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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*

Our invitation to review David Hay’s biography of Sir Alister Hardy has been taken up by Marianne Rankin and Ben Korgen. See pages 43 – 45.

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

Apologies for the late arrival of this Autumn’s *De Numine*; we hope to be back on track with timing for 2012. As I write, high summer seems to have returned, beautiful sunshine and the temperature in the 80s, so it doesn’t actually feel like Autumn at all … No excuse I know, but climate change is confusing to the senses, and one’s sense of time.

The theme for the All Wales group this year has been spirituality and sacred place in the Welsh landscape, which does return one’s mind to the way the natural world changes with the turning of the year. The passing of time at the turn of the seasons would once have been marked by religious ceremony, of which echoes still remain in the Christian ecclesiastical calendar, but with the removal of worship and ritual from the sacred grove to the sacred building, away from the fire under the stars, and from the trees to pillars of stone, the sensory connection to the living earth in worship has been lost, or lessened. Urbanisation and the rise of the scientific world view that insists on claiming a monopoly on truth mean we view climate change through a technological lens, and debate its existence rather than experience it with our senses, until tsunamis and hurricanes force us to acknowledge the reality. Animals still flee while humans are unaware of approaching danger …

In ‘The View from the Chair’ (p. 4) Jonathan Robinson talks of the connection (or disconnection) between our internal reality and the external reality we experience through our senses. Dr Howard Jones explores the search for an underlying unifying force or element in creation in his investigation into zero field gravity – zpf (p. 5), which he suggests would serve to underpin an holistic approach to all human enquiry, and all levels of experience. He sites his investigation of zpf in the philosophical tradition that encompasses Plato’s theory of Forms, and Jung’s concept of the collective unconscious. We are fortunate to have Dr Jones, a physicist, to bridge the gap between the prevailing scientific world view (he shows how zpf is a concept in quantum physics) and a belief in Spirit. While an advocate of research into the numinous, he admits that it’s unquantifiable but defends it’s validity on the basis of the volume of evidence we have for spiritual experience. Dr Ken Vincent’s article supports this view, offering a wealth of evidence from studies of OBEs (p. 9).

In her review of his book, Dr Penny Sartori takes issue with Professor Marsh’s refutation of Sir Alister Hardy’s ‘biology of God’ (demonstrated in his keynote lecture on last year’s Open Day and printed as the lead article in the last issue of *De Numine*). Sartori, herself a researcher into OBEs and NDEs, with a scientific background, scrupulously picks apart the evidence on both sides of the great divide. I feel she has summed up in a nutshell the reductionism that is so often found on the materialist side of the debate: ‘The neurophysiology he presents is … very informative; it’s just a pity that it is only considered as causative because it could add so much more to the debate if it was also considered from a correlative perspective’ (p. 42).

Sir Alister (quoted on page 4) and Karl Popper (quoted on page 13), both say how little we know. I wish science would show the same humility in the face of the ever changing miracle of existence, and the physical challenges facing us if we are to survive on this planet – scientific ‘truth’ is only as good as the next discovery after all. We need science to be open to an holistic view – then a new Enlightenment might well supersede the entrenched dualism of reductionist materialism and New Age thinking, admittedly awash with flights of fancy. Many people equate the latter with any belief in the numinous as reality. We also need the traditions of meditation, and mysticism, within which the quest for union with the sacred has often meant a longing for transcendence, to embrace the idea that it is a heightened sense of the sacredness of all creation – the earth included – that we must urgently seek now.

*Patricia Murphy*
A View from the Chair

David Hay, in his majestic biography of Sir Alister Hardy, notes the difficulties which Alister had in getting his ideas accepted, by scientists and philosophers alike, and the challenges which RERU/RERC has had to face. Some of these problems were practical and financial. However, the essence of the challenge was, and still is, to demonstrate that ‘the empirical evidence suggests that in investigating spiritual experience we are examining a biological constant that is not a delusion’ (p. 288). He goes on: ‘Over the past 400 years, religion has been under increasing attack in the western world. I have argued that commercial and intellectual pressures have forced us towards a heartless individualism that cancels relational consciousness/spiritual awareness out of the human equation.’ David is, of course, here referring to the excessive individualism of our time and the spiritual poverty which results. Yet, ‘since individualism is a socially constructed ideology, there is always the possibility of deconstruction.’ Are we seeing the beginnings of deconstruction? Is the tide turning towards an appreciation of relational consciousness, to a greater understanding of the interconnectedness and interdependence of all things, to a realisation that our future survival and well-being depend upon living in harmony with the natural world? (something that Prince Charles is so keen to emphasise in his book *Harmony: A New Way of Looking at our World*). Is this what the New Age, despite its shortcomings, is fundamentally all about?

David quotes the work of Andrew Newberg, who observed that ‘In deep meditation and prayer, the flow of blood reduces in the left posterior parietal lobe of the cerebral cortex (the back of the brain). This is the part of the cerebrum that makes us aware of where the boundary of our body lies, or ‘where we stop and the rest of the world starts’ (p. 272). In one of the cases sent to RERU, the recorder observes ‘… my separate self ceased to exist and for a fraction of time I seemed part of a timeless immensity of power and joy and light. Something beyond this domain of life and death. My subjective and painful feelings vanished …’ (p. 222). In another example of this sense of unity, recorded in Raynor Johnson’s book *Watcher on the Hills*, p. 67, the observation is made that ‘… the change was wrought to my eyes in the world apart from me. But it was so wrought that I saw there was no such thing as separateness – no such thing as the world apart from me – and the unity of all life, of all existence, was spread out before me, as though a vast curtain had been lifted and the full scene exposed to my gaze. Words fall lamentably short of true description.’ In the final minutes of one of his talks Sir Alister raised the question of telepathy, and concluded: ‘If I appear to be ending in fantasy … I do so only to emphasise my conviction that we fool ourselves if we imagine that our present ideas are more than a tiny fraction of the truth yet to be discovered …’ (p. 201).

How easily we can believe ourselves to be free thinkers, and fail to appreciate how our thoughts are conditioned by the world around us. I have often wondered how children’s exposure to the world affects their spiritual awareness and sensitivity. David Hay draws attention to the observations of Edward Robinson, a previous Director of RERU, who, as with Wordsworth before him, suspected that ‘the vision of childhood could perhaps be locked out of awareness on entering the secularised world of adult life’ (p. 249). Robinson observed that ‘a sizable proportion of the accounts [submitted to the Archive] were reminiscences of events occurring in childhood, sometimes in the very early years.’ He was also impressed by how the memories of ‘these childhood experiences had remained vivid in the memories of his correspondents for the whole of their lives. People repeatedly spoke of them as having the greatest personal significance when they were contemplating their personal identity and the meaning of their existence.’

In a sense, the Alister Hardy Society is an encouragement to all of us to be ‘true to ourselves’. If we are true to ourselves, ‘thou canst not be false to anyone’. This is not always easy in our
highly secularised society. Let us listen to the ‘whisperings of the heart’, that we may see beyond the illusion, and find joy and fulfilment in knowing that we are a little nearer reality.

I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at our Annual Day at the Oxford Friends’ Meeting House on November 5th, which promises to be stimulating and engaging.

*Jonathan Robinson, AHS Chair*

**References**

- HRH the Prince of Wales, Tony Juniper and Ian Skelly, *Harmony – A New Way of Looking at our World*, Harper Collins, 2010

**The Material Brain, the Human Soul and the Cosmic Spirit**

Today we can describe the human body at several different levels of detail. We can talk of the whole person – body, mind and spirit – and their relationship with other human beings on the planet. We can describe the individual in terms of the functioning of the organs of their bodies. We can go into still further detail of the biochemistry of the molecules that comprise these organs. Then, at the most fundamental level of description we have at present, we can talk about the constituents of those molecules, their energies and interactions.

Science has made the progress that it has by applying this principle of reductionism – looking at parts of the world in ever greater detail. But reductionism has its limitations, and rarely more so than with regard to the human body. Body, mind and spirit are not three separately functioning parts of a human being. Physicians, psychologists and psychiatrists such as Larry Dossey, Jeffrey Schwartz and Herbert Benson have shown how profoundly interactive are the material brain and the non-material mind. Not only does mind to some extent emerge from brain function, but mind can also have a physiological effect on the structure of the brain. Dossey and others have shown how prayer can have beneficial effects on the health of both the sender and receiver.

Science and its application in medicine have made huge strides in understanding the functioning of the human body at a materialist level. But materialism too must be tempered with idealism – the recognition that we are not machines. The aesthetic or spiritual dimension is an integral part of the functioning of most individuals, be it as religious observance or appreciation of music and poetry or of the natural world, or experience of one of the kinds of psychic communication. Until relatively recently, the mind and consciousness were almost excluded from scientific study because they were considered outside the remit of science – they were non-material and subjective entities and therefore unlikely to meet the requirements of universal repeated testing and observation, or even quantitative measurement.

The determinism of science that suggested the workings of the universe could be expressed by physical laws and represented by mathematical equations, so enthusiastically embraced by Newton and Laplace, left little room for human free will. Religious adherents were confronted with the same predicament if they supported the notion of an omniscient and omnipotent God. As we shall see, a ‘new philosophy’ based on 20th century physics, offers us a way out of this difficulty.
Now, brain function can conveniently be described as being broadly of two kinds. There is the material and mortal function, described by mind, which records and interprets the input of the five senses. This function can be measured and, to some extent, quantified by IQ tests, and so forth. But there is also another aspect of brain function that is spiritual, and which substantial empirical evidence suggests is immortal. This capacity for aesthetic appreciation is the human quality that many would describe as soul. As yet, no way has been found to quantify this faculty, so it remains a qualitative function of the brain in the living human that persists in the discarnate individual. A holistic description of human beings, individually or collectively, must therefore embrace body, mind and spirit.

One of the challenges of the last few decades has been to give an account of the concepts of consciousness and soul that would stand up to scientific scrutiny. Spiritual experience is only one of a number of events described as psychic phenomena or psi. Sir Alister Hardy, a marine biologist, set out a classification of such experiences in his book, *The Spiritual Nature of Man*. In general though, the biologists have been very reluctant to recognize these human abilities: rather, biologists were content to dismiss them as imaginary or fraudulent or untestable.

It is to the physicists that we must turn to find scientific support for the notion of soul or spirit. Quantum physics is a century old now and it is in this specialism that the theoretical basis for the notions of an individual and collective spiritual energy can be found. Atomic physics today recognizes three main subatomic particles, the proton, electron and neutron that together make up the basic structure of an atom. Quantum physics also found that we needed some kind of energetic glue to hold all these subatomic particles together. This ‘glue’ is called the zero point energy field. It takes its name from the fact that it is the only energy left in an atom at the zero point of temperature (zero Kelvin or –273°C). The zero point field (zpf) penetrates every atom of matter in the universe – solid, liquid or gas. It is in our bodies and in the air we breathe. At root, the objects of the whole material world are simply our images of the coherence of packets of the zpf. It is the world that the eastern mystics describe as maya.

A famous Irish philosopher of the Enlightenment, Bishop George Berkeley, believed that the only knowledge we had of the existence of the material world was through our perception of it. These ideas were presented to the human mind by what Berkeley called God but which our 21st century scientist might describe as the universal spiritual energy field. Although religious adherents regard their God as unequivocally a source of good, that leaves the problem of evil in the world, always a challenge for philosophers of religion. However, cosmic energy is morally neutral – neither good nor evil. It is what humankind does with the energy from this cosmic spirit which creates good and evil. Some scientists, like Goswami and Mack have gone so far as to suggest that consciousness is the creative energy out of which the matter of the universe has been derived.

Most significantly, the zpf is the medium through which the neurons of the central nervous system can function. The nerve cells of the brain and spinal cord send their messages mostly by electrons travelling along the length of a nerve cell, jumping over the gap (synapse) at the end and on to the next neuron. Everywhere that we have moving electrons (actually, they never stand still!), we have the zpf. In the brain, this is accompanied by another energy field created by the streams of electrons called the electromagnetic energy field.

Now, philosophers have debated and agonized for four centuries over how the lump of cells representing the matter of the brain could generate the non-material entity we call mind or thought or consciousness. Modern neurophysiology has it that it is the passage of the
electrons through a network of neurons that produces an idea. ‘Mind’ is the name we give to the function of the brain at a material level in the living individual.

‘Thinking’, generating ideas, is just what neural cells do when electrons pass through them. ‘Consciousness’ is our awareness of these ideas in the brain both during internal processes and in interpreting the input from the five senses. The brain function we describe as the physical (but non-material) mind is the result of the passage of streams of electrons through a collection of neurons. These ideas or mental images can be triggered by sensory input, or by other neural pathways (association of ideas), or they can simply appear spontaneously – what we mean when we say ‘it just popped into my mind’. ‘Memory’ refers to the collection of neural pathways already established and available for recall from the unconscious database.

Measurement of brain wave activity using EEGs indicates that spiritual people, shamans, mystics, mediums and others who are able to generate deep meditative states for themselves display significantly more theta wave activity in the 4-7 Hz range than those of us who spend most of our time in the active beta wave state at 12-30 Hz. So much for the physical mind, which essentially dies with the mortal death of the body.

We can understand what triggers ideas when we have sensory input. These impressions give us our mental representations of the physical world. If an idea arises spontaneously, we have no need to account for a ‘cause’. Electrons are coursing through the neurons of the central nervous system continuously while we are alive, so it would not be surprising if one piece of circuitry here and there represented an idea. If some networks are already in contact with one another, we can see where one idea might lead to another.

What we must consider is that particularly important instance of neural function when we create an original thought or decide to search for one of these neural pathways buried in the memory of the unconscious mind or, indeed, make any decision. If we are to avoid ‘infinite regress’, we must account for the original thought in a succession of neural processes and our mental recognition and interpretation of it.

The triggering of that original idea, even if recalled from memory, must itself also come from a neural process, and this is the process we call Will. The American philosopher-psychologist William James described it as an ‘act of volition’. Living some fifty years before James, the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer called this mental driving force der Wille. The application of Will or Volition determines which of the neural pathways expresses itself as an idea. Will or Volition is a focussing or concentration on one neural network, a coherence of electronic pathways: it involves bringing an idea (a neural pathway) into conscious awareness from the unconscious and this ability is an intrinsic property of neurons in sentient beings.

The zpf that is associated with the human body is inextinguishable: it is infinite and eternal. This is the component of mind that we describe as the immortal soul. It accompanies us in every moment of our life on Earth and continues on in the discarnate spirit after what we regard materially as death. Universally, it is the collective unconscious described by Jung as source of the archetypes, and there are many other comparable descriptions. Rupert Sheldrake calls it the morphic field; for Ervin Laszlo it is the akashic field of eastern mysticism. It is the spiritual God of western religion and the Brahman or the Infinite Mind of the East. It is the World Soul or Communal Soul to which we turn for guidance and inspiration. It is that spiritual Source with which we commune in prayer and of which our individual souls are parts. It is the representation of the cosmic energy that spiritual healers draw on to treat their patients, and through which other psychic events are transmitted. To live in harmony with this cosmic spirit, with constant awareness of its presence, is a more holistic attitude than that
displayed at present through dogmatic religion or hedonistic living. It is also an attitude we surely must cultivate if we are to keep planet Earth suitable for habitation.

As early as 400 years BCE, the Greek philosopher Plato suggested in his ‘Theory of Forms or Ideas’ that all our learning comes to us from a previous incarnation. These Forms are spiritual templates for the ideas that we call upon in mortal life. Now we know that we have to learn to talk, to learn information about the world, in each lifetime. But Plato was thinking beyond this. It is our spiritual learning that progresses with each incarnation, learning that we take from the spiritual to the mortal plane. This is what the eastern mystics call karma – the actions of each soul that must be learned through life, or lives, on Earth, to be refined in the afterlife.

When we create original ideas, especially if these are particularly constructive and creative, our zpf communes with the cosmic zpf – tunes into it, if you will. The greater the harmony or resonance between our individual zpf (as soul) and the cosmic soul, the more inspired and creative the thought is likely to be. All original works of art, poetry, literature or music come into being in this way. Of course, the material brain still has to learn the practical techniques of creating works of art, or of writing music, or lines of poetry. That same mystical insight has created works of scripture and great mathematical and scientific theories.

Will or Volition involves focusing our own neurons and their associated soul so that they resonate with cosmic soul. Just as electrons cohere in laboratory experiments, so they also cohere within the brain to produce Will, which then directs mind. Not every trivial decision in our lives necessitates our tuning into cosmic soul. Many habitual actions become so ingrained in our mental processes that only the appropriate mental stimulus is needed to provoke the relevant pathways of the physical brain into action. Here, the material functions of mind can operate quite successfully without the input of cosmic energy. But communication with the cosmic spirit is an essential mechanism of psychic, spiritual, numinous or mystical experience or inspired creativity for that aspect of human activity we describe as soul.

Dr Howard A. Jones

* Examples of evidence supporting the immortality of spirit:


2. There are also group mystical visions reported independently by ordinary people who are emotionally and physically close to a dying friend or relative [Raymond Moody, *Glimpses of Eternity: An investigation into shared death experiences*, Rider (Random House), 2010].

3. Some very effective spiritual healers (like Leah Doctors and George Chapman) who are totally without medical training but who resonate with one particular spirit guide who is medically trained (respectively, Dr. Chang and Mr Lang) could not be as effective in curing medically incurable disorders, like diabetes and blindness, without spiritual help from discarnate souls [J. Bernard Hutton, *Healing Hands*, Virgin, 1966; *The Healing Power*, Frewin, 1975]

4. The 20th century spiritual medium Rosemary Brown, who had only very limited musical education, created many piano compositions in the style of Chopin, Liszt, Brahms, and others. She would have to have some musical training, otherwise she would not have been able to write pieces in musical notation [Rosemary Brown, *Immortals by my side*, 1975].

6. Equally impressive is the ability of some mediums (sometimes dismissed disparagingly as ‘fortune tellers’) to predict forthcoming events, examples of which I have first-hand experience.

7. Psychologist Ian Stevenson describes many instances of reincarnation amongst children who describe people and places they could not possibly know about in their present mortal life [Ian Stevenson, *Children Who Remember Past Lives*, University of Virginia Press, 1987].

To dismiss all of these various accounts (many by people of high academic or social standing who stand to lose much by damage to their credibility) as fraud or imagination just indicates the limited vision of their critics.

**Bibliography**


Dr Jones’ new book, *The World as Spirit* (Fairhill Publishing, 2011), is reviewed on pages 46 and 47 and elaborates the theme introduced in his article above. (Ed)

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**What the Near-Death Experience and other Spiritually Transformative Experiences Teach Us about God and Afterlife**

In 1975, the near-death experience burst into contemporary consciousness with the publication of Raymond Moody’s famous book *Life After Life*. The public was newly fascinated, unaware that the phenomena had been described throughout recorded history (the story of Er in Plato’s *Republic* being the most famous example).

**Defining the NDE**

In 1979, Sir Alister Hardy began his exploration of all types of religious/spiritual/mystical experiences with the publication of his book *The Spiritual Nature of Man* in which he reported that one ‘trigger’ for these phenomena was the ‘prospect of death.’ Working with cases from Hardy’s original sample, Mark Fox in his book *Religion, Spirituality, and the Near-Death Experience* labeled these ‘crisis experiences’ because it was unclear whether some persons had been clinically dead. Fox found little difference between these ‘crisis’ cases and other religious experience cases.
From the beginning of NDE studies, some researchers have included individuals who had only come ‘close to death’ with those who were resuscitated after being clinically dead for a brief period of time. In their effort to clarify the terminology, Peter and Elizabeth Fenwick in their book *The Art of Dying* coined the term ‘temporary death experience’ to separate those who came near to death from those who revived following clinical death.

Continuing this effort to define the characteristics of the NDE, Vince Migliore used a large sample from the files of the International Association of Near-Death Studies and published it in his book *A Measure of Heaven*. Comparing a sample of 193 accounts of clinical death to a sample of 189 accounts of ‘NDE-like’ experiences (e.g., mystical experiences) that were not near death, Migliore found that the NDEs were more in-depth than the mystical experiences, but the difference was not statistically significant.

Unfortunately, there is still no agreed-on definition of the NDE or other religious experiences in the literature.

**NDE Commonalities**

People can and do have mystical experiences that resemble near-death experiences without dying. St. Paul’s out-of-body experience (OBE) in which he went to heaven is a famous example (II Cor. 12). The NDE is unique among religious/mystical/spiritual experiences in that its ‘trigger’ is clinical death, and we now have over 35 years of research that enable fascinating insights into what the NDE teaches us about God and afterlife.

I begin with Jeff Long’s ‘proofs of afterlife’ from his book *Evidence of Afterlife* because of the magnitude of the sample (N=1300) and the fact that 613 subjects were given an objective questionnaire. They are as follows:

1) NDErs report increased alertness and consciousness
2) NDErs provide evidence from verifiable OBEs
3) NDErs blind from birth report a form of ‘vision’ during their NDE
4) NDErs report experiences while under anesthesia
5) NDErs report life reviews that include experiencing the feelings of others
6) NDErs report seeing dead relatives, including people unknown to them who were identified to them later by viewing family photographs
7) NDErs who are children report having every NDE element of older NDErs, and this is true whether their account is told during childhood or as an adult who had the experience in childhood
8) NDErs who were non-English-speakers from Long’s database form the largest collection of cross-cultural NDEs and provide evidence that NDEs are the same all over the world
9) NDErs report that their lives were changed as a result of their NDE and, for the majority, the change was for the better

To this list of ‘proofs,’ we can add the ‘Shared Death Experience’ which Raymond Moody describes in his book *Glimpses of Eternity*. This occurs when a person or persons at the bedside of an individual who is dying experiences the beginning of the dying individual’s first moments of death, including such things as alternate reality, mystical light, OBE, co-living the life review, unworldly or heavenly realms, and mist at death.

**Basis for World Religions**

Over a century ago, William James in *Varieties of Religious Experience* made the case that ‘The founders of every church owed their power originally to the fact of their direct personal
communication with the Divine.’ His research was reinforced by the work of Evelyn Underhill who in Practical Mysticism proclaimed, ‘This unmistakable experience has been achieved by the mystics of every religion; and when we read their statements, we know they are all speaking of the same thing.’

In Conceptions of Afterlife in Early Civilizations, Gregory Shushan makes the case that the NDE is the basis for afterlife accounts in the world’s religions. His main points are: 1) There is a remarkable consistency among largely unconnected cultures and times regarding belief in life after death; 2) The core elements of these religious beliefs are largely similar to the core elements of the NDE; 3) These consistent beliefs in life after death contrast with the widely divergent creation myths of different religions.

In other words, the above studies taken together demonstrate the NDE to be a world-wide phenomenon and that it is at the generic core of afterlife beliefs in the world’s religions. Organized religion is, at best, second-hand.

Insights into God and Afterlife
Using the same tools that social scientists employ to study all other facets of human behavior, researchers have gained fresh insights into how humans experience God in the here-and-now and in the hereafter. The following 9 findings are the ones I personally find most compelling:

1) God (aka, Ultimate Reality/Great Spirit) is with us and not distant. Sir Alister Hardy in The Spiritual Nature of Man states that, from the evidence, God is ‘partly transcendent, and felt as the numinous beyond the self, and partly immanent within him’ and ‘the spiritual side of man is not the product of intellectuality.’ In other words, the data from NDEs and other religious experiences indicate that the God of the panentheist is the Ultimate Reality; in the God We Never Knew, Marcus Borg makes a strong case for panentheism being biblical.

2) Judgment is a reality. In the NDE, the experiencer is often brought before a divine judge/being of light for a ‘life review’. This can be frightening, comforting, or both; nevertheless, it is awesome. Judgment is virtually universal in world religions.

3) Hell is not permanent. Hell is for purification and rehabilitation — not eternal punishment. In Universalism, the Prevailing Doctrine of the Christian Church During Its First 500 Years, J. W. Hanson makes a good case that universalism was the dominant theology of early Christianity. In the West, it has been relegated to a minority position for the past 1,500 years; nevertheless, it is the norm in the religions of the East (e.g., Hinduism, Buddhism).

Whether they use the word ‘universalism’ or not, a large number of NDE and/or religious experience researchers have come to the conclusion that ALL people are unconditionally loved by God and that, in the end, ALL will be ‘saved’ regardless of religion or denomination. A list of 20 researchers who express this view can be found at http://universalist-herald.net/RelExpUniv.html

But there is also a dark side. Nancy Evans Bush offers her analysis of distressing NDEs using 21 studies (N=1,828) in The Handbook of Near-Death Experiences: Thirty Years of Investigation by J. Holden, B. Greyson, and D. James. Nine of these studies had no distressing NDEs, but the remaining 12 had a 23% rate of distressing NDEs. One of her blockbuster findings was that anyone – not just ‘evil’ people – can face a ‘time of trial.’ Evidence that hell is not permanent includes the fact that NDErs are rescued from hell when they call out to God (or in the West, Jesus).

One very interesting case regarding the impermanence of hell is that of an 18th century NDEr, Dr. George De Benneville, who died of a consumptive-like illness and revived 42 hours later
at his wake. During his tour of heaven and hell, he saw angels taking people out of hell and into heaven when they repented. A full account of this experience can be found at:  
http://www.christianuniversalist.org/articles/nde-debenneville.html

Both George Richey in his book Return from Tomorrow and Raymond Moody in his book Reflections on Life After Life report accounts of people trapped in negative/hellish states as having beings of light standing by them, waiting to rescue them. James McClenon in his book Wondrous Events describes a 7th century Japanese account of a butcher having a hellish deathbed vision which turns positive when he begins chanting the name of the Amida Buddha. Merete Jakobsen notes in Negative Spiritual Encounters that the antidote for negative spiritual experiences is prayer and religious rituals.

4. **Jesus is not an only child!** Jesus is called ‘the only begotten son’ four times in the Gospel of John and one time in the 1st Letter of John, but none of the other New Testament writers mention this. There are also a number of Bible verses which indicate that God is the King of the gods (Ps 82:1, Dan 2:47, I Cor 8:5). While non-Christians sometimes encounter Jesus in their NDEs and mystical experiences, they also report encounters with other divine entities. Divine beings that individuals encounter are discussed in Religious Experience in Contemporary China by Xingong Yao and Paul Badham and in At the Hour of Death by Karlis Osis and Erlendur Harldsson. The latter book compares the death-bed visions and NDEs of people in India and the United States.

5. **What’s in your heart – not what you believe – is what matters.** Religious groups that declare that theirs is the only path to God and salvation are totally wrong. NDE and other religious experiences (e.g., after-death communications, death-bed visions) are replete with stories of people of all faiths and denominations in heaven.

6. ‘By their fruits you shall know them.’ Virtually all of the books on the NDE and other religious experiences mentioned in this article speak to the fact that these events change people’s lives for the better, with some authors devoting a whole chapter to this finding.

7. **The NDE implies mind-body dualism.** In the Handbook of Near-Death Experiences: Thirty Years of Investigation, Jan Holden notes that attempts to place targets in hospitals for NDErs to see during their OBEs have been unsuccessful to date; however, the sheer volume of veridical perception anecdotes over 150 years demonstrates the reality of NDErs being out of their bodies. Additional evidence for mind-body dualism is presented in E. F. Kelly et. al.’s Irreducible Mind and Pim van Lommel’s Consciousness Beyond Life.

8. **Reincarnation is THE unanswered question.** Reincarnation is an essential part of the belief system of Eastern religions. The ‘official’ position in Western religions is ‘no,’ although ¼ of Christians in the UK and USA tell us that they believe this. The data supporting reincarnation is beginning to come in, as this is a major research area at the University of Virginia Medical School’s Division of Perceptual Studies. Jim Tucker’s book Life Before Life is based on 2,500 cases of reported reincarnation from the division’s files.

9. **NDE is not without its skeptics.** The NDE has attracted numerous detractors, many of whom offer only explanations rather than data. An excellent refutation of questions raised by major skeptics of the NDE can be found in Bruce Greyson’s chapter on the topic in the Handbook of Near-Death Experiences: Thirty Years of Investigation.

**Conclusion**

Research into the NDE and other spiritual experiences broadens our understanding of God and afterlife and serves as an essential counter to the oppressive religion that is all too common in today’s world. Thanks to research over the past 150 years, we currently know more about how humans experience God and afterlife than at any time in recorded history.
To me, the greatest contribution of Sir Alister Hardy and the Religious Experience Research Centre has been to demonstrate that religious/spiritual/mystic experiences are, in fact, quite common. The picture emerging is of a generic God and afterlife that are universal; its essential elements are an ‘off-the-rack’ fit for all the world’s religions but a ‘tailor-made’ fit for none of them. What is universal is from God; the remainder of religion is cultural. I pray that we continue this research.

Dr. Ken R. Vincent, AHS Member

Experiences

Out of Body Experiences – an unusual case

I believe that it would be worth trying to learn something about the world even if in trying to do so we should merely learn that we do not know much. This state of learned ignorance might be a help in many of our troubles. It might be well for all of us to remember that, while differing widely in the various little bits we know, in our infinite ignorance we are all equal.

Karl Popper

A persistent challenge made by sceptics to those who seek to ascribe a spiritual significance to OBE’s and NDE’s is that these phenomena are malfunctions of the brain consequent on its disturbed metabolism. Such an interpretation, if true, implies that their study would make no contribution to our discussion of the spiritual nature of man. The ‘disturbed metabolism’ hypothesis would be subject to disproof, at least for OBE’s, if one could find cases where an OBE has been associated with the transfer of information from an individual experiencing an OBE to a second party during the time that the OBE was taking place. To my knowledge accounts of such cases are very rare. What follows is such an account.

My brother Jack was a bomber pilot in WWII. In 1943 he was shot down in France while returning from a raid on Stuttgart. My parents just received the telegram saying that he had failed to return from an operation. My mother was very psychic (I don’t have space to expand on that rather bald statement) and it will be anticipated correctly that the uncertainty about the fate of my brother Jack following his failure to return from the raid on Germany was a strong incentive for my mother to attempt to use her paranormal gifts to obtain news about him. Accordingly, on the night of the receipt of the telegram reporting him missing my parents had a séance. They could hardly have anticipated its outcome. There were just the two of them sitting in silence. Suddenly my mother got to her feet, stepped over to my father and grasped his hands in hers. ‘Dad it’s me. I can see you,’ said my mother in an excited voice. My father recognised that this was Jack. ‘So, you’ve passed over,’ said my father, expecting that his son was now dead. ‘No I’m not’ was the reply. ‘I’m all right. They haven’t caught me yet.’ My father, always possessing a healthy scepticism, then asked for confirmation that it really was Jack who was communicating with him. ‘I changed my will before I was briefed’ then ‘I must go now. Tell Mum her table is all right.’ He laughed and that was the end of the link.

My father was very doubtful about Jack changing his will as, at Jack’s request, he was keeping it in his own strongbox. However, very shortly after Jack’s communication a letter
came from the tail gunner of Jack’s old crew. (Jack had not flown with his usual crew on the raid on which he was shot down but with a composite one made up from a number of different nationals.). The letter expressed the sympathy of Jack’s old crew member and said how popular Jack had been with his crew. He also said that the last thing Jack had done before he was briefed for the raid on Germany was to change his will. This document was now in the hands of the Padre on Jack’s bomber station. The next day at work my father asked as many people as were willing to guess the last thing that Jack had done before his briefing. One good friend made no less than 40 guesses. No one guessed the truth.

To complete this part of my account of this time I shall have to anticipate the outcome. Jack survived, as a prisoner of war in Germany. On his return home my father asked him about the night he had communicated with him via my mother’s paranormal abilities. He confirmed that at that time he had not been captured but he had no awareness whatever of the communication that had taken place between my father and himself. He said that it seemed probable that he was asleep at the time but he could not be sure about that.

One seems forced to conclude that we (can) exist at different levels of consciousness between which communication is, for some events at least, very limited. Paradoxically that state with which we ourselves are not aware can, albeit perhaps rarely, communicate with certain individuals who have the appropriate degree of sensitivity to make the link. It is notable that Jack’s communication with his father had never become part of his conscious memory. We are justified in suggesting that perhaps OBE’s are more common than is generally considered but that many (most?) are not recollected. I do not want to press the case but one might suggest that OBE’s are commonplace but are recollected only occasionally, and then only by some of those who are suffering some severe metabolic disturbance.

The reader will understand why I started this account with the quote from Karl Popper.

Don Mason


A Saving Grace

Foreigners who live for any length of time in Japan soon discover that many of their experiences, both the delightful and demoralizing, prove to be not merely commonplace but identical to the experiences of most other foreigners. This may be equally true of ex-pats living in Finland or Peru, and therefore a banality, but somehow I doubt there is another country in the world where patterns of behaviour and speech are as standardized and predictable as in Japan. Most gaijin at some point undergo the ‘food test’ under the watchful eye of their Japanese hosts (I passed grilled sparrow flattened on a stick, but failed the bottled grasshoppers floating in black sauce), and most will have their tales of torment and endurance at a Japanese bank. For every foreign male who has found himself prey to the unaccountable obsession of a Japanese female there’s a foreign woman who could relate a story of underwear missing from the washing-line, or others less trivial – and in some well-publicised cases tragically fatal – of flashers, stalkers and intruders.

Many foreigners also observe another common facet of behaviour: parental complacency. Though hardly unique to Japan, it is common enough to prompt some gaijin to air their
incomprehension from time to time in letters to the local English-language dailies: perhaps they have seen a mother holding her baby in the front seat of a moving car, or another chatting to a friend while her child skips along the edge of a station platform; or they recently read about a baby left in a car on a summer’s day who died of heat exhaustion while mother went shopping or father played pachinko, or the kids left at home alone who fell out of the window or died in a fire. Except in casual conversation, I had never felt impelled to air my own incomprehension at such behaviour. It was something I had always observed from a distance, nonplussed and briefly angered but impotent to alter.

One windy autumn day I had a more immediate encounter.

It was mid-afternoon and I was leaving for a late shift at the office. I took the lift down to the lobby and was checking my mail-box when the caretaker emerged from his room with a parcel of books that had arrived for me. We chatted briefly, and I decided to take the package back up to my apartment, where I spent a few minutes opening it and inspecting the contents. I left the books on the kitchen table and set off again.

The block of flats in which I lived was set back down a narrow street which ran into Waseda-Dori, one of the busiest roads in Tokyo. As I started walking towards the junction I could see the traffic in full flow ahead, an almost constant stream in both directions. A sudden gust of wind through a gap between the buildings whipped up the dust on the street, and I was forced to pause and put my briefcase down to clear my eyes. When I next looked up I saw a woman on a bicycle gliding over the little crossing at the end of the road, closely followed by a young boy on a smaller bike. They had disappeared from view when an even younger girl on a child’s tricycle entered the frame in pursuit.

As she pedalled over the crossing another burst of wind conjured into the air a small polythene bag, transparent and empty, from the wire basket at the front of her cycle, teasing it away from her instinctive grasp. She stopped right there in the middle of the crossing and clambered off the bike, her gaze never leaving the manic bag which swooped and soared through the passing traffic out into the middle of the road.

Things which happen quickly often seem in memory to have happened in slow motion. In my mind the image of the bag itself floating on the wind gives a retrospective aura of unhurried ease to the incident, like a half-remembered dream. I cannot recall at what point I started running – perhaps at that very moment when the green delivery truck parked on the nearside to the right of the junction came into my view. I was probably already yelling out the danger – ‘abunai! abunai!’ – but my voice too seemed to float away on the wind as the little girl sleepwalked out into the road. In that moment of suspended time the gap between us seemed unbridgeable. And then she stepped beyond the parked truck.

I cannot say she flew through the air, but I think both her feet must have left the ground as she was jerked backwards by the hood of her duffle coat. A black car sped blindly past as we fell against the front of the truck. Regaining our feet, she stared at me with wide uncomprehending eyes, unamazed to hear her language bursting from a frenzied foreign face and pointing anxiously with grubby hands at the plastic bag now swirling in the gutter on the other side of the road.

I told her not to walk into the road, that the traffic was dangerous, that she must stay with her tricycle, that I would fetch the bag. I asked her if she understood, and we locked little fingers in the common gesture of agreement. Eventually I sneaked through the gaps in the traffic and duly retrieved the torn and flimsy treasure.
By the time I got back across the road her mother had reappeared and was chastising her for her tardiness, bending over her and brushing down her coat. I gave the girl her bag, which she took with both hands silently, while the mother bowed profuse apologies, embarrassed for the inconvenience her wayward daughter had caused. I told her it had been no trouble, anxious first to spare the girl a further scolding, and before I could catch my breath again they were off, pedalling back up the pavement in the direction they had come from.

I stood for a moment, my pulse still racing, looking around me with sudden self-consciousness, but also, I began to realise, for witnesses, as if I needed confirmation of what had just occurred. There was nobody in sight, incredible for a weekday afternoon: no one at the bus stop over the road, no one outside the corner shop, no passing pedestrian, not even the driver of the badly parked delivery truck.

I walked back down the side-street to retrieve my battered briefcase, dropped at some point during my sprint, and sat on a low wall. As the enormity of what had happened started to sink in, I became aware that my legs were shaking. The power of indignation suddenly pulled me to my feet again – the indignation I had failed to express – and I hurried up to the junction with half a mind, though already only half, to pursue the girl's oblivious mother and sting her with a sermon on parental care. They were nowhere to be seen.

My mood had begun to change. The relief that had washed over me at first had settled into something deeper, a contentment, a happiness that was growing into kind of elation, tempered only by the absence of someone to share it with. Nor was it a commonplace elation, such as that of having passed an exam or won a lottery perhaps, but of a different kind, such as I could not recall ever having experienced – the elation of undiluted selflessness. As I walked to the bus stop, I played the incident over in my mind, as if to test its verity, to find some fault with the facts. I continued to do so for many days afterwards, but each time it fell out the same. If I hadn't encountered the caretaker in the lobby, or had left the package in his care … If I had taken a few seconds longer to wipe the dust from my eyes … If the single toggle on the girl's duffle coat that held it together had been undone like all the others …

Although that elation has faded, like passion, like grief, like most emotions, I remind myself of it from time to time, of how it was granted to me once, with divinely whimsical irony, to play the hero – the hero of a drama unseen, a hero unproven.

The sense of grace endures, a humbling gratitude for something unsought, and if I never do a good deed in my life again, I can at least claim to have had one experience most foreigners in Japan never have.

*Anthony Head, AHS member*
The Alister Hardy Religious Experience Centre Makes an Impact in Taiwan

One of the most impressive surveys of Religious Experience has recently been undertaken in Taiwan. A group of Sociologists and Religious Studies Scholars under the leadership of Professor Yen-zen Tsai have completed the first stage of a massive research project on religious experience in their country. This has attracted worldwide attention.

Professor Yen-zen Tsai and his colleague professor Yi-jia Tsai gave an early insight into their data in October 2010 at a special lecture in Lampeter’s Founders’ Library – which several members of the Alister Hardy Society attended. At that time, Professor Tsai acknowledged that his research was inspired by Professors Paul Badham and Xinzhong Yao, whose groundbreaking study into Religious Experience in China is now widely known. Then, in June 2011, scholars from around the world assembled in Taiwan to discuss the significance of this new data from Taiwan.

Delegates from Lampeter’s AHRERC played a leading role in this conference. Professor Paul Badham, current Secretary and former Director of the AHRERC, explored how the data on religious experience in Taiwan supports the pluralist hypothesis*. Dr. Bettina Schmidt, Director of the MA Religious Experience at the University of Wales, Trinity Saint David, shared results from her fieldwork on spirit possession in Brazil, with implications for religious experiences across cultures. Dr. Gregory A. Barker, Director of the RERC, evaluated the Taiwan data on ‘non-religion’, exploring similarities and differences between Taiwanese experiences with those claiming to be ‘non-religious’ in the United Kingdom. New AHRERC Trustee, Professor David Voas, shared views on the interface between religious experience and education in Taiwan. Professor Leslie Francis, unable to attend the conference, nevertheless contributed an important paper on psychological perspectives of mystical experiences. Former trustee Professor Eileen Barker discussed issues pertaining to the validity of Religious Experience. Professor Xinzhong Yao reflected on similarities and differences between the data in China and Taiwan.

These papers and others underscored the fact that Taiwan is a deeply religious land with commitments to forms of Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism often intermingling. There is also a lively Christian presence in the country. Even when regular attendance at temples and other places of worship subsides, many in Taiwan report experiences that can best be described as ‘religious’ in nature. Conference participants were taken by their hosts to visit a local Daoist temple, where worshippers shared their devotion to local gods and goddesses.
through music, offerings and ecstatic song and dance. There was also a visit to the world’s largest center for engaged Buddhism, the Tzu Chi movement, which claims to have 4 million followers.

Back at the conference venue, lively discussion and debate ensued; plans have been made to carry on the conversation about religious experience in future conferences and publications.

Readers of De Numine will want to watch for the publication of the data from Taiwan – which is likely to be out in 2012. [We hope to give members information about this in the Spring 2012 issue. Ed.)

Dr Gregory A. Barker, Director of RERC and Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies in the School of Theology, Religious Studies and Islamic Studies at Trinity Saint David

* In God and the Universe of Faiths John Hick suggested that each of world’s religions should be viewed as ‘different human responses to one divine Reality’. The fullest development of Hick’s views can be found in An Interpretation of Religion where he presents a comprehensive theory that attempts to explain all religious phenomena which he refers to as a ‘pluralistic hypothesis.’ Hick’s hypothesis is that all religions are culturally conditioned responses to the same ultimate reality.

http://www.leaderu.com/wri/articles/hick.html

Exploring the Extraordinary: University Of York, Saturday 25th September 2010

The second ‘Exploring the Extraordinary’ conference took place on Friday 24th to Saturday 25th September 2010 at the University Of York. The following is a brief review of the topics covered by the speakers on the second day of the conference.

The first talk of the day was given by PhD student Sarah Metcalfe and titled Therapeutic Emotional Labour, Emotion Management and Ethics in the work of Mediums and Psychic Practitioners. Sarah began by explaining that her interest had begun with personal experiences of mediumship but that she now takes a more critical approach. Her experience with mediumship is therefore both personal and academic. This personal and academic approach was common to all of the speakers and a key theme of the Exploring the Extraordinary conferences. Sarah argued that such phenomena do not have to be ‘real’ to justify their academic study. She observed that in recent years there has been an increase in the visibility, and use of, mediums; for example, via 24-hour telephone lines, internet websites, one-to-one readings, stage-shows, on television, in books, and at ‘Mind, Body, Spirit’ festivals. She situated mediumship in the context of esoteric, pagan and spiritualist beliefs. There is sometimes hostility or suspicion between mediums and researchers but, argued Sarah, it is the consequences of their beliefs and practices that are important, not the verifiability of the phenomena. Sarah interviewed about 300 people, who had used a medium, on Facebook and by telephone. She found that they were mostly women from diverse backgrounds. The issues that were discussed at readings were mostly about their love-lives. Some kind of proof was required by the sitters to validate the advice and information given by the medium. Both positive and negative experiences of mediumship were reported with clients altering their behaviour according to the advice given. Some clients even started to practice as mediums themselves. Sarah’s overall conclusion was that these kind of mediumistic consultations do have social significance.
The second speaker was Jack Hunter on *Talking with the Spirits: an Experiential Exploration of Contemporary Trance and Physical Mediumship*. Jack also took an experiential approach to his study of the *Bristol Spirit Lodge* founded by Christine Di Nucci in 2005. The lodge practices a non-denominational form of trance and physical mediumship that is no longer commonly found. Whilst at the séances Jack witnessed transfiguration (changes in the medium’s face), lights, and hazes. Some of these phenomena were verified by the other sitters after the event. Jack also engaged in mediumship development himself. During these sessions he felt that he was somehow distanced from his body, sensed a presence behind him, felt that he was on the verge of fainting, had an increased heart rate, tingling in his hands and had involuntary movements of his arm. Jack criticised functionalist explanations, such as possession being a form of culturally endorsed protest. He argued that the first-hand claims of mediums are not taken into account, that the phenomenon happens cross-culturally, and that explanations usually assume, *a priori*, that there is no life after death. Jack concluded that his experiences as an insider gave him a new perspective on mediumship, and that there is a core of experiences that are subsequently clothed in beliefs and ideas. Paranormal experiences, Jack stated, are important as they have an influence on society. Jack’s website can be found at [http://paranthropology.weebly.com/index.html](http://paranthropology.weebly.com/index.html)

The next talk was by Dr. Fiona Bowie on *The Awakening Letters: Exploring the Mediumship of Lady Cynthia Sandys*. Dr. Bowie again championed the *emic* approach, emphasising the need for a cognitive and empathetic engagement that does not ignore insider explanations. This ‘imaginative leap’, however, does not demand belief. Lady Cynthia Sandys (1898-1990) practiced channeling in her private life for a number of years and recorded much information about her perception of the post-mortem world. Her letters cover topics such as the process of dying, the post-mortem life and responsibilities, travel on the earth and in the solar system, past-lives, healing and religion. Much of this material accords with similar information garnered from near-death experiences, Spiritualism and Theosophy.

Ann Davies spoke on *Discerning Spirit: Phenomenological Art*. This is the production of portraits of the deceased as Ann perceives them in spirit. Ann herself is a medium, artist and teacher. The artistic process involves automatic drawing (as opposed to automatic writing) during which Ann’s conscious state is retained and an external force controls her movements. Whilst drawing the portraits Ann also gives verbal information and narrows down the portrait to a particular recipient in the audience. Ann gave an example of one portrait that she had produced of a four-year-old, blue-eyed girl called Hollie who had died in hospital of leukaemia. Verifiable details of the picture included butterfly brooches in the girl’s hair and a teddy bear that had been put in her grave. Ann argued that this phenomenon was important for the audience, the individual recipient, and the deceased spirit itself. Ann’s website can be found at [http://www.anndavies-artofspirit.co.uk](http://www.anndavies-artofspirit.co.uk)

Dr. Yves Marton gave an account of his own experiences entitled *The Journey In and Out of ‘The Extraordinary’: Long-Term Research with Mediums in Los Angeles and Brazil*. Dr. Marton, like many of the other speakers, drew attention to the use of the participant-observation method, and the challenges that researchers find with this approach. He also gave an account of the divisions that can be caused between followers of religion and militant sceptics. He also emphasised that this method can result in the transformation of the researcher, and that the extraordinary experiences they encounter may become a part of their own life journey.

Next up was Dr. David Luke speaking on *Anthropology and Parapsychology: Still Hostile Sisters in Science?* Dr. Luke began by summarising some of his own research into altered states of consciousness (ASCs) psychedelics and Psi in other cultures and native traditions; he cited those of India, Siberia, Mexico, Australia, Africa, South America and the Middle East. He
then went on to give an overview of the development of anthropology beginning with the ‘armchair’ variety of Edward Tylor and Bronislaw Malinowski, followed by Andrew Lang’s critique of this approach and his emphasis on comparative studies with other cultures.

Next to come was Alexandra David-Neel, who talked about her interest in telepathy amongst monks in Tibet and the ‘parapsychology era’ of J. B Rhine’s laboratory research. This developed into the ‘psychedelic era’ due to the interest sparked by Castaneda. More recently, research has focused on reincarnation, notably by Dr. Ian Stevenson, in Sri Lanka and Thailand amongst other places. Dr. Luke expressed his agreement with the sentiments of Edith Turner who advocated ‘participation with genuine intent’ with the culture under investigation. This approach has been used recently by Susan Greenwood in her research into Neo-Paganism. The conclusion was that anthropologists ‘must be willing to risk being transformed in the process of exploration’.

The final speaker of the day was Dr. Paul Marshall on *The Psychical and The Mystical: Is there a Connection?* Dr. Marshall began by stating that there is little mention of mysticism in parapsychology, which instead focuses its attention on Psi and post-mortem survival. Equally, there is little reference to parapsychology in mystical studies, which concentrate on mystical and unitive type experiences. The other phenomena mentioned by mystics, such as Psi, visions, voices, stigmata, levitation and bi-location are generally considered accidental and as distractions from the true path. From the parapsychological perspective, this lack of interdisciplinary research may be due to the fact that mystical insights are not open to scientific testing and that the mystical literature is not informative enough about Psi. Likewise, scholars of mysticism often view Psi phenomena as dubious and tend to define mysticism in terms of union. Dr. Marshall went on to suggest some connections between parapsychology and mysticism, such as an expanded perception of space and time, increased knowledge and an altered sense of self. There are also shared predisposing factors and triggers to both parapsychological and mystical phenomena, for example, transliminality, sensory deprivation, drugs and distress. He concluded by suggesting that a ‘filter theory’ of consciousness may explain the differences between the two types of experience. There may be different selection processes acting on subconscious content. In the case of Psi there is still a large degree of filtering, whereas in mysticism there is less filtering between the subconscious and the conscious mind. Therefore, he argued, there is a common source to both types of experience. Dr. Paul Marshall is the author of *Mystical Encounters with the Natural World*.

If anyone is interested in attending future *Exploring the Extraordinary* conferences, or in joining the e-mail list, please contact Dr. Hannah Gilbert at heg104@york.ac.uk

Mike Rush
www.esoteric-experience.org.uk

‘The Experience of Worship’: Research, Engagement and Transcendence
An historical re-enactment of worship at St Teilo’s Church, Cardiff in June 2011

‘The experience of worship in late medieval cathedral and parish church’ is an innovative Religion and Society Research Programme, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). By enacting medieval worship it is hoped to shed new light on the process by which sacred spaces become sanctified, and texts, artefacts and music become an act of worship, i.e. a religious experience. The enactments are taking place during 2011 at Salisbury Cathedral and at St
Teilo’s Church, part of St Fagans National History Museum in Cardiff. This report provides one viewpoint (of many) of the first enactments at St Teilo’s in June.

Key to the essence of this interdisciplinary project is the range of research methodologies that experts in liturgy, music, theology and history (and others) bring to it. By encouraging, comparing and then integrating different viewpoints it is hoped to come to a greater understanding of how the people, places and rituals of worship contribute to the ‘Experience of Worship’. From 2012 the project team will be describing the enactment process and disseminating results of the project at a number of conferences around the UK (see www.experienceofworship.org.uk for details). This report represents my personal perspective as a researcher into transcendence, and as a member of the AHS.

My role during the enactment was two-fold, firstly as project administrator, concerned with practical arrangements. Secondly, like more than half of the thirty or so directly involved during the week long enactment period, I was in medieval costume trying to experience medieval worship as my character (a carpenter) might have done. I, like many fellow participants reviewing the event immediately afterwards, described periods of the enactments as ‘moving’. Others described the week of research as ‘special’. As ‘action research’ it certainly provided material that one cannot obtain from reading nor even from attending an event as observer.

A major factor in the success of the enactment (in that everybody involved felt it had been a worthwhile and powerful experience) was the sense of community that quickly built up amongst the participants. This was almost certainly due to the commitment shown by all and to the inspiration and leadership of Professor John Harper of the International Centre for Sacred Music Studies (ICSMuS) at Bangor University. The resulting trust between a group of diverse age, academic discipline and faith denominations, was remarked on in many of the ‘review’ discussions at the end of the week. It also contributed greatly to the ability of those challenged by events (as discussed below) to continue to take part. Such a sense of community, commitment and personal interest in the project enabled us all to engage with the tasks at hand during the week.

Given the often conflicting roles of minister, performer (particularly the singers), worshipper and researcher, questions were raised as to what should be our focus? Or put another way, at any given moment, what should we be engaged with and committed to? In the event we each had to find our own answers to these dilemmas. For me, the focus was to be in the moment, to be as ‘present’ as possible, using whichever of my available roles best enabled that. Commitment to pre-determined goals, I felt, could disable the spontaneity which so often plays a part in a free-flowing, meaningful experience. An example of this occurred during our day of filming, when two errors from the singers led to a retake of significant portions of the enactment. Whereas the original take (despite technical errors) was a very moving experience, the (technically precise) retakes were felt by a number of us to be an anti-climax, and for me at least, lacking in depth.

By comparison, there were times when ‘everything clicked’. Everybody was immersed in the experience and flowing with it. These high levels of engagement by all participants were constantly reported on in debriefing sessions, in the sense of consistently being open and aware of those around and being able to respond, emotionally and physically, to developments. This, in turn, for many of us on many occasions, greatly assisted the sense of this being a genuine experience of worship.
Perhaps this is where engaging is also ‘being present’: when we are fully aware of our situation and engaged through the words, images, music and scenario, and thus open to higher states of consciousness. In such cases, I would suggest, our sensory focus is merely a portal. Perhaps more importantly, I would also suggest, to enable the depth of a genuine worship experience, we need to be able to feel the moment, inwardly.

Many singing participants, however, reported that they were too busy getting the words right to feel it as worship; the rational mind being in a ‘language consciousness’ mode, presumably makes feeling the experience far more difficult. Those, like myself, who had roles as laity were spared such difficulty. Not only were the words being sung in Latin, so incomprehensible to most of us, but many were deliberately inaudible, and we were separated from the action of the clergy by the rood screen. We were however provided with a number of keys: by watching and following the Lord of the Manor, we would stand or kneel at appropriate moments; our character staying respectful of our patron in the process. We were also provided with the striking wall paintings of St Teilo’s, recreated as they would have been in 1520 (see: www.museumwales.ac.uk/en/1240/).

During the mass, without a bench for my lower class carpenter character, I had to lean against the wall to support my aching back. On the wall was an image of Jesus showing his crucifixion wounds. I was reminded of our enculturation session the night before where it was suggested that these paintings were more than just images: they could act as a means of connecting to the suffering of Christ. The ache (which I often get) in my lower back and side was in a place not dissimilar to the wound depicted on the wall painting of Christ. It was not difficult to focus on my own pain and to be aware that what I was feeling was so much less than he would have felt, and that somehow our pain was shared and common with that of humanity as a whole. I began to feel almost feverishly hot (particularly in the head) and with a sense of being not just in a reconstructed church in a museum in Wales but ‘Being’ in the sense that Heidegger uses the term. What may have started as ‘play-acting’ had certainly become worship, with at least some degree of what I would call Christ-Consciousness or transcendence.

On reflection I could imagine that the carpenter, in his day and without the distractions of project objectives, could well have been able to enter into a similar state. As a skilled craftsman he would quite likely have had a strong connection to wood, to the trees and natural world. It seems reasonable that he would also have related to Jesus the carpenter. To him the liturgy was of less importance than the opportunity physically to rest and to reflect. If he was able to detach from worries of whether or not he would finish the table that he was making for the Lord of the Manor (for example) or the latest illness in his family, he might have been transported into a transcendent state of consciousness, in a similar manner to
myself as ‘modern mystic’. However, whilst modern mystics have to make a conscious effort to stand aside from rational deliberations and detach from consciously thinking about the liturgy, it might perhaps have been easier for the illiterate medieval laity.

Besides my own transcendent experiences during the enactment, at least one other participant had a significant experience, but in his case, as an observer. Paul (real name, used with permission and thanks) was neither singing nor in period costume and thus, during the day of filming, had to remain outside the church door. Unable to see or hear most of the action inside the church he was detached from the detail of the enactment, but could hear enough to follow it. Alone in the tranquillity of the porch, his attention was engaged by his immediate surroundings: the birds singing in the church yard, butterflies and insects. By emptying his mind of everything else, he found that he was drawn to contemplate the work of Creation, God’s presence in the world and, particularly at the moment of the consecration of the bread and wine, the Incarnation: it was neither planned nor deliberate, but took over and became all-absorbing. Contemplation of nature led to involuntary engagement with one part of the Christian message and one strand of the half-sensed Eucharistic liturgy, in the same way as the paintings inside engaged me in contemplation of Christ’s Passion.

Such a lead-up to what I would call a transcendent experience is, I have found in my research, by no means unusual. Such experiences often occur once we ‘let go’ of expectations and allow ourselves to surrender into the moment. That such a moment of, if not ‘Christ Consciousness’, at least a step towards it, should occur outside the church might seem paradoxical, but such is the nature of original research: to report and make sense of what happens in practice. Why should ‘Experience of Worship’ not extend to the churchyard?

In general, the experiences of those directly involved in the ‘performance’ side of the enactments, challenge of words and notes aside, tended to be of a more personal nature. Typical were reports of a challenge to prior ideas (from within their own denomination) as to what constituted worship. In the context of my own research into transcendence, I have found that such questioning of expectations can be considered another facet of transcendence: a ‘mental’ transcendence of conditioned thinking, for example. This, I am suggesting, enables subsequent experience of a more numinous nature. Together mental transcendence and numinous experiences can be seen as part of a transcendence process, our personal journey towards Christ Consciousness. That a project aimed at exploring ‘The Experience of Worship’ enabled both sorts of experience in abundance would seem to both support this hypothesis and justify the project and its aims.

Keith Beasley

Further enactments have taken place at St Teilo’s Church, St Fagans, Cardiff during September: Latin Mass of the Holy Name with procession (male singers and organ) and Latin Vespers of the Holy Name. Similar events will take place in Salisbury Cathedral on 6th and 9th October: see the following web site for details: http://www.bangor.ac.uk/music/AHRC/dates.php.en Places are limited, so prior booking is required at all enactments. Contact: experienceofworship@bangor.ac.uk or 01248 382490.

Keith Beasley is project administrator for the Experience of Worship project and a PhD student at Bangor University. He coordinates BUTT (Bangor University Transcending Thought), the North Wales local group for AHS.
Report on the Alister Hardy Society/World Congress of Faiths one-day Conference

Our June one-day conference, organised by the London and Oxford/Cotswold Groups, was held this year on 11th June 2011 at the Essex Unitarian Church in Kensington, London, with the World Congress of Faiths, on the theme *Spirituality: How might spiritual religious experience help towards understanding & compassion?* Our speakers were Revd. Dr. Marcus Braybrooke, President of the Word Congress of Faiths, Dr Gregory Barker, Director of the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre responsible for research, and Eley McAinsh, Director of the Living Spirituality Network.

Marcus Braybrooke, in his talk *Fellowship of Faiths: a Communion of Spirit*, referred to Sir Francis Younghusband founding the World Congress of Faiths, seventy-five years ago, with the hope that it would be ‘a fellowship of faith or a communion of the spirit’. He quoted Robert Runcie, advocating not a single-minded and synthetic model of world religion, but for religions ‘to break through their particularity to the point at which religion loses its importance and breaks through to a spiritual freedom and a vision of the spiritual experience of other expressions of the ultimate meaning of human existence.’ But against this he recognised the rejection of universal concepts by post-modernist thinkers, and that no religion was showing itself ‘willing to die to self and to be reborn into a richer fellowship.’ He focussed on the nature of spiritual experience and the sense of Oneness, and how that experience of Oneness flows over into sympathy and compassion for all beings – and makes forgiveness possible. If the sense of oneness inspires empathy with other people, the experience of the Divine transcends all our dogmas and doctrines, and this is the true basis for ‘a fellowship of faiths.’ His final point was that ‘mystical awareness and social action are interdependent’. Those who see most vividly God’s will for the world will be the most critical of abuse and active in social reform. This bringing together of the spiritual and the practical is one of the great insights of the twentieth century. The World Congress of Faiths is a small body, but members one of another in the ‘Great Unity’. Membership in the Great Unity far exceeds membership of any organization, but those who belong to it are those who spread understanding and compassion in our world.

Dr. Gregory Barker, in his talk, *Faith and No Faith: the Contribution of Atheism to the Spiritual Quest*, spoke about applying spirituality and the sense of oneness; how we might develop a compassionate attitude to what is happening; and the need for flexibility and to see each other as brothers and sisters as we face critical questions. Contrasting this with the interfaith perspective, he looked especially at the group of people who call themselves atheists. Atheism has a human side, rejecting supernaturalism but favouring science over religion – with a new atheism firmly repudiating any form of religious belief. However, there is a form of atheism which seeks to view itself in some continuity with religious traditions rather than opposing them – a spiritual atheism. He believed that exclusivity could not be right: there could not be just one right religion, or science versus religion. He believed that science will ultimately end up knowing the nature of spirituality, and spirituality understand that science is just a method of understanding what is true – there is no separation between science and spirituality. He pointed to common links between spiritual atheism and interfaith spirituality, both sharing a modernistic heritage; a common agenda in articulating spiritual values; and opposition to a literalistic religious interpretation of reality – differences being in atheism’s rejection of life after death and God. Spiritual atheism is important because it demonstrates that we can go beyond typical oppositions and characterising others as a way of defining who we are. He concluded by coming back to interfaith spirituality as being able to offer spiritual values which can be seen as shared amongst several religious traditions. There are questions facing all of us today and we need to find partners to find solutions: we need all to work together in a larger coalition.
After lunch, Eley McAinsh, in her talk *From Contemplation to Compassion*, asked what role contemporary spiritual experience could play in facilitating the changes necessary if conflict and catastrophe are to be avoided, and justice prevail. Looking at mysticism and contemporary spirituality, she had begun to see the essential relationship between mysticism and action, contemplation and compassion. Compassion born of spiritual experience was able to bring forth a radical change of heart and perspective. Mentioning Alister Hardy’s view that the future of theology might be observably found in religious experience as opposed to doctrines and supposed events in the past, she observed that at the heart of the so-called Spirituality Revolution is a new emphasis on personal experience as opposed to inherited religious forms. She referred to contemplation being not particularly concerned with the inner states of the contemplative but with the breaking through of wisdom into the contemplative’s consciousness. To attain different states and stages of consciousness is not the ultimate aim, which should be a decentring of self to free us for love, compassion and service. She said spiritual experience sought for its own sake will not lead to contemplation, but advocated meditation as the best way to realise compassion, and a way to access the inner wisdom; and that, as spiritual practice brings us to a deeper consciousness of that connection, we come to a deeper awareness of our responsibilities in the world.

An open discussion followed bringing in all the speakers, with questions including: what is meant by ‘spirituality’; whether spirituality could be considered as a sense of oneness between oneself and one’s environment; if the clash between spiritual experiences and what is considered objective study still didn’t allow for the two to be compatible in an academic context; and, the paradox between religion and spirituality and whether or not the two could support each other.

*John Franklin*

[CDs of the three talks (£6.00 each, incl. p&p – or £12.00 for all three), or DVD containing all talks (£8.00, incl. p&p), are available from, Jean Matthews, Archive Supervisor, Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre, The Library, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Lampeter, Ceredigion, SA48 7ED. Cheques payable to ‘The Alister Hardy Trust’. Overseas members may pay by credit card.]

**Evolutionary Consciousness – a conference organized by Common Ground and the Wrekin Trust**

This was a day-long gathering at the Trevacoon Country House, Llanrhian, Pembrokeshire. The aim was to explore the vision of participants, establish or re-establish connections between spiritual groups and create suggestions for how we could meet the challenges of our time. There were over 50 attendees on this beautiful Spring day, the weather mirroring the generally optimistic mood of the conference.

The principal speakers were David Karchere, Spiritual Director for Emissaries of Divine Light (www.emissaries.org), based at the Sunrise Ranch in Colorado; Tessa Maskill from The Wrekin Trust (www.wrekintrust.org); and Reverend Don MacGregor, Vicar of St. Mary’s Church, Fishguard and Interfaith Officer for St David’s Diocese, who together with his wife Jayne helped organize this day for us. Don is a key member of Common Ground (www.commongroundpembs.org.uk) a local network in North Pembrokeshire seeking to link and inform those in the area who are interested in approaching spiritual issues in life with an open mind.
David’s message was that the subconscious life-force within us was now emerging and merging into a global consciousness that we cannot go on living the materialistic life of the last few centuries, riven with religious and territorial enmity. It was time that individually and collectively we devoted ourselves to global harmony.

Tessa, standing in at the last moment for Janice Dolley who was taken ill, outlined something of the work of The Wrekin Trust that had been established by Sir George Trevelyan in 1971 to promote non-sectarian spiritual education. The idea is to develop and promote communication between various spiritual communities.

Don, who was formerly a science teacher in Leicester, is seeking to promote a more broad-based interpretation of Christianity. In his current book he seeks to show the relevance of developments in science to religion in general and to Christianity in particular. He echoed Karen Armstrong’s assertion that ‘any interpretation of scripture that calls for hatred or intolerance of any other sect is illegitimate’.

It was inspiring to learn just how many different groups there are now in existence all devoted to the same aim of promoting different aspects of this global consciousness of love and tolerance. Several group organizers were given the chance to say a few words about their own group, so Paddy Murphy and I said a few words about the AHS and De Numine. We also had the opportunity to discuss issues amongst ourselves in organized small groups and informally over lunch and coffee. It was a most uplifting meeting.

Howard Jones

More links from the conference:
CANA – Christians Awakening to a New Awareness www.christiansawakening.org – some downloadable resources available.

Holistic Map – www.holisticmap.org – mapping organisations to do with holistic and contemporary spirituality – get yourself on it!

World Community for Christian Meditation, WCCM, www.wccm.org

www.millionthcircle.com – ‘The millionth circle’ refers to the circle whose formation tips the scales and shifts planetary consciousness. ‘When a critical number of people change the way they think and behave, a new era will begin.’

www.greenspirit.org.uk – GreenSpirit is a movement that celebrates all life as deeply connected and sacred. This radical vision brings together the rigour of science, the creativity of artistic expression, the passion of social action and the wisdom of spiritual traditions of all ages.


www.spiritofpeace.co.uk - Spirit of Peace is a rapidly developing UK based charity, with a heartfelt vision to foster greater peace and equality in our global society.

www.interfaithwales.org - Inter-faith Wales aims to build a culture of mutual understanding and respect between the different faith and spiritual communities living in Wales, and with the wider secular society. Alan Bayes is currently the chairperson.

Multi-dimensional consciousness and earth energy – Karen Bishop, multikaren@yahoo.com
Reports from the Local Groups

Chesterfield Group

AHS member Christopher Gilmore visited us in June to give a talk on *Learning from Past-Lives*. Group member Oriel commented ‘I have not been able to attend the Alister Hardy Society monthly lecture meetings for a while so it was a nice re-introduction, meeting Christopher Gilmore. I enjoyed the whole evening. I had not met Christopher Gilmore before and found him to be a warm, caring and friendly person. He is very talented having been an actor, teacher, writer and author. A man of many talents he has the ability to communicate with people on all levels. He is a spiritual person and this understanding and awareness comes through. His talk entailed a lot of interaction with audience participation. We meditated and answered his probing questions on reincarnation, life after death and the whole experience of why we are here and the lessons to be learnt. I found that a lot of his knowledge and understanding on spiritual matters pertaining to the subject mirrored my own. I enjoyed the evening.’

Christopher’s website can be found at: [http://souleducator.blogspot.com](http://souleducator.blogspot.com)

In July David Croft gave a presentation on his new Oracle-X card deck. Oriel kindly provided a summary of this talk too: ‘David Croft, speaker at the July meeting, is not unknown to me. It is, however, the first time that I have attended one of his lectures. It was an unusual subject to talk about – Oracle-X, but David made the evening very interesting and
entertaining and the time passed quickly, soon going into extended time. Oracle-X is a card system, designed and implemented by David himself, not unlike the Tarot Cards, but with a different flare – a modern approach. It has self explanatory leaflets and can be used with greater or less understanding of esoteric matters, prediction, etc. I enjoyed the talk and admired his reasons for designing the system. I have even purchased one for myself! David came across as a dedicated and caring person – a good evening!

In August group member Vicky Wade led us on a trip around some sites of religious and historical interest around Staffordshire, Derbyshire and Leicestershire. The trip included the Priory Church of St. Mary & St. Hardulph at Breedon-on-the-Hill, home to the Breedon angel, and St. Wystan’s Church at Repton, containing an Anglo-Saxon crypt and pilgrimage site. A selection of photos from the day can be found on the AHS Chesterfield Group website at www.esoteric-experience.org.uk

We also watched and discussed a few DVDs, including Spirituality and the Arts by Edward Robinson, The Spirit of the Child by David Hay, and Glimpses of God featuring Professor Paul Badham amongst many other familiar faces. All of these DVDs are available for loan from the AHS library.

The new programme will include a movie night with a showing of The Crucible (Arthur Miller’s play about the Salem witch trials), a DVD biography of Joseph Campbell, a spiritual poetry evening, and a talk by Joe Revill entitled ‘Christianity’s Illegitimate Child’: A Witch looks at Christianity.

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

Mike Rush & Oriel Blissett

Midlands Group.

On 18th February the Revd. Jayne Crooks, from the Kings Norton Team Parish, presented a slide show, talk and display on A Pilgrimage to the Holy Land undertaken in May 2010. The meeting began with a sound meditation performed by Rodney on an unusual choice of instrument, a vuvuzela; having heard vuvuzelas at the time of the world cup in South Africa we wondered whether we would more likely be transported to Hell, but Rodney coaxed an amazingly beautiful sound from the instrument.

Rodney, introducing the speaker, skilfully linked the theme of pilgrimage with the closing quote from Rev. Jonathan Robinson’s presentation in January (A Glimpse of Glory), which was from the hymn ‘Jerusalem’, and a future event planned on the Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage (see below). He introduced the concept of our life as journey, and sound, music, helping to lead us into a sonic journey; he illustrated this with Blake’s painting of a spiral ladder ascending to Heaven, and compared it to the scale in music.

Jayne told us how a group of about 30 from the area had gone with their Bishop to the Holy Land visiting sacred sites that brought the Jesus of the gospels vividly to mind. She felt that Lake Galilee was the most peaceful site, and that the River Jordan where they renewed baptismal vows, was the most spiritual. Very significant for Jayne was her meeting with Elias Chacour, Archbishop of Galilee and his powerful pleas regarding the Palestinian cause. She
recommended we read his book, *Faith Beyond Despair; Building Hope in the Holy Land*. We enjoyed discussion with Jayne, and her slides had given us a window into this beautiful but divided land.

On 18th March we had a more informal meeting on *The Life and Works of Kahlil Gibran*, facilitated by Gilly. Gilly led a silent meditation for the plight of those in Japan following the earthquakes and the risks of radiation from the damaged nuclear plant. She then shared with the group a recent dream, in which the Divine was as a midwife at her birth, then a poem inspired by the dream, which led her to talk about the respect and significance Gibran accorded his dreams, as *Again I Dreamed of Jesus*. Our scribe and researcher (Rodney) found that Auguste Rodin had said of Gibran, ‘I know of no-one else in whom drawing and poetry are so linked together as to make him a new Blake.’ Clement played us a CD of the chapter on ‘Work’ set to up-beat music. Other poets, whose work resonated with that of Gibran were discussed (Tagore, Henry Vaughan) and we had an intense discussion as to whether Gibran was a mystic or not. Some of Gilly’s paintings were on display, and this added another dimension to the evening’s enjoyment.

On May 20th we continued the theme of *Spiritual Poetry*. Christina began the meeting with readings from John O’ Donahue, a well respected Irish theologian who died last year; ‘Blessing for Presence’ from *Divine Beauty* and a Celtic blessing. The latter poem reminded Harry of his illustration of the ‘Birth of the Soul’. This work was passed around the group, and the subject of the soul formed an underlying element during the evening. Clement played a track from the CD ‘Sweet Honey in the Rock’, a gospel choir singing the verses from Gibran’s ‘The Prophet’ on ‘Children’, and there was some discussion on children who spoke of a previous incarnation, common among the Druze community in Lebanon. Tim read Henry Vaughan’s ‘The Retreat’ which led us to speculate about future generations evolving (or returning) to a more spiritual state. Sasha read from *The Empathic Civilisation* by Jeremy Rifkin on the environment and use of resources. Christina read Kathleen Raine’s poem ‘Amo, Ergo Sum’ (a mystic’s response to Descartes axiom of ‘cogito ergo sum’). Rodney had written an amusing but profound poem entitled ‘Lines Panduriform, or Phase of Play Divine’, a meditation on Kali and Siva, and we ended the evening with Clement playing a CD of his composition ‘Invocations to Archangels’ previously broadcast on Radio 3. These last two items merit a revisit!

On June 17th we were pleased to welcome Roger Coward, organiser of the AHS Wales Group, giving his beautifully illustrated presentation on *Mandalas, Outer and Inner*. He opened the meeting with a traditional Buddhist universal blessing in which peace, love, joy, and serenity were conferred on all beings in the four compass points, and we were invited to repeat each verse together. Roger distinguished between mandala-like images such as rose windows, and Tibetan mandalas designed to focus meditation and aid achieving a spiritual experience – or enlightenment. He explained that these were not culturally derived but were revealed by sages who had ‘seen’ them within. He mentioned Carl Jung’s understanding of the mandala image in dream as symbolising the Self. From mandala –like images of different cultures Roger turned to the wealth of similar forms in Nature, and then to geometry, the symbolism of the circle, and how the Tibetan mandalas were used. Special reference was made to the Dalai Lama’s Kalachakra. We highly recommend Roger’s beautiful and well-researched presentation for AHS groups.

Our final meeting before the summer recess was on July 15th. The Revd. Theresa Jones and the Revd. Colin Jones were our guest speakers on *Pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela*. Colin is President of the Confraternity of St James. We began with a bamboo flute sound meditation by Rodney, an improvisation inspired by a poem by Theresa, ‘Choosing’, published in the
anthology *Writer’s Cramp*. To Rodney the lines, ‘he sought out a lowly way/ and kept to its path/ always avoiding excesses’ epitomised the spirit of pilgrimage. Colin’s beautiful slides accompanied his talk. He explained that Santiago was once considered the ‘end of the Christian world’. Legend tells of a star revealing the site of relics of St James resulted in a chapel being built and in the 10th century pilgrims started to arrive, and the relics were transferred later to a cathedral and Santiago became a major pilgrimage centre from the 10th to the 16th century. Monasteries were established along the routes to provide hospitality for pilgrims. With the rise of nationalism numbers dwindled until the 1980s, when a man called Elias mapped ancient pilgrim routes, and then in 1992 informal groups began making the pilgrimage. Numbers grew to many thousand per year and last year some 250,000, including members of other faiths, and of none.

Sheelah James

**London Group**

We started off our programme this year with a talk on 10th February by Dr. Ornella Corazza on *What Near-Death Experiences can teach us about Everyday Life*. She questioned the Cartesian mind-body distinction, so ingrained in Western thinking but not in accord with everyday experience, mentioning other philosophies such as the Japanese in which mind and body are regarded as a unity. Describing near-death experiences (NDEs), and how people thought them to be every bit as real as ordinary everyday experiences, she thought the Western view interpreting them dualistically, and often seeing them as proof that our souls or minds leave our bodies when death is imminent, was not so near the mark as the Japanese view of them being the sort of experiences that humans-*qua*-unified-beings sometimes had. She pointed to experiences similar to NDEs often happening to people nowhere near death, such as in childbirth, excessive tiredness or through the taking of drugs. These experiences can involve multi-sensual awareness and are often accompanied by feelings of acceptance and understanding. She pointed also to NDEs being cross-cultural – Japanese accounts being well-documented and very similar to Western accounts. She said there were three ways NDEs could be understood – the embodied or reductionist view, the survivalist view or the non-reductionist/non-dualist view – but they should not be seen as proof of one or other of these world views.

In March Margaret Rizza, a musician, singer and composer, gave an illustrated talk entitled, *A Journey to the Centre*: an account of her own search for a spiritual way of life and ultimate discovery of it. From a strong spiritual inclination as a child, she converted to Catholicism in the late 1960s, being strongly engaged through the inspirations of such mystics as St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross. She played some recorded extracts of her musical settings for some of St. John’s poetry. In the 1980s, she said, her life was settled and for 17 years fulfilled in worldly terms, but despite this she felt a sense of inner grieving. A six-week retreat at a Jesuit Ignatian Spirituality Centre in Wales led her to the writings of Dom John Main and meditation through the use of prayer or mantra, and to the works of Meister Eckhart. She said she found this an exciting journey, though she thought Eckhart’s teaching not a comfortable one to follow. He warns against getting bogged down in techniques and ideas and so missing the essence of the spiritual life, which is our relationship with God. She concluded with her favourite Eckhart insight; love is like a fish hook: whoever is captured by love picks up this hook – but do we want to be caught?

In the evening we shared personal spiritual/religious experiences. The experiences recounted varied widely from a sensation of blazing light, of a transcendent reality and overwhelming
love to a meaningful encounter at a bus stop. An inner conflict was described by a member who was trying to reject the materialistic ambitions that troubled him. He had approached a well-regarded swami in the hope of guidance, but without success. Another member opined that you don’t have spiritual experiences when you are thinking about them. The question of whether dreams can be a form of guidance was raised by a member who quoted a specific dream, which although now forgotten was acted out and led to a beneficial result. Several members spoke of being aware of God at a very young age, and the development into adulthood of their spiritual sense.

Our May evening talk this year was given by Barney Leith, Secretary for external affairs of the Bahá’í community of the UK, on Building Community: a Bahá’í perspective on the role of spiritual and religious experience in individual and collective transformation in the 21st century. He talked about the Bahá’ís as a small community on a journey, seeking to help bring about a world which is genuinely united and peaceful. To the Bahá’ís it is clear that one person can begin a process which can snowball a process of change. He outlined the history and writings of the Bahá’ís from their beginnings in Shiite Muslim Iran, the central message of the teachings being that the beginning of all things is the knowledge of God with the injunction to gain a true knowledge of oneself. To the Bahá’ís human experience is essentially spiritual in nature and rooted in a shared inner reality. A ‘community’ in this context indicates a set of active human relationships, for which a dynamic model of learning by Action, Reflection and Consultation is adopted, promoted by youth groups and study circles for adults. The Bahá’ís seek to avoid direct political involvement or criticism, but rather try to build up procedures which avoid adversarial conflict by building consensus. They have a permanent office in New York and observer status at UN level, run on the lines of seeking to induce change by ‘constructive resilience’, which has some principles in common with Gandhi’s ideas on non-violent resistance.

John Franklin

[CDs of these talks are available, from John Franklin, 21 Park Vista, Greenwich, London, SE10 9LZ, price £6.00 incl. p&p for talk only – £8.00 for 2 CDs with talk and discussion or for a DVD for both – cheques payable to ‘AHS London Group’.]

Oxford and Cotswold Group

The Oxford & Cotswold Group is continuing its path of gently exploring wide-ranging themes. We had a lovely half-day with Jonathan Stedall in March in Oxford. Jonathan read excerpts from his book, Where on Earth is Heaven, and showed us a compilation of scenes from his films over the years, including some inspiring interviews with John Betjeman and scenes from The Seven Ages. See http://www.jonathanstedall.co.uk/films.php for a list of his films. Copies of the book sold out on the day, but you can order it from Amazon if you missed your chance.

Oxford members helped with arrangements at the Joint Conference in London with the World Congress of Faiths on Saturday 11th June on the theme: ‘Spirituality: how might spiritual/religious experience help towards understanding and compassion?’ All three speakers gave excellent presentations (Revd Dr Marcus Braybrooke, Dr Gregory Barker, and Eley McAinsh). If you missed them, the CD or DVD of the talks is available from John Franklin (see London Group report).
Our next meeting (24 September) will be in Islip (just outside Oxford), featuring a presentation by Edward Baldwin, entitled ‘Turning a light on after-death communication’. Edward is a member of the Alister Hardy Society and shared his interest in spiritual and psychic matters with his wife, who died ten years ago. From the day of her death he was visited in his Oxford house by an ever-widening range of phenomena in electric lights, which spread to other locations in this country and abroad and to houses of many people who had known Sally well. (An article about his two direct encounters with Sally three months after her death was published in *De Numine* in February 2004.)

On Saturday 3 December I aim to hold a bring & share lunch to discuss activities for the new year. This might include another study group at a member’s house, possibly on the topic of healing, or some film showings. Please e-mail me if you wish to attend. Even if you cannot attend, I would welcome suggestions for future meetings and speakers, 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 use e-mail 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). e-mail: ahs@riachi.free-online.co.uk

Rhonda Riachi

**All Wales Group**

The **All Wales Group** programme of a Spring and Autumn Lecture and Annual Retreat is listed in the general AHS Programme for 2011. Group meetings and the bi-annual lectures have been scheduled for the afternoon so that members can travel to and from Lampeter comfortably during a day. Pleasant B&B accommodation can be had at reasonable cost in a University Residence, (Contact Anne Jones 01570 422351). Our All Wales local or mini groups continue in Swansea, Mid-Wales (Abbeycwmhir), Bangor, West Wales (Lampeter) and South East Wales (Cwmbran). Here’s what’s been happening:

The All Wales Groups meeting on April 12th was attended by members of the West, South East and Mid-Wales Groups. After a meditation we shared each group’s activities and began an exploration together of the subject of the year, *Spirituality & Sacred Place in Wales*.

For our Spring Lecture which followed we were honoured to have James Roose-Evans (ordained in the Anglican church) lead us to a spiritual experience of silence – ending with a meditation. His title *God is a Feel not a think – what is spiritual experience?* was made manifest through his skills as a much published author and international theatre director. Quoting from a wide variety of writers including Meister Eckhart, Blake, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Eckhart Tolle, Rumi, Karl Rahner, St. Bernard and many others, he explored the concepts of spirituality and religion in a most informative and stimulating manner.

The first part of the title was an explanation by a small boy of his idea of God, and James Roose Evans pointed out that in dealing with concepts such as God and the spiritual we have to deal with the intuitive and the experiential. Nothing is to be gained by arguing about God. Today, he said, the search is less for theory, less for theology and more for ‘practice’ – hence the attraction of Buddhism, meditation, listening and silence. Quoting Rumi he reminded us to ‘Stay in the root of your dream; don’t climb out on intellectual branches. Listen to what the silence is telling you’. (The full text of this lecture is available on the Alister Hardy website: [www.alisterhardysociety.org](http://www.alisterhardysociety.org))
Our next Groups Meeting and Lecture is on September 20th when the new Head of Theology, Religion and Islamic Studies at Trinity St David, Lampeter, Professor Densil Morgan will speak on our theme of the year, *Spirituality and Sacred Place in Wales* on which he is a much published specialist. Bangor has been innovative in requesting the lecture be televised to them through the fibres. This has been arranged. We continue with our theme on our Annual Retreat at Llantarnam Abbey in October.

**The Mid-Wales Group** has met bi-monthly at Roger Coward’s Cwm Bedw Barns, sometimes walking in the landscape opposite the Radnor Forest’s serpent guarded by seven St.Michaels’s churches, and sometimes sitting quietly in the gazebo. We always have a prayer or a meditation, and are working through the chapters of Dorian Llywelyn’s *Sacred Place, Chosen People*, sharing our personal responses and seeking understanding together. Dorian’s ‘vigorous analysis’ was published under the auspices of the Theology Department at Lampeter where he was a lecturer as well as being a Welsh-speaking catholic parish priest. It was reviewed as ‘the best new writing in Wales’. He explores the relationship between sacred and not sacred space: Wales as Old Testament Israel (especially chosen?) and whether it is tradition, community or God that makes a place feel especially holy? We explored this too.

The Convenor of the **West Wales Group** (previously Lampeter, Ceredigion & Pembrokeshire), **Marian MacPolin** has written: This group, averaging approximately 10 – 12 members, has continued to meet in the University at Lampeter. Since the Newcastle Emlyn group had gone down to 3 members, we were delighted that they decided to join the group meeting in Lampeter and they are warmly welcomed. It was also decided to widen the title of the group and re-name it the West Wales group. We continue to explore the theme for the year, ‘Spirituality and Sacred Place in Wales’.

23rd February 2011 meeting – 10 members attended and 3 sent apologies. This was a sharing meeting and each one presented an area, an experience or an object that was meaningful for them within the field of religious experience. So we heard about sound chambers, religious and spiritual experiences in a cathedral, a garden, a retreat, a new house and experiences abroad. Symbolic objects such as stones and holy well water likewise stimulated interest in the experiences connected with them. Some discussion followed and book titles were shared.

23rd March. One of our members, Louis Friedman, introduced us to the topic of Sound Chambers from his experience of discovering one on his property, enclosed by a quantity of quartz, in West Wales. He got valuable insights into this find from a visiting Pueblo Indian, Joseph Rael, who deepened his knowledge about one of these very special sacred places, also known as peace chambers. Often found where ley lines intercept and where sometimes sweat lodges are connected to them, they are places of strong vibrations and healing. After this very interesting talk we listened to a CD of some Bronze age instruments and voices and sounds of ancient Scotland.

23rd May. Nine members of the group attended this meeting and the topic, presented by Marian Mac Polin, MA, was ‘Pilgrimage and Religious Experience at Holy Wells in Ireland and Wales’ which was based on her MA dissertation. While pilgrimage to these sacred sites was very common in both countries in the past, pilgrimage to many holy wells has continued to be popular in Ireland but has declined in Wales with only a few sites being frequented by pilgrims nowadays. The talk was followed by a reflective visit to a nearby holy well, St. Cybi’s, at Llangybi and inspired this poem by Avril Jacques:
St Cybi’s Well

We stand under the green bough
That overhangs St Cybi’s well
A small verdant glade all aglow
With celandines, daisies and pink campions
Bluebells past prime, stand guard
Over fern frilled rock mouth
Where water appears
Serenely gliding its way over stones

Through meadows made lush by its bounty
Leaves and tiny petals of May blossom
Sail gently on the water surface
Vessels bound for a wider world
Nearby traffic roars, but here
A quality of silence fills the scented air
As we meditate and give thanks
For this quiet, sacred place of plenty.

Mary Cook, Convenor of the South East Wales Group, writes on a similar theme, An Ancient Well and Wellies:

In preparation for the All Wales retreat, which will focus on place and spiritual significance, the SE Wales group had arranged to visit our most local ‘spiritual place’, the holy well near Mamhilad. It was midsummer’s day and the high winds blew the clouds away revealing blue skies. The scenery was quite delightful, but underfoot quite risky, as the narrow, overgrown path grew more stony, steep and squelchy. It was a relief to find we had arrived. The well was medieval, small and all but hidden, but also delightful. A small bell hung from a weathered red ribbon. Nigel rang it, but if any sprite issued forth we weren’t aware. Had we been alone it could have been more conducive to ‘tuning in’.

I was not looking forward to the descent. Having tentatively managed the most treacherous sections, Ken found me a stick which served me very well as a confidence booster.

The lesson from the well seemed to be basic – that it was worthwhile taking the decision to go, to give ourselves the opportunity to immerse ourselves in the natural beauty all around us, and maybe touch a timeless element slumbering in the unlikely spring near the ridge of this friendly mountain. Its waters were deep and dark, but the sunlight seeped through the boughs making the moisture on the moss sparkle. Conversation sparkled too, as we enjoyed our fellowship, the touching of like minds.

Patrick Walter, Convenor of the Swansea Group writes that the group considered the idea that the spiritual might be complementary to science. How might the spiritual be appropriately explored: poetry, art, philosophy, experimental science etc? The approach of Alistar Hardy was described as empirical in the sense of collecting experiences. Penny Sartori discussed cases of Out of Body Experience and described a graphic example of the case of a man with Cerebral Palsy who had an Out of Body Near Death Experience. The physical and psychological effects were real. The idea of Carl Jung’s Collective Unconscious was
considered together with the metaphorical imagery of previous civilizations – the Tibetan Book of the dead and the Egyptian Book of the dead.

Gareth Davies asked how one could find robust evidence for spiritual and psychic experiences? What do they mean? Gareth James referred to the article from the New York Times *The Truth Wears Off* by Jonah Lehrer. The article describes how many well established, variably confirmed findings, in several fields from medicine to ecology, have begun to look uncertain and have proved increasingly difficult to replicate. The same sort of doubt occurs in parapsychology, and the article considered the case of Joseph Banks Rhine and the Zener card experiments.

The culture associated with death and dying was discussed: death and the idea of a departing soul might be associated with ritual and magical ceremonies; death has traditionally been a social event, but this is inconsistent with a hospital setting. There was some discussion of the importance of the message from the NDE.

Gareth Davies suggested an experiment and inviting a medium. There was some discussion of Kirilian photography. Marie Walters suggested the link between Art and Spirituality.

There was some discussion of pre-language, the psychic world of images and the idea of the collective unconscious. There was a discussion of pre-industrialized and even pre-agricultural civilizations and the psychic realm. There was a discussion of examples of psychic phenomena, including remote viewing.

The next scheduled meeting was on September 23rd with a presentation by Roger Coward: *Mandalas and Spiritual Experience*.

Compiled by Roger Coward, Chair, All Wales Group:
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**Letters to the Editor**

Dear Paddy

I came across the Prison Phoenix Trust (PPT) whilst working at the Alister Hardy Library, which receives its newsletters. I was impressed with the PPT’s support of inmates by teaching meditation and yoga that can be practised in one’s cell or groups organised in various prisons and led by PPT teacher. Letters from individuals that are published in the PPT bulletin testify that these disciplines are transforming people’s frames of mind; helping them cope in very difficult situations; and with the rebuilding of their lives when released.

It was when Marianne Rankin did some research on Ann Wetherall that I realised there was a connection between the Alister Hardy and Prison Phoenix Trusts.*

I have been communicating with PPT (in a personal capacity) for a little while, so, whilst based in Oxford I decided to visit their offices. An appointment was made; I was welcomed warmly and shown around. I noticed a collage of photos featuring Ann Wetherall. I mentioned the link between RERC and PPT and was told the wonderful story. Apparently, Ann Wetherall had worked with Sir Alister. They had collected accounts of religious experience from prisoners and became involved in pen-friendships. As I understood it, it
became impossible to keep up the correspondence but Ann did not want to disappoint those prisoners with whom they had developed relationships and who looked forward to receiving mail from the Religious Experience Research Centre, so Ann left AHT to set up the PPT and continue the letter writing service. (I hope that Marianne or Ann’s sister Tigger – an active patron of PPT – will correct any mistakes or add other interesting information.)

I noticed that among the many paintings and highly decorated envelopes created by prisoners that enhance the offices was a photo of Sister Elaine Machnnes, who wrote ‘Spirituality Imprisoned’, RERC Occasional Paper no. 16, [Second Series, Jan 1998, ISBN 0 906165 25 3]

If you would like to borrow back copies of the PPT newsletter, or Sister Elaine’s Occasional Paper, please contact Jean Matthews at RERC

Yours sincerely
Anne Veronica Watkins

* See http://www.theppt.org.uk/history.php

Dear Editor,

It was interesting to read the (reduced) form of Professor Marsh’s lecture in De Numine. He seems to infer that Near Death Experiences provide little or no evidence for survival of death.

I am surprised that Consciousness Beyond Life by the cardiologist Dr Pim Van Lommel is not included among the references.

What adds to my conviction that we survive death is that there are indications from many different phenomena. I wonder whether Professor Marsh considers that any convincing evidence comes through mediums.


Yours sincerely
Rowland Bowker
Keswick, Cumbria

Dear Editor,

I was shocked today to hear that books from the Alister Hardy library, held here at Lampeter, have been sold to private individuals by the campus library. I am told that one of the books that has been sold is signed by Sir Alister himself.

It would seem inconceivable that Sir Alister would have imagined, let alone allowed, the dismantling of either his archive or his personal library by sales of what is, after all, his
personal property amassed by great effort over many years and committed in good faith into the keeping of the University in perpetuity. Indeed, I would expect that in passing the archive and the library into the hands of any custodian he would have protected them both by a covenant to the effect that they were to be made freely available for all the purposes he had envisaged.

Of course, I do not know the full facts, and I am aware that the Alister Hardy library is now to some degree integrated with the campus library itself, but this could not cancel any prior covenant.

Eric Franklin, AHS member

This is an abridged form of the letter Eric Franklin sent to De Numine. The unabridged version will be sent to the Trustees as it does raise issues about which other members have expressed concern verbally. There seems to be a lack of clarity both about the status of the Archive and the basis on which the Alister Hardy library is being merged with the university library. The editor feels that information from the Trustees on both these issues should be made available to members as soon as possible.

Remembering Friends

Professor L. B. Brown, Director RERC 1993-1996

Remembering Laurie Brown

The study of religious experience is a multi disciplinary exercise, and over the course of the Alister Hardy Research Centre’s history there have been Directors with a variety of academic backgrounds. Originally a New Zealander, Professor Laurence Brown, who died in May of this year, was first involved with the Centre while still Professor of Psychology at the University of New South Wales, Kensington, Australia, and editor of the International Journal for The Psychology of Religion. The first formal contribution of his I have found is to Issue No 8 of Numinis (De Numine’s predecessor) in March 1991, giving an analysis of an account of experience which had been printed in the July 1990 copy. He became Director in 1993 following Gordon Wakefield’s retirement and continued till 1996 when Peggy Morgan succeeded him. He was a friend of another notable psychologist, Michael Argyle, and reported in the notes introducing himself (Numinis, April 1993 no. 12) that he had met Sir Alister on several occasions. As well as the Directorship of the Centre he also participated in Westminster College’s lecturing responsibilities in the area of psychology of religion. He became joint editor of Numinis in June 1993 and the name was changed for the next edition to the more grammatical De Numine. He also had a plan for a new journal focusing on religious experience, but that did not flourish beyond one sample edition.
L. B. Brown’s publications include:
*Religion, Personality and Mental Health*, Springer-Verlag, 1994

As Director Emeritus he jointly edited:
*Modern Spiritualities: An Enquiry*, Prometheus, 1997

Peggy Morgan
RERC Director 1996-2002

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**Charlotte Waterlow MBE (31st May 1915 – 3rd March 2011)**

A familiar and much loved figure, particularly in the Oxford/Cotswold Group, Charlotte Waterlow had, until recent years been a stalwart member of the AHS, regularly attending and contributing at meetings. Sadly, after she retired to Watermoor House she had found all-day events too tiring and we had not enjoyed her company for some time.

Charlotte was born in 1915 in Virginia and Leonard Woolf’s country house Asheham; her parents were part of the ‘Bloomsbury set’. She has told her story in *From Bloomsbury to Balham and Beyond*, subtitled *Life Journey of a Global Citizen* – indeed a true description, as she travelled widely all her life. The daughter of a diplomat, Charlotte attended boarding school and then went up to Cambridge University, where in 1936 she gained a First Class degree in History. During World War II Charlotte worked in the Ministry of War Transport Division, and then in the Foreign Office for which she was awarded the MBE in 1950. From 1954 to 1982 she taught modern world history at senior level in Britain, Canada and eventually in the USA. On her retirement she wrote her major work *The Hinge of History*, contrasting 5,000 years of traditional civilisations (in the plural) with 200 years of ‘modern civilisation’, based on human rights and science, which she describes as being in its adolescent phase, needing in the words of the title of her last book to *Grow Up or Blow Up*.

A spiritual explorer all her life, Charlotte was guided by a vision of universal spirituality, beyond the dogmas of religious traditions, with each person encouraged to fulfil their creative potential as a person. She was passionate about the value and significance of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and I treasure the copy she gave me.

We are most grateful to Charlotte for leaving us her large collection of books, which will be added to the Alister Hardy Trust Collection in the main library at the University of Trinity Saint David in Lampeter.

John Franklin represented the RERC & the AHS at Charlotte’s Funeralfriends and Family Farewell on March 21st in Swindon, and I attended the Memorial Meeting at the Friends
Meeting House in Cirencester on April 16th. Both John and I were able to pay tribute to Charlotte on behalf of the AHS, and as a much-loved friend.

(Marianne Rankin, Former Chair Alister Hardy Society)

**John Meldrum**

We were very sorry to hear of the death of John Meldrum. John had been a most supportive member of the Alister Hardy Society, and a member of the Society’s London Group, for a good number of years. I really got to know John when he offered the interesting ‘promise’ of a day’s sailing on his yacht on the Medway in an Auction of Promises, held in Oxford in 1996 as part of the Society’s fund-raising programme at that time, putting in a successful bid. My wife and I had a most enjoyable day’s sail on the river, and greatly enjoyed John’s company. Since then John and I became good friends. His quiet comments and contribution to discussion at the London Group meetings were much appreciated, and he will be greatly missed.

John Franklin

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Here is the rest of Anne Watkins’ tribute to Wendy, cut short on Independence Day in Delhi last Spring (see issue no. 50, p. 20). Ed.

**The Joys of Working with Dr Wendy Dossett**

Wendy and I became involved with RERC under the capable and inspiring guidance of Peggy Morgan. This was prior to the division of the directorate into areas of responsibility of the Centre, the MA, and Research; so Wendy really had her hands full!

I think Wendy and I were motivated by a number of factors. Of course we had our own professional standards to maintain but we also wanted to protect and develop the legacy we had inherited. We also sensed that it was difficult for the Oxford administration to hand over responsibility for something they cherished and we wanted to reassure the ‘outgoing team’ that we could look after the Centre and Society of which they were rightly proud.

The beginnings were exciting as the Alister Hardy Library, Archive and Art arrived and was sorted. The real ‘fun’ began when researchers began arriving. (Our first was Mary Bowmaker.) Wendy and I were struck by what genuine, appreciative and fascinating people they were. The new accounts of religious experiences, when they arrived, had us entranced. I recall Wendy saying what a privilege it was for us to be able to read people’s contributions to the archive, which were so personal, and sometimes this was the first time their story had ever been revealed to anyone.

Wendy further developed the MA in Religious Experience, which proved very popular. Despite the success in numbers which increased her workload, students remarked what a wonderful supervisor Wendy was: approachable, available, and supportive. I valued
Wendy’s encouragement for me to be involved with the students, both in my role as Correspondent and Librarian and during the busy and well-attended Residentials.

The Re-launch Conference in September 2002, ‘Spirituality, Science and Religious Experience’, preceded by a ‘Spirituality and Creativity’ Workshop, was co-ordinated by Wendy. This event incorporated the two areas that are important to RERC and AHS: the academic, essential for respect and recognition, and the experiential, which is the more important for many of our Members.

I soon discovered that Wendy not only made a caring friend but also was ideal to work for. As we started our new roles Wendy was always ready to answer my questions. When we settled into our jobs and I became more knowledgeable and experienced, she encouraged me to make work-related decisions myself, to take on more responsibility and to extend my skills. My tasks and planning were made easier by Wendy’s prompt reply to e-mails and enquiries. Most pleasant of all was Wendy’s appreciation of good work and ideas.

All that seems such a long time ago now and for various reasons we have had to move on. I am convinced that Wendy’s move to Chester is good for her but it is a great loss to the MA in Religious Experience, to students of the programme and to me.

Thank you for all you have done for us during the past decade, Dr Dossett.

Anne Veronica Watkins. AH Librarian 2000-2010

After the upheaval caused by the merger of Lampeter and Trinity College Carmarthen, we were delighted to welcome Dr Bettina Schmidt as a new Director of RERC, and also as Director of graduate research studies in the Department of Theology, Religious & Islamic Studies at Trinity Saint Davids. She is a more than worthy successor to Wendy, and we wish her well in her new posts. (Ed.)

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**Book Reviews**

**Michael N. Marsh, Out-of-Body and Near-Death Experiences: Brain-State Phenomena or Glimpses of Immortality?**


This book is based on the DPhil thesis in Theology of the author, who was a clinical biomedical research physician and then returned to Oxford to read Theology. Marsh has renamed NDEs and OBEs as Extra Corporeal Events (ECE). The book has two main parts – Part One discusses ECEs in relation to early research in the field of near-death studies, along with physiology, and Part Two discusses ECEs in relation to Christian concepts of the soul and afterlife.

The first point that I found very unusual was that this book was based predominantly on only eight books by five authors – the most recent being published over 12 years ago. The books referred to are certainly classics in the field of near-death studies but there have been far more up to date books published since which have not been considered. I also find it quite remarkable that there is little reference to the multitude of articles that have been published in
peer reviewed journals. Even more surprising is the very little reference to the four prospective hospital studies published during the past decade.

On page 9 Marsh emphatically points out that he has not engaged with any NDErs. It is unfortunate that Marsh has not spoken to NDErs or listened to any first hand accounts of NDEs, as it is one thing to read accounts of NDEs and quite something else to be in the presence of someone who recounts their NDE. Further to this he conveys his assumption on page 237 that NDEs are ‘not convincing as spiritual encounters, offering no greater significance or spiritual insight than those occasioned by any other event which it is reasonable to regard as hallucinatory’. This conclusion does suggest that merely studying eight books about NDEs provides instant understanding of these highly complex experiences.

Some statements made by Marsh suggest that he doesn’t have a full grasp of the phenomenology of NDEs. In the introduction (pp. xix) he states ‘that such dream-like mentation can be conjured during multi-second intervals by a brain rapidly awakening from an antecedent insult’. NDEs are not dream-like, NDErs report a heightened sense of consciousness, there is nothing dream-like about what the majority experience. With regards to frightening NDEs, unfortunately Marsh is under the misconception (pp. xxiii) that ‘experients find themselves in hell, thence to be rapidly transported into heavenly warmth and light’. Not all frightening NDEs turn into positive – this is true in some cases but certainly not for all. Some frightening NDErs are left with resultant psychological trauma and a fear of going to hell when they die; something that is far too easily dismissed and overlooked.

One of the most striking things about this book is the style in which it is written, particularly the first part, where there are many comments which are quite disrespectful to the researchers who have worked so hard doing the groundwork in this area. The book is written in a way that conveys that Marsh believes his theory is correct and by far superior to any other research in the field, even calling into question the interview techniques of some accomplished researchers.

With regards to veridical research, the OBE is the only aspect of the NDE that is potentially verifiable. All of the researchers in the field have followed the most logical protocol for such possible verification, yet Marsh on page 126 comments ‘I can hardly believe that intelligent people can so obstinately continue to pursue such hopelessly insubstantial ends.’ If patients report viewing these symbols then this tells us something about consciousness; conversely if hundreds of patients claim to have an OBE but do not view the symbols then this too provides valuable insight into consciousness. Either way the research is of value, and if such protocol was not followed then I’m sure the researchers would be criticised for not doing so.

Interestingly on page 50 Marsh comments ‘we must accept that during the OBE the reported viewing of the subject’s body and of events occurring within the immediate vicinity are not true records of these supposed events’. Speaking from personal experience of being present while an unconscious patient in my care later regained consciousness, and very accurately reported an out of body experience where he viewed actual events that occurred at the precise time that he was deeply unconscious, Marsh’s comment above is simply not true. Further to this Marsh fails to mention and discuss this comment in light of published OBE cases gathered from prospective studies in which actual events have been accurately reported.

From the outset of the book it is apparent that Marsh has his own pre-conceived ideas about NDEs. Marsh’s theory is argued from the premise that consciousness is created by the brain and there is no consideration to other possibilities. That the brain is involved in perceiving these experiences is not denied by researchers in the field. In fact for example, paediatrician
Dr Melvin Morse, one of the pioneers of near-death research, whose books were not amongst those reviewed by Marsh, suggested involvement of the limbic system many years ago. Unfortunately Marsh takes the neurophysiology to be a causation of consciousness, a priori, whereas the most recent research shows that it is more or equally likely that it is a correlation.

Marsh also fails to address empathic or shared death bed visions. There are increasing numbers of reports where people present at the deathbed, but not close to death themselves, experienced a transcendent partial journey into the light which culminated in the death of the loved ones whose bed they were sitting around. The effects these shared visions have on the experiencers leave them with a sense of elation and peace as opposed to the usual sadness and grief – this phenomenon cannot be explained by Marsh’s theory as these people at the bedside were not close to death nor were they unconscious.

It is also intriguing that Marsh believes he is the first to recognise the ways in which NDEs can change the lives of those who experience them – he seems quite unaware of the vast amount of work that has been devoted to researching life changes post NDE.

He makes very useful suggestions for future prospective research. However, these have already been considered by those researchers undertaking this work, many of which were already in practice before Marsh’s book was published. On page 246 he makes the very good point that measuring changes, such as faith, post NDE, has little value if no pre-NDE data has been collected. Although it is a good suggestion to gather pre-NDE statements on beliefs when put into practice this is almost impossible as NDEs occur in unexpected situations, and are usually the result of emergency admission to hospital, making it impossible to conduct any interview before-hand.

It is unfortunate that Marsh has conveyed such a negative view of the thorough research that has been undertaken in the field so far, even though many of the researchers he has a downward view of have been published in peer reviewed journals. I find it remarkable that he pays such little attention to the rigorous prospective study undertaken by Dr Pim Van Lommel and his team that was subsequently published in the prestigious medical journal The Lancet.

The second part of the book discusses the Christian beliefs of the resurrection in support of NDEs, yet I fail to see why only Christianity has been considered when NDEs have parallels in all religions. This discussion seems a little out of place in a scientific review of NDEs.

Marsh presents a critique of the eight books he reviews which is both interesting and thorough, and raises many good points. On page 55 he begins an interesting and relevant discussion on the depth of NDEs. Unfortunately, he attributes the variations in depth of NDE reports to ‘artefacts in the minds of the authors’ – if Marsh had taken the time to speak to several NDErs who recount varying qualities of the NDE, then he would realise the importance of classifying the depth of the near-death experience.

The neurophysiology he presents is also very informative; it’s just a pity that it is only considered as causative because it could add so much more to the debate if it was also considered from a correlative perspective.

Everyone has preconceived ideas of NDEs. However, all of the researchers who have done the most work in this area, and have remained open minded, having engaged with NDErs and the study of NDEs for many years, realise that in order to gain a greater understanding of this phenomenon we must be open to possibilities other than consciousness being a mere by-product of neurophysiology.
After more than thirty years of research in the field of NDEs there are no materialist theories that provide an adequate explanation for the full range of complexities associated with the NDE. The NDE is far too easily dismissed especially by those who have not fully engaged with NDErs themselves. Such bold statements about NDEs as these, quoted and outlined above, need to be supported by more up to date information and not rely predominantly on texts that are between 12 and 35 years old.


David Hay, God’s Biologist: A Life of Alister Hardy

If you are one of those involved in the continuation of Sir Alister Hardy’s work in the AHS and RERC, who has always regretted not having met the man himself, then this is the book for you. I had always wanted to find out more about Sir Alister and was determined that a biography should be written. So, many years ago, after seeking advice from Peggy Morgan, I wrote to David Hay, asking if he would be prepared to undertake the task. Who better to write such a book than a former student and colleague in the scientific world and a fellow-researcher in the field of religious experience? Despite illness, David Hay has more than fulfilled his commission and has given us a most enjoyable, comprehensive account of Sir Alister and his thinking. We owe him our gratitude.

David Hay’s stated aim was to ‘present a readable account of his life that goes some way towards an understanding of the religious preoccupations of a great biologist. … to illuminate the interaction between his biological and theological conjectures.’ Indeed, this is more than the story of a life. It is also a window onto the worlds of science, academia and religion as Hardy encountered them and a clear exposition of his thought and work.

The scene is set with Sir Alister on his bike at the familiar corner of Holywell Street and Mansfield Road where the RERU began. Today a plaque marks the entrance and another is found inside the Chapel at Manchester College. The fascinating story of Alister’s boyhood and emergence into adulthood is told as we follow his enthusiasms, for insects, bicycles, flight and adventure on the high seas which led to the study of zoology at Oxford, joining the Northern Cyclists’ Battalion in World War I, reconnaissance flights over France and his voyage to the Antarctic on the ‘Discovery’. A lively, humorous person emerges, one who warmed to his fellows, valiantly attempting and usually succeeding in ignoring the differences of class so prevalent at the time, epitomized by his life-long contact with his NCB comrades and their descendants.

Hardy had a sense that his life was ‘guided’ and viewed ‘Homo sapiens’ as ‘Homo religiosus’. However, despite his youthful vow to reconcile Darwin’s Theory of Evolution and the spiritual nature of humanity in the sceptical world of science, he carefully guarded his opinions on spirituality lest they hamper his professional advancement. Even his own children were unaware until their adulthood of his deep interest in religion and his students (Richard Dawkins included) had no idea at all. It was not until he was invited to give the Gifford Lectures in Aberdeen between 1963 and 1965 later published as The Living Stream and The Divine Flame that Hardy publicly formulated his ideas on spirituality. By then he was an established academic and prepared to defend his position.
The birth of the Religious Experience Research Unit at Manchester College followed in 1969 but this was no easy time for Hardy. By then he was somewhat isolated from the scientific community both through the articulation of his spiritual ideas and retirement from the Linacre Chair of Zoology at Oxford. He had also left the Church of England (although saying it was where his heart remained) for the Unitarians, whose thinking he shared.

Sadly, the great reward for his efforts, of the Templeton Prize, came too late for him either to attend the presentation himself or to direct the use to which the prize money was put. But the prize enabled the work he began to continue. Hardy would have been proud of later achievements, which are summarized by Professor Paul Badham at the end of the book. Between that section and the end of the account of Hardy’s life, Hay has chosen to add a lengthy Postscript on western secularism. My only caveat with the book is that this analysis is misplaced here, although it would make an excellent Occasional Paper.

One is left feeling that it is a privilege to play a part in the legacy of the man we have come to know in this engaging portrait. It is a book to be treasured.

Reviewed by Marianne Rankin, AHS Chair 2002-2010

(Copies at a reduced rate of £17 including p&p are available to AHS members from Jean Matthews).

David Hay, God’s Biologist: A Life of Alister Hardy

God’s Biologist is about a fun-loving, exuberant man who became an award-winning life-sciences professor and proponent of evolution theory, who at the peak of his career flitted off to become the world’s most enthusiastic student of religious experience. The author’s writing skills and inclusion of photographs make the book accessible to a wide audience. His insistence on excellence in scholarship and attention to detail make his writings useful at the same time to a narrower audience of scholars.

In writing a Hardy biography, the author needed to explore evidence within the three major themes of personality, science and religious experience. His own credentials, interests, preferences and assessment of what was feasible caused him to write as if he ranked these three themes in importance, with religious experience first, science second and personality third.

Readers who expect to see a typical mass-audience book might need to raise their sights and do a little more work than expected to be amply amused and rewarded. Based on their own credentials, interests and experience, scholars might have significant differences concerning how the author impresses them or satisfies their needs.

While trying to represent a cross-section of the people I have met during my eighty years of life on planet earth, I am giving Hay’s biography of Alister Hardy four out of five stars. If I represented only myself, I would give the same book two stars. This is partly because I am well steeped in knowledge of Hardy’s efforts in science and religious experience. It also is explained by my utter fascination with Hardy’s personality as it was revealed during the ten weeks I spent in his presence on a very small and crowded schooner.

The time was the summer of 1965. I had just finished my first year in the graduate oceanography program at Oregon State University. The ship was Stanford University’s
Te Vega. Hardy was a guest scientist chosen from outside my native America. Three American faculty members and twelve graduate students chosen from around the world completed the sixteen-member scientific party. A crew of similar size ran the ship.

I was ten years older than most of the other graduate students and had been exposed to many different leadership styles, also the behavior of people under stress and living in high population densities aboard US Navy ships. Compared to the people I had associated with in my Navy and football past, Alister Hardy’s behavior patterns seemed less guarded, less brazen, more sensitive and driven by creativity.

I have tried with little success to write about Alister Hardy’s personality, so I can understand the author’s failure to impress me in this category. The best of what I have tried describes how Hardy could smile with his eyes without curling his lips. That’s not much, but it suggests something important. He tried to assert himself and demand respect while reassuring students he was not threatening them.

Reviewed by Ben Korgen
(This review previously posted on the Amazon.com website (Books))

Tom Harpur, There is Life After Death

This book by Tom Harpur is an up-dated and expanded version of his 1991 book Life after Death. He answers the query, ‘Is there life after death?’ with a ‘resounding, reasoned yes!’ This book follows the same outline as his earlier book.

Chapter 1 deals with evidence for life after death, namely, after-death communications and death-bed visions which Harpur calls ‘Strange Encounters.’ Chapter 2 is ‘The Near-Death Experience’. In my opinion, these first two chapters provide his best evidence for afterlife.

Harpur agrees with Mark Fox who, in his book Religion, Spirituality, and the Near-Death Experience, declares there is largely silence in the theological community about the near-death experience. Harpur (a theologian himself) states that the near-death experience, ‘offers a bridge between religion and the modern world that church leaders should be rushing to cross.’

Chapter 3 is ‘The Spirit Mediums.’ While Harpur is a skeptic, he cites the excellent work of Gary Schwartz and Linda Russek of the University of Arizona, whose book The Afterlife Experiments has caused him to be more receptive to the idea of the medium; this practice has historically been riddled with fakes.

Harpur is not a big fan of reincarnation, but chapter 4 does include the excellent work of psychiatrist Ian Stevenson of the University of Virginia Medical School on this topic. This is followed by ‘Dreams of Death and Dying’ (chapter 5) about the dreams individuals have of their deceased loved ones. Chapter 6 is entitled, ‘New Light from Science.’ Here Harpur has chosen to highlight the anti-reductionist research that supports the idea that the mind exists as an entity separate from the brain. As in his earlier work, Harpur includes the research of the great Canadian neurosurgeon Wilder Penfield, but updates the book by adding the more recent research of Canadian neuroscientist Mario Beauregard.

When Harpur told me he was updating his 1991 book on the afterlife, I could not wait to see how he would deal with the fact that he no longer believes in an historical Jesus, but instead
believes in a Jesus of spirit. He refers to this new conceptualisation in his 2004 book *The Pagan Christ* and his 2007 book *Water into Wine*, with descriptions such as the ‘Mythic Christ,’ ‘Christ Spirit,’ ‘Christ Consciousness,’ ‘Christ Within,’ and ‘Spiritual Christ of the Mythos.’ For the sake of brevity, I will refer to this Christ concept as simply, the ‘Cosmic Christ’ (my words). Harpur does not disappoint in his updating the chapters on ‘Christianity’ (chapter 7) and ‘Heaven, Purgatory, and End-Times’ (chapter 8). He brings his current views that the Cosmic Christ is the model for showing us the way to God’s promise of eternal life for all – and I do mean ‘all’ – for Harpur is still committed to the idea of Universal Salvation for ALL. While Harpur believes that we all face, ‘a moment of review or kind of tribunal which will be intense for some’ and ‘a kind of suffering or hell,’ in the end, ALL will be saved.

His next chapter (chapter 9) on ‘Other World Faiths’ includes the major religions of the world. He follows through with his commitment to Universalism by pointing out that Universalism is either the dominant position on afterlife in the religion (as it is in Zoroastrianism) or a minority position in the religion (as it is in Islam). His inclusion of Native American spirituality is excellent. In ‘Personal Reflections and Conclusions’ (chapter 10), Harpur’s conclusion also echoes his theme that the Cosmic Christ is, ‘the central motif in a mythical drama, almost as old as humanity.’ At death, the ‘Light not only reveals and brings judgment’ but also ‘love, mercy, and forgiveness as well.’ At death, Harpur sees us ALL reunited with God and our loved ones (including animals).

If you have not read Harpur’s earlier book on afterlife, this one is a ‘must-read.’ If you have read his earlier book, don’t miss out on this sweet update.

Reviewed by Dr Ken R. Vincent
(This review previously posted on the Amazon.com website (Books))

**Howard A. Jones, *The World As Spirit, How Science Supports the Mystical***

In this book, Howard Jones takes his reader on a rollercoaster ride through science, philosophy and religion. It is at times a challenging read as he brings his wide-ranging material together to suggest a fascinating New Story, a new vision for the future,

‘... a vision derived from reason and the senses that is compatible with many different world-views both secular and spiritual. ... a natural or rational yet spiritual philosophy without recourse to the dogmatic theology derived from revelation, because this is too controversial, individual and subjective. The vision could equally be described as a secular plan for global social harmony.’ (xv)

Jones begins with an overview of the development of science from Aristotle to Max Planck. He critiques the western dualist view of mind as separate from matter and Man and Nature as separate from God and advocates a holistic view, inspired by philosophies and religions from the East, which are seen to be in tune with the natural world, through concepts such as the tao, li or wu wei. His contention is that western religion has become formalized and de-spiritualized.

He considers the concept of God and suggests that a view of God as pure spirit or ‘cosmic consciousness’ would eliminate the barrier between theists and atheists, paving the way for an integrated worldview. This would include psychic and spiritual events as part of the natural world in an enlarged understanding of the whole.
There are multiple references to a vast collection of writers and at times the work reads like a series of mini book reviews. This offers a huge range of informed suggestions for further reading in the different fields considered.

Inevitably in a work of such scope there are generalizations such as ‘There is no essential difference between messages claimed to have been received by the prophets of religion and messages claimed to have been received by a medium from discarnate spirits, a kind of spiritual or mystical insight that we can describe as “intuition” (p. 32) with which readers may or may not agree.

Part II ‘The monistic world-view’ begins with a particularly challenging chapter on Quantum Physics, but hold tight and persevere as it holds the key to the main argument. Very briefly (I think) the quantum field energy or zero point field (z.p.f.) fills the spaces between subatomic particles and so is inherent in everything in the universe. Jones identifies this as cosmic spirit, which leads to a holistic view of the universe, as everything is connected on a Quantum level. The cosmic spiritual energy field also enables psychic activity and communication with discarnate spirits. Just as the Newtonian materialist view of the universe has been overtaken by Quantum, so must the corresponding materialist view of ourselves. We each have within us this z.p.f. or cosmic spirit. We touch it in spiritual experience, meditation and prayer. It is our soul and it is eternal.

Humans are formed of this spiritual energy with ‘Darwinian inheritance but shaped by Lamarckian experience’. We make who we are by our choices, through using our Will. The title of the book is a reference to Schopenhauer’s The World as Will and Idea and Jones suggests that ‘… we and the world are Spirit that we embrace through Will.’ (p. 86)

Part III develops the concept of ‘Cosmic spirit’. Alister Hardy is acknowledged as an inspiration, through having recorded both spiritual and psychic experiences and having grasped the essential underlying spiritual truth that ‘… the visible world is part of a more spiritual universe from which it draws its chief significance’. Ben and Judy Korgen’s ‘Rolling Wave Insights’ website is highlighted ‘as a clarion call to all those who care about the future of human kind and the planet …’ as the holistic world-view leads to a reconnection with Nature.

The book itself has a scenic picture on the cover, showing the one element which exists simultaneously in three forms of solid, liquid and gas on earth – water. However, the volume is fragile and despite my best efforts, its pages had sprung apart by the time I had finished reading.

The World as Spirit links science and spirituality in a new way and I thoroughly recommend it.

Reviewed by Marianne Rankin


This is another in a series of books by the same author that all point to new directions of being and thinking in our world.

Howard Jones moves easily between science, religion, philosophy, ecology, psychology and many other discreet ways of knowing and brings them together to build new visions. The
World as Spirit is a deep well of background information, each item used to build on the last one to lead readers to better understanding of the synthesis they make. The sense of building a pyramid comes to mind, with each brick resting on another, but the end is not a final and static brick. On the contrary, Jones shows that we do not stand alone on the top of something solid, but are linked together in a unity with all things; that we are not solitary beings but totally interconnected in the all-encompassing spirit. With the hundreds of sources given, it is possible to see that neither science nor idealism are complete systems in themselves, but each takes us further into new realms of holism.

The book is characteristic of Jones’ wide spirit, always looking for ways of integrating one view into a bigger one, and seeing how one aspect affects another. The words synthesis, holism, unifying, and spiritual are not on every page, but every page speaks of them and leads one to understand better what they represent. In each of his books one encounters the accumulated wisdom and insights of a person with wide views, and one feels to be holding a summa in one’s hand; then another book is published and the mind is further expanded, and the body becomes more integrated in a vision that is not ‘out there’ but right here.

This is a book for any reader, young and old, learned and unlearned, familiar with any of the topics addressed, and not; it is written in a very accessible style, without jargon or necessary pre-understanding. Each reader can find new connections and insights, a bigger view than so far reached, and encouragement to continue in the path of ever greater or deeper thinking, feeling and acting for the greater good of all creation.

Reviewed by Verena Tschudin, former editor of De Numine; co-editor with Meg Maxwell of Seeing the Invisible (Penguin, 1990/RERC 1996); Reader, University of Surrey, England; and Director of the International Centre for Nursing Ethics, UK.

Thomas Berry (ed. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim), The Christian Future and the Fate of the Earth

This slender volume encompasses a collection of essays written and taught between 1982 and 2000 by Thomas Berry (1914-2009). They represent Berry’s reflection on the present systematic destruction of the earth and on the role Christians may fulfil to enable the future existence of the planet and humanity. There is a hardback edition that was published a few months after Berry’s death in 2009; whereas this paperback edition has recently become available.

The introduction by the editors provides an overview of Berry’s active life and of his pioneering response to the environmental crisis. Berry was a member of the Passionist Order and after his doctorate in theology he went to study in China. Berry had a keen interest in the Asian religions, of which he studied the sacred texts in their original languages (he is the author of Buddhism and The Religions of India). Back in the States, he founded the History of Religions program at Fordham University, where he taught until his retirement from teaching in 1979. He opened a library for religious research in the Riverdale Center, which was an old Victorian house. With the students there he studied the Latin Church Fathers, the Greek philosophers, the Asian religions, and the North American tribes. It was there that the book’s editors Mary Evelyn and John were students and were married to each other by Berry. In the meantime he became fascinated with Teilhard’s espousal of Christian doctrine and the evolutionary story. Next door to Riverdale was a retreat centre where large groups would
gather to share in his latest insights. Gradually, he came to connect his historical study and evolutionary cosmology with the environmental crisis.

In the essay on *The Third Mediation* (1982) which is taken up in this book, Berry reflects that the *First Mediation* is that between the divine and the human, a mediation, which was begun in ancient Israel, and which has dominated most of the last three thousand years in human history. The *Second Mediation* is the inter-human mediation, which was given special consideration in the last two centuries within Christianity. It concerns the reconciliation of differing human groups. He reflects upon the urgency of this mediation as the human community at the time of his writing spends over a billion dollars a day for military purposes. The *Third Mediation* is that between the human community and Earth. He asserts that while the preoccupation with the second mediation continues, this third mediation has attained such imperative that it overshadows in significance even its predecessor. He considers that it is not only a matter of food for the body, but also concerning all images in our imagination and our very powers of thinking; even our knowledge of God comes from our acquaintance with Earth, ‘for the divine reveals itself first of all in the sky and in the waters and the wind, in the mountains and valleys, in the birds of the air and in all those living forms that flower and move over the surface of the planet.’ Berry realizes in all sharpness that if we fail to attain a positive relationship with the Earth, there will not be a divine-human or an inter-human relationship; there will be no humanity. It is thus the most urgent task of all. Yet, as Berry observes, despite this fundamental dependence, humanity has severely damaged our planet, and continues to do so. He considers in the same essay that ‘Christianity, as well as most other great religions, has been excessively oriented towards transcendence. ... Now we need a greater sense of humans, not as transcending the Earth community, but as members of the Earth community.’

In 1978 Berry wrote an article called ‘The New Story’. It was ten years later taken up as a chapter in his important book *The Dream of the Earth*. He wrote there ‘It’s all a question of story. We are in trouble just now because we do not have a good story. We are in between stories. The old story, the account of how the world came to be and how we fit into it, is no longer effective. Yet, we have not learned the new story.’ Berry came to see the emergent process that is the universe as the Great Story. It is the story of each entity within the universe, including ourselves individually and communally. When Berry met cosmologist Brian Swimme, he found the ideal partner for the next stage of his work. Together they produced *The Universe Story* published in 1994. They present it, as the subtitle indicates, as ‘a celebration of the unfolding of the universe’. Correspondingly, the posthumously published collection includes, for example, essays called ‘Christian cosmology’ (1985), ‘The role of the Church in the twenty-first century’ (1995) and ‘The universe as a cosmic liturgy’ (2000). In the essay of 1995 Berry expresses the hope that ‘the Church could be a powerful force in bringing about the healing of a distraught Earth. The Church could provide an integrating reinterpretation of our New Story of the universe.’ He calls it the Great Work to which Christianity is called in these times.

The collection contains an appendix which reproduces a chapter of his book *The Great Work*, though without indication of this source. This is perhaps a criticism I would utter against this publication, that it does not indicate where the various essays exactly first featured. Nevertheless, this publication is a valid contribution that hopefully makes this great man and his all-important teaching better known.

Reviewed by Dr Robert Govaerts, affiliated to Glasgow University
This is a book for the lover of all things Celtic. Its subtitle is ‘Ancient Traditions to Illumine your Life throughout the Seasons’. It is a beautifully produced miscellany with enchanting illustrations and takes the form of a month by month journey through the Celtic year. Each month we are introduced to the lore and customs that the Celtic peoples would have practised at that time of the year.

To provide a taste of this book let us turn to the month of June which is headed ‘Midsummer Magic’. We learn how important the summer solstice was to the Celt, bonfires were lit from hilltops to celebrate the sun and to help strengthen its power to ripen fruits and grain for the harvest. In Cornwall the festival of a midsummer bonfire has been revived and proves a popular festival at the solstice.

We learn of the standing stones at Stonehenge and Callanish on the island of Lewis which are magical places to witness the midsummer sunrise and sunset. Midsummer was a time to collect herbs for healing, and there follows information on several sacred plants and herbs, including how to make a protective amulet as well as a recipe for cooking salmon using fresh herbs and honey to enhance the taste. This mix of folklore and legend, together with information relevant for us today, delights us throughout the book.

We are told how to address a fairy in Welsh, Gaelic (Irish or Scots), Manx or Breton. Fairies or ‘faeries’ are out hunting on ‘calm summer evenings’. A place to perhaps meet one are ‘threshold places’, these are places away and remote such as on hills and mountains or beside streams where ‘you might catch a glimpse of them out of the corner of your eye if you are in a meditative frame of mind’. We hear of fairy healers who have knowledge of the Otherworld. We can read the beautiful ‘Healing Blessing’ by Fiona Macleod. At the end of this chapter there is a healing meditation to ponder and visualize.

Each month follows this pattern of recounting Celtic myths, traditions, blessings, recipes and poetry and sometimes meditations. It is book not only for reading but of things to do and make. As the title suggests it provides all you need to rekindle your Celtic spirit: a delightful and illuminating book.

There is a good resource section at the end of the book where you can find out about Mara’s workshops and retreats and her other activities, as well as finding out about Celtic languages and culture, music and storytelling from organisations in Ireland, Wales and other Celtic lands. The book was written while Mara was still living in California and was, I felt, primarily aimed at the North American reader. But as someone who lives in the ‘Celtic Fringes’ here in West Wales, I know I will find it an insightful companion to my exploration of Celtic traditions.

Reviewed by Juliet Greenwood

Mara Freeman, M.A. is an internationally recognized speaker and teacher on Celtic sacred traditions. She taught for many years in universities and educational centres throughout the United States before moving to West Wales in 2007. She is at present completing a book on the spirituality of the Holy Grail. Mara can be found online at www.celticspirit.org

There will be an article by Mara Freeman on Celtic Spirituality, illustrated by Juliet Greenwood, in the Spring 2012 issue. (Ed.)
Leo de la Houssaye, *Wisdom of the Stars: Astrology and Spiritual Biography*

This is a fascinating book – well written and therefore approachable despite the complexity of the subjects of astronomy and astrology. It is based on, and greatly influenced by, Rudolf Steiner’s Anthroposophy. The history of how horoscopy [an earlier term for casting of horoscopes derived from the Greek] developed, and the interest or lack of it at various stages of that development, makes compelling reading.

The author discusses the developmental stages through which humankind has journeyed – cultural epochs lasting around 2160 years – and how the wisdom of the stars adopts a form that is appropriate for each particular epoch. We are currently in the fifth epoch in which we are becoming conscious of the spiritual world again; it is the period of the conscious soul. But we are not even two-thirds of the way through this time period at present.

There have been many books published of late about our life in Spirit between our earthly lives, and one view is that the world of Spirit is not somewhere out in the heavens, but that it is located around our earthly life with just a thin veil between the two worlds. This book, however, suggests that we are born of the stars and that we return to the stars when our earthly life is over. His view is that we give knowledge to the cosmos through the events in our earthly lives – it is a way of informing star wisdom.

We take this wisdom with us when we experience our spiritual birth (or earthly death of the physical body). The major events in our lives happen at times when there is a specific conjunction of planets and at our birth into Spirit we take the knowledge and wisdom of these experiences with us to enhance or inform Spirit. The conjunction of planets at our spiritual birth is equally significant in allowing this to happen. He tells us that ‘The spiritual world gathers the fruits of human lives on earth at those places in the cosmos where they belong spiritually, where they are at home.’

The author gives numerous examples of the lives of people like Michelangelo, Florence Nightingale and Spinoza showing us how the major events in their lives and the times of their spiritual births were significantly connected by the conjunctions of the planets at both times.

Although some of what the author tells us sounds unfamiliar and perhaps surreal, I found the book a real ‘page-turner’. Whether you accept the author’s theories or not, this is an enjoyable and well-researched book, and the anthroposophical view that the cosmos is a living spiritual organism that requires nourishment from all humankind is one that would encourage us all to live in a less self-absorbed way.

Reviewed by Jenny Jones, www.spiritofoneness.co.uk

Maureen Lockhart, *The Subtle Energy Body: the complete guide*

This book provides a well-researched comprehensive sourcebook for students of the fundamental principles of spiritual philosophies. Part One of the book is devoted to Eastern Perspectives while Part Two is focussed on Western Perspectives. The book is copiously illustrated with black-and-white diagrams and photographs and there is also a beautiful 32-page colour section. The illustrations make it easy for the reader to assimilate what are unfamiliar concepts in orthodox western religion. The author is a lecturer at the University of
Wales Trinity Saint David located at Lampeter in mid-Wales. She spent two decades as homeopath, naturopath and yoga teacher in India and the Far East.

The subtle body is the spiritual energy field that surrounds the physical body in several layers. Although nominally only the first third of the book is devoted to Eastern perspectives, the principles of eastern practices keep recurring in the remainder of the book even when Dr Lockhart is discussing western practices such as theosophy or anthroposophy or the increasingly popular spiritual healing. This is inevitable since the whole concept of the spiritual energy field of chi or ki or prana is not accepted by materialist western science and medicine. Indeed, the whole book is pervaded with the concepts of yoga and the chakras.

In the chapter on the application of science and philosophy to the concept of the subtle body (by far the longest in the book at over 120 pages), Lockhart takes issue with Gilbert Ryle’s dismissal of ‘The ghost in the machine’ but rather endorses the view of Popper and Eccles that that is precisely the correct description of human spiritual energy. There is an interesting discussion here of terminology and meaning, of kinds of indeterminacy especially in relation to free will, and of the philosophy of science in relation to the subtle body, a concept that at present is outside the scope of western science. In this as in other chapters the author refers to many different writers to allow the reader to explore topics in more depth by reading the books cited for themselves, but an acquaintance with the writing of Heidegger would be a distinct advantage.

This is a very learned book for an in-depth study of many different spiritual beliefs derived from Indian and Chinese mysticism, their philosophical significance and their possible scientific interpretation using concepts from quantum physics. It provides information that will provoke readers to ask more questions and a desire to read other texts in science and philosophy to achieve a deeper understanding of the subject.

With a double-column setting, even in quite large type, but in a 215 x 280 centimetre page size, this book of nearly 400 pages needs concentrated reading and I suspect will be something of a challenge for the casual reader. The book is scholarly and detailed but the writing style still makes it very readable. The book concludes with a Notes section, a Bibliography and an Index.

Reviewed by Dr Howard A. Jones


If the size and title of this book haven’t put you off, there is a mine of information and ideas here to which my short review will struggle to do justice. Nicholas Hagger is a controversial figure – a former lecturer at the University of Baghdad in Iraq and the University of Libya and professor at the Universities of Tokyo and Keio – who has already published over twenty books of poetry and prose. The University of Libya was founded only in 1955 and disestablished in 1973. The other universities are of longer standing, but we do not know in which faculties Hagger served, or when, or what is the relevance of these positions to this philosophical treatise. In the Acknowledgments section, Hagger mentions his discussions with Fred Hoyle (d.2001) and David Bohm (d. 1992), so again the relevance of these meetings to this book is not clear. I have had conversations with many eminent professors, including a few Nobel Prizewinners, but their relevance to the five books I have written is minimal.
This book is like a mini-encyclopaedia in the breadth of its coverage: it attempts to unite science with philosophy to present a holistic world-view that challenges the materialist and competitive views of today’s science and society. The author regards the work as continuing the philosophy of A.N. Whitehead with his process theology. He calls his philosophy ‘Universalism’ which he defines as a holistic world-view in which philosophy is reconnected to Nature and the universe by acceptance of ‘the evidence of a principle of order in cells [to] enable philosophy to be reunited and reassume a more central position in Western life.’ To Jews the word Universalism means that the Jewish faith should apply to all humankind. In Christianity, it is interpreted as meaning universal salvation. In science it means that the laws of Nature are everywhere applicable and are therefore accessible to human enquiry.

To the moral philosopher the word ‘universalism’ means that there are certain ethical principles, like Kant’s Categorical Imperative, that apply to all humankind. As the book jacket tells us, philosophy in the 20th century focussed on language and logic and was considered by many outside the discipline to have become largely irrelevant. The author’s idea is to present a philosophy of Universalism that takes the subject back to its origins amongst the ancient Greeks where it focussed on all aspects of the natural universe, and especially the relevance of philosophical ideas to humankind.

The subject matter is presented in four parts. Part One deals with a history of philosophy, focussing on the ideas of the ancient Greeks and the philosophers of religion. From Plato he takes his Theory of Forms and the eternal truth of mathematics and ethics; from Aristotle the notion of potential and actuality; and from Plotinus the idea of the One or the Good as the highest of the levels of Being. The ideas of philosophers of the Enlightenment and modern times are summarised rather briefly because the author regards their work as fragmenting the subject.

Part Two takes us into the Scientific View of the Universe discussing physics and cosmology, biology and geology, ecology and physiology each in self-contained chapters. Thus far, much of the material could be found in specialist books on these respective subjects. It is comprehensive in the range of subjects surveyed, and there is a mass of detail on certain topics; however, it is presented in an easy to read manner and is intended to form a background to the central thesis.

Hagger rejects the ‘accidental’ origin of life and of the universe itself, prevalent in materialist science, and also rejects the theory of multiple universes. He sees the quantum vacuum and dark energy as a reservoir of order, but sees the universe as ‘a self-running, self-organising, self-perpetuating system’ operating through DNA and not the product of random accident. Hagger challenges the Neo-Darwinist view of competitive evolution in favour of an ordered, symbiotic one, such as we find in Amit Goswami’s book *Creative Evolution* or Mary Midgley’s *Evolution as a Religion*. Hagger attaches great importance to the Law of Order, though this is only one of 14 spiritual Laws that he envisages. This concept also is not new: Dan Millman gave us 12 spiritual laws while Diana Cooper listed 36 in their relevant books.

Hagger speculates that Newton’s expanding force of light represents the ether or spirit world, ‘metaphysical Light’ that may lie within the electromagnetic spectrum at frequencies higher than those of gamma and cosmic rays. Psychics often maintain, and science has confirmed, that the brain-waves of spiritual people operate at frequencies higher than those that occur in most of us. This high-frequency metaphysical energy, Hagger suggests, might be the ‘dark energy’ that physics is now exploring – an energy that preceded creation of the material universe and out of which the Big Bang was created. Amit Goswami, Pfeiffer and Mack and Swami Abhayananda, amongst others, have suggested something similar. Hagger suggests
that a Grand Unifying Theory such as physicists have sought for the past century can be created by developing some of Newton’s ideas ‘that there is an expanding force in light which counteracts the contracting force of gravity . . . gravity is weak because of the push of light against it.’

It is mainly in Parts Three and Four, ‘The Metaphysical View of the Universe’ and ‘The Human Applications of Universalist Thinking’, that the book breaks new ground, though this part amounts to only some 100 pages of the whole. The metaphysical significance of the proposed scientific world-view is that the quantum vacuum, ‘an emptiness filled with order’, is regarded as a flux that ‘contains the latent possibilities of Being and Existence from which our universe was thrown up.’ Universalism then is a ‘new philosophy’ that takes account of those discoveries of science made over the last century or so that accord with this view of an ordered, cooperative and unique universe that has developed to accommodate Man, as suggested in Brandon Carter’s ‘anthropic principle’. This philosophy resonates with much written over the past few decades about New Age thinking by such luminaries as Father Thomas Berry, Paul Devereux and Peter Russell.

There are a few illustrations in the text and the book is completed with 6 Appendices, 35 pages of references, a short Bibliography, and a 47-page Index.

Reviewed by Dr Howard A. Jones

References
Mary Midgley, Evolution as a Religion, Methuen, 1985.

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 Jean Matthews (j.matthews@tsd.ac.uk), who will arrange for a copy to be sent to you. When we receive your review, the book will become yours.

Dinah Livingstone Poetic Tales: Logosophia Down to Earth, Katabasis, 2010
S F Haeri Happiness in Life and After Death: an Islamic Sufi View, O Books, 2010
S F Haeri Witnessing Perfection, O Books, 2008
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<th>Author</th>
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<tr>
<td>Steven Ogden</td>
<td>Love Upside Down: Life, Love and the Subversive Jesus</td>
<td>O Books</td>
<td>2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>Melissa Lowe</td>
<td>The Apocalypse of the Mind: transforming ego into Stillness of Consciousness</td>
<td>O Books</td>
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<td>Maureen Minnehan Jones</td>
<td>Wisdom to Wellness: Healing your Emotional Sufferings so the Physical Healing Can Follow</td>
<td>O Books</td>
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<td>Sandie Gustus</td>
<td>Less Incomplete: a guide to experiencing the human condition beyond the physical body</td>
<td>O Books</td>
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<td>Terry Welbourn</td>
<td>T C Lethbridge: The man who saw the future</td>
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<td>Nevill Drury</td>
<td>Wisdom Seekers: the rise of the new spirituality</td>
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<td>Caroline Brazier</td>
<td>Acorns Among the Grass: Adventures in Eco-Therapy</td>
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<td>Ilia Delio</td>
<td>The Emergent Christ: Exploring the Meaning of Catholic in an Evolutionary Universe</td>
<td>Orbis</td>
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<td>Robert K C Forman,</td>
<td>Enlightenment Ain’t What it’s Cracked Up to Be: a Journey of Discovery, Snow and Jazz in the Soul</td>
<td>O Books</td>
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<td>Steve Taylor</td>
<td>Out of the Darkness: from Turmoil to Transformation</td>
<td>Hay House</td>
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<td>Waking from Sleep: Why Awakening Experiences Occur and How to make them Permanent</td>
<td>Hay House</td>
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<td>Reconciliation, Justice and Peace: the Second African Synod</td>
<td>Orbis</td>
<td>2011</td>
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<td>R Butkus &amp; S A Kolmes</td>
<td>Environmental Science and Theology in Dialogue</td>
<td>Orbis</td>
<td>2011</td>
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<td>Duane Olson</td>
<td>Issues in Contemporary Christian Thought</td>
<td>Orbis</td>
<td>2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>Catherine G Lucas</td>
<td>In Case of Spiritual Emergency: Moving Successfully through your Awakening</td>
<td>Findhorn Press</td>
<td>2011</td>
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</table>
List of AHS Events October 2011 to May 2012

Thursday 6th October 2011
3.00 pm  **AHS London Group:** Talk: Remote viewing and unconventional meditation methods: new evidence for the existence of God? by Prof. Gwyn Hocking
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
(Contact, John Franklin, e-mail: johnfranklin35@hotmail.com )

Friday 7th October 2011
7.30 pm  **AHS Chesterfield Group:** Theme: *The Crucible* (film)
Venue:  Whittington Moor, Chesterfield
(Contact: Mike Rush, e-mail: mikerush@virginmedia.com )

Friday 21st October 2011
7.30 pm  **AHS Midlands Group:** Theme: Tuning, Resonance and Consciousness, presented by Clement Jewitt PhD.
Venue:  1 Woodcroft Close, Blackwell, Bromsgrove, B60 1DA
(Contact Sheelah James, e-mail: sheelahjames@aol.com )

Friday 28th to Sunday 30th October 2011
4.30 pm Fri. –  **AHS All Wales Group:** Centre Point Residential Retreat:
3.00 pm Sun.  **Spirituality and Sacred Place in Wales**
Venue:  Llantarnam Abbey, Nr.Cwmbran.  [Cost: single rooms & 1 twin bedded room £84 per person; en suite £94.   Contact for bookings and further details:
Mary Cook, Tel: 07794 294432  e-mail: maryfrechfa@yahoo.co.uk
(For local group meetings, contact roger.coward@smartemail.co.uk )

Friday 4th November 2011
7.30 pm  **AHS Chesterfield Group:** Theme: *The Hero’s Journey* (Joseph Campbell DVD)
Venue:  Whittington Moor, Chesterfield.
(Contact: Mike Rush, e-mail: mikerush@virginmedia.com )

Saturday 5th November 2011
10.00 am  **Alister Hardy Society Open Day 2011:**
10.30 am  2011 Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture, *Jesus Beyond Christianity: Unexpected Images of Jesus from the World’s Religions*, by Dr. Gregory Barker,
followed by the AHS AGM
1.15 pm  Lunch (bring packed lunch; tea/coffee provided)
2.15 pm  **Spiritual Experience and the Alister Hardy Society**, led by Marianne Rankin and Rhonda Riachi
4.15 pm  Tea and Departure
Venue:  Friends’ Meeting House, 43 St. Giles, Oxford, OX1 3LW
[Cost: £16.00 AHS members, £20.00 non-members, £5.00 students. Inquiries and bookings: Jean Matthews, Religious Experience Research Centre,
University of Wales, Trinity Saint David, Lampeter, Ceredigion, SA48 7ED.
Tel: 01570 434310. e-mail: j.matthews@tsd.ac.uk ]
Friday 18th November 2011
7.30 pm  **AHS Midlands Group:** Theme: *From Darkness to Light: Our Journey through Dark and Light Times*, audio-visual presentation by Revd. Jonathan Robinson
Venue: 1 Woodcroft Close, Blackwell, Bromsgrove, B60 1DA
(Contact Sheelah James, e-mail: sheelahjames@aol.com ).

Tuesday 22nd November 2011
3.00 pm  **AHS London Group:**
Talk: *Spirituality in the Counselling Room* by Revd. Amanda Keighley
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
(Contact, John Franklin, e-mail: johnfranklin35@hotmail.com )

Friday 2nd December 2011
7.30 pm  **AHS Chesterfield Group:** Theme: *Witchcraft: Ancient & Modern*  
(presentation by Joe Revill)
Venue: Whittington Moor, Chesterfield
(Contact: Mike Rush, e-mail: mikerush@virginmedia.com )

Saturday 3rd December 2011
1.00 pm  **Alister Hardy Oxford/Cotswold Group:** Christmas bring & share lunch  
and planning meeting for 2012
Venue: Oxford (to be confirmed)
(Contact Rhonda Riachi for details: e-mail: ahs@riachi.free-online.co.uk )

Sunday 11th December 2011
1.00 pm to AHS Midlands Group: Christmas social and planning get together
6.00 pm  ‘Bring and share’ vegetarian lunch; planning for next year’s programme; DVD *From Science to God*, by Peter Russell; discussion and evening meal
Venue: 1 Woodcroft Close, Blackwell, Bromsgrove, B60 1DA
(Contact Sheelah James, e-mail: sheelahjames@aol.com )

Friday 6th January 2012
7.30 pm  **AHS Chesterfield Group:** Theme: *The Field and NDEs*  
(Lynne McTaggart & Pim van Lommel DVD)
Venue: Whittington Moor, Chesterfield
(Contact: Mike Rush, e-mail: mikerush@virginmedia.com )

Friday 3rd February 2012
7.30 pm  **AHS Chesterfield Group:** Theme: *Spiritual Poetry and Artwork*
Venue: Whittington Moor, Chesterfield
(Contact: Mike Rush, e-mail: mikerush@virginmedia.com )

Friday 2nd March 2012
7.30 pm  **AHS Chesterfield Group:** Theme: *The Irrational Health Service*  
(Richard Dawkins DVD)
Venue: Whittington Moor, Chesterfield
(Contact: Mike Rush, e-mail: mikerush@virginmedia.com )
Thursday 26th April 2012
3.00 pm  **AHS London Group**: Debate:  *Personal Experience and Interpretation: Working Together for Better Understanding*. Speakers: Diamuid O’Murchu: *Evolving Spirituality Taking Shape in our Time* and David Boulton: *Personal Experience and Interpretation: a Quaker Humanist Approach*
5.00 pm  Shared supper (please bring finger food, tea/coffee provided)
6.00 pm  Open contribution to the debate
7.00 pm  Finish
Venue:  Essex Unitarian Church, 112 Palace Gardens Terrace, London, W8 (Contact, John Franklin, e-mail: johnfranklin35@hotmail.com)

Friday 4th May 2012
7.30 pm  **AHS Chesterfield Group**: Theme:  *Christianity’s Illegitimate Child*:  *A Witch Looks at Christianity* (presentation by Joe Revill)
Venue:  Whittington Moor, Chesterfield (Contact: Mike Rush, e-mail: mikerush@virginmedia.com)

Other Events

Saturday 12th November 2011
6.30 pm  **Scientific and Medical Network**: Open Dialogue:  *Patterns of Apocalyptic Thought: 2012 and other prophecies*. Speakers: Dame Jocelyn Bell Burnell, Prof Eileen Barker, Prof Charles Strozier and Prof Keith Ward
Venue:  Holborn Bars, 1388-142 Holborn, London, EC1N 2NQ (Cost: £75 for members, £85 for non-members. Contact: Conference Administrator, Scientific & Medical Network, PO Box11 Moreton-in-Marsh, Glos., GL56 0ZF. Tel: 01608 652000, E-mail: infor@scimednet.org)

Wednesday 7th December 2011
6.30 pm  **World Congress of Faiths**: Annual Younghusband Lecture:  *The Core of Religion* by Karen Armstrong
Venue:  The Liberal Jewish Synagogue, 28 St. John’s Wood Road, London, NW8 7HA. (Cost: £5 for members, £10 for non-members. Entry by ticket only, available from WCF at 125 Salusbury Road, London, NE6 6RG. Tel: 01935 864055)

Friday 13th April to Sunday 15th April 2012
**Churches’ Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies**: 2011 Spring Conference:  *The Psychic Dimension – for good or ill?* Speakers: Canon Michael Paternoster, The Revd. Clifford Curry
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 20th April to Sunday 22nd April 2012

Scientific & Medical Network Mystics & Scientists Conference:
The Western Meditation Traditions and the Mystery of Consciousness.
Speakers: Rabbi Nilton Bonder, Prof. Robert Frager, Laurence Freeman, OSB,
Dr. Anne Runhov, Dr. Taymond Tallis
Venue: University College, Sparkeford Road, Winchester
(Cost: £265 residential (£245 before 31 Jan 12); £230 (£210) non-residential –
(£250 (£230) residential; £215 (£195) non-residential members of SMN). 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 )

October 2011 – March 2012

5.00 pm University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Faculty of Humanities Research
Lecture Series
14 November 2011: Prof. Janet Burton: From Hermitage to Royal Abbey: Historical Writing and
the Creation of a Monastic Identity
5 December 2011: Prof. Martin O’Kane: From Text to Image: The Reception of the
Bible in Welsh Visual Culture
30 January 2012: Dr. William Marx: Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea:
Medieval Law and Redemption
20 February 2012: Prof. Johannes Hoff: The In/Visibility of God in Nicholas of
Cusa: An Aesthetic Approach to the Foundations of Christian Theology
of Isaios
Venue: Founders’ Library, Old Building, University of Wales Trinity Saint David,
Lampeter. All lectures free, and open to the public - no booking required
Contact: Dr Kathy Ehrensperger: k.ehrensperger@tsd.ac.uk 44(0)1570 424844

Religious Experience MA at Lampeter

Congratulation to James Banks who graduated with distinction from the MA Religious
Experience this year. He has received a bursary from the British Association for Study of
Religions (BASR) to present the outcome of his dissertation at the annual conference at
Durham this year. His paper earlier this month was well received by members of the BASR
and he was congratulated on his religious experience research among students in the USA.
AN IRISH BLESSING

May the road rise to meet you,
May the wind be always at your back,
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
The rains fall soft upon your fields and,
Until we meet again,
May God hold you in the palm of His hand.

Drawings by Juliet Greenwood
Photographs supplied by Bettina Schmidt, Keith Beasley, Anne Watkins and Jean Matthews