

CONTENTS

Editorial		3
A View from the Chair	Andy Burns	4
Articles		
Reflections on the Timeless Present, Part II	John-Francis Phipps	5
A Man who Walked with Total Abandonment in the Way of God's Love	Dr Robert Govaerts	10
The Idea of the Numinous	Dr Howard Jones	14
Meditation on God/Great Spirit/Pure Consciousness	Dr Ken R. Vincent	19
Reports		
From the Director of Communications	Marianne Rankin	20
The Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre Lampeter: Update from the Director	Professor Bettina Schmidt	22
Master by Research (MRes) in Religious Experience		
Reports on the Religious Experience Research Centre Re-launch	Marianne Rankin Revd Dr Jeff Leonardi	24 25
Llantarnam Gathering, July 2014		27
Reports from the Local Groups		29
WebNews	Mike Rush	35
Remembering Friends	John Franklin	37
Poems	Gerard Manley Hopkins Jonathan Robinson	38
Book Reviews		39
Books Received for Review		56
Programme of AHSSSE Events for 2014		57



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.



Llantarnam photographs: Alan Underwood, Ken Price, Katherine Bains Davies

RERC Re-launch photographs sent in by Bettina Schmidt

Photograph of Professor June Boyce-Tillman, page , sent in by Marianne Rankin

Photographs of Autumn: Jean Matthews

Drawings: Jean Matthews and Juliet Greenwood

Editorial

We would like to congratulate Bettina on her promotion to Professor, also for her launch of the AHRERC as new Director (see reports, page 20). Both TRIS, where she has also launched the new MRes in religious experience, and the RERC under her directorship, will I'm sure continue to reap the benefits of her proactive and innovative leadership style, and seemingly inexhaustible energy! Both institutions are not only in safe, but in talented hands ...

John-Francis Phipps' monograph, Part II, begins with a discussion of protests against the Iraq war in 2003, which brought to birth the current incarnation of the peace movement. He saw this as 'practical monism in action - people were far more aware of the underlying oneness of humanity than its differences' (page 5). These were protests against the war on a massive scale, but it went ahead anyway, and the peace movement faded for many of us into the background of our lives. The movement now seems, in terms of attempts at international co-ordination, to have been reactivated by the NATO summit held this month in Wales. In my view global pacifism in the form of protests is not an option right now; pacifist principles seem to me to be challenged as never before, or never since the Second World War. I believe that prayer, and inclusive debate¹ rather than protest is the way forward for an active engagement with the Spirit of peace. This is why, thanks to John-Francis, I have taken editorial license to say this: unless we all engage, rather than giving in to fear, passive pity for suffering, and feelings of helplessness, we are in danger of sleepwalking towards Armageddon. We need to engage with the Holy Spirit, in whatever form our imaginations see Her, here on earth more than ever. Letters to the editor very welcome, on 'the profound challenge which the wisdom of peace presents on a global scale' (see page 21).

Yes I did mean 'Her'. Gerard Manley Hopkins' powerful poem on page 38 reminds me further of the on-going debate about gender and language – and the surprises one encounters in exploring this issue: one of my first encounters with the nuns at Llantarnam Abbey was with Sister Alice – then director of Ty Croeso, the guest house, now Mother Superior of the convent. She came into the dining room as my husband was saying grace with 'The Great Invocation'. 'Well', she said brightly afterwards 'that's a bit sexist isn't it?' So is the poem's second verse, in the context of religious imagination – but times change and language changes and I can wait ... although I reserve the right to choose the iconography that inhabits my own spiritual landscape, I would not challenge the beauty and power of a great poem, or prayer, for the sake of political correctness in this respect. Next year's Llantarnam theme is 'Crossing Boundaries', and offers the potential for the gender divide to be one of the boundaries we can attempt, on every level, to cross. I think my basic position through decades of defining myself as a feminist has always been *vive la difference*, which is what I feel about the creative religious imagination engendered by different faiths, and cultures, as well.²

And life goes on; as well as remembering friends (page 37) I am delighted to celebrate with beautiful photographs the wedding of member Karen (nee Asmuss) to David in May, and the birth of Sol Lucca to Penny Sartori and her husband in June. See page 36.

May autumn be a season of mists and mellow fruitfulness for us all ...

Patricia Murphy

¹ There was an international alternative NATO summit held in County Hall Cardiff at which Russia and America shared the same platform.

² See information on the Llantarnam Gathering 2015 in 'Events', page 59.



A View from the Chair



I hope that you have had an enjoyable summer which will be soon giving way to autumn when this edition of the journal is published.

The year to date continues to be important for both the Society and Trust as the relationships with the two Religious Experience Research Centres continue to be consolidated. In Lampeter a relaunch of the RERC took place at a one day conference in July. I was sorry to miss this very successful, well attended day through illness. The event was chaired by Dr Bettina Schmidt, the new director of RERC, who has recently been awarded a professorship by the University of Wales. This is very good news and we wish her well.

At our Open Day event this year we will have the opportunity to meet Professor Christopher Lewis who will be giving the annual lecture. It will be an opportunity to hear about the newly established RERC at Glyndŵr University of which Professor Lewis is the Director. I look forward to welcoming Chris to Oxford on the 4th October and hope that many of you can be there too. John Franklin is in the final stages of publication for his revised history of the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre and Society. The updated edition brings events right up to date and is very welcome; we hope to launch the book officially at Open Day.

The annual gathering at Llantarnam Abbey will now have taken place and I look forward to reading the reports [see page 27]. This event is now open to all members of the AHSSSE and is an important part of the Society's annual calendar.

The Society participated in a second event held in London by One Spirit Alliance, also well supported. This diverse and loose collection of groups came together again this year following the very successful launch at a conference held in London last year. Elsewhere Marianne Rankin, one of the founders and organisers, gives a full report of the day and also of an earlier one day conference held in Sheffield [see page 20].

I always look forward to reading the reports from our local groups and learning what events they have organised or what speakers they have invited to talk to members. My local group in London is active and recently our committee meetings have fallen on the same day as the group meeting so that committee members have been able to take part in the afternoon events. The local groups really are the heart of the AHS and I would like to express my personal thanks to the leaders of these groups who work so hard to plan events, arrange venues (or in many cases use their own homes) and to the members and non-members who support them.

The last twelve to eighteen months have seen a significant change in the legacy of Sir Alister Hardy, but, after what some thought were uncertain times, we now have two RERCs to take his legacy forward. The next twelve months will see the two centres consolidate still further and I believe that Sir Alister would have been very pleased with the new academic impetus which is now unfolding.

Andy Burns, Chair, AHSSSE

Please note that I have new e-mail address which is shown under my contact details on the inside front cover.

ARTICLES

Reflections on the Timeless Present

Part One of this monograph appeared in Issue 55, page 9. Ed

Part II

February/March, 2013

10th anniversary of the Iraq war. Despite the millions in this country and worldwide who marched against the war, it still took place. So at the reductionist level of nothing-butness, a huge demo against a specific war failed to prevent the war in question and that was all there was to it. But ...

The great march of 2003

Anybody present on that cold February morning in Hyde Park could not have failed to notice quite a few other things going on. I've never in my life seen such a broad cross-section of society gathered in such vast numbers. Just about every nation under the sun seemed to be represented. I saw several different groups of Israelis marching alongside Palestinians. This was certainly something very much more than the rent-a-mob demo full of depressed and disillusioned people (although there were some of them too). The great march of 2003 was also a manifestation of practical monism in action – people were far more aware of the underlying oneness of humanity than its differences. To witness this is one of the best antidotes to cynicism, dualistic disillusion and atomised alienation. Andrew Murray, who was at the time chairman of the Stop The War Coalition, believes that 15th February 2003 established a political coalition 'that cut across almost every political, social, ethnic or cultural category in society... In particular it united hundreds of thousands of British Muslims with their neighbours in a joint project of peace.'¹¹

A year so later, at the beginning of 2004, a group of Israelis and Palestinians went on a joint Antarctic expedition. They explored new territory and climbed mountains that had not been climbed before. The eight explorers worked together and overcame seemingly insurmountable obstacles. 'The political issue isn't an issue at all', said one of the members. 'We are a group of people trying to do something together'. In working together like this on a joint project, group members became more aware of the underlying oneness that united them to the point where political differences ceased to be perceived as insurmountable barriers.

Get angry! Over the past few years, there have been several new initiatives and movements expressing different forms of practical monism. The 'grandfather of the indignant ones', Stéphane Hessel, died recently aged 95. His pamphlet, *Indignez-vous!*, first published in France in 2010, has now sold four million copies worldwide. The English edition, *Time for Outrage!*, was published in 2011. In Spain *Los Indignados* came into being; 'Occupy Wall Street' in New York and the 'Occupy' presence in London and elsewhere. 'Indifference is crippling', said Hessel. 'Be angry, revolt, peacefully, for what you believe in'. In the 2013 elections held in Italy, Beppe Grillo's Five Star Movement polled over 25% of the vote, thus holding the balance of power, with significant representation in parliament. This movement represents a new beginning in Italian politics, and people are now more hopeful than they've been for a long time that radical change is a realistic possibility. M5S is very much a grassroots democratic movement, opposed to centralised hierarchies. Above all, on the economic front, M5S is strongly opposed to the whole establishment set-up, in particular the rigid, dogmatic imposition of austerity measures that are causing such hardship.

The invisible Arab

In his book, *The Invisible Arab* (2012), Marwan Bishara stresses that the Arab revolution did not just appear out of the blue in Tunisia in 2011. It had been many years in the making, with unknown, unpublicised, immensely courageous people standing up for justice and against corruption. They were ruthlessly disappeared by the dictators, wiped off the historical record, rendered invisible. As Bishara observes, the Arab revolution is bound to be expressed differently in the various countries concerned, each with their own particular background. The people continue to demonstrate the kind of inner fortitude and moral courage referred to by Spinoza [see part 1, issue no 55]. No matter how many problems and setbacks, the people have already gone beyond the same old politics of fear that dominated the Middle East for so long.

Evolution

One of Darwin's key insights in *The Origin of Species* was that those species most responsive to change are the most likely to survive. Although the strongest and fittest are the most likely to mate, it is not just a question of survival of the fittest. It also involves willingness to change. If a given species gets too inflexible and set in its ways, and if those ways are self-destructive, the species in question is unlikely to survive. Most animals spend most of the time on activities conducive to survival – nest-building, foraging for food and so on. They live continuously in real/present time. Anybody who has worked with dogs, for example, will know this. The animal behaviourist John Bradshaw believes that dogs live in the here and now to a much greater extent than humans.¹²

It is surely in the real here and now, not elsewhere in some virtual abstraction, that all species, including our own, have to be willing to adapt and learn about being open to change. The 'humanimal' often seems to lack the honesty to admit that other animals can teach our species a great deal about survival, especially when it comes to living in present time.

Our ancestors

There is such a vast time span between our earliest ancestors and the present that we almost forget they existed. But our ancestors unquestionably existed or we wouldn't be here now. Our human ancestors go right back to prehistoric times and very much further back to our animal ancestry. In *The Ancestor's Tale*, Richard Dawkins reminds us that 'if we go sufficiently far back, everybody's ancestors are shared. All your ancestors are mine, whoever you are and all mine are yours.' Shamans of different cultures have long been aware of our close connection with animals. The spirits of our animal ancestors are invoked in healing ceremonies and other rituals. The animism and pantheism of our earliest human ancestors seem to have followed naturally from long pre-existing animal capacities for living in the here and now.

It does not get any less true as time goes by that all our ancestors occupied their inalienable place in our joint history. Something of our ancestors continues to exist in a timeless sense, physically in our genes and spiritually in the continuous present. Some of us sometimes feel the need to honour the spirits of our animal and human ancestors in some appropriate way. The absence of suitable mythic ceremonies in the present adds to the general nostalgia, referred to earlier by John Burnside, and to the feeling that something vital and beautiful has been stolen from us.

We now seem to have reached a point in our social and evolutionary history where we need to challenge currently prevailing dogmas of time fundamentalism, thereby re-creating a more timeless-friendly society.

The Dreaming

The indigenous peoples of Australia have no word for time. There's no notion of linear progression – moving from past, via present, to future – in Aboriginal ways of seeing, known as the Dreaming. When Aboriginal children took much longer to learn how to tell the time than their white counterparts, this was seen as a 'learning difficulty'. The reason for this 'difficulty' was only understood when anthropologists took the trouble to find out a bit about Aboriginal ways of seeing the world, which are cyclical and take place under the form of eternity, within a context of timelessness. The anthropologist, W. E. H. Stanner, was one of the first to recognize that the visionary realm of the Aborigines represents what he described as 'One of the great experiments in human thought'. Stanner worked out that the Aborigines had invented a sophisticated form of inter-connectedness, 'an intricate web of social relations based on more than one hundred named kin relationships'.¹³ It seems reasonable to suggest, as do some scholars, that if the Dreaming had become a form of universal devotion, we would not now be contemplating the consequences of climate change.

The rediscovery of mythology

The recovery of ancient indigenous myths is taking place in many parts of the world, especially Latin America. For the first time ever, an indigenous person, Evo Morales, was elected President of Bolivia. New legislation was passed on conservation and respect for Mother Earth. The environment correspondent, John Vidal, believes that there's a resurgence of the spiritual outlook of the Andean people, which places the environment and the earth deity, known traditionally as 'Pachamama', at the centre of all life. The foreign minister of Bolivia, David Choguehuanca, points out that 'our grandparents taught us that we belong to a big family. We indigenous people can contribute to solving the energy, climate, food and financial crises with our values'.¹⁴ People in North America and Europe are also getting more active, running workshops on shamanism and sweat lodge ceremonies, and learning about survival in the wild (or what's left of it). See, for example, Tom Brown's book, *Grandfather: A Native American's Lifelong Search for Truth and Harmony with Nature* (1993, 2001).

Mythology has immensely positive aspects, which tend to be eclipsed by the negative sense of the word as nothing but a false story. As the theologian and writer Karen Armstrong observes, in most pre-modern cultures there was a practical, down to earth aspect to mythology. Myth was seen as a programme of action rooted in actual human experience: 'When a mythical narrative was symbolically re-enacted', writes Armstrong, 'it brought to light, within the practitioner, something "true" about human life and the way our humanity worked, even if its insights, like those of art, could not be proven rationally'.¹⁵

In his poem, *Too Many Names*, Pablo Neruda refers to those moments that 'cannot be cut with our exhausted scissors'. We surely sometimes experience moments that seem to connect us to all the time there is and has ever been, moments when halcyon days are much more than nostalgic memories framed and set apart from us, because even when we're dead those tranquil halcyon days still took place and remain permanently true, just as events that occurred thousands or millions of years ago in the time of our earliest ancestors also remain true.

Henri Bergson

The philosopher, Henri Bergson, distinguished between the ordinary mechanistic notion of time that separates one event from another, and what he called 'real duration', a timeless kind of time that cannot be measured by counting separate successive events: 'We give a mechanistic explanation of a fact and then substitute the explanation for the fact itself', writes Bergson.¹⁶ The way or ways we perceive time determines other perceptions. So if the

overwhelmingly dominant view of time is separatist and fragmented, this would surely be a major causal factor in creating and sustaining a disconnected, atomised society. We've allowed our western culture to become monochronic, by superimposing a nothing-but, fundamentalist linear view of time onto everything. The indigenous peoples of pre-christian and non-christian cultures have usually been polychronic in outlook: they feel relaxed about the coexistence of several different ways of perceiving time. Seeing the world under the form of eternity is to re-enchant the world and thereby save it. Far from being escapist, this way of seeing means being more mindful of different aspects of present reality. The nostalgia we may feel is for a lost present, not a lost past, some golden age that never existed. Least of all does it involve future utopian fantasies.

In 1977 I got in touch with J. M. Cohen, literary critic and translator of Penguin Classics, who was then in the process of compiling an anthology of mystical and similar experiences. Cohen needed an assistant who had access to the archives of the Religious Experience Research Unit, then at Oxford. The unit had been set up in 1969 by the marine biologist, Alister Hardy, very much in the spirit of William James's pioneering work, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). Jack Cohen invited me to work with him and my main role entailed critical perusal of thousands of accounts sent in by the public at large. It was clear that the great majority of peoples' accounts of their own epiphanies were genuine and reflected a perfectly normal aspect of human experience. Some of the accounts are deeply moving.

The very common experience

Our main argument in *The Common Experience* (1979) was that experiences variously described as religious, mystical, peak, etc., are far more common than is generally realized. While some interpreted their moments of clarity in specifically religious terms, many others seemed to be expressing a new yet timeless form of secular spirituality. Several respondents wrote in terms of seeing the world whole, in its true and natural state, as it is in reality, as if a filter had been removed and time suspended. Here's an example: 'I'd be walking along the street when things would suddenly change before my eyes, to become unbelievably beautiful and real ... everything and everybody was one ... there is no such thing as time as we know it – we are here and now in eternity'.

Accounts like this last one made me wonder what sort of response I might get if I focussed on the word 'timeless'. So I conducted a small inquiry, sending brief letters to religious, scientific and general journals and newspapers, saying I'd like to hear from readers who might have experienced moments of timelessness.

Even a small sampling of this kind reveals a surprisingly wide range and variety of experiences. When William James wrote *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, at the start of the twentieth century, most people used religious language to try and describe their mystical moments. In those days it was generally assumed that all such experiences must necessarily be religious. But some accounts might in fact be telling us something about the nature of time rather than religion as such. Now, in the early twenty-first century, people are beginning to see more clearly that ordinary, naturally-occurring events can also have a non-ordinary spiritual dimension.

One respondent referred to an event that had occurred as long ago as 1919, when she was about twelve years old: 'I experienced the feeling of having been to heaven, as if I'd been there and back in a flash', she wrote. The same person experienced a second memorable moment, this time in 1976. She was running a very busy garden centre at the time and had been working flat out, when suddenly, while looking at a plant, she again had what she

referred to as 'that extraordinary feeling of going to eternity, of seeing eternity, of seeing the whole of the universe in that one plant and being united with it'. The idea of seeing the whole universe in one plant and being united with it is no more extraordinary than some of the cosmological theories currently advanced. There is also a sense in which such moments can be seen in terms of spiritual counterparts or parallels to cosmology. A small minority of respondents referred to feeling imprisoned in a form of depression that felt 'eternal' in the sense of continuing unchanged for ever. Several felt a deep rapport with favourite poems, which expressed what they felt – especially a poem such as T. S. Eliot's 'Four Quartets' with its reference to 'the intersection of the timeless moment'. Other respondents said they experienced a form of joy so deep that it went well beyond the usual happy/sad continuum.

Easter, 2013

Every year, when Easter comes round, I become aware of vestiges of ancient pagan cyclical aspects of the rebirth myth that has always been associated with Spring. The fact that one refers to Easter 'coming round' indicates that there's still something cyclical in the western psyche. Every year I'm usually also aware of a sense of emptiness on the two days preceding the day of rebirth, celebrated on what we now call Easter Sunday. This year several different strands came together. A key factor on this occasion was the presence of 'Sammy', the ebullient young spaniel I sometimes take turns walking. 'Ebullience' is a lovely word: 'The quality of being full of happiness; the overflowing expression of joy'. We paused at the spot by the river where the Binsey poplars referred to by Gerard Manley Hopkins used to grow. The poem is a green lament expressing Hopkins's sorrow at the sudden absence of the trees he had grown fond of. He wrote that it only took a few strokes of an axe to damage the 'sweet especial rural scene'. I reflected that, sad though it must have been for Hopkins, those poplars would not have existed at all unless they had been planted in the first place. Their original planting was as real a fact as their eventual felling in 1879. So we can praise 'godnature' for their birth and existence as well as mourn their death.

Despite a cold north-easterly, I heard my first lark of Spring singing its heart out somewhere high above the meadow on the other side of the river. I felt at one with it all: poplars, poet, lark, dog, wind, river – everything.

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12. J. Bradshaw, *In Defence of Dogs* (2011)
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14. J. Vidal, feature on Latin America, *The Guardian* (2011)
15. K. Armstrong, *The Case for God* (2009)
16. H. Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, p.181 (1910)

Copies of Reflections on the Timeless Present are obtainable from: Publications, 12a Meadow Prospect, Wolvercote, Oxford OX2 8PP

Other publications by J. F. Phipps:

Time and the Bomb (1982); The Politics of Inner Experience (1990); The Other Side of Despair (1991)

A Man who Walked with Total Abandonment in the Way of God's Love

John Randal Bradburne (1921–79) abandoned himself into God's hands with a generosity that made him follow very closely behind the Lord Jesus Christ, in close companionship with the poor, similar to Saint Francis. On this path, he delighted greatly in the spiritual company of Mary, the Lord's Mother. In 1969, after a life of moving about in search of God's will for him, he visited the leper colony at Mutemwa, Zimbabwe, at that time Rhodesia. Seeing the plight



of the uncared for lepers, he knew he had to stay with them. John washed them, fed them and dressed their terrible wounds. He also found that the lepers were as a flock threatened by wolves on all sides, and as the shepherd of the flock John got into conflict with a number of people. In addition, the late 1970s brought with them a war of

independence. It is under these circumstances that in the night of 2 September 1979 John was abducted by a group of *mujhibas*, village boys who collaborated with Robert Mugabe's guerrillas. They presented him to the local Zanu PF representatives and thereafter to a guerrilla District commander, but these did not want to harm John for they admired his care for the black lepers. The *mujhibas* and the guerrilla comrade in charge of security, however, did not want John's return to Mutemwa, in case he identified them to the police. John refused the option of not returning. Eventually, on 5 September, the commander told John that he could go free. On his walk home, however, a gunman appeared. At the time John was recognized as having reached a state of extraordinary serenity and holiness. The student of spiritual experience can find in him an extraordinary richness of lived experience of the closeness of God. In view of this, there are also a number of events surrounding his life and death wherein the veil between heaven and earth is as it were uplifted.

John's mother had been born in India; his father was an Anglican vicar. They first lived in Cumbria and then in Norfolk. When war broke out in 1939 John became an officer in the Indian army and sailed to Bombay. He became part of the 9th Gurkha Rifles and was enlisted in a brigade sent to Malaya. During the Japanese invasion of Malaya in December 1941 the men of the Gurkha battalion were told to pair off and try to evade capture. John and his comrade, an ex-Assam tea planter, survived in the jungle for a few months and eventually made for the coast. In a first attempt to reach Sumatra they were shipwrecked and washed ashore; in a next attempt they captured a sampan and forced the entire crew to sail towards Sumatra. Thereafter, suffering from heat stroke, sun stroke and malaria, he was carried aboard by his comrade on the very last British destroyer out of Sumatra, which got them to a British cruiser, with which they eventually managed to reach Bombay. After a rest and having already the reputation of a hero he went in March 1942 to the 9th Gurkhas Regimental Centre at Dehra Dun. It was there that John Dove, who later became a Jesuit priest, met him and struck up a lifelong friendship with him. The whole of 1944 he spent in Burma among the

Chindits under General Wingate, who had been appointed by Churchill as OC in Burma. During these years, John showed himself as somewhat of an eccentric who whenever possible, even in the midst of war, delighted in bird-watching, singing psalms and tending to the wounded. He was demobilized in 1945.

Fr John Dove recalls that John enjoyed socializing and that he was the life and soul of a party with his antics and ready wit. As regards his religious sentiment, Dove informs us that 'in those days all nature spoke to him of God – the Indian sunrise and sunset, the hills, the forests, the birds, the sadhus and holy men. He read poetry and loved music and beauty in people whom he came across. Later, his love for the Himalayas, for India and the East found its way time and again into his poetry.' So for example in the poem *Ut unum sint*, a poem that spans over ten thousand lines and that is written probably in 1955 or 1956, he recalls in stanzas 1044 and 1045:

I remember a tower near fair Dehra Doon
Where I stood in a daydream, too true for the moon
And her whimsical ways, while below me did fly
Many hundreds of swallows – O higher was I
Than those aerial multitudes courting the eaves
Of the Forestry Building! ... but no one believes:

Will any believe? on that marvellous morn
I knew all of the secrets of things, I was born
To a close understanding of 'sadhus' and song
And had intimate knowledge of where we belong
By our Heavenly Destiny – sons of the King
Who has fashioned both swallow's and seraphim's wing.

Later, in 1969 while at Mutemwa, he wrote in the poem *Panorama*:

I well recall one morning as I went
Up that long avenue in Hindoostan
I heard a sadhu's chanting (sweetly blent
With jacaranda's fragrance): Lindisfarne,
Cluny and Quarr, look Eastward! praise there one
Singing alone, entempled in the Sun.

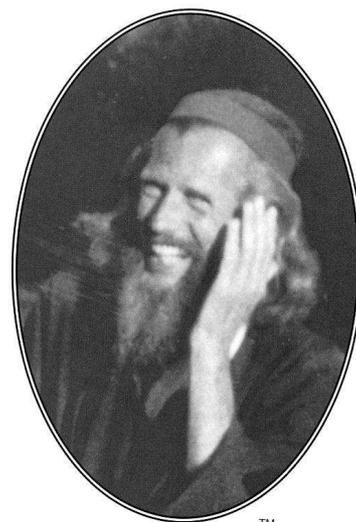
Back in Britain John's thoughts were occupied with the way he could serve God. He worked for some time for the Forestry Commission and thereupon wanted to join a monastic community. John was received into the Catholic Church at Buckfast Abbey in 1947; but according to the rule for converts he had to wait two years before being allowed to enter religious life. As it happened, John never settled within a religious community. It could be wondered what the mental impact had been upon him of moving around for five years with a military regiment during war. In any case, his life thereupon contains so many twists and turns in his tireless search for quiet, for isolation, for the intense communion with God, that it is not possible here to give a full account. He knew he had a vocation – but for what? He passed through several religious institutions and places of pilgrimage. Eventually, he would consider himself a vagabond of God. He became a holy tramp who during his journeys prayed and sang hymns to his own accompaniment. During these years as a vagabond he became a member of the Third Order of Saint Francis, at one with the poor.

At this point a few words are due about John's poetry. He wrote over five thousand poems, some of very great length, making him the most prolific poet of English literature ever. Professor David Crystal explains that the three major themes therein are the nature of the Trinity, the centrality of Mary (he sees himself as her amanuensis, writing down what she inspires) and the necessity of ecumenism. Crystal testifies, 'I have never read anyone who

taps so deeply into so many religious traditions.’ John wrote poetry from his youth onwards, but he was most productive from 1968 onwards, that is while he stayed mainly at Silveira House, the Jesuit education centre near Harare where his friend John Dove was posted, and thereafter at Mutemwa. During these years he wrote twelve or more poems a day. While he lived the love of God in poverty and humility, poetry in praise of the Trinity and the Virgin Mary, poetry that connects daily living with the eternal realm, simply flowed out of him, or through him, unlimited. His closeness to Mary and his love for her finds expression in, for example, the poem *In nomine dominae*, written 28 November 1968. His poems often inter-mingle various episodes of his life, and in this poem he recalls time spent in one or other monastery, while he is taking up lodgings probably in a lonely hut:

In feeling and in faith I had
Experience to make me glad
Uniquely with a She!

Meseemed that, while I did aspire
To meditation in the Choir
At morn or noon or eve,
I sat amidst the lissom frame
Of Miriam (the Eastern name
For Western Mary): folded me
Amidst herself that Maid of Glee
And while I murmured but her name
My hermit’s hut herself became.



In *A Wandering* (3) (revised by David Crystal), where he provides an account of his tramping around, he mentions a bread incident:

Talking of bread recalls to me a personal incident experienced some sixteen years ago. I was in the course of begging and hitching my way from Belgium to Italy, and had reached the South of France. I was walking at the time when one morning, feeling pretty hungry, I mentioned my lack of breakfast to God. No sooner had I done this than a hand threw a perfectly good loaf out of a car which was passing. ‘Give us this day our daily bread’: Our Lord meant all that He said regarding Divine Providence, I believe. ‘Quis ut Deus?’ [Who is like to the Lord our God?]: at that time somebody was at any rate, – it may have been at fifty miles an hour.

Another remarkable aspect to John’s life is the interest he developed in eagles after he came across an eagle’s eyrie, which he thereupon visited as often as he could. For some period he also was to look after a *bateleur* eagle, while its master went abroad. Besides this, John became famous for the relation he developed with bees. As John was getting the reputation of a holy man a good number of visitors at Silveira House looked him up, which became a disturbance to John who, though being very sociable, desired quiet, and so he prayed for a swarm of bees to keep away visitors. When he received what he prayed for he wrote his poetry and played his harmonium, wearing shorts and barefoot, totally undisturbed by the buzz around him. In a letter dated 29th April 1969 he writes:

There must be fifty thousand bees at hand
And they are settling down inside a hive
Two feet away from where I’m typing this, - all planned
By God I trust it is (I’m still alive!).

John’s remarkable spiritual life is illustrated by the poem *Metaphysics at The Physicians’*, which Crystal estimates to have been written possibly on 20 August 1978, during a period that he had been taken to hospital seriously ill from a type of polio virus that attacked him:

I saw all heaven opened by one sound,
 By limpid purity of one clear bell,
 There seemed to be no limit to the ground,
 The new creation ranged, rang true the spell;

 The raptured land ran bordered by blue sea
 That did not take predominance of space,
 Infinity of homeliness, and free
 For gazing on amazed by boundless grace;

 From end to end of it there was no ending
 But only blending with an endless joy,
 Its peacefulness complete was not depending
 On anything but love with no alloy:

 My eyes were closed, my sight of it was caught
 Through one true sound in which rings all re-wrought.

 I saw it at the Mission of All Souls,
 I heard it from a bed in hospital,
 No earthly panorama ever rolls
 As heaven's landscape did at that bell's call;

This brings us to the events surrounding John's death, of which a full account can be found in Fr John Dove's book *Strange Vagabond of God*. After John had been forced off the road and shot by a gunman, a group of people who had been walking with John feared there were likely to be repercussions for the surrounding villages when the white security forces found his body. They therefore wanted to hide his body, but when they crossed the main road they heard singing, and not knowing where it came from they dropped the body in a panic and ran away. When after some time they had calmed down, they crept back but again they heard loud singing and they fled again. Yet again they made an attempt to get to the body, but then they saw what they described as a strange, large bird hovering over the body, moving up and down over it. Once more they retired in alarm. When they made a final attempt, they saw three beams of light ascending from near John's body, meeting at a height and descending as one beam. Overawed, they made no further attempts. Dove points out that the old man who had been part of the group and who gave the account was not a Christian, but someone who honoured the ancestral spirits, and so the observed phenomena and the Christian symbolism involved would not have been meaningful to him. This favours the fact that they were not a mere invention as the people were of an entirely different religious culture. Later in the day John's body was found along the road by a missionary priest and taken away for burial. During the time of these events John Dove was just on leave to a remote cottage in the West of Ireland. He recalls at the outset of his book that in the night of 3 September he woke up there and had an inner experience of agony, which he describes as 'deep and sure ... Whose agony?' On the 5th he went to the post office a few miles distant from the cottage so as to post a card to John. At that moment a police car arrived at the post office; he was to ring the Jesuit Missions in London and thus he found out about John; his agony had taken place at the time that John was being moved about and ill-treated by his captors.

At the funeral a friend placed three white flowers on the coffin to represent the Trinity to whom John had such a strong devotion. Thereupon, three drops of blood were observed to fall under the coffin that formed a little pool. The blood was found to be fresh. The undertaker was utterly alarmed, the coffin was opened to examine the body but it was clean and there were no signs of blood on the inside of the coffin. It was then recalled that one of John's wishes was to be buried in his Franciscan habit. This had been an oversight. John's body was then clothed in the Franciscan habit and the coffin resealed.

In his Afterword Dove mentions that Mutemwa itself has since become a Marian Centre with pilgrims visiting from all over Zimbabwe and South Africa; there also emerged nearby a new community called The Mother of Peace community, which takes care of AIDS orphans (see Derek Van der Syde's remarkable account, pp. 3–7). There have been several claims to cures ascribed to John's intercession and signs involving visits by bees and eagles (*Strange Vagabond of God*, 177, 288).

Dr Robert Govaerts

Resources

<http://www.johnbradburne.com>

<http://www.johnbradburnepoems.com>.

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The poetry and picture in this article © John Bradburne Memorial Society. Used with permission.

The Idea of the Numinous

With increasing industrial development in society over the past few centuries we have come to view humankind as separate from the rest of the natural world. Yet humankind is a unique part of Nature and I want to explore what it is that makes us human. In the wake of Francis Bacon's exhortation to 'subdue Nature with all her children, to bind her to your service and make her your slave [for] the enlarging of the bounds of human empire', we have exploited Nature as another 'thing' we can use to increase our material wealth. The time has come to re-integrate ourselves with the environment that sustains us and to preserve the aesthetic beauty of the natural world that we are destroying.

The ancients of the pre-industrial world used to describe what they called the Four Levels of Being: rocks and minerals; plants; wild animals; and humans – and above all was the Great Spirit. The most obvious characteristic of humankind is the sophistication of our language for communication and expressing thoughts and feelings. From this has emerged our ability for rational thought, leading to the discoveries and inventions of science, medicine and engineering, and the creations of what we now call the humanities – philosophy, art in painting and sculpture, poetry and other literature and music. In these respects we are

unique. Other animals clearly have feelings and can experience pleasure or pain but it is debatable whether they can be said to form thoughts – they act mainly (perhaps exclusively) by instinct. It is this creativity and the quality of being able to appreciate aesthetics that surely define us as a species.

Over a period of little more than a century, psychologists have evolved the concept of a *conscious mind*, which is largely under our control, and an *unconscious mind* that influences and is influenced by our actions but which functions subliminally, seemingly beyond our reach through intention. Furthermore, while the brain processes and consciously interprets the input of our senses to constitute the *rational mind*, there is that aspect of being that we might describe as the *spiritual mind*, which comprises our emotions, feelings, passions and beliefs. It is this spiritual aspect of mind that many describe as *soul* or, particularly with discarnate entities, as *spirit*.

As human beings we undergo two quite different kinds of experiences. There are those that allow us to make our way in the world each day using our five senses. The input of these senses is then interpreted by the rational mind – usually taken to be the function of the brain and spinal cord. The process by which we interact with this information is described as *upward causation*. We use the information gained to look for patterns and explanations and causes in world events because, if we can establish them, they help us to get control over our lives and prepare ourselves for what might happen in the future. As a result, we can deal with what would otherwise be unexpected events more effectively.

But as humans, and uniquely among the animals, we have a complementary side to our natures. We attach significance and value to many of these events, and experience emotion or feeling about this significance – events such as births and deaths for example. As part of this imaginative capability, Man has created various images of deity as the personification of forces we cannot control but which shape our lives. Through prayer or meditation, especially at sites we consider sacred, we believe we commune with this mystical presence, and this provides meaning and purpose to our lives.

Although imbued with anthropomorphic qualities, this deity is essentially spiritual. The Hindu and Buddhist faiths have their notion of the akashic field that holds the record of all human affairs for all time. Judaism speaks of the *ruach Elohim*, the spirit of God in the world; Islamists envisage the *Dhat* as the Divine Essence, the Spirit of Allah; and Christians see their God as a Holy Spirit. Even the atheistic faiths of the east have an image of a Universal Mind that holds the *karma* of each individual from one incarnation to the next as the soul searches for the enlightenment of *samadhi* or *nirvana*. Most of the major faiths of east and west have seen their God as a unified spiritual presence.

In the secular domain, humans also experience aesthetic pleasure from active or passive participation in the humanities. Aesthetics – the creation and appreciation of beauty that allows us to express our most positive emotions – is a component of the human psyche that is essential for most of us. To paraphrase Jung, we cannot understand the world only through the intellect. The need to give expression to this emotional side of our natures is paramount for our mental wellbeing and, as pointed out by Solomon¹, this is where we find our meaning in life.

It was German theologian Rudolf Otto² who coined the term ‘numinous’ to describe those aspects of the spiritual domain that inspire human feelings of awe, reverence and exaltation in a religious context. But such heights of emotion can be found too in the secular experiences of the arts. This emotion we feel is ineffable or inexpressible in terms of more fundamental

concepts. There is clearly a deeper wisdom lying beyond mere sensory experience that touches the human spirit and influences the affairs of Man, and this can only be provided by mystical or numinous experience and an awareness of the aesthetic dimension of human existence.

Alister Hardy used the term 'spiritual' to describe such uplifting experiences. He included psychic events and artistic expression as well as overtly religious experiences in his survey of human spirituality.³ In his survey of religious experiences, William James described these experiences as 'mystical' and commented: 'the existence of mystical states absolutely overthrows the pretension of non-mystical states to be the sole and ultimate dictators of what we may believe'.⁴

Thus, the terms 'numinous', 'spiritual' and 'mystical' are used somewhat synonymously to describe religious or aesthetic secular experiences that produce different degrees of emotional euphoria. These emotional states are described as being derived by a process of *downward causation*, emanating as they are believed to do from a cosmic energy that some describe as divine. The human mind has the ability to change focus in its perceptions. By analysis using the *rational mind* we can perceive the detailed structure of things or we can see them as a whole. But with the *spiritual mind* or *soul* we can interact with the ethos beyond the material and get a feeling for the soul of the artisan who created the painting, poem, musical composition or the fine architecture of a cathedral – in other words, we perceive 'the message' behind 'the medium', to paraphrase Canadian philosopher Marshall McLuhan. Many situations in natural surroundings produce the same euphoric effects.

Rational understanding may well deepen aesthetic experience, but this component of subjective emotional response surely is paramount in appreciation of art-work of any form. In the philosophy of ancient Greece, Socrates, through Plato, argued that an appreciation of beauty encourages the young to prefer noble deeds over evil ones. To this end of improving morality, other Greek and Roman philosophers, like Pythagoras and Boethius, felt that music for example should be studied, dissected and analysed, 'setting aside the judgement of the ears'. However, we can analytically dissect a symphony into keys, and tempi, and dynamics; into exposition, development and recapitulation; but ultimately it will be the aural experience and its emotional response that determines the extent to which we admire and enjoy the piece.

It was the German sculptor, Adolph von Hildebrand who, in *The Problem of Form* (1893), first distinguished between the emotional sensations we experience from an art-work as a whole (what he called *Fernbilder* – the 'picture from a distance') and those we appreciate by a detailed examination and analysis of its components (*Bewegungsvorstellungen* – the individual components that contribute to our sensations). Aesthetic judgement involves both an active intellectual understanding of the material properties of an object, its representation in painting, stone, words or music, and its numinous qualities that demand a passive sensibility to qualities that move the individual soul and commune with that of the artisan.

I have said that some analysis is desirable to heighten understanding, but knowing that water is H₂O does nothing to deepen our appreciation of a brook or a waterfall or a snowflake. Aesthetic appreciation of a painting of a scene is only partly appreciation of the scene itself and mostly of the skill of the artist in representing it in their use of colour, and their creation of a harmonious relationship between the components of the painting. Through our appreciation of the arts, self-consciousness becomes a part of the cosmic consciousness – what Alister Hardy calls the 'unseen spiritual world of eternal values behind the material world of the senses'.⁵ Rational analysis will heighten our appreciation and admiration of both the artist

and their work, but there remains an aesthetic dimension that reductionist analysis can never interpret. For many years, academics have sought to understand our responses to works of art or music.^{6,7} Many creative artists working in many different mediums have acknowledged a source of inspiration beyond themselves.

Ever since the Enlightenment there has been passionate debate as to whether the world consists of one or of two types of entity – philosophies respectively distinguished as *monism* or *dualism*. Indeed, we could trace this debate as far back as the philosophers of ancient Greece. In recent centuries, the archetypal advocate for dualism is considered to be the French philosopher Rene Descartes. When Descartes wrote of the *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, he apparently had in mind two different kinds of entity – a solid, material entity that could be examined with the senses and studied with the science of the emerging New Philosophy; and a numinous, ineffable entity that was somehow associated with the human body. It was in the 19th and 20th centuries that mind came to be defined as simply the working of the brain, and many scientists still regard it essentially in this light today. Modern materialist science is squarely in the monist camp.

I have said that numinous experiences can be generated by religious events or by secular interaction with the arts. Psychic events also comprise an important group of spiritual experiences. Over the past century since the emergence of psychology as a separate discipline, scientists have explored the psychic experiences of telepathy, clairvoyance and mediumship. With varying degrees of success, some psychic phenomena are accessible to controlled scientific experimentation. Now, we are increasingly finding scientists – particularly physicists, biologists and physicians – who accept and explore psychic phenomena and claimed interaction with discarnate souls in the afterlife as part of the natural world, establishing the existence of a spiritual realm. No longer can such experiences validly be dismissed by closed-minded individuals as wild imaginings or the products of a deranged mind, though some materialist scientists are still unbelieving. As recently as 2010, the eminent scientist Professor Michael N. Marsh wrote an imposing book⁸ discrediting, as he saw it, psychic experiences, though the unbiased reader will see that the arguments advanced are fundamentally flawed, as Dr Penny Sartori and I have pointed out in an earlier issue of *De Numine*.

Investigations by scientists over the last century especially have shown that a more widely embracing paradigm for ‘laws of nature’ is required. Some contemporary biologists see the realm of the numinous as contributing to the ‘nurture’ component that shapes the behaviour of the human individual.⁹ This idea would be in tune with Jean-Baptiste Lamarck’s view of human evolution¹⁰ that the environment has a deep effect on development of the individual beyond what became known as genetic inheritance. More recently, biologist Rupert Sheldrake’s concept of the ‘morphic field’¹¹ has suggested how the numinous cosmic field could affect the path of evolution. In the early 20th century, philosopher Henri Bergson spoke of the *élan vital*, the ‘vital force’ that inhabited all living organisms.¹² Although he strenuously denied being a ‘vitalist’, Bergson’s concept is closely allied with the animism of indigenous societies.¹³

Pagan tribes and indigenous societies have felt this spiritual essence within Nature since the earliest recorded times, a belief system variously called animism, hylozoism or panpsychism. It was for this reason they venerated trees and certain rock formations. If there were no appropriate natural rock formations available, they erected menhirs to create a sacred site as temple or burial ground. Trees and rocks were so much more long-lived than humans that they believed that these natural objects contained the wisdom of the elders. As Karen Armstrong says in her book on myths¹⁴: ‘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'. The idea of an innate sensibility within the natural world is reflected today in James Lovelock's concept of *Gaia*¹⁵.

I have tried to show that being able to conceive of the idea of the numinous is the most distinctive and unique characteristic of being human. As a result, we find spiritual or aesthetic qualities within the religious systems we have created, as the defining characteristic of what we describe as the arts, and within the splendour and awe-inspiring majesty of the natural world. In the earliest stages of human evolution, when Man had very little by way of material possessions, emotion, passion and a sense of awe at the natural world they were beginning to inhabit must surely have propelled them forward through the stages of evolution they were about to undergo.

Dr Howard Jones

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Meditation on God/Great Spirit/Pure Consciousness

God is Spirit.

Zoroaster called it the Holy Spirit;
Jesus called it the Spirit of God;
Native Americans call it the Great Spirit;
Laozi called it the Tao;
Ralph Waldo Emerson called it the Oversoul.

Carl Jung's 'collective unconscious' is a part of it.
Richard Bucke said the experience of it is 'cosmic consciousness.'

Modern physicists call it Pure Consciousness and say it preceded matter.
Native Americans say the Great Spirit's imagination brought the universe into being.

God/the Great Spirit/Pure Consciousness is One.
St. Paul said, 'It is in God that we live and move and have our being.'
All things are connected. We are all connected to God and one another.

God's consciousness connects us to God and one another making prayer, healing, and mystical experience possible.

Because we are all connected to the Great Spirit/Pure Consciousness, we are eternal.

God is Light.

Light is a pure form of God.

Einstein saw all matter as frozen light.
Stephen Hawking said, 'When you break subatomic particles down to their most elemental level, you are left with nothing but pure light.'

The ancients sometimes described the light of God as fire. (This was more common before Edison!) The description is one and the same. The angel of the Lord that appeared to Moses 'in a flame of fire out of a bush' is comparable to the 'Being of Light' of modern NDEs and other mystical experiences.

Throughout history, divine beings are said to 'glow.'
Mystical illumination is to be filled with light.

God is Love.

God is Love is the testimony of mystical experiences and NDEs from ancient to modern times. Although much of the world and its creatures are engulfed in violence, the larger reality of the Great Spirit/Pure Consciousness is marked by love.

Evil is real, but God is always with us.
This is the message of those who have had an opportunity
To peek behind the 'veil' of Omar Khayyam,
To briefly remove the 'filter' of William James,
Or 'cleanse the doors of perception' of William Blake.

Spirit/Light/Love – God/Great Spirit/Pure Consciousness

Dr Ken R. Vincent

www.near-death.com/vincent.html

REPORTS

From the Director of Communications

This is now a regular slot in *De Numine* to keep you posted on events within and beyond our organisation, apart from our own AHSSSE and Local Group meetings, which are described elsewhere.

Religious Experience Research Centre Re-launch

Within the organisation, the Big News was the Re-launch of the RERC at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David in Lampeter on July 4th 2014. We now have two RERCs, the other set up at the University of Glyndŵr in Wrexham. Over the past year, regular meetings have been held in Lampeter between David Greenwood and myself on behalf of the Alister Hardy Trust with Mirjam Plantinga, UWTSD Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Dr Bettina Schmidt, the new Director of the RERC. These have proved fruitful and enjoyable occasions. I would like to offer many congratulations to Bettina, who has recently been appointed Professor.

RERC in Lampeter was re-launched with a conference on *The Study of Religious Experience*, organised by Bettina. Mirjam Plantinga extended a warm welcome to the audience of about 70 people, which included several Trustees and many local members and folk associated with the AHSSSE (see report page 24).

One Spirit Alliance

The main outside focus is our involvement with the One Spirit Alliance. This is a network of spiritually minded people and organisations, coming together to foster connection and collaboration. In addition to main events, OSA supports regional conferences.

Sheffield Conference

A one-day conference was held in Sheffield on Saturday 15th March 2014 entitled *Deeper Dimensions in Education*. I worked with Robert Chamberlain of the Anthroposophical Society to arrange the conference. Our aim was to hear from people involved in various spheres of education, working from a spiritual perspective, with plenty of time for discussion and interaction.

I spoke first, about the work of the Alister Hardy organisations and the archive, as well as my talks to 6th forms who use my *Introduction to Religious and Spiritual Experience* as part of their 'A' Level syllabus.

Dr Greg Barker, now Visiting Research Fellow at the University of Winchester, gave an insight into religious teaching today at higher levels. Greg is a popular educator who has delivered innovative and engaging presentations to thousands of students and to educators and groups across the Britain. He has also been involved in research projects worldwide.

The final speaker was Aonghus Gordon, founder of the Ruskin Mill Trust, which pioneered a unique, holistic and student-centred approach to the education and care of young people with complex learning and behavioural difficulties. Three such colleges have now been established. Aonghus also founded The Field Centre, a higher education institute which promotes research and development.

Shorter contributions were given by Kath Bransby, a mainstream nursery teacher working with a Steiner-Waldorf approach and Fiona Burgess, a youth worker, outdoor practitioner and research associate at The Manchester Metropolitan University.

The speakers set the scene for a day of lively discussion on education.

London Event

The One Spirit Alliance held a follow-up to last year's inaugural day with *Spirit in Action* on June 28th 2014 at Colet House, home of the Study Society in London. It was a day to meet people of like mind and to network. About 30 spiritually-based groups were offered a platform to speak briefly about their work and space to display their publicity material.

About a dozen participating organisations gave advance funding to sponsor the event, which enabled them to be part of the initiating and planning group. This allowed OSA to hold the event on a gifting basis for participants. Costs were kept low and about 80 people came.

The day began and ended with meditation led by Colum Hayward of the White Eagle Trust, author of *The Meditation Lifestyle: Going beyond the Practice*. Impromptu singing enlivened the proceedings.

The first speaker was Dr Serge Beddington-Behrens, author of *Awakening the Universal Heart: A Guide for Spiritual Activists*. Serge is a spiritual educator and psychotherapist, who teaches a way of integrating spiritual practices with psychological inquiry, towards a fundamental transformation of our lives.

His talk was entitled *Awakening the Heart and Serving the World* and focused on how each of us can move evolution forward to create a more integrated society.



Professor June Boyce-Tillman (AHT Trustee) led us all in an impromptu song

In the afternoon we heard from Anthony Russell, founder of the Chandos Foundation and author of *Evolving the Spirit: From Democracy to Peace*. Anthony, an artist, cultural historian and an advocate of non-violence spoke on *Evolving the Spirit: Ten Steps to Change the World*. Having worked with the All Party Political Group on Burma, Anthony spoke on the profound challenge which the wisdom of peace presents on a global scale.

There was plenty of time for discussion in smaller groups. Feedback was gathered and will be considered at another meeting on 22nd November in London. That day will not include speakers but will simply be a get-together of groups and interested people to consider the future of the One Spirit Alliance. Details to be finalised. All Welcome!

Publicity Material

Instead of our many different leaflets, I decided that one comprehensive brochure for the Alister Hardy Society for the Study of Spiritual Experience would be a good idea. Our blue leaflet had proved popular so we kept the sunburst cover picture. After much input from the AHSSSE Committee members, various organisers and from John Franklin in particular, a new 6-page A5 brochure has finally emerged. Thanks are due to John for producing our publicity material over the years – no easy task!

The brochure gives an indication of what we are all about. It quotes the Hardy Question and gives some examples of spiritual experiences. It has a membership application form and an indication of the benefits enjoyed by members, including online access to the archive database and TSD library privileges; there is also a list of Patrons and Trustees and contact details of RERC Directors and everyone involved in the organisation.

Anyone wishing to have some leaflets for distribution, please get in touch.

Open Day

We are very much looking forward to welcoming you to Open Day on October 4th in Oxford, when we shall hold the AGM. We'll then hear from Professor Chris Lewis, Director of the RERC in Glyndŵr and from Andy Burns, Chair of the SSSE. Both presentations sound fascinating – an event not to be missed! [See Events, page 57]

I would be very happy to receive any ideas or suggestions for what you might like the AHSSSE to do – and also if you would like to get more involved.

Marianne Rankin

Both talks, above, were recorded and are available on CD at £5 each including p&p from Martin Redfern of the Study Society, and from SMN: requests to oldmanbeaver@btinternet.com

The Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre Lampeter: update from the Director

One year has passed since I became the director of the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre. On July 4th 2014 we celebrated with a one-day conference the official re-launch of the centre (see Marianne Rankin's report below). It was a successful day and I am grateful to the speakers and the audience. In the presence of research students, members of staff of the university, members of the society and the wider public, we discussed the various approaches to the academic study of religious experience. It was such an interesting and engaging day that we hope to publish the papers, and make them available online.

The keynote speaker was Dr Fiona Bowie who delivered the first Alister Hardy Lampeter Lecture. This will become an annual event which will take place in the first week of July. We have already some ideas but nothing specific. I will announce topic, speaker and date in the next issue of *De Numine*.

However, the one-day conference, and the inauguration of the annual Alister Hardy Lampeter Lecture, have not been the only recent developments. During this last year the focus of the work in the first few months has been the online access of the Alister Hardy database, and I am delighted to inform you that the database is now available via an online access gate:

<http://uwtsd.ac.uk/library/alister-hardy-religious-experience-research-centre/online-archive/>

Members of the society can apply for access by signing a confidentiality form (see details on the website or send an e-mail to RERC@tsd.uwtsd.ac.uk).

The University has also validated a new Master by Research programme in Religious Experience: <http://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/postgraduate/mres-religious-experience/>. It is now open for applications. It has a longer research element than an MA programme and allows greater possibility to focus on one's research interests. I hope that the news about the MRes programme will spread so that a new generation of scholars in religious experience will grow in Lampeter.

In the next couple of months I will focus on the development of an online journal for the study of religious experience. This journal will contain scholarly articles on the study of religious experience that will be peer-reviewed and open access, hence available for everyone.

In addition to the articles the journal will also offer space for reports and book reviews so that different types of contributions can be published. I hope to announce the first issue sometime in 2015.

Meanwhile we are working on the Occasional Papers which we want to make available to everyone via the new RERC website:

<http://uwtsd.ac.uk/library/alister-hardy-religious-experience-research-centre/>

It will be still possible to buy hard copies of the papers. But in order to make them widely available we will offer to download them free from the website. This way we hope to increase the interest in religious experience, Alister Hardy and RERC.

Another development is the arrival of a new member of staff at the RERC: Tom Pritchard will start working at the Centre in September. His main job will be to catalogue the Alister Hardy Library books for the Lampeter university campus library. However, he will later also work with the 'history' archive material (i.e. correspondence and other records) so that the material can be made accessible to researchers. He will be available in the library via e-mail and phone to help researchers, students and members of the Society. I am grateful to the Trust for funding the position.

However, I also have sad news: Jean Matthews will retire at the end of this year. She will still remain involved in the Society and *De Numine* but she will stop working for RERC. I will miss her very much. She has guided me during my first year as Director and helped me in so many ways that I cannot express my gratitude sufficiently. While she continues working at RERC for a few months, I do not want to miss this opportunity to say Thank you, Jean. I wish you all the best for your retirement. And, for information to members, Jean's position will not be replaced. The Trust has decided that Marianne Rankin will oversee the incorporation of new accounts on the database together with Marian MacPolin who has recently moved back to Lampeter. We have at the moment two collections of accounts that need to be incorporated which will be dealt with in the next year.

Last but not least I want to take the opportunity to thank everyone who has congratulated me on my recent promotion to professor. I am grateful for your ongoing support and appreciate all your warm wishes.

Professor Bettina Schmidt, Director of the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre

The AH RERC Lampeter is proud to announce that a new programme for the study of religious experience is available at the University of Wales TSD, Lampeter:

Master by Research (MRes) in Religious Experience

This is a distance learning degree that can be studied full-time (1 year) or part-time (2-3 years). It is linked to the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre and offers the opportunity to research the accounts in the archive (online).

For more information check the website:

www.uwtsd.ac.uk/postgraduate/mres-religious-experience/

Reports on the Religious Experience Research Centre Re-launch

The aim of the day was to highlight different academic approaches to the study of religious experience: anthropological, theological, historical and religious studies.

Dr Fiona Bowie of King's College, London gave the first annual Alister Hardy Lecture on *How to Study Religious Experience: Methodological Reflections on the Study of the Afterlife*. An anthropologist of religion, Dr Bowie, has worked at the Universities of Wales, Bristol, Linköping in Sweden and at the University of Virginia in the USA. She is founder of the Afterlife Research Centre* and is currently a Senior Visiting Research Fellow in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at King's College London. Dr Bowie proposed a form of cognitive, empathetic engagement as an ethnographic method, consistent with aspects of phenomenological, dialogical and ontological ethnographic methods, as well as the anthropology of wonder, which has been used to bridge ethnographic and theological perspectives. She then used the study of the afterlife as an example of the 'common core' or 'experiential hypothesis' of religion, which brought us back to the key role of experience in the formation of religious ideas and practices.

Other speakers were Dr Robert Pope on the theological approach to the study of religious experience; Dr Gary Bunt on religious experience in cyberspace; Dr Catrin Williams on religious experience in early Christianity; Professor Bettina Schmidt on anthropological reflection on the study of religious experience and Dr Thomas Jansen on the study of religious experience in China.

Professor Schmidt chaired the event and her presentation gave us a fascinating preview of her forthcoming book about her study of spirit possession and trance in Brazil. Employing participant observation as her research method, she involved herself in the local communities, and gained entry to ceremonies where such religious events took place.



Professor Christopher Alan Lewis (Glyndŵr), Revd Professor June Boyce-Tillman MBE, Professor Bettina Schmidt, Jane Winship, Marianne Rankin



The whole conference was a stimulating and enjoyable occasion to herald a new era of co-operation with UWTSD.

Marianne Rankin

* see AHSSSE website for more information on the Afterlife Research Centre

A Response to the One-day conference on The Study of Religious Experience in Lampeter held on 4th July 2014

I have recently retired to the Lampeter area and was pleased that this 're-launch' for the Alister Hardy Research Centre was to take place just after we moved here. My background is in counselling and ordained ministry and in 2008 I completed doctoral research into the relationship between the spirituality of the Person-centred approach to counselling and Christian spirituality, and the implications for Christian ministry and pastoral practice. I had quoted from David Hay's work in defining spirituality and religious experience, and I was delighted to discover that the Alister Hardy centre is now based in Lampeter.



Dr Fiona Bowie

The first presentation, by Fiona Bowie on 'How to study religious experience? Methodological reflections on the study of the afterlife and other examples of religious experience', made me realise how oppressed I feel as a British citizen in espousing spiritual and religious experience in the climate of polite scepticism and dismissal that characterises so much of our public discourse. This recognition came in response to Dr Bowie's fearless declaration of her evidence-based conviction of the realities underlying so many of the experiences to which she referred.

As the day progressed I perceived there to be an interesting 'fault line' between the academically credible study of such experience, akin to anthropology – 'this is what the natives believe' – but without any claim to affirm the ontological reality of the experiences, on the one hand, and those such as Fiona Bowie, who took the further step of crediting the source of the experiences beyond a simple subjectivism. (She made more than one reference to the difficulty of receiving academic respectability for such views, particularly at early stages of promotion, and suggested that perhaps academic staff only felt 'safe' to hold such views when they had secured a tenured post!)

It seems to me that there is a real challenge here for this area of study. The nature of spiritual and religious experience when experienced at any kind of depth is that it is transformative, life-changing and life-shaping. There could be said to be a danger for the researcher, if he or she maintains the required scientific distance and objectivity, of recording others' accounts of powerful spiritual experience while maintaining a detached and therefore uncommitted attitude towards that to which their accounts refer: an 'out there' reality with the power to change lives for the good.

In saying this I do not mean to suggest that every experience be given equal credibility, or that scientific objectivity is unnecessary or undesirable in such research. But if one engages in some depth with the experience of others with 'a form of cognitive, empathetic engagement (which) implies openness to the other, critical awareness of one's own perspective, and reluctance to move too quickly to explanation' (from Dr Bowie's abstract for her talk), then one may indeed find oneself sufficiently respectful as to accord their experience, when viewed alongside one's own, as suggestive of, at least a shared reality, or even a level of experiential truth, and with 'anthropological wonder' (ibid).

Professor Schmidt's presentation on spirit possession and trance in Brazil was tantalising in just this regard. Her account of being present to such experience, accompanied by visual

illustrations, inspired more than one of her audience to try to ask what she had made of it personally and not purely objectively – and indeed whether she had been touched by it in the sense of beginning to experience something subjectively at the time – but she wouldn't be drawn, maintaining an impressively scientific stance towards her subject matter.

Dr Jansen's presentation in relation to Chinese culture was also tantalising in leaving me, at least, wanting to hear much more of substance about his extensive experience of contemporary Chinese culture, behaviour and attitudes in relation to historical perspectives.

Dr Pope's session led into the later one by Dr Williams, in that both were concerned with the place of experience in Christian tradition. His presentation helped explain the almost distrust of personal spiritual and religious experience in relation to the 'surer ground' of systematic theology and scriptural authority. Dr Williams took our focus to Early Christian beliefs in relation to personal religious experience, and in particular St Paul's own accounts of his experience, especially in 2 Corinthians 12, his 'third heaven experience'. It is tempting to interpret Paul's third-party self references: 'I know a man ...' as proceeding from both humility and a diffidence about claiming such experience, a diffidence that could be said to continue today.

In the question time following her presentation I asked about the dividing line between scripture and later Christian experience. I have long been intrigued by the question of why the New Testament ends where it does in Acts. In an obvious sense Acts is 'The Acts of the Apostles', and when they died out their acts were over, but I believe there is some merit in considering whether there might not have been continuing acts by their successors which could have been deemed worthy of record? In this sense my question was simply about the closure of the Canon.

But in the context of the conference theme, I think it might be argued that by enshrining only the foundational documents and accounts in the Canon, and making no equivalent space for continuing revelation and testimony, the early Church made inevitable the separation of doctrine from ongoing experience, and the longer the time lapse the greater the potential discrepancy between teaching and experience. In this way one might argue that the attempt to affirm the value of researching religious experience is in conflict with the legacy and modality of tradition.

In conclusion I should like to make one further observation. It seems to me that a great deal of the study of religious experience is formulated in terms of individual experience. The particular focus of my research has been into the spirituality of therapeutic experience, that is when two or more persons are engaging at relational depth. I would be interested to develop this perspective further in the context of the Alister Hardy Centre's explorations.

Revd Dr Jeff Leonardi

It is hoped that the presentations given at the RERC launch will be put online. Details will follow when available. Ed.

Llantarnam Gathering 25th-27th July 2014 Pilgrim Paths; the Inner and Outer Journey

Mary Cook, co-organiser, writes:

Once again we were blessed with perfect weather. We filled all the available accommodation without having to turn anyone away.

After Alan's presentation on the inner and outer paths of pilgrimage, which he explored through the works of Bunyan and Jung and the 'ten bulls' of Buddhism, we heard stories from five 'pilgrims'. They took us on journeys to Bardsey Island, and through the hills of Wales, to Mecca in Saudi Arabia, Haifa in Israel and along the whole pilgrimage route through France and Spain to Santiago de Compostela. One presenter talked about personally being drawn to the tracks of our ancestors, especially tied in with equinoxes, constellations and our countryside landscapes. Thus we saw pilgrimage through the eyes of the Christian, Pagan, Baha'i, and Muslim. (I hadn't realised that the Hajj had grown from Abraham's close relationship with his son Ishmael.)



The weekend was entitled 'The Outward Journey, the Inward Journey', but whereas the 'outward' element was very evident the 'inward' was much less so. One speaker said the inner aspect was what her journey was all about, though this may not always have been evident at the time. On reflection, it seemed to me that this problem epitomises the dilemma facing all who study the spiritual. By definition the spiritual is personal in a way that cannot easily be shared, even among members and friends of the Alister Hardy Society!

While time had been set aside to discuss our personal inner journeys, it soon passed leaving us yearning for more. Because the idea of the Gathering grew from AHSSSE members needing an opportunity to meet each other and to share our journeys and guidings, some suggested we should extend this event to three nights next time. This is what we are hoping to do.

Patricia Murphy, co-organiser, writes:

This was the sixth year of our gathering at Llantarnam, the second to which the national AHSSSE had been invited. Numbers are rising, a mixed blessing as places at Llantarnam



Abbey are limited, and this year's group of 19 filled the guest house (and cottage) to capacity. We will come to the Abbey next year, for the seventh year, then consider moving on if demand continues to grow. We want the Gathering to flourish, and welcome all who want to come, but the Abbey is so much part of what makes the weekend special that moving on to a larger venue will change the event on every level. A common theme among those who have sent in comments on the weekend is the special peace that pervades the Abbey...

The next theme suggested by this year's gathering was 'Crossing Boundaries', the name of Jonathan Robinson's newest publication, and we hope he will lead a service with one of the beautiful liturgies contained in his book during the gathering next year. The theme has, as usual, emerged from what has gone before, beginning with 'Mandala' when the first gathering was convened by the All Wales chair Roger Coward for local Welsh groups, who had all been working with this theme, to share their year's activities. It seems to me we are still, 6 years on, enfolded in this beautiful and universal image; we have worked our way

through Celtic myth and legend, involving enactments and exploration of the *Mabinogian*, the Arthurian legends and the search for the Grail, Celtic Spirituality then and now, and this year the inner and outer paths of Pilgrimage. We have progressed naturally from the Celtic fringes as the gathering has reached out beyond Wales to welcome all AHSSSE members.

This year was a truly multicultural and interfaith event, with several presentations on pilgrimage in Christianity, and in Islam, and the Ba’hai faith. There was an eclectic mix of spiritual paths and approaches among the participants, and had there been more time to share I am sure more stories of personal pilgrimage would have emerged. Feedback suggests strongly that people would like more time to share informally, and this has been taken on board by the organisers. There has also been considerable interest from those attending this year’s gathering in spending longer at the Abbey, so taking these two things into account we have booked an extra day. Next year’s Gathering will be from Thursday 23rd to Sunday 26th July. Thursday will be informal, as will Friday morning, a chance to enjoy the Abbey and grounds and relax and talk informally. There may be optional activities, but the weekend will be formally opened and introduced on Friday as usual.

Alan Underwood, co-organiser, writes:

Dear Pilgrims

The sun has now set on the Society’s Annual Gathering at Llantarnam Abbey. Those who were present are left with memories and reflections of the evening walk to Cwmbran Boating Lake and of a convivial weekend full of insights, warmth (both inner and outer!) and companionship. The common resolve was to make the pilgrimage back to Llantarnam again, next year, to explore the theme, tentatively set, of ‘crossing boundaries’.



Natalie:

Thank you all for being there, on that weekend in July at the beautiful Llantarnam Abbey. That weekend made me re-evaluate myself. Thank you. I remember the peace in the gardens, and our walk around the labyrinth, which seemed to have paths that moved randomly in discrete directions...



Katherine:

I can say that we felt very relaxed and well cared for, and it was rather a shock to get home and be thrown back into the hurly burly of dealing with people and life on an earthly level! It took a few days to get used to it, which shows I think how beautifully catered for we were. We loved the talk on Compostela, and we loved the gentle company of all who came.

Ken:

I enjoy weekends like these, they give me the chance to tune into the ‘spiritual connection’ within. I follow inner prompts – go there, do that – and sure enough something interesting happens – a chance meeting, an opportune moment for a photograph:



And last words from **John Franklin**:

What an enjoyable week-end! Once again I was riveted by the peace and tranquility of Llantarnam Abbey and the surrounding countryside – we were so fortunate in the weather there being beautifully warm and sunny. And, once again, excellent food for both body and spirit, and warm and empathetic company. It couldn't have been better.



The theme of Pilgrimage I thought most apt, and certainly stimulated much thought. I particularly enjoyed Jonathan Gaunt's account of his pilgrimage to Santiago da Compostela, which he presented with such enthusiasm and illustrated so well, with many photographs of the countryside, places and people met on the way, bringing the pilgrimage journey vividly to life. Having made the journey, myself, from Roncesvalles to Santiago, broadly following the pilgrim route, a number of years ago – but I have to say, by car as a tourist, rather than on foot as a pilgrim – Jonathan's talk had special resonance for me.

I also enjoyed the walk to the 'boating lake' nearby on Saturday evening – a beautiful spot – noting that it was fed by the river Lywd, or I should say the Afon Lwyd, which goes on to pass close by just to the north of the Abbey. Meeting Mary early Sunday morning packing the car for the journey home later that day, and mentioning the river, she took me to see it there, and I was struck by the sheer beauty of the scene: Llantarnam Abbey is most fortunate to be situated in such a lovely part of Wales.



Overall, I found the week-end both inspirational and relaxing – a happy combination: and it certainly caused me to pause and consider, and think more deeply of my life as a 'pilgrimage'...

Jonathan Robinson: see page 38 for his poem 'Apples' inspired by the beautiful orchard at Lantarnam.

Reports from the Local Groups

Chesterfield Group

Over the last few months we have heard from group member Rodney Ward on *The Lady in the Old Testament*. Rodney told us about the work of Margaret Barker, an independent Bible scholar who lives in Derby. She has developed her 'Temple Theology' over many years in around 20 books. We have also enjoyed watching and discussing a documentary on the *Egyptian Book of the Dead* and the controversial life of the Indiana Jones-style Egyptologist, E. A. Wallis Budge. We also saw an interesting documentary on the Tarot by Daniel Zuckerbrot of Reel Time Images. I recommend the latter for their well-made DVD documentaries on a variety of fascinating esoteric topics. Their website can be found at www.reeltimeimages.ca Recently, we had another group trip to sites of historical and spiritual interest including the sacred spring or Holy Well in Staffordshire known as the Egg Well, and the Bridestones, a Neolithic burial chamber in Cheshire.

Still to come this year is a documentary on Helena Blavatsky, founder of the Theosophical Society, and the first two parts of a DVD lecture series by Professor Andrew Newberg on 'neurotheology' – the neuroscience of religious experience. The first two lectures (approx. 30 minutes each) are titled: *A New Perspective on Ancient Questions* and *Why Do We Have a Spiritual Brain?* The entire series of 24 lectures is available from the Great Courses website at www.thegreatcourses.com I hope to review this lecture series in a later issue of *De Numine*.

There is currently no Chesterfield group programme for 2015 as I am considering how best to continue the group in a new format. Please watch this space for future updates. Alternatively, if you would like to take over the role of Chesterfield group organiser, please let me know; also, anyone interested in joining the group please contact me at the e-mail address below. The programme can be found on the AHSSSE website under 'Events', and on my website: www.esoteric-experience.org.uk

For any further info please contact me at mikerush@virginmedia.com or on 07518 544795.

Mike Rush

Midlands Group

Meetings continue to be well attended and 3 members joined the Society earlier this year. I apologise for the absence of a report in the Spring issue of *De Numine*, and consequently the extra length of this one.

August 16th, 2013. Rodney Reeves, 'Rumi and other Sufi poets'. The topic was introduced with a CD of Mevlevi dervish music, followed by an excerpt from a DVD of the dervishes whirling dance in Turkey. The group were interested to note that one of the dancers, in keeping with Rumi's early followers, was a woman. Rodney defined Sufism as the mystical tradition in Islam.

Sept 20th. The first in our series of meetings on the Divine Feminine. Rodney quoted Empedocles' statement that the Whole Man is androgynous [hermaphrodite], and how, to attain wholeness and thus become divine, the Male looks for the Female. In the discussion Tim expressed his belief that the Cosmos itself is feminine, and stressed the importance of aiming for balance in all things. Stella referred to 'women's intuition' and 'men's rationality' and the male view that only males were rational! She also referred to Yin and Yang as a constant ebb and flow of masculine and feminine energies and how there needs to be a balance for optimum health. Maria spoke of the tendency for men to bury their emotions, and stressed the importance of feelings. Sheelah mentioned the recent series 'Divine Women', and how modern society has subjugated the divine feminine in our patriarchal systems. Stella highlighted how even our concept of God has been influenced by language, e.g. 'Our Father ...', and Sheelah drew attention to the Hindu concept of Siva [male divine energy] and Shakti [female divine energy] and made a plea that in trying to reinstate the divine feminine we should not relinquish the divine masculine but see these as equal and complementary, not in competition.

Oct.11th, Guest Speaker Simon Romer, Faith leader for Birmingham in the Tibetan Buddhist Kogyi tradition, described his introduction to Buddhism through meditation as a student. He explained that Buddhism teaches that all beings have the potential for enlightenment, but the mental clouds obscuring our true nature need to be removed, and this cleansing is done by removing harm and suffering to other sentient beings, and promoting their happiness. He explained that meditation in Tibetan is called 'cultivation', and teachers speak of 'cultivating compassion'. Simon imparts wisdom with such a light touch, often using humour to make a profound point!

Nov.15th. *The Divine Feminine in the Indic Traditions* was introduced by Clement using Tibetan bowls and alto recorder. We chose a chronological presentation, Sheelah presenting first on Hinduism, and later on Sikhism, while Rodney covered the Ajivika, Jain and Buddhist traditions. Rodney's paper 'The Divine Feminine: An Interpretation' included references to woman's role in Ajivikism and Jainism, and he produced six original poems inspired by this material including one on the birth of Gosala in a cowshed [predating the N. T account of Christ' birth in a stable, by a few centuries]. He also gave copies of a paper listing the feminine references in Milarepa's songs, and considered that Tara, in Tibetan Buddhism, 'the Mother of All Mercy' made a link with Hinduism. Sheelah described the historical role of women poets, especially in the Bhakti movement, and the many women gurus and activists in modern India, and the role of women in Sikhism, citing some of the prayers in the Jap sahib.

Our December planning session succeeded for once in getting a programme agreed for the coming year!

Jan. 14th 2014. *The Divine Feminine in Sufi Poetry*. Rodney spoke on the works of Rabi'a, a renowned Sufi poet. He and Harry had put together a useful hand-out bearing a quote on the cover from Charles Upton's book, *Doorkeeper of the Heart; Versions of Rabi'a*: 'If Rumi is the Ocean, Rabi'a is the well. If Rumi has sheer ecstatic energy and compacted multidimensional meanings, Rabi'a has virgin clarity and undistracted focus.'

Feb. 21st. *The Divine Feminine in Judaism*. Sheelah spoke on the Judaic tradition. We began with recordings of songs from both Ashkenazi and Sephardic sources, a reading from the Song of Songs, and a modern poem, 'Prayer to the Shekinah'. The orthodox patriarchal stance of the Abrahamic faiths was noted, contrasting with the mystical tradition that displays a very different attitude. The Song of Songs uses very erotic imagery and is understood by Jewish mystics as an allegorical description of God's love for his people Israel, whereas the Christian interpretation is of Christ's love for his Church. The symbolism of the Star [or shield] of David was presented along with the use of the same image in Hindu, Jain, Buddhist and even Islamic traditions. The concept of the Shekinah as feminine, and how 'she' came to be identified as the spirit of God dwelling in the world and the individual soul was discussed, and also the welcoming of the Sabbath as a bride. Simon Schama had described Shekinah as the divine radiance flowing through all earthly things, and said that the goal of mystics was to melt their soul into the Shekinah.

March 21st. *The Divine Feminine in Christianity and Islam*

Rodney introduced the topic, ranging from the Ajivika legends of Gosala, the ancient Egyptian Isis and her son Horus, and on to the Gnostic gospels. By way of contrast he read a Wisdom poem from the Dead Sea Scrolls, 'The Seductress', which uses the metaphor of the harlot to warn of the attraction and danger in false doctrine. Then he discussed Mary in the New Testament, her formal recognition in 431AD as *Theotokos* the Mother of God, and her place in the Qur'an. He passed round a book on visions of the virgin Mary. In the discussion we considered the reawakening of the Divine Feminine in modern times.

April 18th. *Fifth anniversary of group*. This was a happy occasion as two of the group had become engaged! Our speaker was unable to attend, but the group were keen to meet, and 'go with the flow'.

May 16th. *The Tao of Neuroscience*, presented by Sheelah James. After a sound meditation from Clement with Tibetan bowls and a tenor recorder, the aim of this presentation, to attempt to draw parallels between ancient teachings and modern findings in neuroscience, was explained. Areas covered were mystical experience, the functions of the pineal gland, sleep

research and dreams, the cerebral hemispheres, and the autonomic nervous system. Modern relaxation techniques aimed at getting the parasympathetic nervous system to override the sympathetic parallel ancient meditation practices detailed in the Upanishads and many other texts.

June 20th. Skin Deep, presented by Denise Whitaker.

Denise considered the influence of the cosmetics industry and our society's pursuit of youthful appearance, and asked whether the use of cosmetics might be a substitute for spiritual wholeness. She quoted the Greek myth of Narcissus in love with his own reflection. The high demand for cosmetic surgery, and the numbers of people getting tattoos and/or piercings was highlighted, and the fact that most cultures throughout history have used cosmetics. Denise asked us 'what is beauty' and whether the pursuit of youthful looks represented a 'fight against death'. Concerns about animal testing of cosmetics, and about noxious ingredients in products were voiced during discussion.

During discussion Rodney quoted from Plato's 'Symposium' on beauty and how the various forms were reflecting spiritual beauty.

July 5th. Visit to the Peace Pagoda, organised by Eleanor Hewson

The Dhamma Talaka Peace Pagoda was built in 1998 near the Edgbaston reservoir, and its name translates as the reservoir of truth. The gold dome and the tranquil garden around the pagoda seem far removed from the busy city. A piece of the Berlin Wall was donated to the Pagoda.

Eleanor has studied with one of the monks, the Ven. Bhikkhu Nagasena, and she kindly arranged our visit, and for the Ven. Nagasena to speak to us. We were given a moving account of Buddha's life and teachings. Our special thanks to her, and to the Ven. Nagasena for a memorable meeting.

July 18th. The Shadows of the Shifting Sands and of the Monolith, subtitled 'the positive and negative aspects of both relativity and absolutism', presented by Stella Seaton-Sims, examined the tensions between absolutism and relativism, and how these affect our 'moral compass'. Stella provided a helpful handout for the topic and began with a recording of a song, 'A Statue in Tsarkoye Selo', words by Pushkin, expressing the belief that life goes on whatever happens. She asked Rodney to read Shelley's 'Ozymandias' in which an ancient broken statue, symbolic of a past power, remains although partially hidden in the shifting sands. Stella asked Maria to read a poem by Pasternak, in Russian, 'After the Storm', and we had an English version in the handout. Written in the aftermath of Stalin's death the poem suggests that betterment comes not as a result of revolution in society but revelations from the soul. In discussion we found many differing standpoints and yet a very loving tolerance! This seems to be a feature of this group, plus the ability to bring a wide range of ideas to the evening and find links, and to continue in lively debate until around midnight!

My grateful thanks to all the participants, and especially to Rodney as our scribe.

All the Friday evening meetings are 7pm for a 7.30pm start and are at 1 Woodcroft Close, Blackwell, near Bromsgrove, Worcs. B60 1DA.

In addition to the evening meetings we hope to continue our outings to sites of spiritual interest, and suggestions for these visits would be appreciated.

Please e-mail or phone if coming: sheelahjames@aol.com 0121 447 7727

Sheelah James

London Group

This year started off with a most interesting talk in February by Revd Feargus O'Connor on *Grounds for Belief in Life after Death*. In his talk Feargus traced the course of thoughts about the soul and its journey towards immortality as it touches on the greatest question of all: what is the purpose of this life? The question of the relation of the body, mind and soul has been explored in the Hindu Vedas, the Abrahamic religions and by the Greek philosophers and many systematic thinkers and teachers. He discussed opposing arguments put forward by Hume and others that grounds for an after-life are wishful thinking, are self-delusional and erroneous as one of those beliefs 'favoured by passions'. But he argued that the 'argument from desire' – that a belief in immortality is innate because we so desire – does at least have some idea of consistency of belief and truth.

He went on to discuss the question of the mind and brain connection, raising the question of consciousness and the brain and the extent to which the mental functions are dependent on the brain or independent. Quoting philosophers of religion leading up to John Hick, Richard Swinburne and Keith Ward, Feargus argued that a belief in non-Cartesian interactionist dualism may arguably be a convincing response to the materialist case. He held that 'even if it is established that consciousness and brain function are interdependent and constantly interact, it does not necessarily follow that the mind ceases to exist with the destruction of the brain, and went on to discuss arguments for the immortality of the soul. Feargus then looked at empirical evidence for an afterlife from psychical research, reviewing the findings of the SPR over the last 130 years on the question of the materialist world view. He went on to consider the evidence of Near Death Experiences (NDEs) supporting belief in life after death, and the philosophical arguments for this put forward by philosophers and theologians, such as John Hick, Paul Badham and Keith Ward. He mentioned Dr Fenwick as considering that NDEs show the capability of the 'mind and brain acting independently,' raising 'questions about the continuation of consciousness after death, whether there is indeed a spiritual component to human beings and whether this is a meaningful Universe with a purpose rather than a merely random one'.

Feargus concluded by stating his belief in the argument for Cosmic justice as being the most convincing, sharing with William James in the hope that 'an afterlife in which that gift of immortality may be an inalienable possession of all: one which we shall joyfully share with all our fellow creatures, in all worlds and all planes of existence'.

In April, Peggy Morgan came to speak to us on *Valuing our Heritage: The Place of RERU/RERC in The History of Research into Religious Experience*. She started by paying tribute to Edward Robinson whom, she said, she had known better than Sir Alister Hardy, and to David Hay, who followed Edward as Director of the Centre and was a living link right back to the very beginnings. She related how investigation into religious experience and spirituality, now very extensive, goes back to William James whose book *The Varieties of Religious Experience* was such a seminal and important work, spawning a whole range of diverse theological and non-theological disciplines, including AHRERC, and thereby the AHSSSE. She spoke of how the Centre has taken seriously the variety of disciplines/approaches needed for this area of investigation, witnessed in the series of occasional papers which have included contributions from sociologists such as Bryan Wilson and Anne Eyre, psychologists such as Michael Argyle, anthropologists such as Fiona Bowie, philosophers such as Chakravarti Ram Prasad and textual scholars such as Colin Thompson and Sue Hamilton and an ecologist, John Rodwell.

The roots of the emphasis on experience as a key category in religious and spiritual life, Peggy said, must go back to any spiritual persons who have emphasised direct relationship with God or whatever they consider to be divine – or 'leaving god language aside, to a figure like the Buddha who, it is claimed, found "the truth about the way things are".' She pointed

to histories of experience being well documented in books such as *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, and *The Religious Experience* by Ninian Smart for whom experience was seminal. She referred to William James again, as psychologist 'but also a medic and a philosopher we could say', who noted the capacity for those who are 'pessimists and live on the darker side of life' to have deep spiritual experiences. Peggy also referred to Rudolph Otto, mentioning as especially important his book, *Das Heilige (The Idea of the Holy)* 1917, saying that for him it is the 'The Holy' or 'The Sacred' which is the basis of all religious experience. Otto was well travelled and a particular impression was made on him by the Mevlevi (Whirling Dervishes). He was impressed by the silence of a Quaker meeting in Boston; by the great three faced head of Shiva in the caves at Elephanta in India and by the cantillation he heard in a Jewish Synagogue in Morocco, all evoking for him the Sacred, the Ineffable. Hardy made several references to him in his book, *The Spiritual Nature of Man*.

She went on to touch on Sir Alister the artist – and Edward Robinson's connection in this respect – and mentioned Hardy being also much stimulated in Oxford by the social anthropologists. He says: 'For years anthropologists have been collecting accounts of religious attitude, ideas and feelings from primitive people'. Peggy ended her excellent talk 'on a note of creativity and imagination' with a poem by Stephen Spender.

John Franklin

[*'Notes' of the talks, and a transcript of Peggy Morgan's talk, can be obtained from: John Franklin, tel: 0208 8584750. e-mail: johnfranklin35@hotmail.com.*]

South East Wales group

The Four Elements of Classical History

'Earth' presented by Alan Underwood on 19th March 2014

Alan spoke briefly about Empedocles, the Greek scientist and healer, and his 'Tetrasomia' setting out his theory of the 'Fourfold root of everything'. Earth was his theme, supported by a very revealing geological map of Wales.

He reminded us that our own bodies are constantly renewed by material taken from the earth and are returned to it on a daily basis not just death. There is therefore a great cycling of matter through both the biological and the geological spheres such that one cannot separate one from the other. We are exploiting it at our peril. Alan also brought along some intricate fossil leaves, pointing out that this indicated earth's memory at work.

'Air' presented by Mary Cook on 23rd June 2014

Mary reminded the group of the ancient Greek origin of the idea of four 'elements' before talking about the physical, chemical and biological attributes of air. It was relatively recent that the formation of air, and its gaseous components was recognised.

We take our first breath (air) and become alive, conscious, for – debatably – the first time, and finally, breath leaves the body when we die. It is not surprising therefore that in Arabic 'ruh' carries the multiple meanings of 'spirit' 'wind' and 'breath'. A very lively sharing session followed. One member shared with us her amazing experiences involving her personal researches, and Wind acting like a powerful Presence.

Dreams of flying are very common, but why? They are certainly not echoes from our daily lives. Three of us shared dreams of flying, one with a wonderfully vivid artistic rendition. One read us a poem he had recently written about breath, and air, relating to effects brought on by his asthma.

Trip to Trellech Well, 17th May 2014

Eleven of us met, two members joining us from Bristol, under blue skies for a delightful trip.

Although Trellech is reasonably local to most of us, the experience of visiting the 'virtuous' well, and the standing stones – some at quite acute angles – was new to us. The historical information displayed around the sites was much appreciated, as was the general presentation of the village sites, enhanced by recent wood carvings.



Mary Cook

WebNews

Mike's role as webmaster & Vice-Chair:

Hi folks!

As mentioned briefly at the AHSSSE Committee meeting on 1st May, here is a summary of my responsibilities as webmaster and Vice-Chair.

This year looks like being a very busy one for me so I feel I need to define what tasks I can take on for the AHSSSE.

- AHSSSE Chesterfield Group (currently meeting every 2 months but may be changing to quarterly study days in 2015).
- Website updates (but not providing technical advice or support, or reviewing or producing content).
- Attending AHSSSE Committee and ancillary meetings.
- AGM (providing it doesn't clash with my course again)
- Book reviews & articles for *De Numine* (where possible).
- Promotion and involvement with the RERC online database.
- Online forum administration.

And, of course, anything Andy needs assistance with as Chair.

Cheers!

Mike Rush, Vice-Chair AHSSSE
e-mail: mikerush@virginmedia.com

Where I have had to shorten Local Group reports for reasons of space, full reports will soon be available on the website. Look out for the link to 'Local Group Reports' on the home page. First to appear will be Midlands and S. E. Wales. Ed



Karen Asmuss and her husband David on their wedding day. Karen and David were married on May 3rd this year at St George's Anglican Church in Berlin. Karen reviews books for us regularly; her latest appears on page 50.



Sol Lucca Sartori, born June 20th 2014, a son for Penny Sartori and her husband. Penny says: 'He's keeping us very busy and it's fantastic having him in our lives.' Luckily Penny's book was published earlier this year, just before Sol Lucca arrived to take up all her time ... See review on page 43.



Remembering Friends



Baroness Edmee di Pauli: We were sorry to hear of the passing of Baroness Edmee di Pauli, a long-time member of the Society, who died on 11th July 2014. A cremation ceremony was held on 21 July at Mortlake Crematorium, Twickenham attended by relatives and friends. Edmee, who had been a friend of Sir George Trevelyan for many years, especially during the last 10 years of his life, was a remarkable lady with many interests: she was a Trustee of Silent Minute, a member of the Green Alliance, Patron of Wyse International and Centre for Crop Circle Studies, Advisor of Pathways to Peace and an International Advisor of the World Health Foundation for Development and Peace. She will be much missed.

We were very sorry to hear about the deaths of two of our members, Katrina Elizabeth Brook and Dr Jean Galbraith. Katrina, who died peacefully on the 9th May after a long and courageous journey with cancer, was a friend of Jean Galbraith, who sadly died a little earlier on 19th March. Jean, a former member of the Society and a doctor in General Practice, had three kundalini experiences which had had a considerable effect on her life and led to her remarkable gifts as a healer and clairvoyant. Both will be missed, and our condolences go to their families.

John Franklin



Andy Burns took this photo in the Cotswolds on a night when, he says, many storms hit the UK, and he was struck (sic) by the 'awesome power of nature'.

(He also says it is rare to catch lightning in a photograph; he has captured another two strikes, just visible.)



As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;
As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;
Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves—goes itself; myself it speaks and spells,
Crying What I do is me: for that I came.



Í say móre: the just man justices;
Keeps gráce: thát keeps all his/goings graces;
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is—
Christ—for Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men's faces.

Gerard Manley Hopkins

Apples

Held in the promise of a new awakening
The earth turns, forever turns,
Disclosing everything in its due season
Processed by time's passing
And the wonder of new beginnings.
A new season births into being
Fruit from the darkness of the womb of winter.
A bud, a flower, a seed of becoming;
Consequences from an infinite progression of causes
Reaching back into stellar immensity
And reaching forward into infinity
With roundness, texture, and subtlety of colour:
Trademarks of divine simplicity
Folded into each creature's destiny,
Unique expressions of love,
Moulded by silent words
And clothed in sweet music,
Deep music, God's music
Gathered into harvest
And sweet taste.



Jonathan Robinson

*In memory and gratitude for our time at Llantarnam Abbey,
where there were already lots of apples in the garden.*

Book Reviews

**Rupert Sheldrake, *The Science Delusion: Freeing The Spirit Of Enquiry*
London, Coronet, 2012. 392 pp. ISBN 978 1 444 72792 0 (hbk)**

Rupert Sheldrake is a biologist, author, and ambassador for a more holistic science. His previous publications include *A New Science of Life* (1981), *The Presence of the Past* (1988), *Seven Experiments That Could Change the World* (1994), *Dogs That Know When their Owners are Coming Home* (1999), and *The Sense of Being Stared At* (2003), amongst others. Most of these books build on Sheldrake's hypothesis of morphic resonance that is described in his first two books. *The Science Delusion* (2012) can be understood as a response to Richard Dawkins' book *The God Delusion* (2006) although it does not engage directly with Dawkins' arguments.

Sheldrake begins by establishing his own impressive scientific credentials. I was pleasantly surprised to find that he did some of the initial work on 'programmed cell death' or *apoptosis*. This is the mechanism inherent in cells that causes them to 'commit suicide' by breaking themselves down. It is a natural process that prevents runaway cell growth. My own final year project at university also investigated apoptosis and how this response could be triggered by a light-activated drug to destroy cancer cells. After establishing his scientific C.V. Sheldrake summarises what he sees as the ten dogmas of materialism. Briefly, these dogmas are that:

- nature is mechanical;
- matter and energy are conserved;
- nature's laws are fixed;
- matter is unconscious;
- nature is purposeless;
- all biological inheritance is material;
- memories are physical traces in brains;
- minds are confined to brains;
- psychic phenomena are illusory.

He then goes on to dedicate a chapter to the discussion of each of these dogmas in turn. Each chapter presents the history of the topic, arguments and evidence *contra* the dogma, questions for materialists, and a concise summary.

As mentioned above, *The Science Delusion* does not directly engage with Dawkins' *The God Delusion* (2006). Dawkins was specifically interested in testing the 'God Hypothesis', and in arguing against it based on his understanding of science. Surprisingly, Dawkins did not claim to be an atheist but an agnostic who leans toward 'strong atheism'; this, in theory at least, making him less dogmatic than he seems in practice. What *The Science Delusion* does make clear, and where it is in opposition to *The God Delusion*, is in the world of difference between Dawkins' paradigm and Sheldrake's: the former is often labelled 'reductionist' or 'materialist', whereas the latter is often referred to as 'holistic' or 'non-materialist' in direct contrast. Indeed, both authors seem to be arguing for their own particular paradigm.

In contrasting Dawkins and Sheldrake, the latter comes across as much more of a diplomat than does Dawkins. Sheldrake does not personally denigrate his opponents, but presents his arguments and evidence calmly and rationally. Although not without faults Dawkins does make a strong argument, but he can't seem to resist making *ad-hominem* attacks, such as calling some religious believers 'dyed-in-the-wool faith-heads'. Sheldrake is much more of a gentleman in this particular respect.

However, this does not necessarily mean that Sheldrake is correct, and his arguments can be challenged in a number of ways. The greatest problem I have with the hypothesis of morphic resonance is that it seems to be a disguised dualist position, which is what Sheldrake is striving to avoid. How does the brain interact with the hypothesised morphic field? He uses the analogy of a television set to explain how the brain does not produce the mind or memories, but rather how it tunes in to a field instead. Unfortunately, this analogy is misleading in a number of ways. Firstly, we already know the mechanism of how a television works in order to receive transmitted signals. The same cannot be said for the brain and a hypothetical mind-field. Secondly, the nature of the electromagnetic field can be functionally described using mathematical models, whereas the morphic field cannot. Thirdly, we can construct devices to detect and manipulate the electromagnetic field based on our mathematical and theoretical understanding of it, but this has not yet been demonstrated for the morphic field. Nevertheless, Sheldrake does raise pertinent questions about intriguing phenomena that do require an explanation, such as animals who sense when their owners are coming home, telephone telepathy, Near-Death Experiences, the sense of being stared at, and inedia*. In *The Science Delusion* Sheldrake discusses several scientific studies of his hypothesis, but unfortunately he does not respond to studies by other scientists that have failed to replicate his results, such as Colwell et al. (2000), and Wiseman et al. (1998). Replication, as I suspect Sheldrake would actually agree, is one of the most important elements of the scientific method.

Sheldrake identifies ten dogmas of the materialistic paradigm. However, these can all be inverted to identify ten dogmas of the non-materialistic paradigm. Doing this we find that these are:

- nature is more like a nested hierarchy with irreducible properties at each level;
- energy and matter are constantly created;
- nature has habits rather than laws;
- matter is ensouled;
- evolution is teleological;
- memory is collective;
- memories are non-physical;
- minds extend through time and space;
- psi phenomena are real.

Sheldrake makes no attempt to disguise the fact that these dogmas have their historical roots in ancient Greek, Mediaeval, and Renaissance concepts of nature. Rather he seems to be encouraging a return to them, in alliance with the explanatory power and methods of modern science.

Personally, I would have liked Sheldrake to concentrate more on the question of conflicting paradigms, rather than also using this book as an opportunity to re-present morphic resonance. My own view is that whilst *some* people do indeed subscribe to one or the other poles of the 'reductionist/holist' divide, this debate is largely irrelevant to the way *most* people, including the majority of scientists (who, believe it or not, are also people), actually live their daily lives. Even within science there are examples of people who are trying to make progress without falling into this stereotypical 'us' versus 'them' trap. Perpetuating this stereotype may well cause more harm than good as we strive to understand our world and our place within it. By depicting science as a religious creed that people subscribe to I fear that Sheldrake is continuing this unhelpful stereotype. Science itself is not a religion or way of life; it is a set of methods and an ever-changing body of knowledge. Having said that, I think that Sheldrake belongs to a growing body of scientists that do take a more inclusive or holistic approach to the study of the universe. He is in the uncomfortable position of trying to raise

awareness of an outdated materialist paradigm whilst, at the same time, being representative of a science that has moved beyond the intellectual restrictions of physicalism and behaviourism. Science, as Sheldrake sees it, and as I see it, can no longer be equated with materialism in its strict, historical sense. Although personally, judging by the plethora of accounts in the RERC archives, I doubt that the majority of people have ever really subscribed to strict materialism in the first place.

I agree with Sheldrake's overall aim to free the spirit of enquiry, and his belief that allegedly 'fringe' areas should be subject to scientific examination without prejudice. However, as Sheldrake recognises, this position raises practical and ethical questions. There are only limited resources and these have to be allocated on the perceived, expected, or likely benefits of any research. Is it ethical to invest in experiments to test whether dogs know when their owners are coming home when we desperately need cures for diseases such as AIDS, cancer, or Alzheimer's?

The Science Delusion is certainly a stimulating and thought-provoking book. Although not directly countering Dawkins, as the title might suggest, it does encourage us to examine our own paradigms and ask how they may be limiting or restricting us? Or indeed, whether we sometimes actually need such opposing paradigms to define ourselves, and who we are, within whichever worldview we adopt. Only by doing this can we then make an informed choice about which world to live within.

Reviewed by Michael J. Rush

* Inedia (Latin for 'fasting') or *breatharianism* is the belief that it is possible for a person to live without consuming food. (Wikipedia) <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inedia>

References

Colwell, J. et al. (2000). 'The Ability to Detect Unseen Staring: A Literature Review and Empirical Tests', *British Journal of Psychology*, 91, 1, 71-85.

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

Wiseman, R. et al. (1998). 'Can Animals Detect When Their Owners Are Returning Home? An Experimental Test of the "Psychic Pet" Phenomenon', *British Journal of Psychology*, 89, 3, 353-529.

FOA Lady Susan Glyn (see letter in Issue 56, page 39):

Dear Susan, you only had to ask ... Patricia

**Yen-zen Tsai (ed.), *Religious Experience in Contemporary Taiwan and China*
Chengchi University Press, 2013. (xx) 388 pp. ISBN 9789866475467 (pbk)**

Following the study of religious experience in China – published under the title, *Religious Experience in Contemporary China* by Professors Xinzhong Yao and Paul Badham, reviewed in *De Numine*, Autumn 2008 issue, No. 45, a further Global Project study was carried out, this looking into the nature of religious experience in Taiwan. The results are well-presented in an eminently readable book, *Religious Experience in Contemporary Taiwan and China*, edited by Yen-zen Tsai, with contributors including Hsing-Kuang Chao, Roger Finke, Shih-Ju Huang, Chen-yang Kao, Ping-yin Kuan, Cheng-yang Kao, Yi-jai Tsai, David Voas and Xinzhong Yao. The book, in analysing religious experience and religion in Taiwan, discusses comparisons of

the similarities and differences between Taiwan and China, which is particularly interesting as the two countries share much in religion, culture and history, whilst, as the book points out, now developing into two separate societies, following different political paths.

The book is the result of a three-year collective study of religious experience in contemporary Taiwan and China carried out between 2008 and 2011 based on data from the Religious Experience Survey in Taiwan (REST). It consists of thirteen chapters that are divided into two major parts. Part 1 comprises an opening chapter giving a profile of religion in contemporary Taiwan, with following chapters discussing the religious experience of seven major religious beliefs in Taiwan; these being folk religion, Buddhism, Daoism, I-Kuan Tao and Buddhismo-Daoism, Christianity, the 'non-religious', and Confucian culture, and ending with an examination of embodied modes of religious experience. Part 2 comprises essays on four themes; religion, religious experience and education; the relationship between change and religious affiliation; political conservatism and religious experience; and gender and religious experience in Taiwan. Overall, the book aims to give a systematic and coherent picture of religious experience and its significance in the two Chinese worlds. Finally, excellent appendices include information about the REST questionnaire, the questionnaires of religious experience in Taiwan, in English and in the Chinese original, together with extensive notes, bibliography and index.

In all, some 1,714 valid responses were obtained, this revealing a very high percentage of the population claiming they were religious (84.1% – as distinct from just 8.7% in China – with 15.4% saying they were 'non-religious'). The findings of the book reveal that, despite the very diverse religious groups, there is much syncretism in religious belief and spiritual experience. Whilst it is recorded that Buddhist religious experiences are often related to the power of the Buddha or Bodhisattva and karma, and those of Christians to the power of God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit or the Virgin Mary, the book points out that some beliefs and experiences are shared in common by adherents of virtually all the religions of Taiwan – such as the power of fate or fortune, and the power of *qi*¹. Of interest is the high percentage of Taiwanese having experiences of 'extraordinary powers' (fate or fortune, 54.8%, karma, 47.8%) with 27% having mystical 'sudden revelation or insight'. The study and breakdown of religious experiences into four 'types' is fascinating but does not allow for direct overall comparison with similar surveys in other countries. However, with regard to 'triggers' of religious experience, these are reported as being very similar to those mentioned in Marianne Rankin's book *An Introduction to Spiritual and Religious Experience*; but here they are classified as 'Occasions of Religious or Mystical Experience' – with the authors' proposing that these accounts of 'occasion' be considered under the concept of 'threshold', rather than 'triggers'.

Of particular interest is that the book contains, besides information on the cultural, historical, social and political background and detailed analysis of religious affiliation and experience, a number of actual accounts of religious experience drawn from the Taiwan questionnaire. Mention is made in the book of Sir Alister Hardy and the work of the AHRERC, and of particular relevance is the open-ended question, which asked interviewees to try and describe the mysterious or extraordinary experiences that have affected them most deeply. The Introduction opens with three accounts from this source, following, by way of illustration, two accounts drawn from Meg Maxwell and Verena Tschudin's book *Seeing the Invisible*. Each chapter in the first part of the book, dealing with the main areas of religious belief, opens with a selection of between six to ten accounts of religious experiences. In all, the book contains over seventy accounts, which give a strong flavour of the nature of these experiences, and enable comparisons to be made between Taiwanese and Western spiritual experiencing. It is to be hoped that these accounts might find their way into the AHRERC archive.

If there is a criticism of the book that might be made, it is that certain terms, such as *qi* and *fengshui*, are used frequently, but no description or definition is given of those terms; they are expected to be understood, which is fine for Taiwanese and Chinese readers, and those with an appropriate academic background. However, it leaves the lay reader somewhat lost and, with regard to '*qi*' and '*fengshui*'², the reviewer had to have resource to an appropriate dictionary. It would have been helpful if a glossary could have been included defining such terms, together with the names of the gods and their attributes mentioned in the book. This having been said, though, the book whilst presenting a very thorough and detailed academic analysis of religious experience in Taiwan, is also enjoyable to read – and is a most valuable addition to the growing body of knowledge on the subject.

Reviewed by John Franklin

1. *Qi* (also spelled *Chi* or *Ch'i*): a fundamental concept in Chinese philosophy and culture. referring to the energy flow or life force said to pervade all things
2. *Feng shui*: a philosophical system of harmonizing the human existence with the surrounding environment

A copy of this book will shortly be available in the Library at the UWTSD library.

May I remind AHSSSE members that they have reading and borrowing rights at the University Library. Ed.

Dr Penny Sartori, *The Wisdom of Near-Death Experiences: How understanding NDEs can help us Live more Fully*

London, Watkins, 2014. 236 pp. ISBN 978 1 78028 565 8. £10.99

In his Foreword to Penny Sartori's book, world renowned NDE cardiologist and pioneer in Near-Death Experience research, Dr Pim van Lommel, suggests that through listening to accounts of NDEs 'our ideas about life and death will change for ever.' He emphasises that the book is important for all of us as we will all one day face death ourselves: 'By reading this important book, with an open mind we are able to reap the benefits of the NDE without having to nearly die.' But *The Wisdom of Near-Death Experiences* is not just about NDEs and death, it is above all about life and how best to live it. The first quotation of the Introduction, by Morrie Schwartz, encapsulates this: '... Learn how to die and you learn how to live'.

Penny begins by telling of her experiences in the Intensive Care Unit where she worked as a nurse. This raised questions in her mind as to how the dying are treated in our hospitals. An encounter with a particular patient led to her deciding to undertake a prospective study of near-death experiences (NDEs) as a way of exploring dying and death in order to alleviate the suffering of patients at the end of their lives. The book draws on her 21 years of nursing experience, her doctoral research into NDEs with Professor Paul Badham and Dr Peter Fenwick, including a summary of her five-year prospective study as well as her reflections on all she has learned.

Penny establishes that NDEs are not a modern phenomenon; there are accounts from Plato onwards. However, they became well-known after the publication of Raymond Moody's *Life after Life* in 1975. In recent times, as resuscitation techniques have improved, more cases have been reported, and it is evident that such experiences can occur at any age and all over the world. Penny also considers NDEs in childhood and in a wide range of different cultures.

The reader is given a precise exposition of the different stages of an NDE, often illustrated with specific examples. Among the main components are: hearing that one has 'died'; having an Out of the Body Experience (OBE); the 'tunnel' experience; meeting deceased loved ones and/or a 'Being of Light'; a life review and returning to the body. The effects on the lives of those who have experienced NDE are explored. In most cases these effects are positive, but some people find ordinary life difficult after such a shattering experience, indeed many never talk about what happened although the experience remains vivid and important to them. However, as NDEs have become more widely accepted, more people have the confidence to speak out. The most common effect among those who have had an NDE is that they no longer fear death. Their values are frequently changed and they become less materialistic and more spiritually orientated, with a greater appreciation of life. Many feel that they have returned to life on earth for a specific purpose although they may be unsure as to what this might be. Some experience an increased sensitivity to light or enhanced psychic, intuitive or spiritual healing powers. Many feel a sense of the unity of everything in the universe and greater compassion for all.

Materialist physiological and psychological explanations for NDEs are considered, although none are found to cover all aspects of the experience. Hypoxia, anoxia and hypercarbia* are ruled out, as are the effects of drugs. Many objections to the acceptance of NDEs are based on the materialist assumption that consciousness is created by neurological processes, whereas NDEs seem to support the view that consciousness can be experienced outside the brain, that the brain mediates rather than creates consciousness, acting like a transmitter. It is this which makes NDEs at once controversial but also potentially ground-breaking. If consciousness can exist outside the brain, then some kind of survival after physical death would seem to be a possibility. End-of-Life Experiences and After-Death Communication also seem to support this view. This of course is what the great religions of the world have always taught, particularly in ancient texts and manuals of dying such as the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* and the *Ars Moriendi*. The NDE experience is in accord with such teachings and may well become a kind of modern guide to dying, much needed in our materialist culture, where death is so often ignored or even denied.

Kenneth Ring has shown that studying NDEs has positive effects on the students similar to those of actual NDEs. That is also the effect of reading this book. Lessons learned from the NDE are in line with the teachings of the major religions and the experience itself is in many ways similar to peak or mystical experiences.

Penny is to be congratulated on producing such a wise and eminently readable book. No wonder it shot to the top of the Amazon list before publication – after serialisation in a popular newspaper. It is good to know that there is such an appetite for the kind of work in which we in the Alister Hardy organisations are involved. The acceptance of NDEs into popular culture opens the door for greater understanding of other religious and spiritual experiences such as those in the RERC archive.

Reviewed by Marianne Rankin

* Anoxia refers to an absence of oxygen supply to an organ or tissue. Hypoxia is a reduction of oxygen supply to a tissue. Hypercarbia is an excess of carbon dioxide in the blood.
(<http://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/>)

Eben Alexander, *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife*
New York, Simon & Schuster; London, Piatkus, 2012, 208 pp. ISBN 978 0749958794

Most of the books on near-death experiences (NDEs) are written by authors who relate accounts given to them by other people. The books by Raymond Moody, Pim van Lommel and Michael Sabom are typical examples. This book, like that of Nanci Danison, is a first-hand account written by someone who has himself experienced an NDE.

Dr Eben Alexander is a neurosurgeon. He had his first material near-death experience as a parachute jumper when he nearly collided with another jumper. However, it was a coma produced by an attack of bacterial meningitis in 2008 that provoked something of the kind of mental images that are usually associated with spiritual NDEs. Many of the incidents common to NDE experiencers were missing, but this event still led him to conclude that 'our life does not end with the death of the body or the brain'.

The first couple of chapters of the book contain vivid descriptions – some of the symptoms of Alexander's condition when he was ill – not for more sensitive readers, perhaps. His recollections of the first period of his coma in another spiritual realm are related equally vividly – and are fascinating. The whole narrative is given more weight by the fact that Alexander is a scientist who started this experience with the usual reservations, if not scepticism, about the existence of the psychic realm. I found the details that Alexander describes of continuing discarnate existence more convincing than several others I have read, and the author himself says that science supports rather than contradicts the existence of spiritual reality. The personal details of his life that he includes get the reader more involved in the story – this is not some dispassionate scientific account of an experiment but a real-life experience of a living being. The account includes the personal events surrounding his emergence from coma.

Eben Alexander wrote this book with the conviction of the importance of unconditional love and the belief that mortal death is not the end of personal human existence. He believes that it is imperative that this is understood by a majority of people on the planet before our obsessive materialism drives humankind to extinction. He relates how he knew during his experience that he was forever part of the divine spiritual energy that he calls *Om*. He knows that the events and impressions he relates in this book are real – and he can distinguish them from the hallucinatory images he rambled about as he was recovering from his coma. During the coma, the attending physicians will attest to the fact that his conscious mind was dead.

There is a good Index and a further Reading List at the end of the book together with an interesting consideration of nine neurological hypotheses that might explain Dr Alexander's experiences, none of which satisfies him or his colleagues – which leaves us with his interpretation of the experience being a vision of 'heaven'.

Reviewed by Howard Jones

Patrick F. O'Connell (ed.) *Thomas Merton: Selected Essays*
Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2013. xviii 493pp. ISBN 978 1 62698 023 5 (hbk) £32.99

This volume offers thirty-three essays arranged chronologically. The editor concedes that 'there are numerous other very fine pieces that could have been selected. ... But it is hoped that the collection as presently constituted accomplishes its main purpose, to provide a representative and comprehensive anthology that accurately reflects the breadth and depth of Merton's work as an essayist'.

Thomas Merton (1915–68) was a Trappist monk in the Abbey of Gethsemani, Kentucky, who became known as one of the greatest spiritual writers of the twentieth century. Very well known books are, among others, his autobiographical *The Seven Storey Mountain* (1948) and *No Man Is an Island* (1955). I first encountered Merton in his book *The Silent Life* (1957) wherein he describes in the prologue what a monk is, and then at length describes the essence of the monastic life and the various forms of Western monasticism. In later years he would develop an increasing interest in Eastern religions, as is manifested in several books. Merton also wrote several journals that were subsequently collected in books, as well as letters and poetry. As the editor, Professor O'Connell, explains in his introduction, from 1960 onward about half the books Merton wrote were collections of essays, many of which had earlier appeared in lesser known periodicals. Merton's output was prodigious; in the last ten years of his life he published an average of eighteen articles per year.

In 'Day of a Stranger' (pp. 232–39 in this volume), dated May 1965 in its earliest version, he describes his day at a time when he had started to live part of the day in a hermitage. In this essay we can find a reflection of the various areas of interest in his essays. He tells us that he sleeps in the hermitage and is out of bed at two-fifteen in the morning to pray the Psalms, 'when the night is darkest and most silent'. He awaits the coming of dawn which is preceded by birdsong, and then starts the 'rituals' of his household tasks. 'What I wear is pants. What I do is live. How I pray is breathe. Who said Zen? Wash out your mouth if you said Zen. If you see a meditation going by, shoot it.' In the early morning he sets out for the monastery with his water bottle, rosary, and library book that is to be returned. He walks through the pine woods. He speaks about having seen the nuclear-armed plane fly low over him and considers that though living in the woods, 'like everyone else, I live in the shadow of the apocalyptic cherub'. In the monastery (where he is known by his monastic name, Fr. Louis) he joins in the choir office and performs his duty as novice master. He speaks to the novices about Eliot's *Little Gidding*. During the midday meal in the refectory a message from the Pope (John XXIII) is read wherein war is denounced – the bombing of civilians, reprisals on civilians and the torturing of prisoners. He is convinced that the Pope is not talking merely about Communists, but also about the American involvement in Vietnam; and he observes that the monks seem to know this as well. Merton considers that 'the monastic life as a whole is a hot medium. Hot words like "must," "ought," and "should." Communities are devoted to high definition projects: "making it all clear!" ... Saint Benedict saw that the best thing to do with the monastic life was to cool it, but today everybody is heating it up'. Soon afterwards he returns to his dwelling in the woods. After some daily tasks, he turns to writing in the heat of the day. He considers himself as participant in an ecological harmony and also in a mental ecology, 'a living balance of spirits in this corner of the woods. There is room here for many other songs besides those of birds'. He then lists numerous poets and religious writers of both east and west, ancient and modern, male and female, and reflects, 'It is good to choose the voices that will be heard in these woods, but they also choose themselves, and send themselves here to be present in this silence.' Towards the evening he hears a bell ring in the monastery; he eats bread and prays the Psalms. As the sun sets he sits in the back room of his cabin; hears the birds sing outside the window. 'I become surrounded once again by all the silent Tzu's and Fu's (men without office and without obligation). ... Meanwhile the metal cherub of the apocalypse passes over me in the clouds, treasuring its egg and its message.'

In this short autobiographical composition – to which I cannot here fully do justice – various strands are interwoven: existentialism, Zen, Christian tradition and faith, monasticism, a desire for monastic renewal, justice and peace, a profoundly Catholic sensibility, commitment to nonviolence, an interest in literature and poetry. His various essays typically develop and interlink these. In 'The Other Side of Despair' for example, he writes: 'Non-objective, elusive, concrete, dynamic, always in movement and always seeking to renew itself in the newness of

the present situation, genuine existentialism is, like Zen Buddhism and like apophatic Christian mysticism, hidden in life itself. It cannot be distilled out in verbal formulas.'

This book is a treasure house. It features a foreword by Patrick Hart, OCSO, and Professor O'Donnell has contributed an introduction on Merton the Essayist; each essay has an introduction by him. In the appendix all Merton's essays are listed chronologically with bibliographical information; and there is a good index. This volume is a most valuable complement to the previously published one-volume selections of Merton's journals, letters and poetry.

Reviewed by Dr Robert Govaerts

Origen, *On First Principles*

Notre Dame IN, Ave Maria Press, 2013. lxxxii 493 pp. isbn 978 0 87061 279 4 (pbk) £16.00

Astonishingly, until the appearance of this present edition, Origen's foundational masterpiece of Christian theology had been out of print for over a decade. The editors have reproduced G. W. Butterworth's standard 1936 translation, introduction and notes, but modified the presentation, thus making it more accessible to the modern reader.

On First Principles owes its survival to a fourth-century Latin translation by Rufinus of Aquileia. A purge of 'heretical' literature in Justinian's time virtually destroyed Origen's vast output. Some Greek fragments remained, mainly in the *Philocalia*, an anthology of Origen's texts compiled by Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nazianus, or as quotations in Jerome's letters, which led scholars to doubt Rufinus's reliability. Rufinus himself admitted in his preface that he had found it necessary, like his predecessors, to 'smooth over and emend the many statements likely to cause offence' so that a Latin reader would find in them 'nothing out of harmony with our faith.'

Consequently Butterworth divided pages into 'Greek' and 'Latin' columns wherever a comparable Greek fragment existed. The present editors have imitated him, says John Cavadini in his foreword, 'only where there is a substantial, continuous attestation of the text preserved in the *Philocalia*'. While undoubtedly making the text more user-friendly, their policy of consigning smaller Greek fragments to the notes at the back may cause the reader to overlook significant differences between Greek and Latin versions. For instance, in Book 1, Chapter 2 on page 27 Rufinus states: 'Our Saviour is therefore the image of the invisible God, the Father, being the truth, when considered in relation to the Father himself, and the image, when considered in relation to us, to whom he reveals the Father.' The Greek version on page 440 reads: 'The Son, who is the image of the invisible Father, is not the truth when compared with the Father; but in relation to us, who are unable to receive the truth of God almighty, he is a shadow and semblance of the truth.' Here I struggled to understand Rufinus but found the original lucid and compelling.

Modern scholars, says Cavadini, are less suspicious of Rufinus's reliability. I wish I could share their optimism. That concern apart, we owe an incalculable debt to Rufinus, and I welcome this new edition wholeheartedly.

On First Principles consists of four books, divided into chapters. Enumerating them all here would be impossible, but we find the essence of Origen's thought in the longest of them, Book 2, where in Chapter 4 he begins to develop his ideas on divine justice. Preliminary discussions have speculated on the nature of God, the Son, the Holy Spirit, and all rational creatures,

whether in heaven or on earth. The world's beginning and end, the reason for its existence and diversity, the permanence or otherwise of bodily nature, and the possible existence of other worlds before and after this one are also considered. Origen suggests that future worlds may be necessary 'for the correction and improvement of those who need it'.

In Book 2, Chapter 4 Origen demonstrates that the God of the law and the prophets and the Father of our Lord are one. One problem for doubters is the question of God's invisibility. John 1:18 states 'No man has seen God at any time', whereas Moses and his forebears claimed to have done so. Origen deals with this objection by equating 'seeing' with 'understanding'. Characteristically he rejects literal interpretations if they result in absurdities. When God is described as being subject to human emotions such as anger we should look for the spiritual meaning in such statements and try to understand them in a way that is worthy of God.

Chapter 5 tackles justice and illustrates Origen's use of logic and reason. Justice is a virtue. Virtue is good. Therefore justice must be goodness. The truth is that those who have sinned need severer remedies for their cure. When God slew the chosen men of Israel in the desert, 'then they sought him' (Ps. 78:34). Humankind's continued existence after death is evidently taken for granted.

In Chapter 6 Origen resolves the question of whether Christ has a soul susceptible like other souls to both good and evil. His argument is cogent. Christ's soul 'so chose to love righteousness as to cling to it unchangeably [...]; the result being that by firmness of purpose, immensity of affection and an inextinguishable warmth of love all susceptibility to change [...] was destroyed, and what formerly depended upon the will was by the influence of long custom changed into nature.' This suggests a process to which any soul might aspire, thus becoming Christ-like itself. But Origen admits that the incarnation and deity of Christ are difficult subjects and remains open to better interpretations, if backed by Scripture.

Finally, in Chapter 9, Origen explains why the world is diverse and unequal. Everyone is free to 'make progress through the imitation of God or to deteriorate through negligence'. But God accommodates these 'diverse vessels, souls or minds' into 'one house, in which there must be "not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and earth, and some unto honour and some unto dishonor". (2 Tm 2:20)'. 'Divine providence', says Origen, 'arranges all creatures individually in positions corresponding to the variations in their movements and the fixed purpose of their minds [...] nor will the happiness or unhappiness of anyone's birth, or any condition whatever that may fall to his lot, be supposed to be due to chance; nor will it be believed that there are different creators or souls that are diverse by nature.'

Origen interprets the Bible spiritually; he postulates souls' pre-existence, and declares predestination and blind chance to be inconsistent with divine justice. Materialists and fundamentalists will condemn him. But few can deny his keen intellect or the loving, patient, and reverential manner in which he illuminates every problem. Reading his book was a joy and an inspiration, and I expect it to be a continuing source of delight in years to come.

Reviewed by Marion Browne

Shirley du Boulay, *A Silent Melody, An Experience of Contemporary Spiritual Life*
London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2014. 228 pp. ISBN 978 0 232 53074 2 (hbk), £12.99.

This is a book to treasure. It looks beautiful, is a pleasure to hold and is an even better read. I couldn't put it down. The many accolades from well-known religious and spiritual figures are well deserved.

Shirley du Boulay, a respected biographer, has turned the spotlight on herself. She has given us an insight into her own life and spiritual exploration. Shirley's prose flows smoothly, carrying the reader along through all kinds of experiences and adventures. However, this is not just her personal story, it is also a reflection of how attitudes and understanding have changed during her lifetime. So it involves us all.

Through Shirley's eyes we see Britain in the forties, with its firmly established Church of England. Slowly she becomes aware of alternatives, with small steps towards Catholicism enticing her away from her roots. A constant undercurrent of spiritual restlessness was encouraged during the 1970s by her work as a producer of BBC religious programmes, first for radio and then television. As she says, she had a 'ringside seat' at the theatre of change.

Shirley discovered Transcendental Meditation, met the Maharishi – and then found herself on a train with the Beatles for their weekend in Wales with him. She was authorized to explore 'madness, mysticism and drugs' and later produced *The Light of Experience*, a series of moving interviews with people sharing experiences which had transformed their lives.

Writing biographies of Teresa of Avila, Desmond Tutu, Bede Griffiths and Abhishiktananda allowed her to delve into the depths of their spirituality and to consider various religious traditions and issues of interfaith and double-belonging.

Shirley herself explored pilgrimage, shamanic journeying, Zen and interfaith in India, and shares her experiences. She also recounts her love for John Harriott, the man who gave up the priesthood to marry her. Her subsequent conversion to the Catholic Church is described and then her heart-wrenching widowhood.

Of particular interest is her view that '... experience is the starting point of all good theology ... mystical experience ... can reach the heart of things in a way acquired knowledge cannot. ... And experience can change lives. We are, naturally enough, most influenced by our own experiences; nevertheless we can also be moved, even changed, by the experiences of others.' Those of us familiar with the RERC archive would surely agree with that. In similar vein, Shirley's book will affect her readers as they vicariously explore the rich pickings of her spiritual life and learn and grow from her experience.

This is a brave book to have written. It is a privilege to share Shirley's life. The underlying *leitmotiv*, that insistent theme in the sweep across time and cultures, is the understanding that we are 'essentially spiritual beings'. We are born with an awareness of another dimension of reality, sensed deep within and in the unity of all that surrounds us. This may be explored through spiritual practice, but as Meister Eckhart put it, 'There is nothing so like God as Silence.' We simply need to listen.

Reviewed by Marianne Rankin

Diarmuid O'Murchu, *In the Beginning was the Spirit: Science, Religion, and Indigenous Spirituality*

New York, Orbis Books, 2012. x 240 pp. isbn 978 1 57075 995 6 (pbk) £14.99

Diarmuid O'Murchu, a social psychologist and priest of the Sacred Heart Missionary Congregation has written quite extensively on themes related to faith, spirituality, religion and science, attempting to bridge the gaps between these subjects and inspire innovation in Christian understanding of these themes and of the Christian faith itself.

This book contains 14 chapters, 3 appendices, bibliography and a fair-sized index. It ranges in themes from modern physics, over world religions, indigenous religions and spirituality to Christianity and the Pentecostal Movement in particular. The connecting, central element is the Spirit – the 'Great Spirit' as the author terms it – and its actual and possible position within the examined concepts.

Chapter	1	Introduction / methodology
Chapters	2 – 6	Spirit in modern physics
Chapters	7 – 9	Spirit in World & Indigenous religions
Chapters	10 – 11	Spirit in Christianity
Chapter	12	Spirit in Pentecostalism
Chapters	13 – 14	Conclusions

All chapters are subdivided into 4 – 9 sections and at specific points O'Murchu includes a short paragraph entitled 'Pause for a Moment' – inviting a reflection on the previous section with a thought-provoking directive, stopping the reader from simply taking in what is given in favour of active reflection – an interesting idea.

The author proceeds to pull together a large number of theories and writings on the subjects of his chapters, be it from scientific/academic or independent writers, with detailed and precise citations and references – there are almost 10 pages of bibliography at the end of the book. He follows up the idea of the 'Great Spirit' as a unifying principle, the source of creation, underlying and inhabiting all, which if sought out is discernible in modern physics as much as in religion and spirituality, including Christian pneumatology. As a foundational and intrinsic part of creation, the Spirit should therefore be re-established in a much more central role, especially in Christianity, he argues. While documenting his arguments carefully with references, he covers a vast range of fields in a short space, thus necessarily only skimming the surface on much that he discusses. His bibliography, however, gives the reader a large selection of texts, academic and non-academic, to follow up and study in depth any part of the content of his book.

In his reflections about the position and interpretation of the Spirit in Christianity O'Murchu himself does go into more depth, aiming toward a new, more prominent role to be found for this central aspect of Christianity, drawing together new developments in pneumatology which are centred around the Spirit. At this point he introduces his main example: the expression of the Spirit through the Pentecostal Movement.

All through his writing an important interpretation of Spirit and spirituality is the near-equation of these to 'empowerment', and a definite concern with power and sexuality of the Spirit runs through the book. This seems to me, certainly, an important aspect to be considered and acknowledged, but his treatment in my view leads toward a one-sidedness which is at odds with the all-pervasive nature of Spirit he himself avows. His refreshingly unifying approach to the concept of the Spirit, which up to this point invited an expansive

view, inclusive and tolerant, suddenly collapses into a rather fundamentalist, power-oriented and separatist concept within the context of Pentecostalism. As an example for a charismatic and 'empowering' side of the Spirit, which he details in the preceding chapters, the Pentecostal Movement may be useful. However this form of religion is not really new to Christianity, and while the author does admit to its many pitfalls, and also points to some more open thinkers arising from this background, the sudden 'shrinking' of the aforementioned wide view into this limited example appears questionable. Why reduce the important idea of a unifying and inclusive principle to be found in the 'Great Spirit' to this one strand of Christianity? In retrospect the book suddenly seems poised to lead only to this outlook – on re-reading earlier sections they seem overburdened by a striving for power: 'empowerment' in a loud, explicit working of the Spirit which becomes limiting and exclusive, just as the Pentecostal Movement is on many levels.

In my personal view this cannot be the way forward as it is aggressive and exclusive. It makes me wonder how and why the author chose to overlook other expressions of the Spirit – for example the quiet, yet not to be underestimated spirit of Taizé? The 'skimming-and-dipping-into' as many areas as possible attitude of the first two thirds of the book does not prepare one for the sharp restriction at the end: that only so limited a 'new' creation of the working of the Spirit should be offered for consideration. This is an extreme example; adequate as it may be on some points, an indication at least of a different way would have been more inspiring in a book that otherwise seemed to promote inclusion.

O'Murchu tempers this unwelcome emphasis in his conclusions, leaning towards an ongoing process and development of which Pentecostalism may only be one, with scope for change – however, this aspect of the book raises some questions for me. O'Murchu describes himself at the outset as a 'non-academic intellectual' putting forward a set of his own approaches and beliefs (pp. 8-9, 2012) on which he founds his methodology. He suggests that this line of inquiry is labelled 'postmodern' by academia in a derogatory sense – yet, he makes extensive use of academic work; many degrees and studies have been involved with postmodernism for a long time, and in fact AHS is explicitly working on integrating just such concepts and aspects he advocates, for example in his sub-chapter 'Trust Experience' (pp 5-7, 2012). It seems strange to me that he ignores all these developments just as he seems to overlook other possibilities of the working of the Spirit in the world today beside the Pentecostal Movement.

I can recommend this book insofar as it offers a wide range of starting points for further studies and brings together fields which are central to the AHS endeavour in a small space. O'Murchu's way of raising awareness for the interconnectedness of all creation is inspiring. Where he really wants to lead, though, requires more thorough research in my opinion.

Reviewed by Karen Asmuss

**Carole M Cusack, *The Sacred Tree: Ancient and Medieval Manifestations*
Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Cambridge Scholars, 2011. xvi 200 pp. isbn 978 1 4438 2857 4 (hbk)**

In this engaging and scholarly study, Dr Cusack seeks to discover the image and substance of the Sacred Tree in the mythology and religion of many of the major European and Indian peoples, from remote antiquity to the later middle ages. In surveying this vast panorama of time and ethnicities, she takes as her *gnomon* the layers of tradition and myth that are found within the Indo-European tradition, as they have come down to us, and uses this body of material as a probe to unlock the underling strata of shared belief and practice around the Sacred Tree in those, and other, cultures.

The book is composed of an Introduction; 'Pagan and Christian Sacred Trees', six chapters; 'Methodology: The Meanings of Sacred Trees', 'Sacred Trees in the Ancient World: Origins, Oaks and Oracles', 'Sacred Trees in Ancient and Medieval Celtic Sources: Druids, Kings and Saints', 'Continental German Sacred Trees: Christianizing a Pagan Symbol', 'The Sacred Tree in Medieval Scandinavia: Judgment, Law and Fate', and a Conclusion; 'Sacred Trees and the Transformation of Meaning'. The volume is supplied with a comprehensive Bibliography and a relatively serviceable Index.

Dr Cusack begins with a thought-provoking discussion of the recent vandalism of the Glastonbury Thorn that grows in the Abbey's grounds. As many readers of this Journal will no doubt know, tradition has it that the Holy Thorn grew up from Joseph of Arimathea's staff which he drove into the ground at Wearyall Hill above the town. Dr Cusack reminds us that Oliver Cromwell's soldiers felled the tree during the Civil War, as it was to them a symbol and example of Roman Catholic idolatry. The current tree was regrown from cuttings secretly saved by the people of the town. The tree or *trees*, since Dr Cusack shows that there are in fact two Holy Thorns in the town of Glastonbury, are still venerated and loved by both Christians and Pagans today, and it is from the second thorn that a sprig is cut to present to the Monarch every Christmas. Deftly illustrating that the cult of the sacred tree is still with us, she next moves back in time, and attempts to discover some core elements in the Indo-European tradition that are fundamental to concepts of the Sacred Tree in that cultural and linguistic group.

The Sacred Tree as *axis mundi* ('hub' or 'axis' of the world) and as *imago mundi* (representation of the world) are two such fundamentals. Dr Cusack regularly expands the phrase *axis mundi* to include 'hub or axis of the *universe*', a meaning that stretches the etymology to breaking point, but that much of the evidence assembled here can bear if we take her examples of linked worlds (such as the nine supported by the world tree Yggdrasil in Scandinavian mythology) to mean 'universe'. Dr Cusack tells us: 'The *axis mundi* is a centre, a pole that runs through the multiple levels of the universe, linking heaven, earth and the underworld.' As *axis mundi* the sacred tree is, of course, central in any land or territory that has one; but because of this very centrality it also acts as a *gnomon*, or measuring pole. In this aspect, the sacred tree is a delineator both of sacred and secular space and subsequently has much to do with boundaries. Dr Cusack suggests that radiating from this central sacral liminal point comes the demarcation of secular space and land-holding within the territory, shown by the placement of wooden or stone pillars set up at appropriate locations. This intriguing idea may well be used with profit by those interested in the distribution of standing stones, from the Neolithic to the Early Medieval period, in the landscape of the British Isles. The tree as *imago mundi* is described by Dr Cusack as: '... a very ambitious and a seriously religiously profound conception.', and she goes on to show a basic equation of 'tree=human=world or cosmos' operating in Indo-European cultures, and that trees were frequently associated with the creation of the first human beings. She gives as examples passages from the *Völuspá* ('The Sybil's Prophecy') and the *Prose Edda* from Scandinavian and Icelandic texts, but also includes analogous material from the non-Indo-European Ainu people of the extreme north of Japan. She goes on to say:

A fascinating possible linguistic relationship, between the Greek *cosmos* (now signifying the physical world but originally signifying 'order' or 'pattern') and the Latin *quercus* (oak), may further reinforce this identity between the human, the tree and the universe.

Dr Cusack then sets out an admirably concise and focused résumé of the Indo-European cosmos with its interlocking heirophanies of deities, both male and female, priests, rulers, warriors, artisans and 'lay' populace. Constructive use is made by her of the scholarship of the last seventy-five years on this subject, ranging from Dumézil and Eliade in the earlier part

of the twentieth century to more recent commentators. Having thus laid out her table, Dr Cusack takes us on a fascinating tour of the societies, languages and cultures as set out in the chapter headings given above. Whilst laying out an eminently clear discussion of the complex relationship between the elements of practice and belief surrounding the sacred tree in the Greek, Latin, Celtic, Germanic and Scandinavian worlds, she treats us to many engrossing diversions along the way. To give but one instance: whilst discussing the role of the god of thunder and lightning and his relationship to the sacred tree, both in its forms as tree, and also as a steed or horse for the deity,* she makes use of a paper published in 1913, which shows that whereas the most common tree in the German woodlands sampled was the beech (73%, with the oak at 11%), the oaks in the study area were struck by lightning 310 times in sixteen years, whilst the beech trees were only struck 33 times. Do we see here the confluence of belief and empirical experience, lending credence to the idea that the god and the tree are indissoluble? The book is full of such thought provoking nuggets of information.

I have only two criticisms of this book; one minor, one slightly less so. Firstly, several examples of modern linguistic usage have crept into the text which can have the effect of damaging the meaning of a given sentence. For example, we are told on page 149 that 'After Óláfr's death in the battle of Stiklestad, his son Magnus (named *for* Charlemagne) continued the process of forced Christianization.' [my italics]. Does this mean what it says in that Óláfr saved Charlemagne the trouble of performing a naming ceremony, or that Magnus was named *after*, at least a part, of Charlemagne's name? Secondly, the book has its origins in Dr Cusack's research for her doctorate. As with the example given above, a gentle editorial hand could have smoothed some of the, thankfully relatively few, recondite passages for the digestion of the 'general reader'. Notwithstanding the above remarks, the book is, in my view, very readable.

A complete description of every theme in Dr Cusack's closely argued and deeply researched book is beyond the scope of this review, and of my abilities; but I hope that enough has been said to whet the appetite of readers from many disciplines, approaches and beliefs for them to want to engage with this pioneering study of the enduring Sacred Tree. Let us give Dr Cusack the final word, taken from the concluding paragraph of this fine, short book:

The future of humanity is inextricably linked to the future of trees. Myth asserts that trees and humans are created together, are mutually constitutive of the cosmos, and perish together at the end of time. It is not too much of a risk to hazard that science, in the long run, will provide a more prosaic set of data in less poetic language that nevertheless reinforce the same conclusion.

Reviewed by Jack Arnell

**The sacred tree is often seen or experienced as a steed that the god or semi-divine hero 'rides' between the worlds. Ed.*

Luke Eastwood, *The Druid's Primer*

Winchester, Moon Books, 2012. x 307 pp. isbn 976 1 84694 764 3 (pbk) £15.99

This book does exactly what its title describes – it would be a first point of call for anyone thinking about studying druidry seriously. The author makes it clear he does not go into any great depth for any topic; he points the reader to other books that have described detailed studies of each area and there is a good bibliography at the back of the book. If anyone is thinking about exploring the possibility of becoming a druid, this would be an excellent start. At the same time, it is a book that can be read by anyone who is simply curious or who is

interested in any of the particular topics covered in the book. I found much of the history of druidry and the stories of the gods and goddesses, the meanings of the trees and of the Ogham alphabet fascinating, even though I am not interested in becoming a druid. Some of the chapters have a great deal more detail than others and overall this gives the reader a good overview of druidry, both original and modern.

The author's descriptions of the history of the druids are very objective and it is obvious that druidry has changed significantly from what we believe was its origin. One gets the feeling that Eastwood regrets the passing of many aspects of druidry that have disappeared or been diluted by other beliefs over hundreds of years. In view of the fact that there is a foreword by the Chief of the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids, we must assume that the author has given a good overview of the practices and beliefs. He offers many of the different beliefs that have shaped the druid order, many of which can be conflicting but which have the same basis – respect and love for nature.

Eastwood includes a couple of visualisations that would be suitable for anyone – druid or not – and I believe engaging in these would be quite important in informing a decision about whether or not to follow the druid's path. Much of what is suggested as the ethos for being part of druidry is the same as the spiritual beliefs of many who have chosen to explore the spiritual path more fully during this lifetime. In this spiritual sense, despite the descriptions of clashes about various beliefs that helped to form the druid order, druidry comes across as essentially a gentle path and one which is the same as that for most of us who live our lives in a sensitive and spiritual way – in our respect for others and for the nature around us, the nature that is truly a part of us if we allow ourselves to believe this.

If I were looking for a group to which I could belong that would resonate with my own spiritual beliefs, druidry would certainly be high on the list. I have read other books on druidry but this one seems to be the most realistic, objective and interesting of them all. I would urge readers not to be put off by the title if they don't wish to become part of a druid order because it has a great deal of general information about myths and legends, trees and other parts of the natural world that make it a very interesting read.

Reviewed by Jenny Jones

**Elizabeth Scalia [the anchoress at Patheos.com], *Strange Gods: Unmasking the Idols in Everyday Life*
Notre Dame, IN, Ave Maria Press, 2013. (xiv) 168pp. isbn 978 1 59471 342 2 (pbk) £9.99**

This '*La Scalia*' opus casts a remarkable collection of our 'strange gods' into a mind-opening – and operatic – production of global significance! Despite the ostensibly Catholic message which results from her own faith, beliefs, and upbringing, this confessional script's undoubted honesty will surely resonate with everyone who can read between the lines and thereby be equally enthralled to recognise anew – perhaps as many, or even more of – one's own 'false gods', beyond those idols which Elizabeth casts before her readers.

As well as an introduction and a conclusion, there are ten chapters, which seem to echo and note the ten Commandments. There is no index; instead, six pages of notes provide all the necessary sources when taken in conjunction with the direct textual quotations from ecumenical, papal and biblical references given throughout. There is also a special section at

the end about the design on the book's cover – a 'church window', with panes of stained-glass icons which represent many of the idols we cherish at our – and others' – peril. Each chapter heading incorporates its own appropriate idol icon. And tellingly, 'Lizzie' (her 'bad Lizzie', self-nickname, at least in this book) reveals her own *bêtes noires* – especially her concluding 'My Dreadful Idol' – which was apparently created from the very writing of the book itself!

Although the graven image of the biblical golden calf casting is mentioned several times, particularly initially, it is clearly a mere analogy for how so many of us do tend to distort our priorities, and lives, away from a truly meaningful life balance and from the path we should really espouse. She illustrates how we constantly lose our way, submitting to our ego (the Idol of I), to our obsessions (the Idol of the Idea), to money (the Idol of Prosperity), to gadgets (the Idol of Technology), to 'fashion', facade, sex (the Idols of Coolness and Sex); also to the excessive concern with our own 'plans', and to a plethora of even more gods – or 'Super Idols' – for example by subverting language itself to create then employ them. Apart from such misuse and endowing a degree of nebulousness to, specifically, the words 'love' and 'peace', Elizabeth perceptively ascribes much wrongdoing (our having previously defined various '-isms') to the additional error of applying them, in turn, arbitrarily – usually unjustly – in order to label other people as being, that kind of, '-ist'. Thereby, all too often, we then subject them to further abuse. This needed to be stated, for, in short, we do so easily lose sight of 'God in others'... We in fact 'judge', forgetfully, conveniently, putting ourselves *before* God.

Whilst the Catholic emphasis, on the Bible, Jesus, and God, may not attract a general readership these days, there is nonetheless so very much here to reflect upon, if one is to be perfectly honest with oneself. The human condition in our troubled World is shown to be an empty, hollow, discontent caused mainly by our unthinking pursuit of such 'strange gods'. Here we are called to reassess our wayward tendencies and to reject the very persistent attitudes which actually produce most of our distress, and then conflict, between us.

Remember that this is essentially a *review*, rather than a *critique*. So, having thought about all that which has been included, it seems that it would be a rare critic, man or woman, who could genuinely surmount the obstacle, implicit in the text, which would appear to brook no criticism as being valid from anyone who has not eradicated his, or her, own idols – especially 'the Idol of I'.

Perhaps Ms Scalia's revelations are too immediate in the sense that once she has had time to fully assimilate the enormity of her new – and very recent – insights, she will surely have more to convey to us, later on. But obviously driven to produce the book *now*, as she has, or maybe not at all, if postponed, may have meant that what is thus explicitly missing, sadly, is how universally applicable to everyone, not only to Catholics, such novel thoughts are, irrespective of one's own set of beliefs. Certainly the book implies how, by correcting *ourselves*, we can yet be in time, and this must still be so vitally instrumental, for forging a viable, vital and urgent basis for the more humane, humble and holistic outlook we desperately need to successfully solve our global crises, free of 'idol' – and quite idle – distortions. *Then*, with open minds and hearts, that 'opera' overture, now benign, may at last begin.

More than refreshing, this is thought-provoking, salutary, material, but will *your* 'resident idols' ever countenance allowing you to peruse such a tome at home?

Reviewed by Eric Cook

Books Received for Review

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

May I repeat my suggestion that readers look at the Oxford University Press catalogue for theology and religion. It has a broad brief, covering spirituality, sociology, history and philosophy of religion, etc, etc. When I look at it I want to ask for far too many of the books on offer, but I also feel my choice alone may omit books that other people would really like to own and review. Website: www.oup.com/uk/religion Tel: 01536 452640 for catalogue. If you choose a book, let Jean Matthews know details and she will send for a review copy. (Ed.)

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| David W Baker (ed.) | <i>Biblical Faith and Other Religions: an Evangelical Assessment</i> | (Kregel, 2014) |
| Robert Lassale-Klein | <i>Blood and Ink: Ignacio Ellacuría, Jon Sobrino, and the Jesuit Martyrs of the University of Central America</i> | (Orbis, 2014) |
| Lucian Stone (ed.) | <i>Iranian Identity and Cosmopolitanism: Spheres of Belonging</i> | (Bloomsbury, 2014) |
| Beckford, Robert | <i>Documentary as Exorcism: Resisting the Bewitchment of Colonial Christianity</i> | (Bloomsbury, 2014) |
| Roger Haight | <i>Spirituality Seeking Theology</i> | (Orbis, 2014) |
| Chryssides, George D
& Geaves, Ron | <i>The Study of Religion: an Introduction to Key Ideas and Methods</i>
(2 nd Edition) | (Bloomsbury, 2014) |
| Stewart, Pamela J &
Strathern, Andrew | <i>Ritual: Key Concepts in Religion</i> | (Bloomsbury, 2014) |
| Charles, J Daryl (ed.) | <i>Reading Genesis 1-2: An Evangelical Conversation</i> | (Hendrickson, 2013) |
| Crockett, Kent | <i>Slaying Your Giants: Biblical Solutions to Everyday Problems</i> | (Hendrickson, 2013) |
| Fredrickson, David E | <i>Eros and the Christ: Longing and Envy in Paul's Christology</i> | (Fortress, 2013) |
| Habito, Ruben L F | <i>Zen and the Spiritual Exercises: Paths of Awakening and Transformation</i> | (Orbis, 2013) |
| Alex Tanous, D.D.
with Callum E. Cooper | <i>Conversations with Ghosts</i> | (White Crow, 2013) |
| Hanegraaff, Wouter J | <i>Western Esotericism: a Guide for the Perplexed</i> | (Bloomsbury, 2013) |
| Himes, Kenneth R | <i>Christianity and the Political Order: Conflict, Cooptation, and Cooperation</i> | (Orbis 2013) |
| Jonson, Jonas | <i>Wounded Visions: Unity, Justice, and Peace in the World Church after 1968</i> | (Eerdmans, 2013) |
| Mandair, Arvind-Pal
Singh | <i>Sikhism: a Guide for the Perplexed</i> | (Bloomsbury, 2013) |

Stewart, Robert B (ed.)	<i>Can Only One Religion be True: Paul Knitter & Harold Netland in Dialogue</i>	(Fortress, 2013)
Sullivan, Dick	<i>Aphrodite Rising: a Philosophy for our Time</i>	(Coracle, 2013)
Treston, Kevin	<i>Emergence for Life not Fall from Grace: making sense of the Jesus story in the light of evolution</i>	(Mosaic Press 2013)
Veneroso, Joseph R	<i>Honoring the Void: Meditations on the Meaning of Life</i>	(Orbis, 2013)
David E Fredrickson	<i>Eros and the Christ: Longing and Envy in Paul's Christology</i>	(Fortress, 2013)
Ruben L. F. Habito	<i>Zen and the Spiritual Exercises: Paths of Awakening and Transformation</i>	(Orbis, 2013)
Joyce Rupp	<i>The Cup of our Life: a guide to spiritual growth</i>	(Sorin, 2012)
Laurenti Magesa	<i>What is Not Sacred? African Spirituality</i>	(Orbis, 2013)
Callum E. Cooper	<i>Telephone Calls from the Dead</i>	(Tricorn, 2012)
Ched Myers & Matthew Colwell	<i>Our God is Undocumented: Biblical Faith and Immigrant Justice (US/Mexican border)</i>	(Orbis, 2012)

Programme of AHSSSE Events, 2014-2015

Wednesday 1st October 2014

3.00 pm AHSSSE London Group: Talk: *The Fifth Love*, by Dr Mark Fox.
 Venue: Essex Unitarian Church, 112 Palace Gardens Terrace, London, W8.
 Contact: John Franklin, e-mail: johnfranklin35@hotmail.com

Saturday 4th October 2014

10.30 am Alister Hardy Society for the Study of Spiritual Experience Open Day 2014:
 11.00 am Welcome and Introductions
 11.15 pm AHSSSE AGM (all welcome, but only members may vote)
 12.30 pm Lunch (bring packed lunch; tea/coffee provided)
 1.30 pm 2014 Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture by Prof Christopher Lewis
Religious Experience, Psychological Well-being and Culture,
 3.00 pm Short break
 3.15 pm Lecture: Sir Alister Hardy's A Cotswold Sketchbook revisited in Photographs,
 by Andrew Burns, Chair – AHSSSE
 4.30 pm Finish
 Venue: The Catholic Chaplaincy), Rose Place, St. Aldates, Oxford, OX1 1RD.
 Cost: £20; AHS members £16; students £5.
 Inquiries and bookings:
 Marianne Rankin 01684 772417 or 077140 32643; or e-mail: mariannerankin@icloud.com

Friday 17th October 2014

7.30 pm AHSSSE Midlands Group: Theme: *Telling the Beads; the Rosary in World Faith*
 Facilitator, Sheelah James
 Venue: 1 Woodcroft Close, Blackwell, Bromsgrove, B60 1DA
 Contact: Sheelah James, e-mail: sheelahjames@aol.com

Thursday 20th November 2014

- 3.00 pm AHSSSE London Group: Talk: *Trance Healing – with demonstration of healing or healing energy*, by Helen Jameson, Trance healer
Venue: Essex Unitarian Church, 112 Palace Gardens Terrace, London, W8
Contact: John Franklin, e-mail: johnfranklin35@hotmail.com

Friday 21st November 2014

- 7.30 pm AHSSSE Midlands Group: Talk: *Free Range Eggs* (mystical context – think ‘Cosmic egg?’), by Harry Houghton
Venue: 1 Woodcroft Close, Blackwell, Bromsgrove, B60 1DA
Contact: Sheelah James, e-mail: sheelahjames@aol.com

Friday 28th November 2014

- 7.30 pm AHS Chesterfield Group: Theme; *Madame Blavatsky* (DVD)
Venue: 11A Avenue Road, Whittington Moor, Chesterfield, S41 8TA
Contact: Mike Rush, e-mail: mikerush@virginmedia.com

Wednesday 10th December 2014

- 10.30 am AHSSSE South-East Wales Group: Discussion: *The Four Elements – Water...*
Venue: 12 Wood Close, Llanfrechfa, Cwmbran NP44 8UR
Contact: Mary Cook, tel: 07794 294432 – maryfrechfa@yahoo.co.uk

Sunday 14th December 2014

- 1.00 pm AHSSSE Midlands Group Social: Pre-Christmas bring-and-share vegetarian lunch, chat and to plan 2015 programme. Includes possible DVD *Jesus in India* or CD on spiritual theme from series, *Beyond Belief*
Venue: 1 Woodcroft Close, Blackwell, Bromsgrove, B60 1DA
Contact: Sheelah James, e-mail: sheelahjames@aol.com

Thursday 19th February 2015

- 3.00 pm AHSSSE London Group: Dialogue: *Interfaith and the Education of the Whole Person*. Speakers: Alan Rainer and Marianne Rankin
Venue: Essex Unitarian Church, 112 Palace Gardens Terrace, London, W8
Contact: John Franklin, e-mail: johnfranklin35@hotmail.com

Friday 20th February 2015

- 7.30 pm AHSSSE Midlands Group: Talk: *The Turin Shroud*, by Tim Houlding
Venue: 1 Woodcroft Close, Blackwell, Bromsgrove, B60 1DA
Contact: Sheelah James, e-mail: sheelahjames@aol.com

Thursday 19th March 2015

- 10.30 am AHSSSE South-East Wales Group: Talk: *Christ in Many Religions* by Mary Cook.
Venue: 12 Wood Close, Llanfrechfa, Cwmbran NP44 8UR
Contact: Mary Cook, tel: 07794 294432 – maryfrechfa@yahoo.co.uk

Friday 20th March 2015

- 7.30 pm AHSSSE Midlands Group: Talk, *The Black Madonna*, by Sheelah James;
Venue: 1 Woodcroft Close, Blackwell, Bromsgrove, B60 1DA
Contact: Sheelah James, e-mail: sheelahjames@aol.com

Friday 17th April 2015

7.30 pm AHSSSE Midlands Group: Talk, *Seeking the Light: How Travel Changed My Life*,
by Eleanor Hewson,
Venue: 1 Woodcroft Close, Blackwell, Bromsgrove, B60 1DA
Contact: Sheelah James, e-mail: sheelahjames@aol.com

Thursday 30th April 2015

3.00 pm AHSSSE London Group: Talk: *Journey to the Centre: The development of the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre at Glyndŵr University*, by
Professor Christopher Lewis
Venue: Essex Unitarian Church, 112 Palace Gardens Terrace, London, W8.
Contact: John Franklin, e-mail: johnfranklin35@hotmail.com

Thursday 30th April 2015

10.30 am AHSSSE South-East Wales Group: Outing – date and destination to be
confirmed
Contact: Mary Cook, tel: 07794 294432 – maryfrechfa@yahoo.co.uk

Friday 15th May 2015

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

Thursday 18th June 2015

10.30 am AHSSSE South-East Wales Group: Talk by Alan Underwood:
Science and Religion
Venue: 12 Wood Close, Llanfrechfa, Cwmbran NP44 8UR
Contact: Mary Cook, tel: 07794 294432 – maryfrechfa@yahoo.co.uk

Thursday 23rd to Sunday 26th July 2015

Annual Gathering at Llantarnam Abbey Theme: *Crossing Boundaries*
First day optional; formal programme begins Friday after lunch.
Details in Spring issue of De Numine
Contact: Mary Cook tel: 07794 294432 – maryfrechfa@yahoo.co.uk

Other Events

Saturday 4th October 2014

Churches Fellowship for Psychical & Spiritual Studies: *The Science Delusion*,
3.00 pm talk by Rupert Sheldrake about his new book.
(following the CFPSS's AGM, members only, at 1.30 pm)
Venue: The Westminster Quaker Meeting House, off St Martin's Lane, London.
Booking essential. Further details: General Secretary, Julian Drewett, Churches' Fellowship
for Psychical and Spiritual Studies, The Rural Workshop, South Road, North Somercotes,
Lincs., LN11 7PT. Tel/fax: 01507 358845 e-mail: gensec@churchesfellowship.co.uk

Monday 6th October 2014

World Congress of Faiths: Visit, and Annual Younghusband Lecture

6.00 pm Tour of the Fo Guang Shan Temple;

7.00 pm 2014 Younghusband Lecture: *The Cultivation of Good Relations with Other*, by the Abbess, Ven. Miao Shiang Shih

Venue: Temple Fo Guang Shan, 84 Margaret Street, London, W1W 8TD

Contact: Tony Rees e-mail: tony.rees@worldfaiths.org

Thursday 9th October 2014

6.35 pm Society for Psychical Research: Gwen Tate memorial Lecture, *Physical Mediumship Today: Investigation of the Felix Experimental Group*, by Professor Stephen Braude

Venue: Lecture Theatre, Kensington Central Library in Phillimore Walk, W8

Details: Tel 020 7937 8984. www.spr.ac.uk

Saturday 25th October 2014

10.00 am Society for Psychical Research: Study Day 68. Topic: *Reincarnation in the Western World*. Speakers: Matthew Colborne, Erlender Haroldsson, Robert McLuhan, Guy Lyon Playfair

Venue: St. Philip's Church, Earls Court Road, London, W8 6QH

Details: Tel 020 7937 8984. www.spr.ac.uk

Saturday 15th November 2014

10.00 am SMN Bristol Group: Theme: *The Dream of the Cosmos*. A day event with to Anne Baring – talks, followed by questions and discussion, including:

5.00 pm *The Great Mother and the Lunar Era; The Great Father and the Solar Era; Awakening to the Divine Feminine and the Soul; The Indwelling Spirit and the Great Work of Alchemy*. (Lunch and tea/coffee will be provided. AHSSSE members invited)

Venue: Colston's School, Colston Hill, Bristol, BS16 1BJ

[Cost: £22 for the day. Details/booking: Katherine Baines, e-mail: Katherine.baines@talktalk.net]

Friday 10th April to Sunday 12th April 2015

Scientific & Medical Network Mystics & Scientists Conference 38:

Harmony: Cosmos, Nature and Self. Speakers: Prof. Charles Jencks, Dr Lucy King, Satish Kumar, Chika Robertson, Prof. Paul Robertson, Prof. Jean-Philippe Uzan

Venue: Horsley Park, East Horsley, Surrey, KT24 6DT

Contact: Conference Administrator, Tel: 01608 652000. e-mail: Charla@scimednet.org

Monday 13th July to Thursday 16th July 2015

Modern Church in association with WCF: Annual Conference, Theme: *Seeking the Sacred: Christianity in dialogue with other religions and the world*. Featuring international speakers and actual dialogue between traditions

Venue: High Leigh Conference Centre, Hoddesdon, Herts

For further information: see www.modernchurch.org.uk and www.worldfaiths.org