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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 for the Study of Spiritual Experience or the Religious Experience Research Centre.

*The Editor*



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

## Letter from the Editor



So sorry *De Numine* is late this Spring, although as the Spring weather is late too maybe we are in touch with the natural world in ways we have yet to comprehend ... In personal terms, the delay has been due to my ill health, a heart condition which is very fortunately reversible. This is rare, so I feel lucky rather than a victim of misfortune.

I would like to draw members' attention to this year's Llantarnam gathering. It is the first such event for the AHSSSE as a whole, although it has been run by the All Wales Group for members in Wales for the last three years. I note that the subject of a residential gathering has frequently been discussed by members, and the idea welcomed, so I do hope this invitation from Wales will be taken up. (Llantarnam is just over the border in South Wales, near Newport, so very accessible from England). For reports on the last three gatherings see *De Numine* No. 50, page 32 (2010), No. 52, page 31 (2011), and No. 53, page 31 (2012).

It has been Roger Coward, as the original founder of the Llantarnam gatherings, whose hard work and dedication kept them going annually for three years for members of the Welsh Groups to enjoy. On the basis of this splendid foundation we are offering an opportunity this year for all Society members to join in. I had hoped that Roger would come this year to open and close the gathering as usual with a Buddhist blessing, but unfortunately he is unable to attend. You'll have to make do with me folks! The weekend will have some excellent events and presentations; Llantarnam Abbey is a beautiful sacred place, and the food is great too. Bookings are still (just) being accepted. Details about the programme and Llantarnam Abbey are on the flyer you will find in this issue, in the Events calendar (see page 52) and on the AHSSSE website – follow the links on the home page.



Only one more thing, as I'm running out of space and energy: on the last page there is a prose poem on the death of a Jew in Israel. Readers might like to compare it to the scholarly account by the Reverend Gareth Hopkins on Jewish death ritual (Autumn 2009, page 9). There are so many levels and dimensions to human experience, of life and necessarily of death ...

*Patricia Murphy*

I had thought, with trepidation, that I was going to have to try my hand at some proper editing but, fortunately for all, this has hardly been necessary. Paddy has rallied wonderfully and courageously and, in spite of going through a very difficult time, has soldiered on with amazing cheerfulness and energy. What a woman!

*Jean Matthews*





## A View from the Chair

I wanted to take the opportunity to write a short article introducing myself as the recently appointed new Chair of the AHSSSE, and for the benefit of those members that I have yet to meet through group meetings or the annual Members' Day in Oxford.

May I begin by thanking my predecessor, Revd Jonathan Robinson, whom I am sure many of you will have met during his four year period as Chair. I can say that Jonathan did a very good job in keeping the Society running smoothly through some changing times. His style – thoughtful, gentle and quietly persuasive – may have hidden his dedication and the volume of work which he put into society matters. It was always a pleasure to work with him as his Vice-Chair for those years. Thank you Jonathan and best wishes for whatever future directions you may go in.

I myself have a long interest in matters of faith and spirituality which really started in my teenage years growing up in a very multi-cultural area of West Yorkshire and within a few miles of Bradford. I had a very traditional introduction to religion via my local Church of England school and parish church. However, my first real encounter came when a newly appointed vicar suggested not only ecumenical services with other denominations (unheard of in the early 1970s in that part of Yorkshire) but also reaching out to other religions which were beginning to become established in the area. I vividly recall my first visit to a newly opened Sikh *Gurdwara* on the outskirts of Bradford and the very warm welcome that we – as a Church of England group – received. What stood out most of all was the hospitality of those present and their openness to their Christian visitors and their keenness to show us around and to explain the various symbols and artefacts within the temple and to answer our many questions, some of which – with hindsight – were perhaps not too polite. From that time I realised in a very simple – and admittedly not very theological way – that clearly there was more than one route to what many now term the 'ultimate reality'. It was clear to me that no one faith had all the answers and if there was any truth in religion then the 'answers' were not to be found in the domain of one faith tradition only. This led to what has now become a lifelong interest in world faiths and in interfaith engagement in particular.

Over the years I have tended to pick up this interest and at other times to lay it down, particularly when juggling a career and family. However, when time permitted I was able to undertake an academic study of faith and world religions by taking firstly a BTh (Oxon) and later the MA in the Study of Religions at Lampeter. I have a particular interest in Buddhism and eastern faith traditions in general and this prompted me to take a post-graduate certificate in Buddhist Studies under Professor Peter Harvey. I also became a member of the World Congress of Faiths, and now represent the Buddhist Society on their central committee.

My interest in the Alister Hardy Society started when I was studying in Oxford and Peggy Morgan was one of my lecturers there and at that time about to become the Director of the RERC. I later used the archives extensively to research for my MA dissertation on the subject of 'Buddhist religious experiences', which was a little bit different from some of the previous research that had been done via the RERC and produced some interesting results. I am particularly interested in Hardy's thoughts about Darwinism and how religious and spiritual experiences may be a part of our human makeup. I also welcome the expansion of the 'Hardy question' to other faiths as well beyond our own shores.

In conclusion, I am looking forward to my time as Chair of the AHSSSE and feel reassured that I have so much support around me. At the annual Open Day last year I was pleased to have present three former chairs and one former Director whose continued involvement in the AHSSSE means that this wealth of experience is ongoing and not lost. I am also fortunate to have the support of Professor Leslie Francis as Chair of the Alister Hardy Trustees whose wisdom is available to guide the new Chair when needed. It was a pleasure to discover that I already know most of the Trustees, including one of the current RERC Directors Greg Barker who was studying for his PhD at Lampeter when I was completing the MA course and also David Greenwood, a contemporary from Westminster College, Oxford.

The Society is in good shape I think, and the tremendous support shown by my colleagues on the Committee should not go unrecorded. From those who run the regional groups to those who administer the Society, take care of membership, edit the journal or promote the AHSSSE in other ways, may I say thank you and I look forward to working with you to move the Society forwards into the future.

Last, but by no means least, I would also like to thank all of our members for their continued support, without which the Society simply would not exist. I look forward to meeting as many members as possible over the coming year and may I wish you all a belated happy New Year.

*Andy Burns, AHSSSE Chair*

## **A View from the Vice-Chair: The Politics of Religious Experience**

I am very flattered to have been offered the role of Vice-Chair of the AHSSSE. This article is an attempt to provide a bit of background about myself and some of my thoughts on the subject of spiritual experience. As far as the academic side goes, I graduated from Keele University in 1997 with a BSc in Biomedical Science. I then gained the MA in Religious Experience from the then University of Wales, Lampeter, in 2008, and most recently achieved a PGDip in Consciousness and Transpersonal Psychology from Liverpool John Moores University in 2011. Since then I have been thinking about studying for a PhD or training in counselling. One of the essays that I wrote for my MA, *On the Side of the Angels: Neuroscience & Religious Experience*, was published by the RERC in 2009 as Occasional Paper #49. This explored the similarities between Sir Alister Hardy's approach to the study of religious experience and that of recent neuroscientists, most notably Newberg and d'Aquili. Since then an article summarising my MA dissertation on spiritual experiences in Western Esotericism has been published in the journal *Paranthropology* (Rush, 2011). I have been a member of the Society for about 12 years now and have been running a small local group in Chesterfield for nearly 10 years. I was invited onto the Committee in 2003 and in 2010 I built the Society's new website. In my spare time I work full-time as an ICT Service Desk manager for a local Council.

Now that I have my academic history out of the way, I have a confession to make. I have never had a religious experience.\* So where do I stand in relation to such experiences? The rest of this article is an attempt to answer that question.\*\* I stole the title from Brian Smith's wry and witty comment in *De Numine* No. 46 that 'religion' could be defined as 'the politics of religious experience'. There are several aspects of the politics of religious experience that have interested me over the years.

## Defining Religion

Brian's quip was in response to the question posed in a previous issue of *De Numine* asking readers to propose their own definitions of religion. My response is not to try to define it at all. 'History', it is often said, 'is written by the winners'. Similarly, perhaps, 'religion' is defined by the discipline. Okay, my cliché isn't as snappy so I doubt that it will catch on. However, 'religion' is often defined, intentionally or not, in an *a priori* way that serves the agenda of its definer. For example, Ninian Smart (1996) avoided defining religion by reference solely to supernatural agents because he didn't want to exclude Theravada Buddhism, Marxism or Humanism from his scope. Instead he referred to 'worldviews' and put forward a 'functional delineation of religions in lieu of a strict definition'. This took the form of several dimensions: ritual, doctrinal, mythic, ethical, social, experiential, and artistic. Similarly, Pascal Boyer (1994, p. 34) admits that his own characterisation of religion depends on the assumptions and models that constitute his own viewpoint; whereas Richard Dawkins (2006) characterises religion as extremist and delusional from the outset, in order to make it easier to criticise and dismiss it. In his national survey Alister Hardy didn't define religion as such but instead asked 'Have you ever been aware of or influenced by a presence or power, whether you call it God or not, which is different from your everyday self?' (Franklin, 2006). I suspect he phrased it this way in order not to exclude people who, whilst having this type of experience, did not consider themselves to be religious.

Last year the Alister Hardy Society (AHS) was renamed the Alister Hardy Society for the Study of Spiritual Experience (AHSSSE). One of the reasons for this was that it was felt the term 'spiritual' was more inclusive and related better to current conceptions of these kinds of experiences. It also makes the interests of the Society immediately apparent to anyone not already familiar with it. Currently, Dr. Greg Barker, Co-Director of the RERC, is planning a pilot study to determine what language a new generation of experiencers use to refer to such experiences. This will help inform a future national survey of religious(?) experience.

Definitions and terminology have a very real impact on the Society. Some time ago, at a Committee meeting of the AHS, we were discussing the option of a Society networking website, similar to Facebook, that would enable AHS members to interact socially over the Internet. A demo site was set up with a variety of content. However, the RERC requested that an item relating to séance style mediumship be removed as it may threaten the success of a funding bid to the Templeton Foundation. Personally, I agreed that the bid should not be jeopardised and that the content should be removed, at least until after the bid. This highlights the kind of political issues around religious experience that I am talking about. Is mediumship a valid area of academic study for the RERC? Hardy himself, in one of his letters to a correspondent stated that he was only interested in 'psychic' experiences as long as they were definitely related to religion in some way. Of course, on the one hand the RERC must maintain a rigorous, academic, professional approach to its subject matter; both to maintain academic respectability and to attract funding. However, on the other hand is this approach liable to jeopardise certain avenues of research by pronouncing them off-limits *a priori*?

There is, of course, a danger in having too many or too broad a definition of religion. The more definitions we have the more difficult it will become to compare the results of different studies. How can we be sure they are comparing the same thing? When I undertook the research for my recent MA dissertation using the RERC archive, biographies, contemporary accounts, and Internet forums, I deliberately avoided defining religion or spirituality. This was partly was to discover what respondents themselves understood by these terms, and partly because I wanted a more inclusive approach; that is, accounts of experiences that were not only traditionally religious but also less traditional ones too.

In summary, I believe it is important to be aware of the implications and limitations of such definitions, and to avoid becoming dogmatic about them. Such preconceived categories may obscure aspects of the phenomena that would otherwise be illuminating. We should therefore listen carefully to how experiencers define themselves and their own experiences.

\* I once had a hypnopompic hallucination, which was quite scary at the time. Fortunately, I had already read about such hallucinations so when I experienced it I simply thought 'b\*\*\*\*\* me, so *that's* a hypnopompic hallucination!'

*Mike Rush*

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\*\* *This introduction by the Vice-Chair is also the introduction to his article on religious experience, which will appear in De Numine this autumn (Ed.)*

## **AHT and SSSE Director of Communications**

It may be news to you that for some time now you have had a Director of Communications.

When the Trustees were giving serious thought to the need for more publicity for the organization and discussing what was required, I realized that unofficially I was already doing the job and so it was decided to support and recognize this work with a title.

Through my *Introduction to Religious and Spiritual Experience* I have been invited to speak in schools, to interfaith and spiritual groups and to lead Quiet Days. Wherever I go, I take our publicity literature and explain just what we are doing in the field of spiritual experience through the Research Centre and the Society.

So far this year I have given talks to the VI Forms of Cheltenham Ladies College and Wellington College; led an Open Sunday for The Study Society in London and in April have a Quiet Day and a talk for the London Scientific and Medical Network Group.

I represent the AHT on a Youth Consultative Panel looking at spirituality and youth in education. This was set up by Roger Orgill of the Wrekin Trust with the Brahma Kumaris, who host the meetings at their Global Co-operation House.

Last year I spoke at a 'Generation Next Consciousness Day' in Frome and even appeared on 4thought.tv – a two-minute slot after the Channel 4 evening news, where my topic was religious experience and insanity.

Recently I have been working with Janice Dolley of the Wrekin Trust to organize the event below, bringing various spiritual groups together. Our hope is that this will lead to an alliance of like-minded organizations, enabling us to co-operate more fully and to speak with a stronger voice in these secular times.

All this has been an adventure for me and I hope of benefit to the AHT & SSSE.

### **Spiritual Alliance**

In this issue of *De Numine* you will find a leaflet inviting you to a gathering in London on June 8<sup>th</sup> 2013 on *Spirituality for a World in Crisis*. As your Director of Communications, I have been busy organizing this with Janice Dolley of the Wrekin Trust and with help from John Franklin.

Many spiritual groups are suffering from an ageing membership and dwindling numbers – and yet ‘spirituality’ is of interest to many people, many having spiritual experiences. Representatives from the organizations listed have been working together to promote better publicity and co-operation in the future.

The day will feature two excellent speakers – David Lorimer and our own Greg Barker. Sister Maureen of the Brahma Kumaris will lead us in meditation. We will hear from the different groups involved and would like your views on how we can make more impact in the secular world around us.

We have deliberately kept the prices low and would love to see as many of you as possible in London.

*Marianne Rankin*



## **A Journey through Time**

Humankind has developed individually and collectively by passing through a number of social revolutions that together represent an evolution of consciousness. Accompanying this process there seems to have always been a form of religion representing homage to one or more gods or goddesses. The information we have about the earliest pagan civilizations suggests that veneration of natural objects – trees, rocks, rivers or locations on Earth, or sun and moon – predominated. Earthly objects were, in some sense, symbols of the greater spiritual force that controlled the seasons, night and day, the wind and the rain. But as Karen Armstrong says in her book *A Short History of Myth*: ‘Trees, stones and heavenly bodies were never objects of worship in themselves but were revered because they were epiphanies of a hidden force that could be seen powerfully at work in all natural phenomena, giving people intimations of another, more potent reality’.

As suggested by Plato in his Theory of Forms, every natural object was the image of its heavenly counterpart. Trees, and even more so rocks, are venerated partly because they are so much more long-lived than humans and therefore are believed to hold a spiritual record of the past.

Long before the lives of Euclid (*fl. ca.* 300 BCE) or Pythagoras (*fl. ca.* 500 BCE), ancient civilizations had extensive knowledge of geometry and astronomy and what we would now describe as civil engineering. Without this information they would never have been able, nor had the incentive, to build their megalithic temples to honour their gods, for the manpower required to raise these monuments was enormous and such as to demand huge motivation and skill. The construction of such structures is a clear indication that these peoples believed that there existed a numinous realm beyond the physical – a realm inhabited by the ancestors, whose lives they wished to honour; it was also the domain of the gods.

Psychologists tell us that most of humankind needs to believe in a transcendent and holistic reality for both emotional and intellectual satisfaction. However, modern determination to raise living standards of such 'primitive' people has meant that we have influenced them politically, economically, theologically and ideologically, so that many ancient traditions have been lost in the process. Keith Critchlow, a professor of art and architecture whose studies equally embrace anthropology and archaeology, believes that 'the greatest threat our modern industrial culture poses for mankind is the denial of its spiritual heritage'. The imposition of western values that are destroying the native culture of the inhabitants of the Australian outback the Aborigines call The Great Forgetting.

After the era of ancient Greek philosophy (roughly 800 BCE up to the first centuries CE), in the temples, monasteries and, later, mosques attention was focussed on the inspirational words of their respective prophets and how these should be interpreted in the light of rational philosophy. The polytheism of the ancient Greeks and Romans gave way to forms of monotheism to establish the religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. This preoccupation with what we now call the philosophy of religion lasted some 1500 years, and thousands of tracts were written in defence of these intuitive writings.

Another great social change began around the 12<sup>th</sup> century, flourishing from the 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards. This had its roots in the new cultural revolution in the arts that began in Florence and spread to other Italian city states and thence to the rest of Europe over the next few centuries. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century this rebirth of learning has been known as the *Renaissance*. Because it placed human needs and interests at the centre of social activities it is also known as *humanism* – not quite the same thing but another philosophy that concentrated on human experience. Humanists may be either religious or secular.

The first Greek philosophers – the pre-Socratics – had been concerned to speculate about the nature of the material natural world. This gave way to a kind of humanism in which the welfare of human souls became the main topic of discussion. Then from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards, attention turned once again to the nature of the Earth and our place amongst the stars and planets. With the studies of Copernicus, Brahe, Kepler, Galileo and Newton, the subject of natural philosophy or natural theology was born – a series of studies that became known as science, trying to find how God had shaped the universe. The religions based on intuitive scriptures now felt compelled to defend themselves against this new knowledge obtained by the senses and reason. Increasingly, scientific knowledge was seen to contradict passages of the Bible.

A new variation of humanism emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century called existentialism. Where humanism reflects concern with the wellbeing of humanity as a whole, existentialism is all about the individual's will to live a full and satisfying life. Although some of the most famous existentialists were atheists, just as there are religious humanists, there are also religious existentialists, like Simone Weil, Paul Tillich and Karl Barth.

One of the most significant of the atheistic existentialists was Edmund Husserl. Husserl based his philosophy on first-person experience – the phenomena that were accessible to human consciousness. The foundation of an experience is its intentionality – it has to be directed at some thing or idea. Schopenhauer called this process Will and William James described it as Volition. For an experience to become imprinted on memory, or even to be actively processed by the mind, intention must be accompanied by attention – directed concentration on the object of consciousness. Edmund Husserl regarded intentionality as ‘the fundamental property of consciousness’. Contemporary writers such as Wayne Dyer, Herbert Benson, Lynne McTaggart, Louise Hay and others describe it simply as ‘intention’. It is this same attention or focussed intention that produces the benefits of spiritual healing or prayer, directs our individual biochemistry towards health or sickness, and allows psychic communication through telepathy or clairvoyance. Occasionally, the mind of the psychic may be tuned into an appropriate energy frequency without the making of a conscious effort.

The general world-view in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries was shaped by the huge development of materialist and deterministic science, an influence that has continued into the present day. The materialism was represented by the accumulation of data from observations by the five senses: there was no place for mystical illumination. The determinism was represented by the quest to find scientific laws that governed events in the natural world. Where possible, these laws were expressed by mathematical equations. The operating principle was one of reductionism – seeking an understanding of how the universe worked by studying small isolated systems individually, as recommended by the English philosopher, Francis Bacon.

Today, a new consciousness is emerging that recognizes the value of the spiritual dimension of our lives but which forges beliefs that are compatible with modern science. As part of this current cultural revolution, modern science is playing a role in supporting the existence of the numinous rather than contradicting it. Materialism has given way to idealism in the new science in that the fundamental atoms and molecules out of which the physical world has long believed to be made are seen to exist as complementary non-material waves of energy. The determinism of laboratory experiments that had a predictable outcome is now challenged by a new science in which events involving bits of atoms have only limited predictability in their behaviour – thus there is an inevitable indeterminism about experimental outcomes. And instead of being able to study such systems a bit at a time, so that one aspect of an object did not interfere with another, we now find that each of the constituents of an atom communicates through a numinous spiritual energy with all the other constituents. We have an ocean of continually interacting particles of matter and waves of energy – an apt metaphor for the increasing global interaction of humankind.

The great mystical scientist, Father Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, envisaged the evolution of the world as proceeding through four stages. In his book *The Phenomenon of Man*, he described this series of stages as a progression in the evolution of consciousness. First there was *geogenesis*, the creation of the land and the sea; then came *biogenesis*, the creation of life forms; this was followed by *psychogenesis*, the development of thinking beings. Now we are in the stage of *noogenesis*, the evolution of mind into what may be identified as Universal Mind, Communal Soul or an all-pervading God as Holy Spirit. This theistic interpretation is equally capable of a secular interpretation as the all-pervading interactive potential energy field of the atom. The noosphere is made up of loving souls in harmony with one another with no strife between nations or religions. Many pagan nations lived in this way before they were invaded and exploited by the expansion of western capitalist materialism. [Debatable? (Ed.)]

So, as long as scripture is interpreted as the pagan myths of the people of the time, and we do not enforce human interpretations onto these intuitive insights, we have a fundamental and unifying compatibility between modern science and the underlying spirituality of the great religions of

the world. The evolution of consciousness into a state of global harmony has already begun. We need now to build on these tentative beginnings and try to create the noosphere that Teilhard dreamed of.

Howard Jones

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Howard Jones' latest book, *Evolution of Consciousness*, published in Autumn 2012, will be reviewed in *De Numine*, Autumn 2013. (Ed.)

## Modern Visionary Appearances of Jesus

In a recent article published in the *Journal of Near-Death Studies* (Vol. 30, #3, Spring 2012, pp. 137-148), I made the case that resurrection appearances of Jesus in the Gospels of the New Testament resemble modern-day after-death communications. The following is the Abstract for that article.

Scientific research into after-death communication began at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. During this early period, psychical researcher James Hyslop and theologian Rudolph Otto wrote about the resurrection of Jesus as a visionary / spiritual experience – as opposed to a physical, 'bodily' resurrection. More recently, liberal theologians and religious experience researchers have also favored this view. The purpose of this article is to: (a) underscore the fact that the resurrection of Jesus as an after-death communication is solidly based in the only first-hand account of Paul and the verified secondary accounts of Peter and James (I Cor 15:5-8) in the *New Testament*, and (b) demonstrate that, although a physical resurrection is implied by the *Gospel* writers because of the empty tomb, the appearance stories of Jesus are more in accord with the phenomenology of modern after-death accounts of communications by Jesus, other divine figures, and ordinary people.

In my article, I identify nine categories of resurrection appearances in the accounts of the New Testament: 1) He appeared to individuals. 2) He appeared to small groups and large groups. 3) Sometimes Jesus' former friends did not recognize him. 4) Sometimes people touched Jesus. 5) In one account, Mary Magdalene was asked *not* to touch Jesus (although some modern translations like the NRSV [New Revised Standard Version] translate John 20:17 as 'do not hold on to me...' as opposed to 'don't touch me'). 6) Jesus appeared and disappeared instantly; he walked through locked doors. 7) Jesus broke bread, served breakfast, and ate! 8) Jesus used his psychic powers to predict where to catch fish. 9) Jesus converted people (like St. Paul).

All of these behaviors have been reported throughout history in visionary experiences. While space limitations of *De Numine* prevent me from providing case examples for all nine categories, I am including two examples of persons whom I interviewed personally (as

opposed to abstracted from other sources). Both Revd David Parke and Dr Tom Hargrove gave me permission to use their actual names.

Revd David Parke is a retired Unitarian Universalist Christian minister. His example illustrates the appearances of Jesus to an individual in a closed room and the life-changing effects these appearances have on people.

This experience took place when Revd Parke was a young divinity student at the University of Chicago.

Then mid-way through my first year, the crucified Christ appeared to me in my dormitory room. For those few moments – I do not know how long – Jesus Christ crucified occupied my entire personal horizon. His tragic visage and piercing eyes penetrated to the bottom of my soul. He did not speak. I did not speak. Although unspoken, the message was clear – ‘I come from the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Your life is your own, but it is also God’s. Do not be diverted by self-indulgence and concern for the opinions of others. You are called to minister – and to minister is to suffer as I have suffered. Give yourself to those who come to you in brokenness. Listen to them. Heal them. Love them. You can do less, but more than this you cannot do. I am with you always.’ You will understand, friends, that other than my own birth and the birth of my children, this was the most important moment of my life.

Tom Hargrove, Ph.D., was an expert in rice farming who travelled the world promoting advances in agriculture. His example illustrates Jesus’ offering and drinking wine. Jesus also predicts that Tom will be freed from his captivity. In his book, *Long March to Freedom*, Hargrove described his vision of Jesus while being held captive by the FARC [Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia] in Colombia, S.A. He was kind enough to send me this expanded account of this experience.

Terribly depressed, I went to El Templo on May 26. Alone by my broken cross of bamboo, I started to cry. Then something strange happened. Was it a religious experience or a hunger-induced hallucination? I don’t know. But I thought I saw an ephemeral, bearded man walking from the woods to El Templo. I described him in my diary as having a Kris Kristofferson beard and wearing jeans, red flannel shirt, high leather boots – the lace-up kind. The man came closer and his face seemed exactly that of the stereotyped Jesus whose portrait hangs on Sunday-school walls. He laughed and told me to sit on a log. ‘I’m sorry I was crying,’ I said. ‘You can cry here whenever you wish,’ the man replied. Then somehow, he opened a liter bottle of Gallo Hearty Burgundy and poured two crystal goblets of red wine. We drank, then he said he must leave, but maybe we could visit again. He added (I wrote in my diary), ‘but I might include him more when I’m having fun after I leave here.’ That ephemeral man walked back into the forest, and I was alone again. I had never before and have never again had such an experience. What made it still stranger was (that) I had never remotely thought of Jesus dressed in jeans, red flannel shirt, and lumberjack boots.

When I questioned Tom, he said, ‘If Jesus had been dressed in robes and sandals, I would have been less inclined to think it was real. It’s the only story I have a hard time telling. It didn’t change me, but it sure enough impressed me. I guess it did make a big difference to me.’

In *The Departed Among the Living: An Investigative Study of Afterlife Encounters*, Erlendur Haraldsson notes that after-death communications are common in the general population – not only in his native Iceland – but also in China, the U.K., and the U.S.A. He goes on to state that these examples, ‘indicate that they do indeed have some basis in reality.’ I concur.

*Dr. Ken R. Vincent*

Individuals wishing to receive an e-mail reprint of my article, ‘Resurrection Appearances of Jesus as After-Death Communication’ and my rejoinder to Dr. Gary Habermas, a prominent Conservative Christian theologian at Liberty University, can e-mail me at: [professorvincent@yahoo.com](mailto:professorvincent@yahoo.com)

## Harmony Street

After a visit to family in Melbourne in February, we decided to break our journey home by seeing a little of Singapore instead of just the airport (which is itself magnificent). Singapore was of course amazing. Sleek, efficient, shinningly seductive; and I loved the guaranteed heat. From there we went north to Malacca (Melaka in Malay) on the east coast of Malaysia during the first days of the Chinese New Year.

After the dream-like perfection of Singapore, Melaka was like coming back to the real world. If Singapore gleamed, Melaka kind of sparkled, but with little rusty bits in the corners. There were high rise hotels that used to be luxurious but were now down-at-heel and sadly passé. Between the pavements and the streets were open ditches and you had to look carefully while walking so as not to trip into them.

Because the New Year is the most important festival in the Chinese calendar, lasting 12 days, most of the shops were shut, except for Indian ones selling mainly dried food and spices, or saris and pyjamas and gorgeous dresses, scarves and pants; and touristy market stalls where everything seemed amazingly cheap. Since this is a special time for visiting one's family, the town was in logistical chaos. The hotels (both in Singapore and Melaka) were completely full. Here there were cars and motorbikes everywhere, at all times of day – the entire width of the road would be filled with cars, hardly moving if at all. The heat of them in the street was stifling. What was strangely not unpleasant was the lack of any apparent impatience or anything approaching road rage; there was practically no hooting. Around the Dutch Square in the old town, the cars dodged rickshaws covered in brightly coloured flowers carrying families with children, or couples, with music playing into the street.



The old town of Melaka has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site (together with George Town, further north) since 2008. From the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards Melaka was a trading enclave controlled by the Portuguese, Dutch and British in succession, who adopted a policy of tolerance of local religious culture and laws. This mutually advantageous arrangement meant that local traders (Malay, Chinese, Indian or Arab) prospered and retained their own culture and religions, but the Europeans retained political and military power and control of trade. Melaka and Georgetown provided a blueprint for the social and political structure when Singapore was created by Raffles in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century; this was the first time that any altruism came into the equation: he took the radical and courageous step of abolishing slavery, and establishing a rule of law.



Sri Poyyatha Moorthi Temple

This multi-cultured history is evident: the ruined Portuguese fortress, *A Famosa*, is among the oldest surviving examples of European architecture in Asia; the *Stadthuys* (old Dutch, 'city hall'), was built in 1650 as the office of the Dutch Governor and Deputy Governor; and there is Chinese and British and Dutch architecture in

the town houses. Just as obvious is a comfortable mix of Indian, Chinese and Malay people. Women's heads and arms are covered or not – and it didn't seem to matter at all. The only place I felt I should wear a headscarf and long sleeved was in the precinct of the mosque we visited.

A famous reflection of this co-existence is *Jalan Tokong*, a street known as 'Harmony Street' where a Hindu temple (the oldest in Malaysia), the *Kampung Kling Mosque*, a Buddhist temple and a Chinese temple (the largest outside China) are situated almost side by side.

We only saw the outside of the *Sri Poyyatha Moorthi* [Hindu] Temple because it wasn't open, and not much more than the outside of the Mosque, since non-Muslims weren't allowed



Cheng Hoon Teng Temple



inside. The *Cheng Hoon Teng* Chinese Temple – the oldest functioning temple in Malaysia, practicing Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism – was full of people, colourful and bustling but strangely calm as well. People dressed in sandals, shorts and T-shirts were lighting incense sticks, talking, hugging, using mobile phones, and generally being happy. There was loud, deep, rather monotonous (literally) chanting coming from a loudspeaker; I couldn't see where it originated, because the hall was so full of people. There were several prayer halls in the temple with altars, bowls of incense sticks and candles, figurines, decoration ... tables, a ladder, a bucket ... and everywhere colour, intricate detail, incense smoke, and a kind of quiet profusion ...



near Harmony Street

Harmony Street is in a small area of criss-crossing streets, full of stalls selling things I had never seen before, hung across with the ubiquitous red lanterns, and crowded with Indian, Chinese and Malay people. We felt very European and white, but not at all conspicuous (except perhaps in the street of Indian men where I was literally the only woman to be seen).

There are many functioning Christian churches in Melaka. We saw at least three in the old town. Christ Church (Protestant) is a sort of dark salmon pink colour (the 'red church') and looks rather Dutch; the Church of St Francis Xavier looks more traditional; St. Peter's church is the oldest operational Catholic Church in Malaysia (built 1710). There we were welcomed by a verger who enthusiastically showed us round and said he would send me an account of his own religious experience for the RERC database. The notice board was interesting. Most of the notices were in English and Malay, and some in Chinese and Arabic as well. There was the 'Pastoral letter issued by the Bishops' Conference in Malaysia on the Legal Implications of Conversion to Islam', warning of serious





Church of St Peter

consequences of converting to Islam under Sharia/Shari'ah law (see below). Another notice proclaimed: 'When All Is Said And Done More Will Be Said Than Done'.

We were told that the Chinese New Year celebrations are the equivalent of our Christmas one. But there is very little similarity. In amongst the loud exuberant colour and the noise and the crowded streets and the chaos, the people showed a kind of calm/quiet contentment that you don't often see in the West. (I realised later that a big difference was the lack of alcohol.) I can't say it felt very 'holy', but that didn't seem important: religion seemed very much a part of everyday life, and everyday life a part of religion.

When we got back to Heathrow, trying to find out which bus we should board to take us to Reading station, we were greeted by a surly bus driver who told us almost menacingly that he wasn't an information service but a driver and to go and ask at the information office. At Reading station the First Great Western train waiting at our platform had been emptied of passengers and declared a crime scene because of a 'serious assault against a member of staff'.



*Jean Matthews*

### **'Pastoral letter issued by the Bishops' Conference in Malaysia on the Legal Implications of Conversion to Islam**

Dear Sisters and Brothers in the Lord,

If you convert to Islam, there are important changes to your legal status and what you can or cannot do. Your conversion to Islam will be registered with the Religious Department and the National Registration Department, both of which are computerised so access to this information is available throughout the country.

Under Syariah [Shari'ah/Sharia] enactments of most of the 13 States of Malaysia:

- 1) Conversion back to your former religion is either (a) not allowed under the law, or (b) a criminal offence which means that you may be fined, whipped, detained or imprisoned under most State [of Melaka] Islamic laws.
- 2) If you are under 18 years of age, you require your parent's permission to convert to Islam.
- 3) Your identity card will record your conversion to Islam. Therefore, even if you are no longer practising Islam, you may be fined, whipped, detained or imprisoned for violation of Syariah laws, such as praying in Church, eating in public during fasting month, "khalwat" etc.

4) You cannot marry a non-Muslim. If you decide to divorce and attempt to convert out of Islam, you will lose custody of your children because they are Muslims.

5) Upon death, your non-Muslim relatives will lose their rights to any property, money etc. that you want to leave to them. The corpse of a convert to Islam will be taken away from his or her non-Muslim family for Islamic rites and burial even if you have not been a practising Muslim for many years.

6) In the event that your spouse converts to Islam, you may have no right to either your children or your spouse's property.

We know that certain Christians who convert to Islam for whatever reasons, are not aware or do not consider seriously the implications of such conversion. Hence, the need to inform you.

By this, we are neither against Islam nor freedom of religion, which is guaranteed for all Malaysians in Article 11 of our Constitution which gives the right to an individual to choose freely his or her religion. But to choose correctly, you need to know clearly what you choose and the consequences of your choice.

Archbishop Datuk Murphy Pakiam  
President, Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia'

## **Experience: My Jesus was a Shaman<sup>1</sup>**

It is generally recognised that the Gospels in the New Testament were written many decades after the events that they describe. Thus for me they represent an art form as much as an historical record of Jesus' life. This means that I feel free to interpret them largely in terms of my own spiritual experiences. I feel able to explain the process that converted Jesus from a seemingly ordinary person into someone who changed the course of world history. This process has three essential stages: first a basic grounding in conventional religion that led to spiritual awareness culminating with his baptism by John; a period in the desert where I believe he must have had a near-death experience (NDE) brought on by deprivation (though the gospels do not mention this) which caused a very deep modification of his personality; then a realigning of this new personality with the culture in which he lived. This latter can be seen in his temptations and how he overcame them thanks to his Jewish background. This is the point at which he became a very unusual shaman in that he refused to use his new-found powers for personal gain or the propagation of evil. My only justification for this view comes from my own personal history.

I come from a family which had been deeply religious for many generations, but in my father's time the overt religious commitment faded and was replaced by a deeply felt but largely hidden spirituality. I took all this in without being able to give it a name or even fully realise what was going on. However what I was aware of was an absolute curiosity about the world around me, especially of electricity and magnetism. I also had a great curiosity about the nature of the planets and stars. Perhaps it was inevitable that I would become a radio astronomer although the subject was almost unknown in my childhood. In my twenties I was so committed to research that I was almost bereft of any kind of social life. However in my thirties my interest slowly moved to wanting to know the workings of the human mind, so I began reading books by Jung and Freud in my spare time. These studies gave me the idea that the human mind contained a great deal more than just ego consciousness. However this seemed just rather esoteric theory to me at that time. This was my first stage in spiritual development.

The second stage in my spiritual development would seem to have started entirely by accident. I had to go out onto the moors between Manchester and Sheffield carrying a small amount of radio equipment. I had to switch it on at a precise time, stand with it for half an hour and then come down. I was chosen for the job because I was known to be an experienced fell walker of many years standing. This being so, I made the quite incredible mistake of setting out without proper clothing, just because it was such a beautiful spring day in March. Everything went as planned until I set off to walk home. Then the cloud came down, the wind got up, the temperature fell many degrees and it started to snow! I became completely disorientated, very tired and wanted to sit down beside a boulder and go to sleep. Then it began to dawn on me that if I did that I would never wake up again. Instead I kept walking and went into a kind of life review. I began to realise how much unfinished business there was in my life and this led to the magic phrase 'I can't possibly die now!' Once I said that I felt as though someone had kicked me in the stomach, my whole body seemed to be filled with energy and my personality suddenly switched to a new level. I switched from being this rather absent minded academic to being a highly energetic and intuitive peasant determined to stay alive whatever it took. Totally without thinking about it I now knew just which way to walk through this very thick cloud and was soon home and dry. This really taught me that there was much more in my mind than I had ever guessed at. This was now so much more than mere book learning!

The third phase consisted of several strange experiences including a couple of instances where I seemed able to heal people without any knowledge of how I did it. It was not until many years later when I read the book *The Way of the Wyrd*<sup>2</sup> and I attended a course on shamanism at Woodbrooke<sup>3</sup> that I began to realise that I had been through a spontaneous shamanic initiation all those years ago on the moors. Sometime later I read the book *Who on Earth was Jesus?*<sup>4</sup> and this filled me with an intuitive certainty that Jesus had been through a shamanic initiation without the mediation of a traditional shaman. Also it seems that not only was Jesus able to avoid the shadow side of shamanism by strict adherence to his Jewish faith but that also he found a new way of initiating his followers. The traditional shaman tricks his initiate into a NDE and some of them don't survive it! Jesus seems to have found a different way. He formed such a close bond with his disciples that, when he went through the truly appalling death by crucifixion, it had a vicarious initiation effect on his followers. This effect can still happen today without having any immediate connection with Christianity. See for instance the book *Love beyond Death*<sup>5</sup> in which two people are deeply in love, the man gets killed in a horrific road accident in front of his girlfriend and then, in the subsequent months she has a whole series of psychic experiences.

Barrie Rowson

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> While preparing this article I discovered the book *Moses and Jesus: the Shamans* by Jackie Jones-Hunt (Winchester, O Books, 2011), reviewed in *The Christian Parapsychologist* Vol. 1, No. 6 March 2012, p. 41. This book treats the subject in a very different way.

<sup>2</sup> Brian Bates, *The Way of the Wyrd*, Hay House, 2004. This book is a novel but is based on an historical record of a young monk who went to convert a Saxon tribe and went through a shamanic initiation in the process.

<sup>3</sup> Woodbrooke is a Quaker study centre just south of Birmingham

<sup>4</sup> David Boulton, *Who on Earth was Jesus?*, Winchester, O Books, 2008. This book showed me that there were many views of the historical Jesus even among scholars. Hence I use the term 'My Jesus' in my title.

<sup>5</sup> Elleke van Kraalingen, *Love beyond Death* Winchester, O Books, 2011

## Reports

### Interfaith Dialogue: The Contribution of Theology and Religious Studies at Lampeter

As part of Interfaith Week, Professor Paul Badham gave a talk on this subject at the University in Lampeter on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2012. I had not heard about the event and am grateful to Professor David Cockburn who brought it to my attention. As I wondered about the content, I imagined that Professor Badham would concentrate on Ninian Smart, Cyril Williams and William Cantwell Smith. What a treat lay in store. Paul began with Rowland Williams, Vice-Principal at Lampeter 1850 – 1862. He was a controversial figure and enlightened too, believing all scripture to be the human response to the Divine. He also wrote about Hinduism, but there were not enough scholars of the time in that field to promote or challenge his views. However, the book that he wrote on that topic is in the Roderic Bowen Library at the University.

Paul then leapt to ‘modern times’ and romped through a history of scholars whom we have met, read, or heard lecturing: Kenneth Cragg (Islam), Ninian Smart (Comparative Religion) and John Hick (Religious Pluralism). These all influenced the young Paul Badham as a student; he was first appointed to the academic staff at Lampeter in 1973. He told us that Cyril Williams and Islwyn Blythin joined the Department in 1983 to teach Theology and Interfaith Studies and that Professor Cyril G Williams was responsible for translating the Baghavad Gita into Welsh! When I chatted with Cyril’s widow, Irene, about the talk, she said that Cyril had a theory which was expressed in a chapter of one of Professor Ursula King’s books, *Turning Points in Religious Studies*. Professor Williams suggests that it was Rowland Williams chatting about world faiths whilst his horse was shod at the Smithy in Caio, which inspired local boy Timothy Richards to travel, as an adult, to China as a missionary.

Another important stage in the interfaith journey in Lampeter, as related by Professor Badham, was funding from the Middle East, which in the late 1980s enabled the teaching of Islam at Lampeter by Muslim scholars Mashuq Ally, Mawil Izzi Dien and Dawoud El-Alami. With them came numerous PhD students from overseas, including the Turks, Cafer Yaran, Mehmet Onal, Muhsin Akbas and Ismail Hacinebioglu, who are now all doing well in their careers. There followed Dan Cohn Sherbok for Judaism, and Xinzhong Yao and Yanxia Zhao for Chinese Religions. Unfortunately we lost Gavin Flood, whose expertise in Hinduism was required in Oxford. Professor Matsunaga and His Eminence Koken Otani Supreme Primate of Jodo Shinshu came from Japan to enlighten us on the subject of Pure Land Buddhism. This led to Wendy Dossett pursuing her doctorate in that field and to Paul, Wendy and I, at various times, addressing the priests in Tokyo Hongani. Also offered at Lampeter were courses in New Religious Movements and Esoteric Religions. At this busy and exciting time, pedagogues from Saint Petersburg, Natasha Smolskaia and Slava Arzhanoukhin came to observe how Religious Studies could be taught.

Because of RERC’s close links with the Department of Religious Studies at Lampeter and Paul Badham, Xinzhong Yao and Greg Barker’s involvement with the Alister Hardy Trust, the Research Centre, the Archive, and the ‘Global Project’, the work of investigating the religious experiences of people of other faiths and cultures was given a lot of publicity. The only scholar mentioned that seemed to have no direct link with Lampeter was Saint Thomas Aquinas!

Having been associated with the Department in one way or another from 1985 to 2010, for me, Paul’s presentation brought back a lot of memories and reminded me of how fortunate

we were to be involved with such a thriving and ground-breaking department, at its peak; and how good Paul was at getting his students involved in activities which would extend their knowledge, experience and contacts.

Paul's recall of observations made at various interfaith conferences – that 'with knowledge comes understanding and acceptance', that 'there are more differences within religions than between them' and that 'it is language that separates religions' reminded me of the Syriac scholar Sebastian Brock's lectures in Kottayam, Kerala (2004). Brock (if I remember correctly) believes translations of doctrine and misunderstanding of religious terms to be a major contribution to the split between the Latin, Eastern Orthodox and Syrian Orthodox churches.

Originally I prepared this piece to circulate to friends and acquaintances mentioned in Paul's presentation, then I realised that many of the scholars mentioned have written Occasional Papers or given lectures to AHS Members at conferences and Open Days. Therefore, *De Numine* readers may also be interested in their shared contribution to Interfaith Studies at Lampeter.

*Anne Veronica Watkins*

## **Exhibition of work by Edward Robinson**

Readers will be interested to hear that from February 13th to March 25th at St Margaret's Church, Westminster Abbey there has been an exhibition of triptychs, reliefs and other sculptural forms in wood and bronze by Edward Robinson called 'Forms of Silence', with an accompanying book/catalogue. This adds to the earlier writing on art and religious experience such as *The Language of Mystery* by this distinguished former Director of RERC. Edward Robinson also collected some significant art works by other artists in a collection which he put into the keeping of the Alister Hardy Trust when the Centre moved to Lampeter, and which are displayed in the Theology, Religious Studies and Islamic Studies building with an accompanying catalogue by Peggy Morgan. The catalogue includes interviews with many of the artists conducted by Edward Robinson.

*Peggy Morgan*

## **AHSSSE Open Day, 6th October 2012: The Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture**

Dr William Bloom, one of the UK's foremost spiritual teachers gave the Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture entitled *Deconstructing the Elitism of Religious Experience* in the morning and in the afternoon led an experiential session. William explained that our organisation held an important place in his psyche as he had long been familiar with the work of Sir Alister Hardy and of Dr David Hay (who was with us).

William began his lecture by telling something of his background. Both his parents were highly critical of religion. However, even as a child, he was conscious of 'living within a huge being' although he realised that he had to keep quiet about it. He later enjoyed London in the '60s, in particular the engagement with Indian religion and exploration of different states of consciousness.

Success in his early twenties led to stress and anxiety and thence to tranquilisers. William found that simply sitting quietly was more effective than pills and this experience of meditation led him to a two year retreat with the Berbers. By his early thirties, William had come to realise that there were many different techniques for attaining the universal experience of the liminal state – and he himself explored about 500 in all. This was met with suspicion as the tendency is to think that pursuing one method in depth is the only way. He sees himself as a freelance mystic, experiencing the wonder and energy of the numinous in many different ways.

Our cultural framework presents the liminal experience as a special event. Getting rid of that attitude is the first step towards the democratisation of spirituality and to breaking down barriers between faith communities. The most important question is simply: when is it most easy for you to experience the connection with what is in us and all around us?

Throughout the ages, and all over the world, it is men who have been the dominant cultural force in speaking about and leading spirituality, hi-jacking it with special clothes, objects, ceremonies and hierarchy.\* They have also had deep mystical experiences, which they then represent as special and life-changing. This leads to the assumption that such experiences are to be mediated by a priest and to take place in a sacred space.

William suggested that we need to move from there back to the understanding that the spiritual is within and around us. We need to affirm the experience of grace and presence in ordinary people's daily lives. William James began such democratising, although in the *Varieties of Religious Experience* he concentrated on the mini-epiphanies, which William Bloom stressed can happen to anyone and should not be considered as special. David Hay had extended this democratisation, especially in his work with Rebecca Nye on spirituality in children.

According to William we need to remember that we live in an ocean of spiritual consciousness, which has been given a huge variety of names by different cultures, including ether, bliss fields, cosmic ocean, Manitu, Shekinah, the Holy Spirit, chi, numen, prana, presence. It is a field of energy and consciousness which we taste from time to time and to which we should be more open. Most of the time we don't notice it as we are too busy and distracted but many people have a sudden experience of connection to that level. Spiritual practice can help people who have been flooded by such an experience to explore it further. Others need to be empowered to affirm the experiences which they are already having.

That religious experience is neither special nor the preserve of the religious elite but natural and available to everyone, is an approach which resonates with the general outlook of members of the SSSE, and William led the afternoon in that spirit. We explored how to pause, relax, observe and to yield to the connection with that which is in and all around us. There was a lively engagement of views and a wide-ranging discussion.

Members may be interested to read my review of William Bloom's *The Power of Modern Spirituality, How to live a life of compassion and personal fulfilment* in the Spring 2012 issue of *De Numine*.

*Marianne Rankin (Director of Communications, AHT and SSSE)*

\* May I just mention that since the advent of feminist theology there has been an ongoing debate about gender dominance in the religious ritual and belief systems of pre-historical and non-industrial cultures. This is often discussed in the context of religious hierarchy, with which William Bloom is concerned here. (Ed.)

## AHSSSE Annual General Meeting 2012

The Annual General Meeting was held at the Friends Meeting House, St. Giles, Oxford, on Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> October, and attended by some 35 members and guests. The Revd Jonathan Robinson, Chair of the Society, welcomed all. Apologies were received from Karl Gibbs, Sheelah James, Tristram Jenkins (Committee members); Dr Bettina Schmidt (RERC Director); Professor Leslie Francis (Chair of Trustees); David Greenwood (Hon. Treasurer); Ruth Brinkman (Hon. Membership Secretary); Jean Matthews (RERC Archive Supervisor); Patricia Murphy (Editor, *De Numine*); Jane Winship (Trustee); from Rt. Revd Wyn Evans (Bishop of St. David's, Patron); and Members Keith Beasley, Canon John Brown, Robert Foreman, Hilary Knight, Richard Lines, Tony McCaffrey, Marian MacPolin, Graham Miles and Sue Willetts; late apologies, Shirley and David Firth.

The Minutes of the AGM of 2011 were agreed and signed. Under Matters Arising, it was reported that progress on publicity through local radio and other media had been delayed, but now that we have appointed a Publicity Officer (Marianne Rankin), steps will be taken to investigate this; and the possibility of a weekend Conference was still being explored.

Jonathan Robinson, in his Chair's Report, referred to the background and response received to the announcement of the proposed change of name of the Society; and reported on the Agreement being drawn up between the Alister Hardy Trust and the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, on the need for volunteer help, and on the activities of the Society and future possible events under consideration. He then announced his retirement as Chair of the Society, which would now be taken over by Andy Burns, the Vice-Chair, as Acting Chair, pending confirmation of his appointment as Chair by the Trustees. Jonathan concluded by thanking everybody for what they were doing in support of the Society's aims.

Andy Burns then took over the Chair, warmly thanking Jonathan for his report, and for his contribution to the Society during his period as Chair.

The Chair of Trustees' Report was read by Dr Greg Barker in the absence of Prof. Leslie Francis. This mentioned the Trust's shared commitment with the Society to continuing and promoting the work of Sir Alister Hardy, and the significant source of income to enable this coming from members of the Society through subscriptions and donations – and, lately, from legacies. These would enable the appointment of a professional librarian to organise and catalogue those contents of the Centre's archive of materials which are not accounts of religious experience, and to complete the cataloguing of the AH Library. The report further mentioned that the financial health of the Trust now enables it to pay honoraria to volunteers who assist the Society in its administration, and compensate fully for out of pocket expenses. Professor Francis recorded his appreciation of the work of the Society and the important work done by its officers, and expressed his regret at not being able to be present at the AGM.

Giving the Directors' Report, Dr Greg Barker referred to the Research Centre spreading the news about the validity of religious experience, its continuing work through 6<sup>th</sup> form school conferences, and to a research project aimed at evaluating the use of language surrounding religion and religious experience. The aim of this is to feed into a projected new national survey of contemporary religious/spiritual experience; members will be invited to take part in a questionnaire regarding a suggested update of the Hardy question. Dr Barker mentioned that the John Templeton Foundation has suggested it might be willing to make a generous investment in the re-digitisation of the archive of accounts to make it more relevant for current research, more accessible for researchers and more widely known across the world. He referred to the good relationship of the Trust with the University, thanking David Greenwood and Sally Wilkinson for their support in formulating the Agreement between Trust and University.

Presenting the Hon. Treasurer's Report, Dr Barker reported the mention made of the work of the Trust and Society; the position regarding legacies and the role of the Trust in deciding on the allocation of its financial resources. Reference was made to the fact that the Trust, and the associated Society, being registered with the Charities Commission, must necessarily concentrate on furthering the aims and objectives of the charity, including feedback to the membership through the journal, *De Numine*, and support of Society activities. The report referred to the work of the professional librarian to be appointed through the legacy funding received, and recorded the indebtedness of the Trust to the many volunteers from the Society who keep the name of Sir Alister Hardy alive today and give much useful publicity to the prevalence of religious and spiritual experience.

The Hon. Membership Secretary's report, read by Andy Burns, recorded 309 names on the AHSSSE database including 239 full paying members, 12 student members and 51 mailing list subscribers, and described the present position and state of play. Ruth Brinkman, retiring as Honorary Membership Secretary, said that she had enjoyed serving as Membership Secretary, and thanked all who had given her help, saying she felt confident that her replacement would inherit a membership list both correct and easy to operate. Andy concluded by thanking Ruth for her report and work and expressing the Society's warm appreciation of her contribution to the Society, which was echoed by the membership present.

The Archive Supervisor's report, also read by Andy Burns, recorded that the refurbishment of the University library at Lampeter had suffered delays resulting in the AHRERC being without an office since the end of August, with Jean Matthews doing her work from home with just occasional visits to Lampeter. Professor Keith Ward's Occasional Paper no.44, *Is there a Common Core of Religious Experience?* had been reprinted, with the next reprints to be done being nos. 33, Fiona Bowie's *Belief or Experience? The Anthropologists' Dilemma* and 17, Colin Thompson's *Poetry and Spirituality*. Appreciation was expressed for Jean's contribution to the Centre and the Society.

Amendments to the Rules of the Society: two amendments were presented, and agreed: firstly, change of name of the Society from 'Alister Hardy Society' to, 'Alister Hardy Society for the Study of Spiritual Experience', proposed by Marianne Rankin and seconded by John Franklin; and secondly, incorporation of the Hon. Membership Secretary as a member of the Committee of the Society, proposed by Rhonda Riachi and seconded by Jonathan Robinson.

AHSSSE Committee elections: the following were nominated, and elected unopposed:

- John Franklin (Hon. Committee Secretary), for a further period of three years: proposed by Andy Burns, seconded by David Greenwood;
- Marian MacPolin (Hon. Membership Secretary) for a period of three years: proposed by Jonathan Robinson, seconded by Marian Rankin.

Under Any Other Business, it was suggested that consideration be given to digitalising RERC publications with a view to their sale as e-books for the benefit of the Centre. This was supported by the Director, Dr Greg Barker, and agreed that it would be looked into.

The date of the next Annual General Meeting: it was reported that this has not yet been fixed: the feeling of the meeting was in favour of the 2013 AGM being held at the same time, i.e. early in October 2013. [Subsequently, this was fixed for Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> October at the Catholic Chaplaincy in St. Aldates, Oxford.]

*John Franklin, Hon. Secretary.*

[Copies of the full Minutes of the AGM and written reports presented at the meeting can be obtained from: Jean Matthews, Archive Supervisor, RERC, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Lampeter, Ceredigion, SA48 7ED. Please send stamped addressed C5 (162 x 229mm) size, or similar, envelope.]

## Reports from the Local Groups

### Chesterfield Group

In the last six months or so the Chesterfield group has had a talk on the philosopher Wittgenstein and how his ideas relate to religion, discussed Jonathan Stedall's documentary about Rudolf Steiner, and watched a DVD about 'spiritual crisis'. These themes continue into 2013 as we will be watching part two of Stedall's documentary, and hearing more about Wittgenstein from group member Rodney Ward. Other upcoming topics include the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*, and scientist-turned-visionary Emanuel Swedenborg. The group also continues to arrange the occasional trip out around the local counties to visit places of historical and spiritual interest.

The Chesterfield group now meets on the first Friday of every second month instead of every month. This has enabled me to become involved in the Spiritual Crisis Network (SCN), with a view to setting up a local SCN group in Sheffield. If anyone is interested in the AHSSSE or SCN groups, please contact me at the e-mail address below.

The AHSSSE Chesterfield Group programme can be found in the List of Events, page 51, on the Society website under 'Events'; and on the 'AHSSSE Group' page of my website, [www.esoteric-experience.org.uk](http://www.esoteric-experience.org.uk)

For any further info please contact me at [mike@esoteric-experience.org.uk](mailto:mike@esoteric-experience.org.uk) or on 07790 757955.

*Mike Rush*

### London Group

Our 2012 programme concluded with talks to us on 4<sup>th</sup> October by Dr David Luke, Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Greenwich and, on 29<sup>th</sup> November, by Dr Chris Clarke, former Professor of Applied Mathematics at the University of Southampton, an old friend known to the Group, who had spoken to us before.

Dr David Luke spoke to us on *Spiritual and Psychological Experience: a non-reductionist neurochemical perspective*. He referred to psychoactive substances which changed all aspects of consciousness in various ways, drawing on techniques of consciousness alteration among tribal peoples in South America and India where the Ayahunsca plant and the San Pedro Cactus are used to produce altered states of consciousness leading to intense visionary dreams; these plants are also used for healing. The objective neurochemistry of these drugs had been investigated, but it was their subjective correlates that were more interesting – were the phenomena experienced by drug-takers in any sense true? Results of laboratory-controlled experiments to test subjective claims, he said, had been disappointing. He had devised new controlled experiments, less tedious and freer in nature, focusing mainly on precognition and inquiring whether this was enhanced when people took these psychoactive plants. With one such tribe accounts of those taking the drug were correct in over 30% of cases – significantly more than a 'control' group who achieved the 'expected' 25%. He had also experimented on himself, experiencing pictures in his head, which he described briefly in writing, later checking whether his descriptions accorded with any of four short videos on the computer, and, if so, whether that video was the one 'chosen' by the computer, finding he had been right significantly more than he would have been by chance.

Dr. Chris Clarke, speaking to us on *Cosmology and Consciousness: are we co-partners in creation-ing?* opened by saying that, in order to establish a link between the physics of cosmology and questions of consciousness, we need to look at quantum theory; and he went on to discuss the

cosmic dimension and recent observations that had been made. The universe, it had been found, changed from near-complete uniformity at the Big Bang (he preferred 'Big Question-mark') to something very different and much more complex, due to the force of gravity, and the process of this change was set off by the tiny variations observable in the very early background variation. In a dense argument he stated the general view that 'galaxies are quantum fluctuations, writ large across the sky' – and that if we inquire what these 'quantum fluctuations' are, we discover that they arise from the process of observation; going on to ask, Who then is observing, and what is 'quantum'? This leads on to 'consciousness', and what it might mean. Chris Clarke discussed theories about consciousness and its link with physics; going on to differing views on which beings or things can be regarded as 'conscious' – this extending beyond humans to dogs and goldfish. He ended his talk by saying that, from a spiritual viewpoint at least, it is not a matter of cognitive abilities: and he invited questions, of which there were many, giving rise to a spirited discussion.

*John Franklin*

[CD/audio DVDs of the talks given to the London Group (£5.00 or £6.00 incl. p&p), and 'Notes' of the talks (£1.00 incl. p&p), can be obtained from: John Franklin, 21 Park Vista, Greenwich, London, SE10 9LZ – cheques payable to 'AHS London Group']

*A review of Ways of Knowing, edited by Chris Clarke, can be found in De Numine No. 44, page 41. (Ed.)*

## **Midlands Group**

Please see Events for 2013 programme so far. It has been suggested that members might be interested in a meeting on the role of diet, in particular vegetarian or vegan, and its relationship to spirituality. There are so many aspects of this subject that an evening may not give us enough time for a full discussion, and so I would like members to consider whether a Saturday or Sunday afternoon—and evening, in July would be worth considering. I am also hoping that we can arrange one or two outings in the Summer.

Could you also please give some thought as to whether you would like a meeting in August? The suggested topic is 'The Divine Feminine'; I would be happy to facilitate this but would appreciate some other volunteers.

Meetings are usually held on the third Friday of the month at 7pm for a 7.30, and held at 1 Woodcroft Close, Blackwell, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire, B60 1DA, (Tel 0121 447 7727). Members' friends are also welcome.

*Sheelah James*

## **Oxford & Cotswold Group**

Our last meeting of 2012 was the **Divination Day** on 17 November, which featured presentations by Dr Roger Straughan and Dr Rikky Rooksby. See the report by Neil Hancox below.

### **2013 Events**

The Oxford & Cotswold Group held a **Healing Weekend** on Easter Saturday and Sunday, 2013. The weekend featured group meditation and healing exercises led by Helen Jameson, Patrick Walter and Ann Mills. The event was hosted by Ann Mills in Minster Lovell, Oxfordshire. This was our first 24-hour event.

### Other event ideas

There are still four more event ideas left on the list we compiled in December 2011: *What is God to you?*; *Reincarnation*; *Oneness and Goneness*; and *Spiritual Experiences of the Mystics*. Do contact me to suggest speakers on those topics.

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

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

### AHS Meeting on Divination – 17<sup>th</sup> November 2012, Oxford

About 20 members attended the meeting, which featured presentations by Dr Rikky Rooksby on the *I Ching*, which he has been consulting for 37 years, and Dr Roger Straughan, author of *A Study in Survival* (O Books, 2009; ISBN 978 1 84694 240 2), on the use of books by Conan Doyle as a means of answering questions.

The *I Ching*. Rikky Rooksby explained that divination is a means of intuiting knowledge of the future. It is quite different from fortune telling, which is a passive, or even fatalistic, activity. Divination assumes that life is meaningful and that by contacting a higher power one tries to determine the right action for the individual to take in given circumstances. Specifically the *I Ching* is a source of spiritual guidance and consultation, connecting us – or at least giving us a feeling of being connected to – the greater spiritual world. An excellent analogy is that we are like mariners sailing our (individual) boats on an ocean and divination helps us to set our sails so that we get maximum benefit from the prevailing wind.

The *I Ching* – or the *Book of changes* – originated in China about 3,000 years ago, though some authorities give an earlier date. Rikky explained that it consists of 64 hexagrams, each composed of two trigrams, giving a total of six horizontal lines, which may be continuous or broken. Solid lines are associated with yang (or creative) energy, broken ones with yin (or receptive) energy. Each hexagram represents an archetypal life situation, and each line will provide a different comment on the situation. The concept of the *I Ching* is based on an understanding of a dynamic balance of opposites at work in the universe, the evolution of events as a process, and an acceptance of the inevitability of change.

Once a question has been formulated the questioner throws three coins six times, (originally yarrow stalks were used) and notes which coins land tails up and which land heads up. The six coin throws give six lines, forming a hexagram that can be recognised by looking up the lines on a key in the *I Ching* (the popular Wilhelm edition has these on the back page). The commentaries associated with the particular hexagram are then consulted for guidance. These commentaries have been built up over time and are written according to different philosophical schools (Confucian, Taoist and Buddhist). They may be phrased in terms of poetic images and draw on common elements and symbols in Chinese culture. Rikky explained that you have to formulate your question carefully because the technique cannot give simple yes/no answers.

The first written knowledge of the technique in the west probably appeared in 1834 in the Latin work of two Jesuit monks, followed by an English translation in 1876 by James Legge. New versions and translations of the *I Ching* continue to appear because of a better knowledge of the language and archaeological discoveries. The popular translation by Richard Wilhelm and Cary Baynes first appeared in English in 1951 with a foreword by Carl Jung. Jung developed his concept of synchronicity on the basis of the *I Ching*, and it was

studied by Aldous Huxley. In the 1960s the technique was taken up by the counter-culture and used by US composer John Cage, while Pink Floyd based one of their songs on it. Today there are many books of commentaries available and it can be accessed online.

The secular explanation of how the *I Ching* works is that that it is like a sophisticated 'ink-blot' test and reflects your own unconscious knowledge (enabling you to mirror what is in your higher self). A more spiritual approach suggests that it puts you in touch with the supreme (ultimate) intelligence.

**Book Divination (or bibliomancy).** Roger Straughan taught philosophy and was a Reader in Education at Reading University. He is a keen reader and collector of the works of Conan Doyle, and shares at least three of the passions of the latter – cricket, a love of dogs and an interest in post-mortem survival.

Over 15 years ago Roger lost a much-loved dog and, wondering whether it had suffered in its final moments, picked up at random a book by Conan Doyle, opened a page at random and read '... his exit was as speedy and painless as could be desired ...', which referred to a dog that had died of an illness similar to Roger's own (cancer). Subsequently Roger found that if he selected a book by Conan Doyle from his collection, and opened a page in the book at random, what he read often chimed with what was concerning him. This applied to international and national matters (e.g. terrorist atrocities) as well as obscure medical matters.

Roger stressed that he replaces the books in any location on his bookshelf (he does not know exactly where they are on the shelves) and tries to enter into a receptive frame of mind before proceeding. He gave more examples and wondered whether Conan Doyle was attempting to demonstrate his post mortem existence or whether he (Roger) was tuning in to information not normally available. Roger stressed that book divination goes back to St Augustine (who read work by St Paul prior to his conversion). Further details of Roger's studies can be found in the book mentioned at the beginning of this account.

Prior to the meeting Rhonda Riachi had asked Roger to pose some questions to his collection, and she also posed one question in a sealed envelope which was not known to Roger. The first of the known questions was 'Comment on the Obama election victory.' The answer was: 'His comrades on right and left can bear him up. Now advance in God's name, for the battle is still ours if we bear ourselves like men.'

The second question was, 'Would anything of global consequence happen on 21 December 2012?' (the date when the Mayan calendar ended). The answer Roger obtained from a poem by Conan Doyle was: 'But chastened, thankful, calm, sedate / Be your victorious Christmas-tide... Stand by now for '21!' (Curiously, the book consulted was published in 1921, providing a numeric synchronicity).

The unseen question was, 'Will we see more emphasis on subtle energy healing and less on pharmaceutical healing in ten year's time?' The answer was 'I will not horrify you with details, my friends. His sabre was heavy and sharp. It left a red blotch upon my wrist and ankles, as it cut the thongs which bound me.' In this case Roger stressed that because he did not know the question beforehand he could not get his mind into a suitable state when asking for guidance. [*I think it's a very good answer. Ed.*]

**An observation of mine:** The Bible and conventional Christianity abjure us to avoid mediums, divination and the like as 'the work of the Devil'. It seems to me, however, that in the right frame of mind (positive, spiritual, and mindful of the mischief that can come from

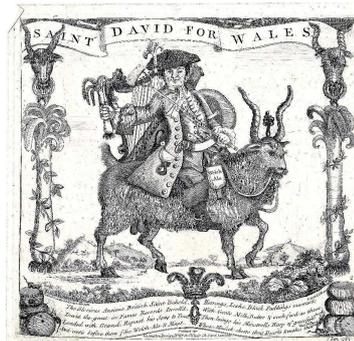
these sources) the techniques described here are similar to the Christian seeking spiritual guidance on their behaviour and actions through prayer and meditation.

Finally, thanks to Rhonda Riachi for organising the meeting and to the two speakers for sharing their ideas and enthusiasms with us.

*Neil Hancox*

## **The AHSSE in Wales: final Report from the Wales Group**

The Wales Group, formerly the Lampeter/Carmarthen Group, was founded by Dr Pat Craig in September 2002 holding group discussions, sometimes with speakers, and later as 'Dialogue Lunches' at the home of Rev Jonathan Robinson and also at the University of Wales, Lampeter – to coincide with the two Residentials of the MA in Religious Experience. On Pat's retirement in December 2007, Patricia Murphy kept these Spring and Autumn Lectures going until 2009 when Roger Coward took over the running of the Group – which had become known as the Wales Group.



Before she retired, Pat Craig sent out a questionnaire to members throughout Wales and, with the responses to this in mind, Roger Coward devised the Mandala Project in which small groups would meet in the far regions of Wales but come together for an Annual Gathering, or at the biannual lectures at Lampeter.

### **Mandala Project**

The Mandala Project was circulated to all Wales members before Roger's election and was voted for unanimously at a well attended Wales Group Meeting in October 2009 with the then AHS Chair Jonathan Robinson and Pat Craig present.

The task of stimulating groups and finding people to convene them was a considerable one. For about a year seven groups were meeting but those in Newcastle Emlyn, Mid-Wales, Pembrokeshire and Bangor didn't survive; fortunately those in Swansea, West Wales/Lampeter and South-East Wales/Cwmbran did. Two groups had two starts with different convenors – our appreciation and thanks go to all those who 'had a go'. The well recognised difficulty of All Wales remains: the membership is spread widely and very thinly. It isn't a surprise that the three remaining groups are in areas of higher population density. It is doubtful there will be any more – although we can always hope.

The Mandala Project also included the idea of an annual 'theme' which groups would explore during the year and share in common at the Annual Gathering. Roger Coward wrote 'The idea is that real knowledge requires concentration and deep contemplation and can't be achieved by rapid changes of topic which our present information/mis-information world encourages everywhere'. Most Groups felt they needed to follow the immediate interests of their local members so the subject of the year worked best for the Annual Gathering. The SE Wales Group has adopted the idea for themselves. A Wales Group list of Speakers was circulated to help local groups.

### **Annual Gathering**

Another innovation was the Annual Retreat or Gathering which has been held for the past three years at the Ty Croeso Centre at Llantarnam Abbey near Cwmbran. Nine to twelve

people attended each year and the Gatherings have been considered a success. At the first gathering our subject was *The Mandala as a means to Spiritual Experience* followed by two years looking at *Sacred Place* with an emphasis on Welsh places and myths including the *Mabinogion's* King Arthur. Many people contributed to making this a success and our thanks go to them. Llantarnam Abbey's premises and food are excellent and it is very convenient for motorway and rail travel. There is also the All Wales Round Table (second incarnation!) on which we have made (and destroyed) a Group Mandala, and around which we held a Grail Procession and made our introductions and farewells. It's up in Roger's barn at the moment if it's needed.

*The Llantarnam gathering on the weekend of 5 - 7 July is being offered this year to the whole AHSSSE membership. See previous All Wales reports for details of what goes on there! Highly recommended. See Events, page 52. There are more details and a booking form to download on the AHSSSE website. (Ed.)*

### **Biannual Public Lectures**

During the past three years the presence of the Society at the University and in the town of Lampeter has been maintained by continuing the Spring and Autumn Public Lectures. These are held in the Old Hall or the Founders Library on the Lampeter campus, and have been well attended. The lecture by Professor Densil Morgan on the history of the Church in Wales was transmitted by video-conferencing-link to Bangor University. It had been hoped other groups would adopt this technology to link the Wales Group together but this has not yet happened. Each of these lectures is available, as usual, on CDs from the Society's Secretary, John Franklin. As well as making a presence for the Society in the University and the town the purpose of these lectures was to introduce students to the Society. [Since there is no longer an MA in Religious Experience at Trinity Saint David, the AHSSSE biannual lectures are no longer co-ordinated with University residenceals.]

*Apologies to Roger for omitting the information that he chaired the public lecture given by Davina Thomas on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2012 (De Numine no. 53, page 30) (Ed.)*

### **Future of the Society in Wales**

On 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2012 at a Wales Group Meeting held at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Lampeter, it was appreciated that as there were three strong groups in the southern part of Wales only there was no need for an All Wales Group and so it was decided to disband it. In its place, there are now the three fully autonomous and separate Local Groups:-

- The Swansea Group, led by Penny Sartori,
- The South-East Wales (Cwmbran) Group, led by Mary Cook, and
- The West Wales (Lampeter) Group, led by Eric Franklin.

The Wales Group ended with £188.92p in the bank which has been sent to the Trust to provide help in the future for initiatives in Wales.

### **Roger Coward writes:**

'When I was voted Chair of the Wales Group to manifest the Mandala Project I experienced a huge surge of personal energy which I understood, rightly or wrongly, to be a sign that this was what I should be doing. It has been a great creative opportunity for which I am grateful – not just the organisational challenge but also opportunities to write, make presentations (still available) and to convene and chair the Annual Gathering. Pat Craig warned me in a private conversation 'it would be all push, push'. It has been. It was not just the admin – I have lost more sleep in the past few years than in the whole of the rest of my life. I was voted chair of a single group. I had hoped there would be seven local groups, and there were at certain times, and I now leave with three thriving groups in place. For myself, I am free to explore further

and write about my great interest – Spiritual Experience – and I wish the three new groups all the very best in carrying on the work of promoting the work of the AHRERC and Society in Wales in the future.

Roger Coward MA, UKCP, Dips. IPC, BAS, CTP. (Homme Libre!)

Time present and time past  
Are both perhaps present in time future,  
And time future contained in time past.

TS Eliot, 'Burnt Norton'

## South-East Wales Group

The South East Wales group has been in existence since December 2010, originally as one of the All Wales 'mini-groups'. We operate as a small informal house group, initially meeting three times a year, but this has now been extended to four. It is a group where members contribute from their individual wealth of experience, enhancing our own personal search for greater depth of understanding.

In our 2010 meeting, one member spoke about his experience of being an Interfaith Minister. There was an 'umbrella' subject 'Dreams' which ran through the year of 2011, inspired by Alan Underwood. 2012's subject was 'Channelling', inspired by Ken Price, which covered channelling's different perspectives. We have an over-arching theme of 'Time' for 2013. Our group has a nucleus of around eight members. We feel that we are exchanging deep and personal matters, and are aware that in order for the group to operate along such lines, it must remain within this number. We have had a very interesting, if wet, walk to see a local 'Holy well', and are planning a similar (hopefully, not so wet!) outing for this summer.

**'Coincidences':** Meeting held at 12 Wood Close on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2013.

We were asked to keep a 'Coincidences' diary to prepare for this meeting. People had obviously given much thought to the subject, and had brought along a number of meaningful coincidences to share. I found when I began my diary that coincidences came thick and fast. To begin with, I opened my book *The Confucian Way* and found the following:

The Master said, 'Tz'u, do you think that I am one who learns many things and keeps them in my memory?'

Tsu-kung said, 'Is it not so?'

'No,' was the answer, 'I am guided by a connected principle,'

This seemed a very good introduction to our afternoon together. Were all our coincidences based on that 'connecting principle'?

In my own research, I found that I could group coincidences into categories. One that was for both myself, my husband and my daughter, the most frequent involved a specific, *very unusual word*. We would be reading a passage with the radio or television on in the background, when we would find concentration slipping away – the mind beginning to wander. We would go back to regain the context that momentarily escaped us, when in many cases we came across a word or a name that we hardly knew, at precisely the same second that it occurred from the broadcast. It is uncanny, and my husband expressed a feeling of being trapped in some sort of *time matrix!*

Most interesting was the fact that I had experienced a mutual coincidence with all but one member of the group present. One member, who lives in another town, just happened to have a very good friend whose wife was the only person I knew in that town. With another, a rare visitor to our house, we were having our first deep talk about spiritual matters when the post was delivered – one item only – 'Faith Initiative' magazine! For a third, I was the answer

to his immediate need. His car had been serviced and the time for him to pick it up had been delayed making it very difficult for him to get to the garage. I had a *De Numine* to pass on to him, and just had a time gap in my plans to make the journey to his home. He had just finished the period he had set aside for meditation when I arrived. His longed-for lift to pick up his car had miraculously appeared!

Briefly, the categories we found were:

Word synchronicities;

Answers to needs, or queries, information sought;

Planning visits to places of special meaning which resulted in unexpected and amazing insights;

Events synchronicities;

Reassuring accumulation of coincidences that helped greatly in a very stressful situation

Why and how? Could it be statistically proven to be *random*? Or the '*trapped in time matrix*', forcing synchronicity? Is there a *resonance factor* involved that draws happenings together?

Could this be a fundamental, physical part of nature, that is of great assistance in the non-human world, a non-verbal help and communication which we humans have forgotten or rejected? (Does it happen more readily when people are genetically close, as shown in research with twins?) If so, could we be preparing ourselves to be open to the resonance when emptying the mind, either consciously or through the 'absent mindedness' that probably happens to all of us at times during the day?

Or ... some are convinced this happens at crucial times as guidance from an Other Being who answers our need,

or,

That same guidance comes from a part of each of us that is within, and comes to the fore, and guides us so that maybe others around us, or in tune with us, benefit?

Is this the 'connecting principal' of Confucius?

To me, it all comes under the heading of 'Amazing Resonances'.

*Mary Cook*

## **West Wales Group**

As things stood towards the end of 2012 I expected to be short of fixtures. Cancellations and illness had almost emptied the programme. However, a return to the aims of Sir Alister himself was possible by filling one gap, on 20 November, with an informal discussion meeting. The usual channels of communication between members and the deliberately arresting posters attracted a group of about fifteen people. The meeting was set in motion by the reading of two very short accounts of events which are difficult to explain without invoking a reality we might call 'providence' which oversees events in the world and protects us from harm. Of course, the sceptic regards such events as mere coincidence, forgetting that the very concept of 'mere coincidence' may be no more than our acknowledgement of our ignorance of hidden causes. It also depends entirely upon a now-outdated seventeenth-century physics of isolated 'things', a world without quantum interconnectedness, without the interdependency of being which science now begins to recognise. Daoists and Neo-Platonists have known this a long time. Although we cannot hold a full philosophical discussion here, it could be said that to attribute both strange events and unstrange events to a Greater Being is more rational, and more reverent towards any Being who may be overseeing the world in this caring way, than outdated materialist physics. The brief accounts read out at the beginning of our meeting provoked spontaneous discussion which was

allowed to flow without any presidential voice or attempt at control, and the sharing of ideas lasted about an hour and forty minutes before it just as naturally came quietly to an end. Many present agreed that further meetings of this kind should be convened.

Ironically, in view of the apparent desert towards the end of 2012, I now have a very full future programme, and it will be difficult to find spaces for further meetings for open discussion of strange experiences. However, the Universe did intervene on 19 January. We had arranged for Dr Howard Jones to speak on 'The World as Spirit', but snow fell, making many roads impassable, and the speaker himself was prevented from leaving his home when the council snow plough left snow piled high directly in front of his gate. I emailed those on the list immediately, and just six people, including Maureen and me, turned up on the day, two in response to seeing the poster. So we held another of our unstructured egalitarian discussions, and, again, it was felt to be a success. For me, the most telling point made during the meeting was, as I understood it, that there is more than one level of experience that might be considered 'spiritual' and that personal experiences may be less important than the attainment of an accurate view of our way of being in the world around us. I would say that while this is probably correct there is a level of our Being which is higher still, not part of the sensible cosmos at all, but, again, we cannot hold a full philosophical discussion here. As on the earlier occasion, the meeting lasted naturally just under two hours, and two people present asked to join the email list.

However, the point made in the meeting relates to two earlier events, Davina Thomas's talk in May 2012, attempting an analysis of the experiential difference between psychological and spiritual, and Dr Sarah Jane Boss's to the Lampeter Philosophy Colloquium, in November, on the same topic, which observed matters in the more detached way usual in academic research. I wondered whether a prior definition of terms, even if only as a very tentative Popperian hypothesis, to be tested and abandoned if disproved, would have been helpful in both instances. I also wonder whether to add to the literature on the matter with a lecture of my own, if ever the convenor's job allows me time to prepare it! It was also Sarah Boss who gave us, the Alister Hardy Society, our final event of 2012, when, on December 13, she lectured on Ramon Llull, who like many of us, suffered from the effects of two opposing views. I knew only a little of Llull, but, as I understand matters from Sarah's talk, he felt himself trapped between two ideologies, the Dominican and the Franciscan, one of which, by an abstruse point of doctrine, damned him to perdition. After her talk the question was asked whether Llull might have been reassured that his own salvation had not been forfeited if he had realised that these worryingly conflicting traditions were only human interpretations, and that our eternal Being is already secure within a higher mode of livingness, and had long been so before limited human constructs ever clouded our sense of the perfection-in-a-Greater-Unity of seeming incompatibles.

The events in the West Wales Group programme still forthcoming (at the time of writing) include a further lecture by Howard Jones, on the subject of the evolution of consciousness, and a second lecture by Jenny Jones, on healing ourselves, spiritually and physically. Still to come is a whole-day event on 4th May centred on the subtle body [see Events, page 51], with an introduction to the topic followed by a lecture about present scientific findings, and then a healing session. Later in May or in June we shall have one, or possibly two, lectures by Gregory Shushan, whose PhD, at Lampeter, was on death and the afterlife in ancient religions.

Anyone who would like to email me at [erf678@googlemail.com](mailto:erf678@googlemail.com) will be sent full up-to-date details as they become definite, and if their name is not already on the e-mail list I shall be glad to put it there.

*Eric Franklin*

## WebNews

The website has a new domain name [www.studyspiritualexperiences.org](http://www.studyspiritualexperiences.org) which was chosen to better reflect the Society's area of interest to people searching for it on the Internet. A search box on the home page should now make it easier to find information on the site, and there is also a Facebook 'Like' button so that visitors can indicate they appreciate our website and share it with their friends on Facebook.

- The most popular pages, other than the 'home' page, are 'events' and 'publications' (both have about 105 views in March).
- The most frequent search terms include: Sir Alister Hardy, *De Numine*, spiritual experience, religious experience.
- Most visitors arrive from Google, Bing, or learning.hccs.edu (The Learning Web is an open academic platform used by Houston Community College faculty to create, organize, curate and share their instructional materials and resources).



Top Pages (this month)		Search Terms (this month)		Referring Sites (this month)	
Views	Page	Views	Keyword	Views	Referrer
49	/	1	david voas	32	www.studyspiritualexperiences.org
13	<a href="#">/publications.html</a>	1	change was set off by the tiny variat	3	www.google.co.uk
9	<a href="#">/events.html</a>	1	Alister Hardy Society Oxford & Cots	3	learning.hccs.edu
7	<a href="#">/lectures1.html</a>	1	Alister Hardy Society	2	uk.search.yahoo.com
5	<a href="#">/ahsffe-chesterfield-group.html</a>	1	6th April 2013 cwmbrian new mystic	2	studyspiritualexperiences.org
4	<a href="#">/sir-alister-hardy.html</a>			1	www.google.cz
3	<a href="#">/whats-it-about.html</a>				
3	<a href="#">/contacts.html</a>				
3	<a href="#">/ahsffe-south-east-wales-group.l</a>				
3	<a href="#">/ahsffe-london-group.html</a>				
2	<a href="#">/personal-stories.html</a>				
2	<a href="#">/past-events.html</a>				
2	<a href="#">/membership.html</a>				
2	<a href="#">/links.html</a>				
2	<a href="#">/hardys-art.html</a>				
2	<a href="#">/de-numine-51.html</a>				
2	<a href="#">/ahsffe-oxford--cotswold-group.t</a>				
2	<a href="#">/ahs-wales-group.html</a>				
2	<a href="#">/ahs-london-group.html</a>				

Back issues of *De Numine* from the previous year are available on the website. They are now being presented so that screen-readers (software that reads out loud the text on-screen) for the blind can access them.

It has now been agreed that a page will be included on the website for articles written by members (or prospective members) which, received for *De Numine*, might be too long for

publication there. They will be edited as for *De Numine*, and an abstract/summary will appear in the journal, and point readers to the website, where they will be able to read the article in full. Other upcoming additions awaiting approval include: the Members' Forum where you can join in online discussions, and an AHSSSE Facebook page,

The website has a downloadable flyer and booking form for the Llantarnam gathering (see Events page 52). Follow the links from the home page.

*Mike Rush*

## Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor / Paddy,

Thank you for the autumn 2012 issue of *De Numine*. I noticed a few mistakes that occurred in the editing of my two book reviews that were printed. The most significant of these is in the review (pp. 40-41) of Butkus and Kolmes, *Environmental Science and Theology in Dialogue*. Towards the end of the review in the version that I submitted there is the sentence, 'They do thereby not disguise that the future for the coming generations looks pretty bleak'. I found that it was altered as follows: 'They do understate the fact that the future ...' As you notice, the printed version is incorrect in regards to both grammar and meaning. May I suggest that when in future significant editorial alterations are made, you perhaps inform me of the edited version. In the end it is my name that goes under the printed item and it upsets me when a text that I have given my best effort to and that I usually have had proofread is printed with some blatant mistakes. I am sorry that I have to send this criticism because I greatly appreciate your kindness and all the work and zeal you put into this service you provide.

Yours sincerely,  
*Robert Govaerts*

*So sorry Robert, mea culpa; a bad mistake as I completely changed the meaning! I will try very hard not to let anything like this happen again. We do have a proof reader, and Jean, to check the text after I have edited it, but of course in this instance, once I had left out the word 'not' in my version, no mistake would have been apparent except to you of course. Ed.*

### Letter to the Editor:

Alan Underwood's review of my sister's book, *The Dreams of Clarsach (De Numine Autumn 2012)*, deals sympathetically with the subject. I agree with him that scant attention is paid to our dreams in secular western societies, which is to our detriment. But there is one fact he seems to have overlooked. My sister Adrienne was not a committed Christian before she had the remarkable dreams described in her book. It was what she was told during them, initially by our late father, and subsequently in her encounters with Christ, that convinced her Jesus was 'the only way, truth and light'. So it is not, as the reviewer maintains, that her dreams are 'that which confirm the religious tradition and beliefs that have been adopted'. She would never have 'adopted' Christianity in the first place but for her dreams.

Adrienne is not unique. Though she was unaware, at the time of recording her experiences, of the Swedish eighteenth-century mystic Emanuel Swedenborg, his dreams paralleled hers

(albeit on a grander scale). He was busy writing a book on the soul from a scientific perspective when a dream vision of Christ, who instructed him to investigate the internal sense of the Bible, changed his life's work. Swedenborg encountered 'angels', who deplored contemporary Christianity's erroneous doctrine that Christ's Passion guaranteed the redemption of believers. The crucifixion, he says in *The True Christian Religion*, was 'the last temptation that the Lord endured as the Grand Prophet' before he was glorified. It is humans' actions and thoughts that influence their future destiny. Heaven contains people of every nationality who love God above all else and their neighbours as themselves. Hell is filled with humans who, led astray by selfishness and greed, have rejected God and the Scriptures. People unfamiliar with the Bible are not condemned if they lived virtuously. But those acquainted with Christianity who reject Christ's teachings, even when invited to revise their opinions after death, will end up in darkness and cut off from God, condemned, not by God, but their own intransigence. Swedenborg's dreams, therefore, had a divine purpose.

To make a distinction, as Alan Underwood does, between 'spiritual' and 'non-spiritual' dreams may be tempting, but surely 'inviting them to drag, push, shock, and love us' is itself a spiritual exercise? We are spiritual beings and our dreams reflect this, giving insights we lack in waking life. Whether defined as the 'collective unconscious', or God, the effect is the same. Thinking 'outside the box' really means acknowledging that the material and spiritual are interconnected. A power infinitely greater than ours, (in particular a *moral* law greater than anything we can conceive), permeates the universe. The instances in my sister's dreams of reincarnation and references to other religions confirm the idea of a just system beyond our present understanding. Job 33: 14-17 highlights how unwise it is to dismiss such experiences as 'only a dream': 'For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumbering upon the bed; then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction.'

*Marion Browne, Dover, Kent*

**To the editor:**

### **A Religious Experience in the Catholic Church?**

It is our custom, when I am in Cardiff at a weekend, for my Mom and I to attend Sunday Mass at Christ the King Church in Llanishen. On the second Sunday of Lent, the third reading was from the Gospel of Luke: Chapter 9, verses 28–36. It is the story popularly known as 'The Transfiguration'. In it, Jesus and his senior disciples ascend a mountain to pray. Jesus' appearance is transformed and He is joined by the ancient prophets: Moses and Elijah. Peter, James and John witness the 'vision' and hear God's voice. Poor Peter is often ridiculed because of his spontaneous reactions. On this occasion, Peter wanted to build three tents, (I had always imagined for the dignitaries).

To my amazement, in his homily, the celebrant, Father Tomy Augustine, described the Mount Tabor episode as a 'heavenly experience' (a religious experience). Fr Tomy explained Peter's reaction as one we are familiar with from some of the accounts in the Archive at the Research Centre. Peter had his experience. It was awesome. He wanted to stay in that state and not to descend the mountain. Peter's solution was to build three tents there.

The reasons for my surprise were firstly that the Archive in Lampeter includes stories from members of institutional churches; however, for various reasons, the experience often turns them against their religious affiliation. Some feel the church leaders do not know how to communicate with experiencers: others that the liturgy no longer reflects or encompasses their profound encounter with the Divine.

Secondly, I'd often wondered why there were relatively few reports from practising Catholics in the Archive and questioned whether it might be because Catholics (for example) took certain moments or feelings for granted and did not register the peaceful moments of prayer; the lightness of mood after the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession); or the sacred silence during adoration of the Blessed Sacrament; as religious experiences.

Father Tomy went further ... Not only are we able to have these mountain top experiences but 'we cannot stay there, we must come down'. I began to suspect he had been reading one of the Centre's publications as this too reminded me of various records. Those of people who, after their experience, suffered the depression of not being able to stay in that enlightened state, and also the narratives of those who spent the rest of their lives trying to re-create the elation or 'oneness' they had felt at the time of the experience.

... 'We must come down and share the experience with others.' Of course Fr Tomy was talking in a specifically Christian way and continued that the sharing of our experience would enable others to know the 'Heavenly Father's love and glory'. It struck me that experiencers who had volunteered their stories were doing exactly that. They were sharing their experiences of the Other and witnessing to the Presence or Power, other than the usual, that exists in our modern world.

*Anne Veronica Watkins, February 2013*



## Remembering Friends

### **Professor Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke (1953-2012)**

Readers of *De Numine* will be saddened to learn of the early death of Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, a former Trustee and Treasurer of the Alister Hardy Trust .

Nicholas was educated at Bristol University where he gained a First Class degree with Distinction in German, Politics and Philosophy . He moved on to Oxford to research for a D.Phil. and his thesis, published as *The Occult Roots of Nazism* in 1985, established Nicholas' reputation. This book, which has been translated into twelve languages and repeatedly reprinted, was followed by *Hitler's Priestess* (1998) and *Black Sun* (2002).

From 1982-87 Nicholas worked as a banker, which gave him sound financial experience. It was in this period that he married his beloved wife Clare. From 1988-94, he worked at Oxford University as a Senior Executive of the *Campaign for Oxford*, raising over £20 million for the university. He was also General Secretary of Europaeum, a pan-European graduate school

involving Oxford, Leiden and Bonn. Thereafter Nicholas was an independent scholar for some years writing books, including a work on Paracelsus, giving lectures and extending his vast knowledge.

Then in 2002, Nicholas was appointed to a Research Fellowship in the Western Esoteric Tradition funded by the Blavatsky Trust, at the University of Wales Lampeter. He published a monograph on *Helena Blavatsky* in 2004 and a similar work, jointly with his wife Clare, on another leading theosophist G. R. S. Mead in 2005. While at Lampeter, he devised a new module in Western Esotericism for the MA in Religious Experience.



In 2005 the then School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Exeter University, with generous support from the Blavatsky Trust decided to establish a Chair in Western Esotericism. Nicholas was appointed Professor, and established the Exeter Centre for the Study of Esotericism (EXESES0) in what became the College of Humanities. Drawing on expertise from a range of disciplines, Nicholas' team has fostered advanced research into historical and comparative aspects of the esoteric traditions from the Hellenistic period to the present day. The Centre has attracted MA and doctoral students and the recognition of scholars from all over the world; many of whose tributes to Nicholas can be seen on the internet.

Nicholas had a particular love of the British countryside and was a warm and welcoming host to all who knew him. He had an encyclopaedic knowledge and wrote a very wide range of erudite publications. In particular, his book on *The Western Esoteric Traditions* published by Oxford University Press in 2008 is the standard work in this area and a reminder of the tragic loss to Religious Studies from his untimely death. He is survived by his wife, Clare, who continues to work in the Centre that he established in Exeter.

*Paul Badham*

### **Elizabeth June Knowles (nee Watkins) (1921-2012)**

In 2008 with great sadness we had to report the death of Oliver Knowles OBE, late Hon. Treasurer of the Alister Hardy Trust and AHRERC, and benefactor and friend of the Research Centre for many years (Autumn 2008 issue of *De Numine*). Now we regret having to report the death of his wife, June, who died, after a short illness, at her home in Oxford on 14th October 2012. Her funeral Service was held on 29th October at St Leonard's Church, Watlington, and was attended, amongst many others, by Peggy Morgan, former Director of the AHRERC, and Marianne Rankin, Rhonda Riachi and John Franklin for the Alister Hardy Society. June was a fascinating person in her own right. Her childhood was spent in Kenya, where her father was a District Commissioner. After education in England from 9 to 16, she returned to Kenya, her first job being a plotter for the Kenyan Met Office. When War broke out in 1939 she enrolled as a cypher officer with the WAAFs, working first in Nairobi and then in Cairo, the Seychelles and Italy, experiences that she later described in her book *Cypher Officer*. After the war, June studied PPE at St Anne's in Oxford, where she met her future husband, Oliver, in the Bodleian Library where they both wanted to read the same book. After marriage, she returned with him to Africa, where Oliver took up a post in the Colonial Service as a District Officer in Kenya. There she brought up her four sons while pursuing a career as a journalist, contributing to the local press as well as working for *The Economist* for

one month a year. In 1970 they moved to Geneva, where Oliver worked for the United Nations, while June continued her journalism and worked for the Red Cross. In 1985 June and Oliver retired to Watlington in Oxfordshire, where June began writing books, under the pen name of Elizabeth Watkins. Her first book was *Jomo's Jailor*, the biography of Leslie Whitehouse, who was put in charge of a prisoner, Jomo Kenyatta, future president of Kenya, with whom he developed a lasting friendship. This was followed by *Oscar from Africa* and *Olga in Kenya* – accounts of her parents' colourful lives – and *Cypher Officer*. After Oliver's death, in 2008, June stayed on in Watlington before moving into Oxford in 2010, where she died. June was a strong supporter of the AHRERC and the AHS, regularly attending meetings of the Oxford/Cotswold Group and the Society's Open Days. As one of the tributes at her funeral, made by Rhonda Riachi, Chair of the Oxford/Cotswold group, said, 'June combined intellectual rigour with a warm heart, and we shall miss her at our meetings.' Indeed, we shall all miss her very much, and our thoughts go out to her family.

*John Franklin*

The following are entries in an online guest book, courtesy of her sons:  
( <http://www.legacy.com/guestbooks/timesonline-uk/guestbook> )

I was only just beginning to get to know June last year, when she invited the Oxford Alister Hardy Group members to her flat for a Christmas social. She described herself as an African, and when I saw the fascinating artefacts she had collected I finally understood why.

Her tales of international adventure during World War II and the semi-cloistered existence at St Anne's College after the War gave me a glimpse of the rich, full life she had led. June combined intellectual rigour with a warm heart, and we shall miss her at our meetings – though we hope she will be with us in spirit.

*Rhonda Riachi, Oxford*

It seems hard to believe that someone as vibrant as June is no longer alive. She never seemed to waste a day in her long, adventurous life.

After getting to know June and Oliver through the Alister Hardy Society, where they were lively and helpful members, I invited them to stay. A whole new closeness opened up – in Swahili – as they shared memories of Kenya with my husband John, who grew up there while Oliver was District Officer. All four of us had lived as expats and understood each other's challenges and adventures.

I admired June tremendously – as a woman who combined scholarship and writing with a full family life. She and Oliver were a wonderful couple and will be very much missed.

*Marianne Rankin*

June with Oliver were a magnificent practical and spiritual support to the activities of the Religious Experience Research Centre, their support linking back to the earliest days. They were an especially warm support to me when I became Director of RERC in 1996. As a couple they were an inspiration in their devotion to and appreciation of each other and June I always thought very beautiful, even though I did not meet her till she was an older woman with a face of character because of its fine bone structure. She was a very able woman intellectually and her own anthropological work and autobiography took one into a whole other world than her life in Watlington and Oxford. I know how much she was loved by the generations of her family and her death leaves a gap for very many people.

*Peggy Morgan, Oxford*

## **Lord Rees-Mogg**

We were saddened to hear of the death of Lord Rees-Mogg, a Patron and long-time friend of the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre, who died aged 84 on 29<sup>th</sup> December 2012. In his public life, William Rees-Mogg, journalist and former editor of the *Times*, knighted in 1981 and elevated to the peerage by Margaret Thatcher in 1988, had been Chairman of the Broadcasting Standards Council, a director of GEC and of fund manager M&G, and a prominent public figure: obituaries appeared in the *Times*, *FT* and the *Telegraph*.

For many years Lord Rees-Mogg had had a very close association with the Centre. He was an early member of the Board of the Advisory Research Council, established in 1985 as the then governing body of the AHRERC. Besides giving valuable advice, he also gave considerable financial help to the Centre on a number of occasions through grants from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, the grant-giving Charitable Trust established in 1961, of which he was a Trustee. From 1992 to 1994 he was Chair of Trustees – a period when Professor Laurence Brown was Director and Dr David Hay Chair of the Advisory Research Council. In February 1994 the Alister Hardy Research Centre was renamed and reconstituted as the Alister Hardy Trust (under which came the Religious Experience Research Centre and the Alister Hardy Society) and the Research Council was dissolved, the Trustees taking over the running of the AHRERC. It was then that Lord Rees-Mogg stepped down as Chair of Trustees. We were delighted, however, that in that year, he went on to continue his association with us by becoming a Patron of the Centre. He will be much missed, and our condolences go out to his family.

*John Franklin*

## **John (Ian) L F Buist CB (1930-2012)**

Ian Buist, a long time member of the AHSSSE, died aged 82 peacefully in October last year. He was one of the earliest members of the Society, joining in June 1987 and becoming a Life Member four years later. Ian came of a highly intellectual Scottish family whose legacies formed his core beliefs, and was educated at Winchester and New College Oxford where he obtained double first-class honours in classics. He joined the Colonial Office and handled the East Africa desk throughout the Mau-Mau crisis. He later moved to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office where he achieved the abolition of race-based appointments in the Kenya Police, his work in ending white privileges over land ownership winning widespread respect and helping the country towards independence. He was recognised as a dedicated, formidable and effective champion of human rights. Living in London, Ian became a member of the AHS London Group, coming to a number of its meetings – and to his death remained a strong supporter of the Society. He will be much missed, and our thoughts go out in sympathy to his family.

*John Franklin*

## **Revd Professor John Hick (1922-2012)**

We also record the death last year of the eminent theologian, Professor John Hick. He was one of the most influential philosophers of religion of his time and HG Wood Professor of Theology at Birmingham University from 1967 to 1982. He taught and travelled to all parts of the world to discover more about the great religious faiths and to lecture and write about them; and was widely recognised in America, where he held chairs at Princeton Theological Seminary from 1959 to 1964 and at Claremont Graduate University from 1979 to 1992. He

wrote nearly 30 books which, unusually for philosophy, included several bestsellers. He became vice-president of the World Congress of Faiths, and gave the 1986-87 Gifford Lectures, published as *An Interpretation of Religion* in 1989. He retired in 1992, but for many years continued to write and lecture, returning to America once or twice every year. Members might remember that he came to Oxford on the Society's Open Day on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2005 to deliver that year's Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture on *Religious Experience and the Brain* – and some members, if arriving early at the first, inaugural, conference celebrating the re-launch of the AHRERC/Society at Lampeter in September 2002, might remember his address to the MA students at Lampeter on *Consciousness and the Mind/Brain Issue*.

*John Franklin*

In his seminal book *An Interpretation of Religion*, Hick deals with aesthetic, mystical and religious experience as categories. He takes seriously and attends to the variety of religious experiences which 'can be individual or communal, can occur on many different levels of intensity and may take endlessly different forms' with the rigorous discussion of the problems of interpretation that are on the agenda for a philosopher of religion of his calibre. Unfortunately he makes no references in his discussion, footnotes or bibliography to any of the work of RERC.

*Peggy Morgan*

### **Professor Ian Parrott (5 March 1916 – 4 September 2012) award-winning composer and musicologist**

Professor Ian Parrott, a member of the Alister Hardy Society, is remembered with great fondness. 'Prof' was engaging, endearing and witty. His stated aim as a teacher and composer was to retain a sense of wonder regarding artistic creation. He wrote several operas, music for ballet and documentary films, and was the author of several books. He was a leading expert on Elgar, and his own music has been performed all over the world.

After the war, Parrott became a lecturer at Birmingham University from 1946 to 1950. After about 1951, Parrott's compositions became deeply influenced by his interest in the Welsh landscape and culture, when he was appointed Gregynog Chair of Music at Aberystwyth until he retired in 1983.



In 1974 he met Sir Alister Hardy and they began a correspondence to share their ideas (see *De Numine* No. 40, pp. 19-22). 'Prof' had an enquiring mind, and was delighted to be associated with Sir Alister's research programme. He wrote: 'It was in the desert during the second World War that I started wondering about the extra-sensory. It was therefore most exciting (in 1950) to discover an eminent scientist – Sir Alister Hardy had written *The Biology of God: a*

*scientist's study of man the religious animal*, and [I was] pleased to discover that a "Religious Experience Research Unit" had been set up by him at Oxford'.

Dr Lyn Davies, Chairman of Ty Cerdd at Cardiff, a former student of Ian Parrott, says 'Ian had no problem dealing with other realms, as his well-documented time in Egypt during the War shows all too clearly and where the orchestral *Luxor* was begun. He simply thought, as in

his book on Rosemary Brown, that it was a case of somehow switching something on and this spiritual or spiritualist side of him was wholly in keeping with his open mind. As a teacher he was stimulating and ahead of his time, with his manner of looking again at the seemingly familiar’.

He was an inspiration to his students:

‘Undoubtedly he had a certain charisma. He inspired and influenced a great many students and musicians who surrounded him ... It was due to his understanding of music at a deep, almost subterranean level. He saw things that others did not see. He uncovered truths and connections in music – his understanding of music was genius. He was an unforgettable character’. (David Russell Hulme, Director of Music at Aberystwyth University)

‘Prof retained a lifelong interest in all his former students at Aberystwyth, he showed real thoughtfulness and commitment, even in late life – a great example ... He was very touched by the exhibition which we arranged at Gregynog Festival to mark his 90th birthday in 2006 – and his excitement was tangible!’ (Rhian Davies, Artistic Director at Gregynog)

HRH Prince Charles was his student in 1969.

Some years after the death of his first wife Elizabeth, an artist, Prof’s second wife Jeanne won him at an auction in 1996 for £10! Philomusica had organised the auction and Ian contributed a series of music lessons. ‘Prof’ was a romantic and Jeanne was charmed, they made a very happy couple for their last years.

His publications include *Elgar* in the Master Musicians Series (1971), *Cyril Scott and His Piano Music* (1992) and *The Crying Curlew: Peter Warlock: Family and Influences* (1994). His interest in psychical research is reflected in *The Music of Rosemary Brown* (1978) and his autobiography *Parrottcisms* [written at the age of 87] was issued as British Music Society Monograph No.5 in 2003.

[<http://gregynogfestival.org/english/history/ian-parrott> ]



A concert of Professor Parrott’s works will be held in his memory at The Tabernacle, Machynlleth in May, performed by the acclaimed Manchester Camerata Ensemble. Further details: 01654 703355

His music will also be featured at the Gregynog Festival of Music in June. Further details: 01686 207100

*Victoria Whiteland*

*Photographs supplied by Helene McMurtrie*

## Solstice

Bravely move forward and cross the threshold  
this is the time of challenge and change  
when the knots of the past are fast unravelling  
and consciousness shifts in a fifth world age.  
They told of the passage of thirteen baktars,  
of ripples of light, and cycles of stars.  
In echoes of dreams we've heard their singing,  
let's honour the spirit and nurture the light.  
We are the warriors, the hope of the future  
defeating the darkness, awakening love.  
This time of transition remember who you are  
perfect and reflect the song of your soul.  
The universe hums to a fresh vibration  
resound with the power in all constellations.

*Josie Smith, The Mulberry Bush, Lampeter*



Llangranog, Solstice 21 12 2012

## Book Reviews

**Bruce Chilton, Anthony Le Donne and Jacob Neusner, eds., *Soundings in the Religion of Jesus: Perspectives and Methods in Jewish and Christian Scholarship* Minneapolis, Fortress, 2012. xx 268pp. ISBN 978 0 8006 9801 0 (pbk) £32.99**

Did Jesus consider himself to stand within Judaism or not? Did he consider himself to be introducing a new religion or to bring renewal right at the centre of Judaism? This is a basic theme that is approached from different angles within this book. The various essays aim thus to contribute to Jewish-Christian relations today. The book contains contributions by fourteen high profile scholars, including the three editors, who represent various Christian denominations and Judaism.

Probably the best way to give some further idea of the book is to briefly describe these various contributions as well as the structural outline of the book. After the foreword and the introduction the book is made up of four parts, each containing three papers.

Part One probes for the Jewishness of Jesus and for his teaching in the context of Jews and Gentiles. In paper one Leonard Greenspoon considers the way the New Testament has been translated. He suggests that the manner wherein the names of main persons have been translated has made their Jewishness less obvious, and that speaking of 'the Jews' in translation of Jesus' opponents has fuelled an anti-Semitic attitude. However, not translating the names does not seem a viable option, and the fact is that the Gospels do speak about 'the Jews'. So, recognizing that there is no easy way around, Greenspoon proposes that translators remain conscious of the problem of anti-Jewish readings. In the second paper Joel N. Lohr

discusses Jesus' teaching on the Last Judgement in terms of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31–46). Lohr argues that the parable is in accord with Jewish ideas of judgement of the time of Jesus, and that it holds out hope that the gentiles can be saved apart from Israel (even though they are encouraged to associate themselves with the Israelites) and that, in parallel, they can be saved even if they do not know Jesus directly, but live charitably. In paper three Anne Lapidus Lerner analyses the episode wherein Jesus has an exchange with the Canaanite/Syrophoenician woman who begs Jesus to heal her daughter. Jesus replies that it is not fair to give the bread intended for the children, that is, the Jews, to the dogs. Eventually the woman prevails over Jesus and he grants her wish.

Part two stays with the New Testament but focuses rather on the evangelists and the way they interpreted Jesus. Michael Cook's paper finds several anomalies in the way the Jewish leaders are named in Mark's Gospel, and he suggests that Mark's hand has been heavily at work in trying to reconcile arguably pre-existent sources. In the course of doing so the Gospel would have acquired a more anti-Jewish character. The historical significance of this alleged manipulation would have been aggravated by the fact that Matthew's and Luke's gospels were significantly influenced by the gospel of Mark. The fifth paper is by Donald Senior and focuses on Matthew's Gospel, which was written for a Jewish-Christian audience. Matthew's agenda would have been to situate Jesus within his Jewish context and by doing so would in fact be the Gospel that is closest to a truthful representation. The sixth paper by Eyal Regev argues that Jesus was tried for his action in the Temple, turning over the tables of the money changers, and for his sayings about the Temple's destruction. He suggests that Jesus' action was not against the workings of the sacrificial system as such, but against the fact that the money used in the Temple was not ethical, that it was related to injustice and corruption. The sayings of Jesus, Regev suggests, were misunderstood and taken as the pronouncement of a real threat, whereas Jesus would have been speaking figuratively. At the beginning of his paper, Regev states: 'Most modern commentators have not followed the gospels in viewing the historical Jesus as an actual messiah and have not thought that he presented himself as such to his followers and outsiders.' The references he provides in the notes, which are found at the back of the book, are Wrede (1901), Weiss (1892) and Schweitzer (1901), whereas there is no satisfactory argument that follows this assertion. It is in my opinion thus not the best paper and indicates that at least in this assertion the author is way out on a limb.

Part three of the book compares research on Jesus before and after German National Socialism. One idea mentioned is that under the Nazi Christians the Jewishness of Jesus was denied – by arguing among other things that Jesus' Galilean descent made him ethnically independent from the Jews – so as to create a great dissimilarity between him and the Jews and to present an Aryan Jesus. It is also pointed out that the idea of an Aryan Jesus predates the Nazis, that Martin Luther's teachings included a pronounced anti-Judaism, and that the events of *Kristallnacht* (10 November 1938) were in celebration of Luther's birthday. Besides this there was throughout the centuries an easily stirred Catholic hostility against Jews as alleged 'Christ killers' and so forth.

Part four focuses on Jesus in contemporary Jewish-Christian dialogue. James D. G. Dunn responds in his paper to each of the foregoing chapters. In the course of this he says to be 'very sympathetic with the view that Christianity as theologised by the Jew Paul should be seen as fulfilling Israel's mission to be a light to the nations.' He would like this, including its problematic features, to become a topic within Jewish/Christian dialogue. The splendid paper by Amy-Jill Levine that follows has the title 'Jesus in Jewish-Christian dialogue' and she includes responses to the foregoing contributions by reflecting upon each word of the title (apart from 'in') in turn. In the conclusion the editors reflect upon what are Judaism's truth claims and what are those of Christianity. They further shed a light upon the essays of the book from yet again a different angle and point out that 'these essays put definitively behind

them the model of Judaism and Christianity as static entities.' They end by expressing their hope upon an era of mutual understanding.

May the foregoing description provide sufficient recommendation for this interesting book on an important topic.

*Reviewed by Dr Robert Govaerts, affiliated to Glasgow University*  
[govaerts1430@btinternet.com](mailto:govaerts1430@btinternet.com)

Reviews are invited for Robert Govaerts' book, *Cosmic Prayer and Guided Transformation: Key Elements of the Emergent Christian Cosmology* (see list of books for review, page 50).

**Robert K. C. Forman, *Enlightenment Ain't what it's Cracked Up to be: A Journey of Discovery, Snow and Jazz in the Soul***

**Alresford, O-Books, 2011, 214pp. ISBN 978 1 84694 674 5 (pbk) £9.99**

Dr. Robert Forman is co-founder of the Journal of Consciousness Studies and founder of the Forge Institute for Spirituality and Social Change. He has many years' experience of meditation and academic work in religion and mysticism. His stance on the latter led to the 'Katz-Forman debates' regarding Perennialism versus Constructivism. He gives lectures and workshops globally and has written numerous books including *The Problem of Pure Consciousness*, *Mysticism, Mind, Consciousness*, and *Grassroots Spirituality: What it is, Why it is Here, Where it is Going*.

The first thing that should be said about this book is that, in contrast to most of Forman's other work, it is not an academic text. Instead Forman has chosen to write a personal, autobiographical account of his own spiritual journey, which is accessible to non-academics. Although he mentions the so-called 'Katz-Forman debates' he does not get side-tracked into putting forward an academic argument about his views on what he terms 'pure consciousness events'. Leaving aside this debate Forman emphasises some important, and possibly controversial, points about 'enlightenment'. Having gone through his own process of spiritual awakening, he is in a position to be able to do this from a first-hand perspective.

Forman's 'experience of vastness' began on 4<sup>th</sup> January 1972 after he had been diagnosed with 'generalised anxiety disorder' or 'post adolescent anxiety diffusion'. He describes himself as '... spiralling into what I can only describe as psychological collapse'. He recounts hearing voices and having suicidal thoughts. Then, one day, he had his first spiritual experience. Whilst racing a car at high speed, his life's concerns just dropped away. He took up Transcendental Meditation (TM) and within two years his life had improved. However, he didn't undergo a profound personal transformation or achieve some enlightened state. The peculiar silence that he encountered within his head was too puzzling, confusing and weird for him to talk about until he discovered others who had similar experiences. 'Yippee', he cries, 'I am not alone! There's a league of the transformationally confused!' He lists five characteristics of his new state:

1. thinking didn't stop but became more focused and the constant background noise in his mind disappeared;
2. a shift in identity where boundaries between himself and the vastness became blurred;
3. effortless witnessing, he became more alive to the world;
4. he experienced an increased depth perception;
5. he experienced wakefulness in sleep (as opposed to insomnia).

All of this, Forman emphasises, came partly through meditation, partly by grace. Later, he discovered post-modernism and learned that TM was just one system amongst many others. He states that having a tradition is important to ground spiritual experiences but that clinging to dogma can become restrictive to further growth. He came to the realisation that his experience was the same as that described as fullness in Hinduism, and as Nirvana in Buddhism; 'Enlightenment, as I was seeing it described in countless texts from every major tradition, is a shift in the relationship between consciousness and its objects. Enlightenment is the unmingling of a commingled reality'.

However, he objects to the way that spiritual experience is promoted by various gurus and modern spiritual organisations. He denies that one can be utterly egoless, that one can attend to thought processes often enough to change them, that gurus are ego-less, that one's life will be made complete and easy, or that there are any kind of spiritual goals. These latter, he says, do not take into account complicated modern life. He quips, 'I was looking for spiritual party favours. What I got was an existential earthquake'. He does admit that he benefited from his experiences. They motivated his academic work, removed his constant anxiety, led him into psychotherapy, and helped form his ethics. He argues that, whilst spiritual experiences can offer 'warmth and strength and peace in a storm-tossed mind and a fragile world', we still need to engage with that world and our place in it; the spiritual and the psychological or what Forman terms 'enlightenment plus'. He stresses the importance of the inter-personal relationship as sacred, not just the individual inner-experience. There is a tension throughout the book between reconciling his spiritual experience with the reality of everyday life and being. This gives rise to some memorable quotes such as 'I am way too much beast to be a god-man and far too much god to be a beast', and 'I don't know if I am a human being held in the arms of an endlessness, or a vastness having human fears.' He advocates a down-to-earth, life-affirming spirituality that embraces silence, critical intellect, painful memories, and sexuality without being bogged down by unimpassioned sobriety or retreat into defensive, mystical fantasy.

Whilst Forman glosses over the academic debates about Perennialism, a single reality that underlies all spiritual experiences; and 'pure consciousness events', experience of pure consciousness devoid of any content including self concept, these debates can be found elsewhere in Forman's publications. Indeed, these views may be open to criticism and disagreement. However, his analysis of modern gurus and spiritual movements seems appropriate and a timely warning to bear in mind. It also serves to remind us that spiritual experiences are not always blissful and ecstatic, leading to profound spiritual transformation, but can be puzzling, confusing, and even frightening. They are not panaceas or gateways to a personal utopia and, despite a glimpse into another way of being, life goes on with all its trials and tribulations. To me, it seems that too much introspection can become its own sickness. We can unintentionally define and create our own illnesses, which we can only then cure by ourselves. Perhaps the crux of Forman's insights is that spirituality needs to be realistic about its goals and how it grounds itself in everyday life. My view is that spirituality is, or should ultimately be about the relationship between self, others, and the world. Forman seems to agree: 'The shifts I had been witnessing were mostly changes in how I hold *myself*, another or the world'.

Forman's book may offend some and court controversy. Nevertheless, it presents an important, realistic, and down-to-earth view of spirituality and spiritual experience that is often overlooked. Forman's website can be found at <http://enlightenmentaint.com>

*Reviewed by Michael J. Rush*

Website: [www.esoteric-experience.org.uk](http://www.esoteric-experience.org.uk)

**Mary Bowmaker, *Leaning on the Invisible***

**Milverton, Courtenbede, 2012. xxiii 186pp. ISBN 978 0 9554292 1 7 (pbk) £11.99**

Mary Bowmaker was the first visitor to use RERC after its move to Wales, and as with all authors who use the Archive, Bowmaker acknowledges the contribution of RERC and its staff.

Mary's premise is that we are each a 'spirit in a physical body'. She records numerous stories to defend her theory. Like the RERC's collection of accounts of unusual events, her records do not actually prove anything, but in common with the Alister Hardy Archive, the book's mass of information about people's experiences lead us to believe that statistically these occurrences cannot be meaningless; that the evidence must surely point us to something real-but-not-seen, something transcendental.

Bowmaker begins by considering a pattern familiar to AHS members – coincidence; a hunch, synchronicity; when things happen just at the right time.

Recognising experiences in our lives for what they really are requires practise; Bowmaker suggests the reader start trying now. Many books (whether consciously or not) prompt us to think about their content or message. Lots of us postpone that exercise, but there is no room for procrastination here. Bowmaker provides space for our wonderings and memories with blank pages at the end of the volume. She encourages us not to dismiss the topic in hand as something unknown or strange to us by naming the notion she is discussing in various different ways. Have we experienced intuition; an inner voice; a knowing; a sensing; a being aware of; a feeling when we are meditating; day dreaming or dozing?

The final chapter, 'Living with the Light', raises the perennial question of the difference between religion and spirituality. Bowmaker sees great hope in the spirituality of the New Age Movement, which she understands to be reinterpreting life, religion, ecology, materialism and society. This re-evaluation results from what some call intuitive thinking but which she calls Inner Wisdom. It is the Inner Wisdom that enables people to see humans as 'spirit' living in a physical body, and leads to a different - understanding - of paranormal issues such as prayer, coincidence and dreams.

Whilst agreeing with Mary Bowmaker about the spiritual nature of humans, I find that her emphasis on spirit in body reminds me of Descartes' 16<sup>th</sup> century notion of dualism as expressed in the Cartesian picture of individuals as a mind/soul, whose body's purpose is solely to contain this. However, that would be to misunderstand Mary, who is certainly not in favour of dualism. She steers towards the understanding of the 20<sup>th</sup> century criticism of Descartes' theory; Mary favours a more integrated presentation of mind/body/spirit so that a person is viewed as a complete whole, composed first and foremost, in Mary's opinion, of the non-tangible living *in* the material. This is in contrast to the possibility of a body *with* a spirit.

It seems to me that this book is not a work aimed at academics; it is easy to read, accessible and illustrated with many fascinating stories. Between the recorded insights, Bowmaker speculates on what these related experiences might mean for humanity, deceased spirits and the world. It is an ideal introduction to the subject of the supernatural (despite a number of typing errors which will be corrected by the next printing). Its lack of technical phrases would make this a good book for one of the AHSSSE sixth-form members to review.

*Reviewed by Anne Veronica Watkins*

**Marion Browne, *Eccentrics, Truth Seekers or Holy Fools? The Search for a Moral Universe***  
**Self-published, 2010. 418pp. ISBN 978 0 9566854 0 7 (pbk) £17.99**

This book had its beginnings in the breakdown of a personal relationship. The shock and disappointment that Marion Browne experienced as a result raised a *mélange* of moral, theological and philosophical questions which she seeks to explore in this volume. These include the possibility of an explanation for an inequitable universe; the nature and purpose of suffering; the divinity of Jesus and the nature of God; the nature of the spiritual realm and the means of its interaction with the material world; and the relative importance of reason and affect in shaping ideas, particularly in the field of scientific endeavour.

Her self-confessed approach is that of an amateur: 'Not being an expert in anything myself however, I have impulsively and ignorantly rushed in where specialists fear to tread'. Her selection of material for inclusion is eclectic: 'Any writing that was even remotely connected with what, for want of a better description I shall call an enquiry into the true nature of things, served my purpose.' The many characters that feature are 'arbitrarily selected'.

Given this methodology, it is not surprising to find that throughout this substantial collection of material from or about 'journalists, philosophers, physicists, psychologists, Buddhists, healers, and mediums', the strategic direction is faint and the narrative of the argument without momentum. However the author has done a prodigious amount of reading and research. Here are encounters with Jung, Freud, Darwin, Koestler, Newton, James Clark Maxwell, Einstein, Mesmer, Steiner, Mary Baker Eddy, Houdini, Max Planck, Madame Blavatsky, Kierkegaard, Heisenberg, Swedenborg, Kant and many others, both familiar and unfamiliar. These she judges as the eccentrics, truth seekers or holy fools. The search for a moral universe is ever present although sometimes so faintly that it can scarcely be discerned.

As the book proceeds, it becomes clear that the search is not altogether an open-minded one. Browne is deeply suspicious of the attachment to established ideas in all areas of endeavour. She considers that this blocks the acceptance of new thinking. She is wary of reliance on the intellect: 'our arrogant faith in our own intellectual perspicacity'. In some cases we have to 'trust our instinct, the voice of our subconscious'. She espouses a Christian perspective, though not a conventional one. She is sure 'there is an ethical purpose behind our existence' and she is convinced of a spiritual world which interpenetrates our material existence in a multiplicity of ways, including through the manifestation of psychic phenomena. 'Can any of us afford to discard the clues life has offered through intuition, odd experiences, uncanny events?' Writing of the humanist view of the 'absence of God', she opines that if this 'mean objective [is] all we have to look forward to' then 'the lunatics really are in charge of the asylum'. Atheists receive no truck at all: '... there is no knowing into what murky depths the tenacious unbeliever's thought processes may lead us' she writes in criticism of Richard Dawkins, a *bête noir* who appears throughout the book. In the final chapter the atheist viewpoint is even associated with the extremes of the Marquis de Sade.

And does this search arrive at a destination? Scarcely; in the penultimate chapter she recounts in detail many of the ideas of the New Thought Movement founded in the nineteenth century United States by Dresser and Warren. This seems to come close to paralleling her view of a radical Christianity because its philosophy 'has the merit of penetrating more deeply than the established churches into the true meaning of Christianity'. The title of the final chapter 'A Truth Seen Dimly' perhaps suggests a resolution of the experiences of the writer's voyage through the oceans of ideas, knowledge and life events that stand in this book. True, there is no drawing together of the mass of material; true too that there are hints that Browne may think that the nation if not the world is going to hell in a handcart. She is of the opinion that currently our children don't understand what tolerance, common sense, and compassion

really mean; they swallow 'without question the prejudices of their forebears, the tastes of a louche minority of media personalities [and] the misinformation propagated by certain scientists, politicians or clerics'. However the fundamental question of suffering is addressed: it is to be reduced by a broader replication of the process that the reader has experienced. '... we need an educated population that is not content to swallow whatever it is told without question ... reading of all kinds, particularly specialist non-fiction, should also be encouraged'. And drawing on Socrates, the cause of bad behaviour and an explanation of the apparent lack of retribution are touched on. Otherwise, some ideas that have been aired before are re-stated, and we learn that the certainty of the writer about the realm of the paranormal is based on her own psychic experience.

Browne sets the criteria for the success of her work in the introduction. It rests on an experience of process. In writing the book she has experienced 'moments of exhilarating discovery' which she hopes to share. 'My efforts will have succeeded if ... I have managed to convey any sense of that exhilaration to you'. Your reviewer was too exercised by navigating the labyrinth of ideas, theories and life stories into which he was thrust to feel exhilaration but he was impressed by the richness of the material and fascinated by accounts of the more bizarre examples of paranormal manifestations. The book will stay on my shelves as a potential source of reference, a place where I may meet and discover more about thinkers old and new and be entertained and amazed by psychics and magicians.

*Reviewed by Mike Perks*

**Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, *Authentic Hope: It's the End of the World as We Know It, but Soft Landings Are Possible***

**New York, Orbis, 2012. 176pp. ISBN 978 1 57075 057 4 (pbk) £14.99**

A truly magnificent treatise which critically examines how mankind has so seriously gone astray that very existence is now threatened by our selfish and persistent lack of regard not only for others, but for the planetary biosphere we all vitally depend upon.

Jack expertly weaves a wide-ranging tapestry of how the world, and specifically how capitalism, and the United States of America in particular, have been responsible for the dire situation in which we find ourselves. He clearly relates how the growth of an unsustainable and greedy affluence, together with the insane, yet condoned pervasive gun culture which excuses (and ensures) a sustained global industrial-military complex based on fear, have resulted in quite unacceptable levels of inequality and human misery, and of the continuing profligate waste of precious energy and resources.

These counter-productive effects on the world have in turn created many of the other problems we face to such an extent that the author is able, both justifiably and constructively, to dismantle a form of the so-called 'American dream' which he calls and defines as 'American exceptionalism', and replace it with 'authentic hope'. But make no mistake about this book (for it is *not* restricted to *American* folly!); it bravely questions the *status quo* generally, and does so in a manner which must be unique to the author. Woven around much repetition in both the introduction and the early chapters, he nonetheless succeeds in gradually applying the central tenets, or what one might call the 'book's DNA', to each chapter topic, before dividing the DNA strand into the 'dead-end roads' (of the *status quo*) and the now-so-urgent 'authentic hope' the world *must* engage with!

So, *please*, be patient with the repeated text sections in order to really assimilate the message of hope which Nelson-Pallmeyer conveys in his tome; it is a mere 189 pages, but also has an extensive, diligent, notes and references section (22 pages), and a comprehensive index (11 pages). The excellent layout further lends clarity via an introduction, including a description of the chapters; each chapter has its own introduction, and, with one exception, a conclusion. Somehow Chapter 3 has no 'conclusion', but perhaps a deserved second edition (*if there's time!*) may remedy this omission. For the purpose of this review, the other 'elephants in the room', both explicit and implicit, are best served by a brief listing of topics covered.

Chapter 1 addresses and defines 'dead-end roads' contrasted with 'authentic hope'; Chapter 2 contrasts the unrealistic illusions of economic growth with the deeper crises of our 'fragile Earth'; Chapter 3 emphasises the poverty and failure of all policies which deny equity and hence inevitably result in inequality, insecurity, and thereby waste of resources and even more Earth-damaging activities; Chapters 4 and 5 ('Good Riddance to Empire') totally reject militarism, as *the* real 'elephant in the room', yet so often ignored, and ensured by ring-fenced 'interests', so obviously anti-Earth and, madly, hastening Man's extinction; Chapter 6 separates, with authentic hope, the DNA strand of 'Values and Vision' from the 'elephant' herd, and *real* solutions, not those failed 'solutions', still being pursued, to everyone's peril; Chapter 7 is an indulgence by Jack and his (future) family – a series of letters, 'in AD: 2055', from a grandchild to her grandmother – which delightfully demonstrates a possible alternative future *if* the USA (and the rest of us!) actually eschew accepted wisdom (*i.e.* ignorance) and follow, instead – that other strand – the path to authentic hope.

*Reviewed by Eric A. Cook, AD: 2013 01 21*

***Ilia Delio, The Emergent Christ: Exploring the Meaning of Catholic in an Evolutionary Universe***

**Maryknoll, New York, Orbis, 2011. 197pp. ISBN 978 1 57075 908 6 (pbk) £ 14.99**

The topic of this book is one that is close to my heart; a book that I deemed worthwhile to know about. Moreover, the author has pretty high credentials. Sr. Ilia Delio, a Franciscan nun, is Senior Fellow in science and religion at Woodstock Theological Center, Georgetown University. The back cover of the book tells us that she won the 2000 Templeton Course Award in Science and Religion and that she has authored several books including *Christ in Evolution* (2008). Despite all this, I did not really enjoy the book. A few of my misgivings are the following:

The author proclaims that 'the most fundamental task of our age is to forge a union between evolution and Christianity, if we are to go forward towards the fullness of God.' To begin with, I disagree with this. The most fundamental task of the Christian is to believe in God and to pray to Him; to leave greed and violence behind; to communicate the love of God and to live simply in the presence of God (See for example Micah 6:8 or the two great commandments upheld by Jesus at Mark 12: 29-31). A major point that the author stresses over and over again is that 'there is no inherent conflict between evolution and Christian doctrine'. She points out that according to official catholic teaching, as it was expressed by Pope John Paul II, evolution is accepted as an explanation for the development of life, albeit (as she apparently regrets) without specification of the mechanisms of evolution that belong to science. She deplores that 'a growing number of Catholics believe that evolution is incompatible with Catholic doctrine.' So far so good, but the author wants to promote one perception of natural evolution, the neo-Darwinian. She exults in Darwin's theory (even

though she never enters into a detailed discussion) and so at the end of the book she expresses the opinion that 'for theology to resound the harmony of the spheres, it is helpful to play religious music in the key of "D" (for Darwin).' I do not think that this is helpful at all. The fact is, Darwin envisaged a blind competition among contesting members of a species and survival of the fittest, that is, the one who is best adapted to put external circumstances to his advantage. The way that the nineteenth century industrialists interpreted this (and many in later times) led to a total disregard for others or the environment. In recent times, the need for taking distance from Darwin's negative perception with a balanced interpretation is being recognized (e.g. Douglas E. Caldwell, 'Post-modern ecology' in *Environmental Microbiology*, 1 (1999): 279-281; or Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan, *Acquiring Genomes: A Theory of the Origin of Species* (2002), 32-33). The author seems totally unaware of these issues.

The author overemphasizes the Darwinian idea of natural evolution, thereby constantly attacking the perception of Christian tradition that upholds the existence of other ontological levels. It is worth reflecting that in medieval cosmology metaphysics was largely reduced to the physical. Heaven was perceived at the periphery of a centric universe, whereas hell and the earth were thought to be at its centre. Yet, an overemphasis on natural evolution, and a desire to throw out most of Christian tradition, risks a return to the reduction of metaphysics into the physical, which is what she apparently wants. In accord with this is her talk (following John Haught) about God being situated in the future.

The author speaks about 'divine created energies', by which she seems to mean a hotchpotch of the divine and the created. She holds that 'Christ is a matrix of divine created energies that lures created fields into new patterns of unity.' But such talk flies straight in the face of the Darwinian outlook that she endorses. In a footnote she explains that 'the term "theandric" is borrowed from the fifth-century theologian Maximus the Confessor.' Actually, it stems from *Epistle 4* of the sixth century Ps.-Dionysius, whereas Maximus is a seventh century author (580-662), who interpreted the controversial term in a Dyophysite and orthodox manner (the opposite of her use of the term). As regards the use of ancient sources, I note that at another place she informs us that Bonaventure wrote that 'creation is like a book from which we can gather insight about the Creator.' That is fine, but it was Augustine who introduced the idea of the book of nature as a second book besides sacred Scripture (at *Sermon 126:6* and at *Against the Manicheans 32:20*).

I endorse the view that a critical approach to tradition is appropriate so as to purify it. But the author claims that 'the word evolution disarms the formula of Jesus Christ described by the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451.' The formula of Chalcedon described that in Jesus two natures, namely the divine nature and the created human nature, with preservation of these natures intact and whole, concur into one hypostasis (subsistence) and one person, namely, into the one Lord Jesus Christ, who lived among people on earth and yet, who was and is in the presence of God. The author's comment is that 'the fathers of the church worked with a physics and philosophy of their day'. Any discussion of the patristic and contemporary reflection upon Chalcedon is not touched upon.

I wish the author had engaged more thoroughly with her sources, both ancient and modern; it could have prevented several mistaken perceptions and provided a presentation that is less hostile towards Christian doctrine; a presentation that would have been more constructive for the attainment of a truly catholic and orthodox contemporary Christian cosmology.

Reviewed by Dr Robert Govaerts  
[govaerts1430@btinternet.com](mailto:govaerts1430@btinternet.com)

## 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.

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|---|--|
| Jane Barter Moulaison                         | <i>Thinking Christ: Christology and Contemporary Critics</i><br>(Fortress, 2012)   |
| A A Boesak &<br>C P DeYoung                   | <i>Radical Reconciliation: Beyond Political Pietism and Christian Quietism</i> (foreword by Archbishop Desmond Tutu) (Orbis, 2012) |
| L. Cassidy & M. H. O'Connel (eds.)            | <i>Religion, Economics, and Culture in Conflict and Conversation.</i><br>(Orbis, 2011)   |
| Herbert Danby                                 | <i>The Mishnah</i> , tr. from Hebrew (Hendrickson, 2011)   |
| James W Douglass                              | <i>Gandhi and the Unspeakable: his final experiment with truth</i><br>(Orbis, 2012)  |
| D M Doyle, T J Furry,<br>& P D Bazzell (eds.) | <i>Ecclesiology and Exclusion: Boundaries of Being and Belonging in Postmodern Times</i><br>(Orbis, 2012)                          |
| Luke Eastwood                                 | <i>The Druid's Primer</i> (Moon Books, 2012)   |
| Carol O. Eckerman                             | <i>Lessons in Simply Being: Finding the Peace within Tumult</i><br>(Circle Books, 2012)  |
| Robert Govaerts                               | <i>Cosmic Prayer and Guided Transformation: Key Elements of the Emergent Christian Cosmology,</i> (Pickwick Publications, 2012)    |
| R. D. Hecht & V. F. Biondo III (eds.),        | <i>Religion and Culture: Contemporary Practices and Perspectives,</i><br>(Fortress Press, 2012)                                    |
| Ivy A Helman                                  | <i>Women and the Vatican: an exploration of official documents</i><br>(Orbis, 2012)  |
| Barbara A. Holmes                             | <i>Dreaming</i> (Compass Series Christian Exploration of Daily Living)<br>(Fortress Press, 2012)                                   |
| Jonas Jonson                                  | <i>Wounded Visions: Unity, Justice, and Peace in the World Church after 1968</i><br>(Eerdmans, 2013)                               |
| Joseph A Marchal (ed.)                        | <i>Studying Paul's Letters: Contemporary Perspectives and Methods</i><br>(Fortress Press, 2012)                                    |
| Charles M Murphy                              | <i>Eucharistic Adoration: Holy Hour Meditations on the Seven Last Words of Christ</i><br>(Ave Maria Press, 2012)                   |
| Diarmuid O'Murchu                             | <i>In the Beginning was the Spirit: Science, Religion, and Indigenous Spirituality</i><br>(Orbis, 2012)                            |
| Gabriel Said Reynolds                         | <i>The Emergence of Islam: Classical Traditions in Contemporary Perspective</i><br>(Fortress Press, 2012)                          |
| Jim Ryan                                      | <i>The Spiritual Mind: a journey into awareness</i><br>(London, Brahma Kumaris Information Services, 2011)                         |
| Klaus Schwarzwäller                           | <i>Cross and Resurrection: God's Wonder and Mystery</i><br>(Fortress Press, 2012)  |
| Stivers, Gudorf, & Martin-Schramm             | <i>Christian Ethics: a case method approach</i><br>(Orbis, 2012)   |
| Dick Sullivan                                 | <i>Gideon's God</i> [novel] (Coracle Books, 2012)  |
| Connie Ann Valenti                            | <i>Stories of Jesus: a Gospel of Faith and Imagination.</i> (Orbis, 2012)  |

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

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

## List of AHSSSE Events May to October 2013

### Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2013

7.30 pm AHSSSE Chesterfield Group: *Wittgenstein on Religion - Part 2*: Talk by Rodney Ward about the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein and his thoughts on religion  
Venue: Whittington Moor, Chesterfield  
(Contact: Mike Rush, e-mail: [mikerush@virginmedia.com](mailto:mikerush@virginmedia.com))

### Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> May 2013

10.15 am AHSSSE West Wales Group: Study Day: Theme: *Subtle Energy, Healing and Healers*, with Dr. Maureen Lockhart, Dr. Bob Charman and Sue Knight  
Venue: University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Lampeter  
A non-profit event with a small admission fee (probably less than £20) to cover costs. For fuller details please contact Eric Franklin: [erf678@googlemail.com](mailto:erf678@googlemail.com).

### Friday 17<sup>th</sup> May 2013

7.30 pm AHSSSE Midlands Group: Talk: *Energy Traditions of the Q'ero People of the High Altiplano, Peru*, by Clement Jewitt  
Venue: 1 Woodcroft Close, Blackwell, Bromsgrove, B60 1DA  
(Contact: Sheelah James, e-mail: [sheelahjames@aol.com](mailto:sheelahjames@aol.com))

### Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> June 2013

10.00 am Joint AHSSSE/Other Organisations: Conference: *Spirituality for a World in Crisis: A Gathering to Seek a Co-creative Approach to a New Era*  
10.30 am Welcome and introductions, Janice Dolley  
10.40 am Opening Meditation, Sr. Maureen  
11.00 am *Towards a Culture of Love and Wisdom*, Dr. David Lorimer  
12.00 noon Contributions from Collaborating Organisations  
1.00 pm Lunch (bring your own packed lunch – tea and coffee provided)  
2.00 pm *Spirituality for a World in Crisis*, Dr. Greg Barker  
3.00 pm A Collaborative Vision for the Future – participative session  
4.15 pm Closing Meditation, Sr. Maureen  
Venue: Essex Unitarian Church, 112 Palace Gardens Terrace, Kensington, London W8 4RT  
Cost: £25 (£20 for members of collaborating Organisations); £15 concessions (£10 for members of collaborating Organisations). For further details contact: Marianne Rankin, 01684 772417 or 07714 032643; email: [mariannerankin@icloud.com](mailto:mariannerankin@icloud.com)

**Friday 21<sup>st</sup> June 2013**

2.30 pm AHSSSE South-East Wales Group: Discussion: *Time, eternity, divination ...*  
Venue: 12 Wood Close, Llanfrechfa, Cwmbran NP44 8UR  
(Contact: Mary Cook, tel: 07794 294432)

**Friday 21<sup>st</sup> June 2013**

7.30 pm AHSSSE Midlands Group: Topic: *Rumi and other Sufi poets*, facilitator Rodney Reeves. Members are invited to bring copies of favourite Sufi poetry or a Sufi story, to share. There will be Sufi music, and a short DVD of the Mevlevi Dervishes whirling dance/meditation from Konya.  
Venue: 1 Woodcroft Close, Blackwell, Bromsgrove, B60 1DA  
(Contact Sheelah James, e-mail: sheelahjames@aol.com).

**Friday 5<sup>th</sup> July 2013**

7.30 pm AHSSSE Chesterfield Group: *The Challenge of Rudolf Steiner*: DVD Part 2  
Venue: Whittington Moor, Chesterfield  
(Contact: Mike Rush, e-mail: mikerush@virginmedia.com )

**Friday 5<sup>th</sup> to Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> July 2013**

4.30 pm 4<sup>th</sup> Llantarnam Annual Gathering: Residential weekend, open to all members of the AHSSSE: Theme: *Celtic Spirituality, past and present*  
Venue: Llantarnam Abbey, Llantarnam, Cwmbran, Torfaen NP44 3YJ  
For further information, and booking, contact: Mary Cook, Tel: 07794 294432  
e-mail: [maryfrechfa@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:maryfrechfa@yahoo.co.uk) ; and see insert flyer and website

**Friday 6<sup>th</sup> September 2013**

7.30 pm AHSSSE Chesterfield Group: Talk: *What is Religious Experience?* by Mike Rush.  
Venue: Whittington Moor, Chesterfield.  
(Contact: Mike Rush, e-mail: mikerush@virginmedia.com).

**Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> September 2013**

3.00 pm AHSSSE London Group: Talk: *Trance Healing; with demonstration of healing or healing energy*, by Helen Jameson, Trance Healer, member of the Friends Fellowship of Healing and the Healing Trust  
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 4RT  
(Contact: John Franklin, e-mail: johnfranklin35@hotmail.com)

**Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2013**

12.00 pm AHSSSE South-East Wales Group: Outing to Partrishow – walk to old chapel and well  
Venue: Meeting place to be advised – please ring Mary Cook beforehand  
(Contact: Mary Cook, tel: 07794 294432)

**Saturday 5th October 2013**

- 10.00am Alister Hardy Society for the Study of Spiritual Experience Open Day 2013  
10.30 am Welcome and Introductions  
10.45.am 2013 Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture, *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn*  
by Prof. Leslie Francis, Chair of Trustees; followed by the AHSSSE AGM  
1.15 pm Lunch (bring packed lunch; tea/coffee provided)  
2.15 pm *Can the numinous be expressed through landscape painting?* by David Greenwood  
4.15 pm Tea and Departure  
Venue: Newman Room (OU Chaplaincy), Rose Place, St. Aldates, Oxford  
(Enquiries and bookings: Marianne Rankin 07714 032643 or email:  
mariannerankin@icloud.com)

**Friday 1st November 2013**

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

**Thursday 28th November 2013**

- 3.00 pm AHSSSE London Group: Talk: *Spiritual Experience and Naturalism: Perspectives from the Current Science-Religion dialogue*, by Dr. Christopher Knight  
5.00 pm Shared supper (please bring finger food, tea/coffee provided)  
5.45 pm Evening discussion  
Venue: Essex Unitarian Church, 112 Palace Gardens Terrace, London, W8 4RT  
(Contact: John Franklin, e-mail: johnfranklin35@hotmail.com)

## Other Events

**Saturday 27th April 2013**

- Society for Psychical Research: Study Day (10.00 am to 5.00 pm)  
Venue: St Philip's Church, 97 Earls Court Road, London, W8 6QH  
Details to be announced. Contact: e-mail: secretary@spr.ac.uk  
Tel: 020 7937 8984; website: www.spr.ac.uk

**Tuesday 30th April 2013**

- World Congress of Faiths: Annual General Meeting followed by talk by  
Aaqil Ahmed from the BBC  
Venue: Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, 235 Shaftesbury Ave, London WC2H 8EP  
Details to be announced. Contact: Tony Rees e-mail:  
tonyinmunchkinland@yahoo.co.uk website: www.worldfaiths.org

**Friday 10th May to Sunday 12th May 2013**

- Wrekin Forum – Wisdom Study Group: Study Weekend  
Theme: *Death: An Interlude Between Two Activities*, with William Meacher  
Venue: Park Place Pastoral Centre, Winchester Road, Wickham Fareham, Hampshire,  
PO17 5HA  
(Cost: £248 - £276 Residential; £204 Non-residential)  
Contact: Helen Cresswell, email: helen@planetsi.com Tel: 07747 060419

#### Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> May 2013

- 5.00 pm Society for Psychological Research: Gwen Tate Memorial Lecture:  
*Grounds for belief in life after death* by Feargus O'Connor
- Venue: Lecture Hall, Kensington Central Library, Campden Hill Road, Kensington,  
London, W8 7RX
- Contact: e-mail: [uksociety@aol.com](mailto:uksociety@aol.com) Tel: 020 7937 8984

#### Friday 21<sup>st</sup> June to Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2013

- Wrekin Trust: Weekend Retreat: Theme: *Self-knowledge and the Journey of the Soul*, with Ravi Ravindra
- Venue: The Carmelite Priory, Chilswell, Boars Hill, Oxford, OX1 5HB  
(Cost: £230 (£210 concessions\*) to £270 (£250 concessions\*) Residential;  
£210 (£190 concessions\*) to £230 (£210 concessions\*) Non-residential.  
\*concessionary rate for Wrekin Forum Associates and AHSSSE members)  
Contact, Olivia, email: [office@wrekinforum.org](mailto:office@wrekinforum.org) Tel: 01452 840033

#### Friday 28<sup>th</sup> June 2013

- 9.00 am Spiritual Crisis Network: Interactive conference: *Finding Solid Ground:*  
to *mental health, spirituality and extreme experiences* – Research; Ways of Working;  
4.30 pm Sharing Experience
- Venue: Sunderland  
Early Bird (before 15th April) £65; Standard £85; Service User £15  
Booking: <http://spiritualcrisisnetwork.eventbrite.co.uk>  
Enquiries: email: [conference@spiritualcrisisnetwork.org.uk](mailto:conference@spiritualcrisisnetwork.org.uk) Tel: 07590 643336

#### Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> to Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> July 2013

- The Contemplative Consciousness Network in collaboration with The Study Society: three events with Dr B Alan Wallace, Honorary President of CNN, well-known Buddhist teacher renowned for his collaboration with scientists in promoting the study of consciousness:
- 16<sup>th</sup> July: In dialogue with Dr Peter Fenwick on *The Ultimate Nature of Reality*  
17<sup>th</sup> July: Introductory Day Workshop, *Balancing the Mind with the Power of Focused Attention*, at St Mark's Church, Myddelton Square, London EC1R 1XX  
18<sup>th</sup> July: Public lecture: *Discovering Spiritual Health and Well-being*
- Venue: (16<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup>) The Study Society, Colet House, 151 Talgarth Rd, Barons Court,  
London W14 9DA. 7:00pm - 9:00pm
- Contact: Elizabeth West: [elizabeth@c-c-n.org](mailto:elizabeth@c-c-n.org)

#### Friday 6<sup>th</sup> September to Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> September 2013

- Churches Fellowship for Psychological & Spiritual Studies: Diamond Jubilee Conference  
Theme: *To Faith ... add Knowledge*. Speakers: Dr. David Lorimer, Dr. Santha Bhattacharji, the Revd Andrew Fisher with Dr. Penny Sartori, and John Wyborn with the Very Revd Alex Wedderspoon
- Venue: Bishop Grosseteste University College, Lincoln  
(Cost: £249, includes ensuite room, all meals and lectures. Single, twin and double rooms available; day visitors welcome)  
Contact: Julian Drewett, e-mail: [gensec@churchesfellowship.co.uk](mailto:gensec@churchesfellowship.co.uk))

#### Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> September 2013

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



## AMOS A LIFE

The corpse lies on a black handcart  
Redolent of the black death in his shrouded prayer shawl  
Head and toes neatly tucked in  
Anonymous amorphous bloated shape  
Under the unforgiving sun of the Tel Aviv cemetery  
Heat bouncing off the stones and troubled swirling red sand  
Sand turned and shovelled and blowing with the weight and  
multitude of the dead. Landscape of death  
Row upon row of tombstones, mourners clustered  
*Kaddish*, the ancient prayer for the dead,  
Echoes around the stones, a staccato chorus of *omain*  
*Omain*-refrain

The prayer shawl covers all  
The sweet sickly smell of decay wafts from the corpse  
Hangs in the air. Clings to your skin.  
Amos  
Alone  
'The death of one man is the death of the world'

*Yit' gadal v'yit' kadash sh'mei raba*  
*b'al'ma di v'ra khir'utei*

The corpse looks strangely comical  
Small head, large paunch swollen with putrefaction  
(Flash of Alfred Hitchcock)  
Biological chemical explosion  
Breaking down. Reactions  
Alchemical Atomic Anatomical  
Heat and decay  
The funeral party standing around awkwardly  
The *chevra kadisha*, very in charge of the bier  
Have 'I'm a busy man' air about them

*v'yam'likh mal'khutei b'chayeikhon uv'yomeikhon*

How long was he dead in his bed? Nine days  
The neighbours complained about the smell  
The *chevra kadisha* did not wash the body  
Too decayed they said. Not that friendly.  
Apart from family most of the mourners did not know him  
Later when I asked my hosts his name they did not know it  
They were friends of his sister, as I was, at the funeral of this  
nameless man  
Poor Amos  
A small life and an even smaller death.

*uv'chayei d'khol beit yis'ra'eil*  
*ba'agala uviz'man kariv v'im'ru:omain*

Bier loaded into black van and trundled to the burial area  
Followed by our procession of vehicles  
The pall bearers put on surgical gloves,  
For nephew Julian, barely seventeen, a very dubious honour  
He He tells me he hates this place.  
The Tombstones close in, crowding, dead land a premium  
Red sand. Monochrome. Heat.

*Kaddish*. 'Who knows this man?'  
All around similar ceremonies, eulogies:

'This was a man ...'  
Who will talk for Amos? Who knows this man?  
His eulogy left to me – a complete stranger  
'This was a man ...'

*Y'hei sh'mei raba m'varakh l'alam ul'al'mei al'maya*  
*Yit'barakh v'yish'tabach v'yit'pa'ar v'yit'romam v'yit'nasei:*  
*Omain*

The bier is tipped and the body plops into the shallow grave  
A gurgling sound  
The hole is not long enough to take the body  
The grave digger jumps in and arranges it in a semi-sitting  
position  
Not enough land to take the children of Israel  
Mathematics of death

*v'yit'hadar v'yit'aleh v'yit'halal sh'mei d'kud'sha*  
*B'rikh hu.*

The women stand back  
The men take turns filling in the grave  
Sense of relief  
Death ritual of an unknown Jew  
Concrete slabs placed over the corpse  
Will the Messiah need to move the great mass of concrete in all  
the graves at the Resurrection?

*l'eila min kol bir'khata v'shiratatoosh'b'chatah v'nechematah,*  
*da'ameeran b'al'mah, v'eemru:*  
*Omain*

We head towards the tap to clean ourselves, as custom  
demands, from the smell of death  
Planted squarely in front of the tap is the ultra-orthodox  
religious Jew straight out of 19<sup>th</sup> century Poland  
In his wide brimmed hat and long black coat and *payes*  
Melodiously he chants 'come come here is water'  
He won't move aside  
I stretch over to the tap  
He parries  
He seems to be running a holy protection racket  
'Give me 20 shekels for charity – here take my holy tract –  
Give me shekels'  
He won't move  
Orit my friend takes the tract and scrunches it and takes water  
The weaker souls pay protection  
Imperviously he smiles  
O f\*\*\*ing man. *Omain*.

*Louis Friedman*

[*Chevra kadisha*: friends of the dead, official burial society,  
guardians of the dead until burial  
*Kaddish*: prayer for the dead in Aramaic, not Hebrew, links all  
Jewish souls in a chain from creation to resurrection  
*Omain*: amen  
*Payes*: long sideburns, religious requirement for orthodox Jews]