummingbird is also the guardian of the plant San Pedro, because of the joy and light it brings.

Although some parallels with other studies in related fields are provided, Heaven does not mention lucid dreaming or near-death research, which could help to explore in more depth some features of the San Pedro experiences such as their sense of realness.

In conclusion, this book provides an excellent basis from which to explore further approaches to health and healing, as well as the nature and traditional use of psychedelic compounds.

Reviewed by: Ornella Corazza


In this work, Greenwood sets out to reclaim magical consciousness from its denigrated status as bizarre, irrational and outgrown. In her first book (2000) Greenwood explored both the more formal, hierarchical systems of ‘High Magic’ (drawing on such practices as astrology, Kabbalah and tarot from Renaissance hermeticism and the modern occult revival), and the more informal, nature oriented, democratic systems of modern witchcraft or Paganism. Whilst drawing attention to the potential for the abuse of power in the former and so-called ‘bitchcraft’ in the latter, she argues that magic can be an effective force for personal and social transformation. Whilst clearly distinguishing the two magical traditions, Greenwood accepts the academic view that modern Paganism is largely a reconstruction influenced by the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. She has a clear preference for Paganism in her own experiential investigation, which unfortunately leaves High Magic and other systems such as Chaos Magic largely unexplored. However, her argument is that magical consciousness is a universal participatory state that has been undermined and undervalued since the scientific revolution. By describing this state as ‘participatory’ Greenwood seeks to emphasise the experience of inter-relatedness with nature and society, be it material or spiritual that is a core component of magical consciousness. Participation is transformative and results in feelings of personal connectedness, empathy and the dissolution of bodily boundaries. It is characterised by intuitive, altered states of consciousness (ASCs), the language of holism, metaphors of emotion and poetry, an inspired or animistic worldview, and knowledge or wisdom transmitted within myth and story. Magical thinking, says Greenwood, is analogical, abstract and acausal, and therefore can be juxtaposed with the logical, reductive, causal mode of thinking upheld by science and modern Western culture. As such, magical thinking is no less natural or prevalent than logical modes of thought and has much in common with Jung’s (1972) concept of synchronicity.

The insider/outsider approach of participant observation that Greenwood takes can be a controversial one within academia; it risks sacrificing the objectivity of the observer, who is traditionally supposed to be detached and impartial. It may even risk degeneration into ‘experience for experience’s sake’ if not undertaken within specific guidelines and for a stated purpose. However, Greenwood cites examples of anthropologists, such as Edith Turner, who have taken this risk and gained original insights as a result. Greenwood handles this dilemma well and clearly distinguishes her personal experiences from her academic commentary. On a personal note the relevance and importance of the first-person element does resonate with the reader. For example, the role of myth is exemplified by Greenwood’s description of the Wild Hunt challenge in a Norwich wood. During this challenge the forces of elemental nature, as represented by Herne the hunter, are encountered and incorporated into one’s own experience during a night walk. This recalls my own experience at university when I used to challenge myself to walk through the woods at night and brave a stone-lined tunnel leading to what was known as ‘the amphitheatre’. Student myth associated it with the infamous magician Aleister Crowley. I subsequently discovered that this mysterious place was nothing more magical than a disused fern garden. However, the point is that it was experiences like these that led to my own interest in magic and spiritual experiences.
There are a few minor criticisms that can be made about Greenwood’s conception of magical consciousness. It is not entirely clear how magical consciousness is being defined and characterised. The examples given, whilst clearly describing experiences of interconnectedness with nature, do not differ greatly from other accounts of religious or non-religious experiences involving nature (Hardy, 1979; Dawkins, 2006). There does not seem to be anything that is uniquely magical about these experiences except that they happen within the context of magical beliefs and practices. Therefore, it is not immediately apparent that ‘magical consciousness’ is a distinct type of ASC; Greenwood clearly shows that magic can lead to the same types of experiences that other religious or non-religious traditions do. Neither is it entirely clear how, or if, magical thinking differs from magical consciousness and whether or not this is a specific, discrete state or an ongoing interaction (akin to Maslow’s (1970) peak and plateau experiences respectively). It would also be interesting to know whether magical consciousness can have negative consequences. For example, Janine Chapman’s (1993) experience of Golden Dawn magic initially resulted in disintegration of her personality and abandonment of the magical path for a number of years before she was able to pick up the pieces and start over. In her final chapter, Greenwood refers to the concepts of the multi-modal framework of Geoffrey Samuel, the ‘organic vision’ of Henri Bortoft, and the ‘ideation’ and ‘abduction’ of Gregory Bateson, in an attempt to construct a more inclusive model of science. This interesting and important section seems somewhat abstract and would benefit from some specific examples to clarify the implications for science.

Overall, this fascinating and important book attempts to reinstate magical thinking and experience into a natural context in modern Western society. It helps to fill a gap in the academic exploration of spiritual experience in Western magical thought previously only tackled by a few writers such as Ariel Glucklich (1997), Tanya Luhrmann (1989) and Emma Wilby (2005). The conclusion, that magical consciousness is both a natural and universal part of being human, is a challenge and an inspiration for further study.

Reviewed by Michael J. Rush

Bibliography:
Chapman, J.  1993  *Quest For Dion Fortune*, Samuel Weiser, York Beach.
Mark Townsend begins this account of his spiritual journey from his membership of ‘an eccentric little Pentecostal church’ during his late teens, membership he undertook with such enthusiasm his friends called him ‘a Jesus freak’. Disillusionment soon set in however, as he could not be satisfied with answers to his many questions being presented as ‘bible text solutions’. He decided to seek further enlightenment in the Holy Land, which he did by working on a Kibbutz, and was overwhelmed by what he calls the enchantment, mystery and magic of the holy sites where he claims to have received ‘the gift of re-enchantment’, and returned home with ‘a hunger for mystery and enchantment’. The frequent use of the word ‘enchantment’ towards the end of the first chapter foreshadows much of the rest of the book: Mark Townsend is led by his emotions to seek and follow whatever dazzles most brightly for him, and he is too impulsive to look before he leaps, or to react other than with hurt and lack of understanding when his audiences, and later his congregations, do not find his latest dazzle attractive.

Seeing the spire of a church inspired him to seek ordination in the Anglican priesthood, and he introduced into this rôle conjuring demonstrations, intending, by creating illusions, and thus proving that things are not always what they seem, to induce his parishioners to think more deeply about their perception of reality. For him, there was never any suggestion, or even hint of demonic influence in what he called magic; always it was enchantment in its purest sense, the enchantment with the natural world that enables us to open our eyes properly, and really see, to be open to visionary experiences. This is a concept familiar to Alister Hardy Society members, especially those of us who are familiar with the Archive, but Mark Townsend was not able to convince some of the long-standing members of traditional Anglican congregations that this was all his ‘magic’ was about, and they became very angry and upset at what they saw as intimations of witchcraft and sorcery in their churches. He seemed unable even to try to understand this, and felt hard done by, persecuted, misunderstood. In spite of this he lasted ten years in the Anglican Church, and his unconventional ministry had been of much comfort to some outside the Church who longed for its rituals at particular mile-stones in their lives. He most willingly conducted weddings and funerals in ways other priests could not agree to, and was clearly heartened by the appreciation this brought him. The empathy he showed to the outsiders did not however extend to those already within the Church; he lacked understanding of and patience with those to whom the traditional practices and rules of the Church were most important. ‘It is within and through our inner woundedness and brokenness – rather than our success and perfections – that we truly find [the] light of deity’, he writes – but he could not see the wounds and brokenness of the church-goer who was so very upset and angry at finding a cat’s funeral being conducted in church.

It is not surprising that a man so impulsive and all too often tunnel-visioned as Mark Townsend had many domestic troubles as well as more public criticism than he could handle, and there are many emotional outpourings of woe in this book, many taken from his diary without sufficient care in the selection: ‘I write because I am always chattering in my head’, he says at one point, and all too often this continual and undisciplined ‘chatter’ overlies and obscures what he has to say.

After his break with Anglicanism he found himself drawn to the spirituality in nature worship, though never in the course of this book does he abandon the concept of the monotheistic Creator God, rather, he widens it after the nature-based epiphanies of God, e.g.
'The Earth is our Mother and the Sky is our Father’. He realises mythological interpretation is more true for him than literal interpretation of the Bible: ‘I have grown to see [the Incarnation] as a symbol of what already is, as if there is a hidden divinity to humankind itself’.

Part 2 of the book describes his explorations into nature-based spiritualities which the raven symbolises. Ravens’ feathers are black with a blue sheen, which can suggest they are blue when they fly against the light, and in many cultures ravens are a symbol of transformation; ‘She is my soul calling me home’, he writes. This exploration soon convinced Mark Townsend that he had found his way forward: ‘… it was the same quest for enchantment, but I instinctively felt I had found a new path on which to travel – as if someone had turned on the lights. I’d opened a door in a magical old wardrobe and was about to walk through. The raven spirit was beginning to stir!’

Being at last free of the need to conform to and obey the rules of a church, Mark Townsend flourished and was especially attracted to Druidry: ‘The type of magical experience Druidry fosters … is the type of experience you get when you trek out into the wilds of nature and you are overwhelmed with a feeling of awe that has nothing to do with owning or getting anything … For many modern Druids magic is what life is – and to be fully immersed or plugged into the flowing energy of life on this enchanted planet is how living a magical life is understood’. I should have found this section of the book interesting and worthwhile had it not been marred by more self-pitying emotional outpourings, either from his journal or his ‘conversation’ with God or Merlin: ‘Please God – what have I done? Why is it like this? Why do I have to live inside of such misery? I’m breaking up here … I need help … I need help … what do I do?’

Most of the book’s third and last part consists of accounts of the experience of various nature-based spiritualities by others who have found what they need there – Celtic Christian, Christo-Druid, Pagan-Druid and American Indians and Celts. I found these accounts informative and interesting and I hope Mark Townsend has found help in following his own path from them. He goes in with an open mind, seeing the role of both Church and nature-based/pagan religions ‘as being about awakening folk to their hidden inner divinity rather than converting them’, and ‘part of the problem with the Christian myth is that we’re taught to literalize so much of it. … Druidry is a mythic path for me – as is Christianity. And I can hold them both together so long as I don’t literalize them’.

Reviewed by Janet Leythorne

Steve Nolan, Film, Lacan and the Subject of Religion: A Psychoanalytic Approach to Religious Film Analysis

In recent editions of De Numine (Autumn 2009 & Spring 2010), as in many previous issues, the book reviews are of a wide variety, mostly and appropriately having one theme in common: spirituality or religious/spiritual experience.

This book, in as far as it is concerned with religion, rather belongs to the school of reductionist approaches, viewing religious identity and its formation through psychoanalytic theory and methodology. Nolan constructs a complex methodology for the parallel exploration (explanation?!) of the roles of film and liturgy in the creation of identity through a ‘return to Lacan’: a revival of the Screen’s psychoanalytic approach to film.
True to the often cited requirement that any critical work on the combination of the subjects of film and religion has to be careful to treat film as such rather than to force on it the categories and methodologies of religion, the author’s starting and focal point is the so-called Screen problematic – the psychoanalytic film theory initialised and developed in the film journal Screen during the 1960’s and 1970’s. Nolan does not so much focus on religious themes or reading in films as on the possibility to parallel both film and liturgy as representational media involving the audience in an unconscious participation leading to the creation or re-enforcement of their own identity. He builds up his argument by firstly reviewing a broad spectrum of the recent approaches to religious film analysis, then offering comparative definitions of film and liturgy as representational media. From this point he proceeds to review the psychoanalytic film theory and in this context to recap the central theories of Lacan, working out especially those analytical insights which can relate to an unconscious working of the representational media in their spectators. Finally Nolan brings the threads together in an application of his theory to a range of films, either with or without explicit religious content.

Any aspect of life concerned with human experience can of course be considered from the perspective of psychoanalysis and Nolan’s reasoning and conclusions follow a clear, logical line within his chosen limits. Psychoanalysis as a discipline based on observation and study of the cases of actual people brings a certain depth to the application of its theories to fields such as film analysis. However I was disappointed in the gaping lack of any actual audience research in this work. Unsurprisingly Nolan only mentions Martin Barker, who made an urgent appeal for more audience research in film analysis (Barker 2001), in passing, not heeding this important theme at all.

The dimension of psychoanalysis in this book makes it a challenge to readers, such as myself, who are less conversant with this subject, because the author assumes a good knowledge of the discipline’s terminology and general theory. While this lack may make me a less competent critic of this aspect of Nolan’s approach, as a student of religious / spiritual experience and someone who is interested in furthering the acknowledgement of the validity of it, I want to point out the complete omission of this dimension here. Nolan bases his theories solely around a very specific aspect of religion: the liturgy and hierarchy of priests of the Roman Catholic Church, and combines this with a rather traditional view of psychoanalysis. As an approach within his well-defined and limited scope this is viable and certainly interesting. He also offers many good and thought-provoking critiques of various approaches to religious film analysis in the first part of his book, and, unlike some other authors in the field, he does give several, varied film readings applying his methodology. However to students of religious experience the reductionist attitude of equalling for example the representation of a film star in a film to that of a priest celebrating the Eucharist, completely ignoring the spiritual dimension of his act, may not sufficiently plumb the depth of the possibilities of our experience.

Nolan’s book has been called ‘provocative’ and that it certainly is. It shows us one specific way to look at film and an aspect of religion, the liturgy of the RC Church, essentially boiling it all down to the psychoanalytic theory that all we are is basically derived from repressed desires: ‘Jealousy…the archetype of all social feeling’ (Lacan 1938/ 1988). This provokes in me the memory of David Hay’s conclusion that relational consciousness – the altruistic impulse forms the ‘bedrock of spirituality’ (Hay with Nye, 1998), and thus poses the question of how these two views could possibly be reconciled.

So if you brave the challenging jungle of psychoanalytic terminology and theory you may find many provocative interpretations here to begin a new debate!

Reviewed by Karen Asmuss
Roger Straughan, *A Study in Survival*

This book is sub-titled ‘Conan Doyle Solves the Final Problem.’ The author, Dr Roger Straughan, has taught philosophy and was Reader in Education at Reading University. He has previously published books on, among other themes, science and the ethics of genetic engineering, and basic issues in moral, personal and social education. He is also an avid reader of the works of Conan Doyle, having a six foot long shelf of the latter’s works, and he is a dog lover; both facts are germane to his book. Conan Doyle was a man of many parts – doctor, ophthalmologist, sportsman, campaigner etc. and in the last decade or so of his life an exponent of evidence for the survival of the human spirit or soul after death. In his fictional writings he resurrected Sherlock Holmes from the Reichenbach falls, but he spent 30 years making up his mind about the non-fictional world.

Roger’s work is based on a series of personal experiences that have occurred over the last 15 years. Some time ago a rather ill-tempered, but much loved, dog belonging to Roger and his wife died from a growth and the author wondered if the dog had suffered in his final moments. He picked up a book by Conan Doyle, opened it at random, and read ‘… his exit was speedy and painless as could be desired …’ On the previous page Roger noted ‘… a more malignant case I have never seen …’ and ‘… a frightful sarcoma …’ These random statements, which could be taken as referring to his dog, set Roger Straughan’s mind at rest. Subsequently the author found that if he picked out and opened a book by Conan Doyle at random what he read was relevant to what was concerning him at the time. This applied to international and national matters (e.g. terrorist attacks) as well as obscure medical matters. The book chosen was always replaced at random on the book shelf. Although a detailed log of all the occurrences has not been kept, there were many hundreds of cases of which well over half were judged significant. He was never told what to do in any of the readings, rather he had suggestions of what he might do.

There are several criticisms of the work, which the author acknowledges. The whole thing, as often seems to be the case with descriptions of these sort of events, appears to be trivial, but what is trivial to one person may not be so to another. Could hidden memory be responsible? This would presuppose that the author had read every word ever written by Conan Doyle (and could recall this at will). Fraud? Why go to so much trouble as the book, though intriguing and interesting, is hardly a best seller.

Two other criticisms are how the degree of agreement between the reading and the question was judged, and that there is no statistical analysis of the results. I recall one literary parallel with what is reported here; the case of Sgt. Cuff, in Wilkie Collins’ *Moonstone*, who I think used Robinson Crusoe for ‘advice.’ However there Collins was able to make the characters do what he wanted.

At this stage I must declare a special interest. No, I have not read all Conan Doyle’s works nor ever used this method of divination (?). I did however attend a lecture last year by Dr Roger Straughan and was struck by his ordinariness (I hope he will forgive my use of this word!) and his obvious sincerity. If I had only read the book and not heard the author speak as well, I would have been more sceptical of the events described. Maybe this is evidence of survival, maybe there is another plausible explanation. I doubt if we shall ever have absolute certainty of our future survival in this life – we require faith or belief.

Why not read *A Study in Survival* yourself and see what you make of it?

Reviewed by Neil Hancox
Patricia Mary Finn, *Divine Realisation: One Soul’s Journey*

It was Alister Hardy's contention that religious experiences (or transcendent experiences, as I prefer to call them) represent a higher level of consciousness available to us all. From his zoologist's perspective he also saw an increased human engagement with such experiences as part of mankind's evolutionary journey. This book is positive proof on both counts. Sub-titled *an autobiography of spiritual growth*, it tells of the deep and personal discoveries of one woman's quest for a deeper meaning to life. Triggered by the death of her much loved father, Patricia's search becomes a commitment to expand her whole way of thinking. The result is, as the title suggests, a *Divine Realisation*.

Before embarking on her journey and the writing of this book, the author was (and still is) executive director of a small communications technology company. An ordinary person, who had found it ‘prudent to find the gift of a thick skin’ (p.4) to help her cope with the pressures of life. As a result she now admits ‘I was lost in the corridors of my own mind’ (p.5). Fifteen years on from her father’s death, and after much reflection, she is able to write:

> there is an obvious transition occurring where many souls are becoming knowledgeable enough to question what is happening around the world; knowledgeable enough to recognise that we are more than walking, talking human beings and with knowledge and light the new world I talk of is beginning to take shape. (pp. 88-9)

Whilst this book includes mention of many written works that helped to inspire it, academic readers will be disappointed by the lack of detailed references. The *Epilogue* (pp.93-102) for example contains many thought-provoking quotations, but few are even attributed, let alone given full reference information. To some extent this is to be expected of a non-academic author, writing for a non-specialist audience, but it does limit the book's usefulness to serious researchers. This chapter also highlights another difference between the book as a popular text, and academic sources, as this quote illustrates: ‘Truth feels as if you already know it’ (p.101). Rationally, this may seem a rather trite comment, but in the context of this book and of ‘divine realisation’, it is a statement that sums up inner knowing and higher truth: they are more remembered than reasoned out. It would be a shame if we, as academics, judged Finn harshly for this failing in referencing, since the truth undoubtedly has dawned on the author and the process has, as she points out, been greatly assisted by many other books, many of which also fall foul of such intellectual criticism.

My only other criticism is again made as a researcher, in the field of ‘soul journeys’: although the fruits of her experiences and understanding of her spiritual growth is clearly and succinctly described, there is very little narrative of Finn's personal experiences. We never get to read just what happened to the author as these truths came to her. To me, the wisdom that she shares would have had far more power and persuasiveness had we heard more of her day-to-day struggles in their assimilation. To be fair, she does explain that ‘I deliberately keep subjects in this little book light’ (p.2), a decision which will probably lead other academics to dismiss it. That, I repeat, would be to also dismiss this honest and open attempt to help others who travel on the journey of awakening along which Finn has obviously travelled.

Reviewed by Keith Beasley, AHS member and postgraduate at Bangor University:
Books Received for Review
The following books have been 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 David Greenwood, the Administrator, who will arrange for a copy to be sent to you. When we receive your review, the book will become yours.
When visiting the AHS Library, please ask Anne or Jean to show you the books for review. You may find that leafing through the actual books might inspire you to choose one.

Adams, K, et al. The Spiritual Dimension of Childhood (Jessica Kingsley, 2008)
Arbachakov, A and L The Last of the Shor Shamans (O Books 2008)
Barnes, Michael Horace Understanding Religion and Science: Introducing the Debate (Continuum, 2010)
Constans, G Buddha’s Wife (novel) Robert D Reed, 2009
Haeri, Shaykh Fadhlalla Happiness in Life and After Death: an Islamic Sufi View (O Books, 2010)
Hagger, Nicholas The New Philosophy of Universalism (O Books, 2009)
Holden, Andrew Religious Cohesion in Times of Conflict: Christian-Muslim Relations in Segregated Towns (Continuum 2009)
Paintner, Christine Valters Water, Wind, Earth & Fire: the Christian Practice of Praying with the Elements (Ave Maria Press, 2010)
Robb, Carol S Wind, Sun, Soil, Spirit: Biblical Ethics and Climate Change (Augsburg Fortress Press, 2010)
Rupp, Joyce Prayers to Sophia: Deepening our Relationship with Holy Wisdom (Ave Maria Press, 2010)

Library News:
A New Benefit for Members of the Alister Hardy Society
Following the decision to integrate the Alister Hardy Trust collection of books into the Main Library at Lampeter, it will now be possible for members to borrow books (either in person or using our postal service) from the whole of the University of Wales Trinity Saint David libraries – this gives access now to around 350,000 books. If you wish to use this facility please apply to Kathy Miles (k.miles@tsd.ac.uk) on the Lampeter Campus to obtain your ticket. Once you have your new card you will be able to access via the Internet the library’s Catalogue listing all the available books.
http://www.trinity-cm.ac.uk/en/lrc/catalogue/

Whilst the Alister Hardy books will be shelved with all the other books for loan, their status is defined in the catalogue as Alister Hardy Trust books on deposit.
### Recent Additions to the Alister Hardy Library:

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The Alister Hardy Library is most grateful to all those who have made donations to the Library.

List of AHS Events, September 2010 to May 2011

Wednesday 27th October 2010
2.30 pm  AHS Wales Group Annual Meeting
Meeting and lecture re-scheduled for Spring 2011. Date to be arranged.
(4.30 pm Lecture: God is a Feel, not a Think – What is Spiritual Experience?
by James Roose-Evans.)
Contact: Roger Coward, e-mail: roger.coward@smartemail.co.uk

Friday 29th October 2010
7.30 pm  AHS Chesterfield Group: Theme: Paganism (video and discussion).
Venue: Whittington Moor, Chesterfield. (Contact Mike at mike@mikerush.mail1.co.uk
or on 07790 757955 for further details)

Saturday 6th November 2010
10.00 am  Alister Hardy Society Open Day 2010:
Theme: Aspects of Belief in Life after Death Today
10.30 am  2010 Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture, Life after Death without God:
unconventional religion or gothic romanticism? by Professor David Voas,
followed by the AHS AGM
1.30 pm Lunch (bring packed lunch; tea/coffee provided)
2.30 pm Talk: Out of Body & Near-death Experiences: Brain-state Phenomena or
Glimpses of Immortality? by Professor Michael Marsh
4.00 pm Tea and Departure
Venue: Friends’ Meeting House, 43 St. Giles, Oxford
[Cost: £16.00 AHS members, £20.00 non-members. Inquiries and bookings:
David Greenwood, Religious Experience Research Centre, University of Wales
Trinity Saint David, Lampeter, Ceredigion, SA48 7ED. Tel: 01570 434310
e-mail: d.greenwood@tsd.ac.uk]

Friday 19th November 2010
7.30 pm  AHS Midlands Group: Talk: Paradigm Lost, Paradigm Regained: An Holistic
Approach to Psychical and Spiritual Research, by David Taylor of Parasearch
Venue: 1 Woodcroft Close, Blackwell, Bromsgrove, B60 1DA
Contact: Sheelah James: 0121 447 7727, sheelahjames@aol.com for further information
Tuesday 23rd November 2010
3.00 pm  AHS London Group: Talk: *The Sacred Heart of Evolution: Teilhard de Chardin and the Role of Love*, by Professor Wayne Parsons
5.00 pm  Shared supper (please bring finger food, tea/coffee provided)
5.45 pm  Evening discussion
Venue:  Essex Unitarian Church, 112 Palace Gardens Terrace, Kensington, London W8

Saturday 4th December 2010
10.00 am  AHS Oxford/Cotswold Group: Study day: *Sharing Spiritual Experience through the Ages*, with Marcus Braybrooke, President of the WCF, speaking about his book, *Beacons of the Light: 100 Holy People who have shaped the history of Humanity*, and Marianne Rankin on her book, *An Introduction to Religious and Spiritual Experience*
3.00 pm  Evening discussion
Venue:  Friends’ Meeting House, 43 St. Giles, Oxford

Friday 12th December 2010
12.00 pm for AHS Midlands Group: Pre-Christmas social and planning for 2011*
12.30 start  [bring-and share vegetarian lunch, 1.00 pm; Indian snacks and refreshments provided, 5.00 pm];
Venue:  1 Woodcroft Close, Blackwell, Bromsgrove, B60 1DA.
[* Meetings held on third Friday in month, 7.00 pm for 7.30 pm, at 1 Woodcroft Close, Blackwell, Bromsgrove. Contact Sheelah on 0121 447 7727 or sheelahjames@aol.com for further information]

Friday 7th January 2011
7.30 pm  AHS Chesterfield Group: Theme: *Glimpses of God* (video and discussion)
Venue:  Whittington Moor, Chesterfield. (Contact Mike at mike@mikerush.mail1.co.uk or on 07790 757955 for further details)

Friday 21st January 2011
7.30 pm  AHS Midlands Group: Revd Jonathan Robinson (AHS Chair): *A Glimpse of Glory*: an audio-visual presentation
Venue:  1 Woodcroft Close, Blackwell, Bromsgrove, B60 1DA
Contact:  Sheelah James, e-mail: sheelahjames@aol.com Tel: 0121 447 7727;

Friday 4th February 2011
7.30 pm  AHS Chesterfield Group: Theme: *Spirituality and the Arts* (video and discussion)
Venue:  Whittington Moor, Chesterfield. (Contact Mike at mike@mikerush.mail1.co.uk or on 07790 757955 for further details)

Thursday 10th February 2011
3.00 pm  AHS London Group: Talk: *What Near-Death Experiences can teach us about Everyday Life* by Dr. Ornella Corazza
5.00 pm  Shared supper (please bring finger food, tea/coffee provided)
5.45 pm  Evening discussion
Venue:  Essex Unitarian Church, 112 Palace Gardens Terrace, London, W8

Friday 4th March 2011
7.30 pm  AHS Chesterfield Group: Theme: *If God Is A Delusion – Why Bother?* (presentation by Mike Rush)
Venue:  Whittington Moor, Chesterfield. (Contact Mike at mike@mikerush.mail1.co.uk or on 07790 757955 for further details)
Thursday 31st March 2011
3.00 pm AHS London Group: Talk: A Journey to the Centre by Margaret Rizza
5.00 pm Shared supper (please bring finger food, tea/coffee provided)
5.45 pm Evening discussion
Venue: Essex Unitarian Church, 112 Palace Gardens Terrace, London W8

Friday 1st April 2011
7.30 pm AHS Chesterfield Group: Theme: The Spirit of the Child (video and discussion)
Venue: Whittington Moor, Chesterfield. (Contact Mike at mike@mikerush.mail1.co.uk or on 07790 757955 for further details)

Tuesday 17th May 2011
6.00 pm for AHS London Group: Talk: Building Community: a Baha’i perspective on the role of spiritual and religious experience in individual and collective transformation in the 21st century, by Barney Leith
Venue: Indian YMCA, 41 Fitzroy Square, London W1T 6AQ

Tuesday 31st May 2011
2.30 pm AHS Wales Group Meeting
Venue: Reading Room, Roderic Bowen Library, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Lampeter
4.30 pm Spring Lecture: To be announced.
Venue: Old Hall, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Lampeter. SA49 7ED.
Contact: Roger Coward, Cwm Bedw, Abbeycwmhir, Llandrindod Wells. LD1 6PH.
e-mail: roger.coward@smartemail.co.uk

OTHER EVENTS

Wednesday 27th October 2010
4.00 pm University of Wales Trinity Saint David, with Alister Hardy RERC
Religious Experience in Taiwan in Global Perspective: research on perceptions of religion in Taiwan.
Presentation by Professor Yen-zen Tsai and Professor Yijia Tsai
Venue: Founder’s Library, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Lampeter.
Contact: Roger Coward, AHS Wales: roger.coward@smartemail.co.uk

Saturday 27th November 2010
10.00 am Society for Psychical Research: Study Day:
Theme: Ordered Minds with Disordered Brains: From Evidence to Insight
Speakers: Peter Fenwick, Michael Nahm, David Rousseau
Venue: St. Philip’s Church, Earls Court Road, London, W8 6QH
[Cost, £38.00 – £33.00 SPR members, £3 reduction for concessions.
Booking/details: SPR, 49 Marloes Road, London, W8 6LA. Tel: 020 7937 8984.
e-mail: secretary@spr.ac.uk]
Friday 1st April to Sunday 3rd April 2010
Churches’ Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies: 2011 Spring
Conference: Theme: Prayer & Meditation in different Traditions
Speakers: to be announced.
Venue: The Hotel Royale, Gervis Road, Bournemouth
[Further information from: Julian Drewett, Churches’ Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies, The Rural Workshop, South Road, North Somercotes, Lincs., LN11 7PT. Tel/fax: 01507 358845 e-mail: gensec@churchesfellowship.co.uk]

Friday 15th April to Sunday 17th April 2011
Scientific & Medical Network Mystics & Scientists Conference:
Theme: The Nature of Dreams
Speakers: Dr. Larry Dossey, Prof. Charles Laughlin, Cedrus Monte, Dr. Morton Schatzman and Paul Devereux
Venue: University College, Sparkeford Road, Winchester
[For further information/booking contact Conference Administrator, Scientific & Medical Network, PO Box 11, Moreton-in-Marsh, Glos., GL56 0ZF. Tel: 01608 652001. e-mail: info@scimednet.org]

Religious Experience MA Residentials at Lampeter
(Autumn Term 2010: 27 – 30 September 2010)
Summer Term 2011: 11 – 15 April 2011

Congratulations
Many congratulations to those who graduated in July 2010 with an MA Religious Experience:

Theolyn Cortens (Awarded Distinction)
Elizabeth Ann Gray
Rebecca Patrick-Howard