

## CONTENTS

Editorial		3
Articles		
Western Spiritual Evolution	Dr Howard Jones	4
Spirituality and Religion	Dr Jeff Leonardi	6
Matters (problems) Arising	Mary Cook	9
Experience		
OBE Experience	Tanya Garland	11
Reports		
AHT News:		
Alister Hardy Trust: Update	Andrew Burns	14
Visit of the Supreme Primate Koken Monnyo Otani to the UK	Anne Veronica Watkins	14
Report from Directors of AHRERC Lampeter	Professor Bettina Schmidt	17
Report on Conference at the University of Winchester	Marianne Rankin	18
Reports from the Local Groups		19
Remembering Friends		
Christine Burns	John Franklin	25
	Patricia Murphy	26
Michael Garstang Hardy (1931-2016)	John Franklin	26
Letters to the Editor		27
Responses to the Perennial Question, Issue 60		29
Poems		
	Stevie Krayner	36
	Michael Shearer	37
Request for Dreams	Melinda Ziemer	37
Book Reviews		39
Books Received for Review		54
Programme of AHT and other Events 2016 - 17		56
Letter from Spain	Jean Matthews	59
Note from the Editor		60



PLEASE NOTE CURRENT ARRANGEMENTS  
FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO *DE NUMINE*

Please send all contributions to the Editor: [theotokos66@gmail.com](mailto:theotokos66@gmail.com)  
and copy to the Assistant Editor: [denumine@gmail.com](mailto:denumine@gmail.com)

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

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

*The Editor*

Photographs supplied by

Andy Burns  
Mary Cook  
Jean Matthews  
Marianne Rankin  
Bettina Schmidt  
Anne Watkins

Cartoon on page 3 is from *Private Eye*, 15 September 2016

## Editorial

I am sure our thoughts are with Andy Burns after the sad loss of his wife Christine in March this year. Those of us who knew Christine – I met her last year at Llantarnam – remember her as a charming and courageous woman. Andy is of course well known to most of us through his work for the Alister Hardy Society and Trust. After standing down as AHSSSE Chair, he has carried on as a vital member of the AHT administration throughout the recent changes, to the benefit of us all. Our sympathy goes out to him.

From Tanya Garland we have a description of her Out of Body experience which I found moving, and which vividly evoked the scene in spite of this having taken place several decades ago. The experience was presented by Tanya at the conference 'Is Heaven for Real?' (see page 18). Reading the details of her recall, it certainly seemed real to me. As Tanya's OBE was also an NDE – the nurses thought they had lost her – it has links to Penny Sartori's review of *The Way We Die Now*, which deals with death in hospital where, according to the author, the reality of the numinous for dying patients is still consistently ignored (page 53).

All three articles at the beginning of this issue are responses to Jonathan Robinson's article 'Religion or Spirituality?' in issue 60. The current debate began at the Llantarnam gathering last year, and I am delighted that it is still ongoing in the pages of *De Numine*. Another major theme in this issue is the nature, and impact on our lives, of spiritual experience, encapsulated in the two questions posed by John Franklin in issue 60, which produced a gratifying response. See the lively exchange in the letters section between John and his correspondents (pages 29-35) I always hoped *De Numine* would become a live forum for debate, and it is, on two fronts, in this issue.

The debate on spirituality and religion is still not without contradictions and controversy. For example, Dr Howard Jones states in his article that ritual and ceremony have 'nothing at all to do with spirituality'; Dr Jeff Leonardi quotes from Thomas Jansen: 'rituals can "work" for the participants almost independently of the belief systems they are based in' and relates this to his own experience. Mary Cook neatly trumps both learned gentlemen in her article 'Matters Arising'. She writes, of spiritual experience: 'The fundamental problem is that the "reality" one does know is not transferable to another individual. Even if one can be certain of one's own reality'.



*"I'm not religious, but I am spiritual. I believe in recent nonsense."*

The soul as a concept appears in Henry Houghton's letter to John Franklin, in Dr Jones review of *Seth Speaks*, and the review of Rupert Sheldrake's *Spirituality, a Guide for the Perplexed*. The soul used to be accepted without question, within religious belief, as an entity, but in view of the current emphasis on the more nebulous concept of spirituality, is it possible that 'Soul' is an old-fashioned word for an out-of-date concept? Maybe this is another subject for a debate on the letters pages, or material for an article or two ...

*Patricia Murphy*

## ARTICLES

*These three articles are all responses to 'Religion or Spirituality?', Jonathan Robinson's article in the Spring issue. (Ed.)*

### Western Spiritual Evolution

This article has been prompted by that in *De Numine* No. 60, page 5, by Jonathan Robinson, who poses the question 'Religion or Spirituality?' As I understand his viewpoint, he is encouraging us to embrace both, as the terms are now generally understood. As Robinson says, spirituality is to do with our internalised world-view and is an expression of our soul. I think to call it 'rampant individualism' at any stage is an exaggeration, though it certainly starts wholly with the individual. Religion on the other hand is an externalised expression of our beliefs or faith that we share with others. Robinson, perceptively, also makes the point that religion has negative connotations while 'spirituality assumes a positive connotation of authenticity and experience'.

The first point I would like to make is that in many cases I doubt if the two can co-exist, or are even compatible. Certainly when Sir Alister Hardy wrote *The Spiritual Nature of Man: A study of contemporary religious experience*, the two terms 'religious' and 'spiritual' were almost synonymous. The word 'spiritual' has now come to mean mystical or transcendent, and William James gives a succinct interpretation of what it is to have a mystical experience in 'The Varieties of Religious Experience'. He defined four criteria of mystical experiences: ineffability – 'more like states of feeling than like states of intellect'; noetic quality – 'insight into depths of truth'; transiency – 'mystical states cannot be sustained for long'; and passivity – 'the mystic feels as if his own will were in abeyance, and indeed sometimes as if he were held by a superior power'. He states further that they usually 'modify the inner life of the subject'. Those who have out-of-body or near-death or other psychic experiences provide qualifying examples – but these need have nothing at all to do with religion.

In contrast, Ninian Smart tells us what constitutes a religion: the rituals, the myths or fables of scripture, the doctrines, the personal experiences of the effects of prayer, the moral or ethical behaviour these inspire, the uplift derived from communal gatherings, and the reverence felt for sacred locations, both artificial and natural. The first three of these, which are essential defining characteristics of religion, have nothing at all to do with spirituality. As Robinson points out, world-wide communication has led to a significant increase in global consciousness (as reflected in books by Richard Bucke, Teilhard de Chardin, Gordon Lynch and others) so that adherents of proscriptive religions in the West have now become aware of the more spiritually inclusive religions of the East.

Which brings me to the second point I would like to make. Ever since the days of the seventeenth century Enlightenment, through the theory of evolution proposed by Darwin and Wallace, and into the Intelligent Design controversy of the twentieth century, the ideas of science and religion about deity, creation and other fundamental issues of belief have been considered incompatible. Now, following the development of quantum physics, the world

views of the scientist and the theologian can at last have some hope of finding common ground through the concept of the cosmic quantum spiritual force. But it is spirituality that blends with science and most emphatically not religion. It is encouraging to see some scientists (like Rupert Sheldrake and Ervin Laszlo) and theologians (John Shelby Spong and Diarmuid O'Murchu for example) moving in this direction. It is the rational and materialist energy that dominates in the world today, and if humankind is to survive we must surely learn to listen to and embrace our emotions or passions – or, as Jenny Jones has put it, heed much more the feminine rather than the masculine as a driving force.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who was both a scientist and a priest, envisaged that the diverse religious beliefs of humankind would gradually merge towards what he called the Omega Point. This was a unifying spiritual state for Man that he also described as the noosphere. This state implies rejection of the divisive man-made dogma of the various world religions in favour of a cohesive global spirituality. Such cohesive spirituality is often incompatible with religion.

Even before Teilhard, the Canadian psychiatrist Richard Maurice Bucke suggested that three kinds of consciousness could be defined that have evolved and developed through prehistory. First there was simple consciousness – possessed by animals in their search for food and shelter, which evolved into the self-consciousness that is found in Man – an awareness of ourselves as individuals. This has enabled the human mind to evolve into two distinguishable functions – the rational mind that interprets the input of the senses and the spiritual mind or soul that enables us to empathise with others. We have now reached the third stage, cosmic consciousness, that has given us a much greater awareness of the eternal and universal spiritual force that for some constitutes deity and which science tells us is the fundamental constituent of the material world we experience with our senses. Some scientists suggest that this consciousness even preceded the formation of the material world. This faculty allows us to participate in psychic communication with and through this Spirit or what psychiatrist Carl Jung called the collective unconscious. In this realm the individual soul lives on after mortal death to merge with the communal soul in the afterlife.

A spiritual deity underlies many of the principal religions of the East and is already at the heart of the most popular western religions – the Holy Spirit of Christianity, the Ruach Elohim or YHWH of Judaism and the *dhat* of Islam. Embracing an eternal and universal spiritual energy as the fundamental component and influence in the cosmos should be rationally and emotionally acceptable to scientists and religious adherents alike.

*Dr Howard Jones*

## **References**

Richard Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness: A study in the evolution of the human mind*, Innes and Sons, Philadelphia, 1905

Frieda Fordham, *An Introduction to Jung's Psychology*, Pelican, 1953

Alister Hardy, *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, Oxford University Press, 1979

William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Longmans, 1902; Penguin, 1982

Jenny Jones, *Healing with the Feminine Principle*, Fairhill Publishing, 2012

Ervin Laszlo and Anthony Peake, *The Immortal Mind: Science and the continuity of consciousness beyond the brain*, Inner Traditions, Rochester VT, 2014

Gordon Lynch, *The New Spirituality: An introduction to progressive belief in the twenty-first century*, I.B. Tauris, London, 2007

Diarmuid O'Murchu, *God in the Midst of Change*, Orbis, Maryknoll, NY, 2012

Trish Pfeiffer and John E. Mack, *Mind Before Matter*, O Books, Winchester, UK, 2007

Rupert Sheldrake, *The Presence of the Past*, William Collins (Fontana), 1988

Ninian Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1969; William Collins, Glasgow, 1986

Robert C. Solomon, *The Passions: Emotions and the meaning of life*, Hackett Publishing, Indianapolis, 1993.

John Shelby Spong, *Eternal Life*, HarperCollins, 2009

Anthony Stevens, *Jung: A very short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 1994

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, Collins, London, and Harper, New York, 1959

## Spirituality and Religion

Jonathan Robinson's article (*De Numine*, Spring 2016) and recent correspondence in *De Numine* have stimulated me to offer some thoughts on the theme of religion and spirituality. I am an Anglican priest, recently retired from full-time ministry after 27 years' service, and could perhaps therefore be expected to either uphold the value of formal worship, or conversely to have had enough of it! I am of the former persuasion, but as a result of experience, not contractual obligation.

I was the child of Christian but non-churchgoing parents and they chose not to have me baptised. My only childhood experience of religious worship was school assembly and R.E. When I was 15 a Roman Catholic friend, who had been at a church summer camp on Caldey Island the previous summer, suggested that we might go on retreat at the Cistercian Abbey there, and we did, for five days. The island, the abbey and its guesthouse, the guest master, Father Aidan, and the rhythm of life there, all made a real impression on me. On one morning I went to the church for an early service, and from the gallery watched the robed monks shuffle in to their stalls and perceived that they were as sleepy as I was. Then the Office began and I recognised the timelessness of their sleepy devotions.

I grew up in the '50s and '60s and Christian religion seemed pretty staid and lacking in vision to me, as it did to many of my generation. By contrast, 'eastern' religions seemed exotic and attractive. I travelled to India in 1974 seeking spiritual enlightenment and explored many paths, including Tibetan Buddhism and Sufism. At a conference at the Sufi community of Beshara in Wiltshire in 1975 I encountered one of the guest speakers, Father Andrew Glazewski, a Polish priest and spiritual healer. I was impressed by his teaching and personality and continued to visit him until his death. After undertaking two meditation

courses in the late 1970s at Samye Ling, the Tibetan Buddhist monastery in Scotland, I recognised that to make further progress I would have needed to make a real commitment, which would have included learning Tibetan.

This stage coincided with my undertaking counselling training and engaging with a profound process of psychological self-awareness and relational development. At Easter of 1979 I met my third Christian mentor, Brian Thorne of the University of East Anglia. His Christian spirituality was implicit but real to me, and my spiritual journey came into focus with the realisation that the person of Jesus Christ had always been present to me throughout my life. Despite my lack of formal engagement with Christian religion, Jesus was and always had been an ultimate source of peace and love for me. The Christian tradition was available to me without having to learn a different language, and by now I had learned that there were rich veins of mystical spirituality and contemplative practice to be found in the western, as well as eastern traditions.

I was baptised in our local Anglican church that year, and confirmed six months later. As can be the way with adult converts, I was on a fast track of Christian commitment and before long offered myself, and was accepted, for ordination training. I was ordained in 1988 and served for ten years as a parish priest, and a further 17 years as a specialist counselling adviser alongside continuing parish ministry, until my retirement two years ago.

All of this autobiographical material is intended as an introduction to what I want to say about the relationship between religion and spirituality. I should also remark that in making a Christian commitment, I have never lost my love and appreciation for the other religions and faith systems with which I have engaged. They were a very valuable part of my faith journey, and many still continue to be. I often have recourse to Buddhist teaching, for example, in speaking about contemplative prayer and compassionate relationships.

I referred above to my youthful impression that Christian religion seemed lacklustre in its approach to transcendent realities. I do believe that some (much?) worship in the 1950's and early 1960's could match this description. After the Second World War British society was keen to regain a sense of stability and order, and the churches probably reflected, and provided, this ambience. Respectability also seemed to be synonymous with Christian living, while the '60s saw an eruption among the young (who had not experienced the War, only its aftermath), of free and sometimes chaotic energies and lifestyles. By the '80s I had come to recognise the profound and subtle teachings, not just of Christ himself, but also of the Desert Fathers, the mediaeval mystics, and contemporary and near contemporary writers like Teilhard de Chardin, Henri Nouwen, Robert Llewelyn, W. H. Vanstone etc.

But the heart of my own Christian commitment consisted in prayer and the Eucharist, and this is where the domains of religion and spirituality meet for me, as well as in the outworking of faith in loving relationships. Individual or solitary prayer is immensely meaningful to me, but so is prayer, especially silent prayer, in groups or community. The Eucharist, or Holy Communion, is a sacred mystery which in principle invites and invokes the meeting of heaven and earth, God and humanness. I have been present at Eucharistic worship where the celebrant has seemed tired and lacklustre in his or her role, reeled off the

words seemingly on automatic pilot. Nor did the congregation participate as if heaven's gate were opened for them. When I was on a schedule of leading three services each Sunday morning, it was not always easy to sustain the devotion the service required. But in spite of these human limitations 'something' can still happen, for an individual or for the whole congregation.

You will have noticed that in writing about religion and spirituality, I am talking about my and others' *experience* (consistent with the ethos of the Alister Hardy Trust), not primarily beliefs or doctrines. In a sense this has been the trap for Western Christianity, that in seeking above all to achieve philosophical and theological clarity about belief, there has been the danger of an imbalance towards the intellect and a relative neglect of the heart and feelings and intuition. In these profoundly technocratic times this emphasis can leave us weakened in affirming the primacy of the spiritual. We are not sufficiently practised in asserting the value of the ineffable in the face of the dominance of materialism and empiricism. Many writers on religion and spirituality emphasise that spiritual experience is the bedrock of religion, and that believers need to re-experience some extent of the founder's spiritual experience, some of the time at least, and make it their own.

I was recently in conversation with someone who confessed that she had never found peace or a sense of the sacred in the Christian worship she had experienced in her childhood and youth; she has become a Buddhist. In the same conversation she acknowledged that she could believe in God when she beheld the beauty of the world, but its awful suffering prevented her believing. I felt a deep understanding of both these complaints. In response to the first, I shared some of the spiritual sense I have in worship and at other times; in relation to suffering, I confessed that earlier in my life I had been tempted to try to 'explain' how belief in a God who is love can be reconciled with suffering and evil in life. Now, I said, I can only try to hold the tension between these poles, wordlessly and painfully.

A more recent discovery for me, after all these years of leading and participating in formal Anglican worship, has been the value of just 'doing' worship, without extraneous thoughts or concern, and finding that the 'doing' generates the 'being', and in that sense is self-validating. This somewhat corresponds to a suggestion by Thomas Jansen, in a talk he recently gave at Lampeter on Chinese spirituality, that rituals can 'work' for the participants almost independently of the belief systems they are based in.

Religious systems and institutional religion can be so oppressive and harmful that there are times when I wonder whether Dawkins is right, that the world would be better without them (this despite my misgivings about rationalism that excludes spirituality, and totalitarian regimes which are secular). I frequently interact with persons who acknowledge that they are on a spiritual journey but without any faith commitment to a wider body or community. I find that I yearn for a way for diverse human beings to meet together to acknowledge and celebrate what spirituality means to each person, while respecting and valuing the way it is for each other, and without seeking to impose any one truth on others. In various discussion groups at person-centred counselling conferences I have found that this yearning can be met.

It seems to me that it is vital for the survival and thriving of the human race that we find ways of coming together to name and celebrate some kind of shared spirituality, rather than excluding spirituality from wider discourse, and thereby reducing and impoverishing our human and social natures. But how to acknowledge and celebrate 'my' truth without imposing it on others in a way that might be unwelcome to them? There's the challenge!

*Dr Jeff Leonardi.*

## **Matters (problems) Arising**

Go, go, go, said the bird. Human-kind cannot bear very much reality.  
(Introduction to chapter 22 of F. C. Happold's *Mysticism*)

### *Reality?*

The fundamental problem is that the 'reality' one does know is not transferable to another individual. Even if one can be certain of one's own reality.

The only thing that is really 'real' to each individual is that which each person has experienced for him/herself, and which, by definition, is unique knowledge – a problem indeed. The only things we feel confident to share are those things of the practical 'everyday' – things without controversy, and things that we each know the other will have had experience of – the weather, one's family's health and general news. What a dull, unproductive life it would be if we kept within those bounds!

### *Communication?*

And yet, within my experience, each word uttered is fraught. Even in practical everyday speech one will frequently be misunderstood. Behind our every utterance lies the background of our own experience, not only our individual life-experience, but that which surrounds us – family, culture, education, religion. This may be true more in the English language than in many others, due to our native tongue not actually being 'native' but an historical hybrid, making subtleties and deep meanings more expressible, yet also more prone to misinterpretation. Because I am aware that a listener's time-span is limited, I tend to try to put much into a small package: layers of meaning. The problem arising from this is that the surface of my thoughts is picked up, leaving the kernel untouched, except on rare occasions, when I find someone who is on the same wavelength. This is, unfortunately for me, rare! (I feel sure this is true to some extent for everybody).

### *Problems aside:*

There is nevertheless an underlying need to meet with and to share the life-changing experiences most of us have had, and in an atmosphere where we will not feel we are psychological misfits, or born with a 'vivid imagination'! Yet there is the underlying feeling that we cannot be sure that it is the *right* thing to do to admit to spiritual experience at all. It brings some people (AHT members in the main) to value the work and vision of Alister Hardy who I feel sure would strongly endorse the quotation from William Penn at the foot of this text.

*Our search must continue:*

Some of us will be embedded in the traditional churches, but many of us will not be. Some must have felt the time has come to expand their spiritual searches to encompass each opportunity – even whatever each day presents. One thing is certain; once there has been a life-expanding event of the spiritual dimension there is a need and indeed a drive to pursue the possibility of glancing again through the veil this world weaves, and to make our earthly selves ‘one’ with our spiritual selves. This seems to be an actual part of a Spiritual Ocean of Knowing and Love that Jesus calls the ‘Kingdom of Heaven’ (or ‘Spirit’, depending on the translation). See St Thomas’ gospel, in which this is a central theme. There might also be some inkling here as to ‘what it’s all about’ – John Franklin’s ultimate question.

*Talking about Christ:*

If only people would stop worrying about the historical elements that surround the person of Jesus, and concentrate on his teaching: Seek ye first the Kingdom of Heaven; love one another; pray in secret; the Kingdom of Heaven is within and around us ... and accept these as a way to live, then as Jesus said, ‘all (these) things shall be added unto you’. But we don’t. We argue about interpretation, about translation, about how the gospels differ. The church of Jesus is not *buildings* but *people*, yet as we have recently seen, that in itself is fraught to its very depth. A Muslim scholar who was speaking at a conference I attended some years ago said (in effect) that without the teachings of Jesus there would be no Islam. My sitar teacher in the 1960s said the same thing to me. Muslims and Christians share exactly the same religious roots, so why is this not recognised? The differences are embedded differences in cultures, climate, ethnicity; not in religion: And certainly not within the spiritual.

*Real illumination:*

The words of Jesus (Issa) alluded to above show that a ‘church’ is not fundamental to the pursuit of the Spiritual, though a supporting community could be helpful. Honestly speaking, despite every hope, I did not find spiritual guidance from any church – and only a little in the Society of Friends. There are to my knowledge, there and elsewhere, people trying very hard to provide such a guiding community. Yet the odds somehow seem against them. George Fox said, ‘my guide is within.’ This is the reality. The wee drop IS the ocean!

The humble, meek, merciful, pious and devout souls are everywhere of one religion; and when death has taken off the mask they will know one another, though the divers liveries they wear here makes them strangers.

(William Penn, 1693, *Quaker Faith and Practice*, Chapter 27, Verse 1)

The same has been said of mystics, and isn’t that *all* of us at heart?

*Mary Cook*



## EXPERIENCE

### Tanya Garland's OBE Experience on 7th February 1972

My OBE Experience happened during a very painful labour in a small hospital in Swanage, Dorset. When I arrived at the hospital, the nurse on duty did not believe I was in labour, and without examining me insisted I take a sleeping pill. She ignored my protests by saying if I was in labour the pill would not stop it, but if I wasn't, then we would all get a good night's sleep. Almost immediately, my waters broke and she rushed me into the small delivery room. After some hours, the labour pains became very intense and I asked for something for the pain but she said she could not give me anything as I had taken the sleeping pill and she could not mix the drugs. I mention this because some people explain away a NDE or OBE experience as drug induced, but I was given no other drugs.

Eventually I became exhausted and woozy. I felt as I had done when I was a child and had very nearly drowned. On that occasion, an undertow was pulling me down, I was unable to reach the surface of the sea and I just started to breathe water. A life-guard on the beach saw me go down and was able to reach me in time to save my life – but I always remembered what I called 'the swimmy' feeling, which was rather pleasant, before losing consciousness. In the delivery room, I now had the same feeling come over me. I thought to myself quite calmly, 'Oh. I must be dying.' I was not afraid at all, but I knew I was fading away and thought it was because of the pain. In fact later I was told that I was haemorrhaging.

Then I heard a voice say, 'Ask for help.' It did not say 'Ask your mother for help' and yet that is what I understood the meaning to be and I said, 'It is no good asking my mother for help. She is hundreds of miles away and anyway, she cannot help me in this situation.' It was a male voice and it repeated, 'Ask for help' and I pondered on it and thought, 'Oh it must mean the GREAT mother.' I was not a Christian or an active believer in any God; I had had no religious education at the request of my atheist parents, who demanded I was to be excluded from any school lessons of a religious kind. But I said out loud, '*Mamma Mia* (Mother of God). Help me' ... and I fully expected all the pain to stop. The next contraction started and I felt very indignant thinking, 'I have done as I was told so why is the pain coming again?', but then, at the peak of the contraction, the pain suddenly ceased. The pain was completely gone and I relaxed into the relief of having no more struggle. I was totally at peace and so grateful. I remember saying, 'Thank God. Thank God.'

Then I heard the midwife say, 'Mrs Dobbs. Mrs Dobbs. Open your legs.' So I opened my legs but she said again, 'Mrs Dobbs. Come on open your legs we have to get to the baby.' I said, 'I have opened my legs.' But she didn't hear me. I heard her say, 'I think we have lost her.' I said, 'No. I am alright.' But her voice changed and I became aware of the noise of clapping or what sounded like a slapping noise. I felt nothing but I began to wonder why she thought I hadn't opened my legs and I wondered 'Well, where are my legs?' I opened my eyes and saw the ceiling a couple of feet above my face. I saw the white square polyester ceiling tiles and when I looked to the place where my legs should be, I saw the wire of the light bulb. The bulb was exactly where my feet should have been. I wanted to know what had happened and wanted to find my legs, and so I leaned over onto the right side to look beneath me and could

only see the tops of the nurses' heads. I noticed the midwife's hair parting showed her hair colour had grown out and thought, she needs to dye her hair again. I saw another nurse was wheeling a very large cream-coloured machine into the room placing it beside the bed on which I had been, lying but I could not see my body. There was just a white, grey-like mist where my body should have been. Then I leaned over to look down on the left side, but I still could not see my body which I assumed was directly below me. I had the feeling that if I leant over too far, I might fall. I saw over the top of a green hospital screen which was at the foot of the delivery bed and I saw a nurse run round to dial from a telephone attached to the wall behind the screen. I thought, 'Oh. She is ringing the doctor.' I would not have had a view of this from where my body was lying.

Then I heard the voice again saying, 'You must go back.' I said, 'No. I am not going back to all that pain.' 'What about your baby?' and then, 'What about your other children?'

It was as though I was being reminded of another life. I had forgotten I was having a baby – forgotten I had children and was a wife and mother. It seemed a long, long, way away. All the roles of this life had gone. I was not a mother, sister, daughter or wife. I was just the essence of me and I had lost touch with that 'me' long ago. It was perhaps there when I was a child but the roles of this life had taken over and it was new to be 'me' and free of roles put on me, or roles I had taken on myself. I said, 'Oh I will have to go back.' And immediately, everything went black. A blackness I had not ever experienced before, and everything went quiet. I felt pushed down as though I had a heavy weight all over my body. I opened my eyes and again saw the room from the hospital bed and saw a young nurse was injecting me with something. The midwife said, 'I think she is coming round. Now Mrs Dobbs, see if you can open your legs.' My leg felt very, very heavy. For a little time it was too heavy to move as though I needed some time to adjust to the physical body again. But I did open my legs and the baby was delivered very quickly after this. There was no blood as I remember. I was clean but was told I had lost a litre and half of blood while 'out of it.' I was transferred to a bed and told to rest. A doctor arrived and asked me what had happened. It was about 2.30 am when he was called and he said he had been told that I had gone. I said, 'No. It was just too much pain.' And he told me we could talk later and that I must rest.

The experience I had was not like others I have heard about, where people go down a tunnel towards a light at the end, or see a dead friend, or meet a figure of love and light. I did not leave the hospital room. But yet the only way I could interpret what had happened was in terms of being a spirit or soul which left this body and which was the true me. How else could I see my surroundings and hear the nurse and talk while up on the ceiling when my physical body was thought to be dead – or at least unconscious.

So if what I thought had happened actually had happened, i.e. the real me had left this body, then this was something of immense importance; one day my physical body would die and at death I would live on for much longer in this newly experienced state of being. This time I had not been ready to leave my children or my commitment in this life on earth, but I wanted to be ready next time and I wanted to be prepared. I wanted to spend the time I had left in learning as much as I could about the spirit and spiritual things and growing into a more loving person. This was very urgent for me. I was left with the impression that the roles were not important but that love was what we are here for, what we are about.

I learnt that I was a spiritual being and that there was also a higher spiritual being and later I knew it to be a whole spiritual realm, which I was connected to spiritually. I understood I could communicate spiritually with this being or higher realm of knowledge, and love, and be guided by it while still on earth if I so desired, and that I was connected to others as we were all spiritual beings here.

\* \* \*

For a long time, I found it very hard picking up my life again as it had been before. It was hard to be the wife and mother I had thought was 'me' before this experience and for a long time I did not want to be here. My life was changed because I had changed. I read and studied spiritual books as much as I could, and eventually went back to university to read Theology and then trained as an RE teacher and taught world religions and morals and ethics. I taught in Oxfordshire schools for 20 years, and 3 years in an International School in Jerusalem which brought me into close contact with Muslims – most of my pupils were Palestinians. I also trained as a counsellor and worked in schools with refugee children and unaccompanied minors, but throughout my life since the OBE I have made a study of Religious and Spiritual first hand experiences, and have wanted to open up the subject to others who may not realise they are spiritual beings, as we all are.



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

Saturday 15th October 2016

Oxford Quaker Meeting House, St Giles, Oxford

- 10:30 Registration and Welcome
- 11.15 Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture: *Taming the Spirit? Religious Experience and the Unsettling of Belief*, delivered by Professor Jeff Astley.
- 14:00 Panel, with AHT members, chaired by Tristram Jenkins and led by Professor Jeff Astley, to consider: *What have we learned from our study of Religious and Spiritual Experience, and what we should be doing about it*

Cost: £20; AHT members £16; students £5

Enquiries and bookings: Marianne Rankin: [mariannerankin@icloud.com](mailto:mariannerankin@icloud.com) 07714 032643

## REPORTS

### AHT News

#### **Alister Hardy Trust: Update**

Following my final Chair's report (*De Numine*, Spring 2016) and some eight months since the Society was formally dissolved to become part of the Alister Hardy Trust, I thought it might be helpful to update members.

The day to day running of the Trust continues under the direction of the Chair, Professor Leslie Francis, and the board of Trustees. The local groups and the Journal continue as before and plans are well advanced for this year's Members' Day in Oxford (a leaflet and booking form for the event was sent out recently – and see above). The AGM will now be held separately in November, coinciding with a Trustees meeting in Birmingham. Members will be welcome to attend and have some voting rights in respect of the appointment of Trustees, and it is also anticipated that a postal voting system will be available for those unable to be present. Full details and formal notices will be sent out to all members in due course, but the date for this coming AGM is Monday 7th November 2016.

Finally I would remind members that any queries regarding membership, group activities or other matters can be referred to the **Membership and Activities Group [MAG]** which consists of myself, Marianne Rankin and Dr Sarah Boss; or to any other appropriate member listed on the inside front cover of the journal.

*Andrew Burns, AHT Membership and Activities Group*

#### **The visit of AHT Patron, Supreme Primate Koken Monnyo Otani to the UK in the Summer of 2015**



##### **The Reunion: An account of the visit of His Eminence, as experienced by his guide Anne Watkins**

It began in August 2015. I received a number of emails from 'old friends' announcing the visit to Britain of The Supreme Primate of Jodo Shinshu Buddhism, His Eminence Koken Otani. Staff at Lampeter will remember his visit to the Campus in 2003 and Alister Hardy Members may recall his attendance as a speaker at the Hoddeston Conference in 2004. I must confess that whilst delighted to be included in the circulation list, I was a little bewildered. Other addressees were eminent academics and I certainly didn't belong in that category!

It became clearer as the plans began to formalise. After the party's initial arrival in London, and welcome at Three Wheels Temple, the next stop would be my home town in Cardiff, so I

was the ideal candidate to meet the group in the Capital city of Wales. Correspondence continued and my role expanded; I was to be the guide for travel to official meetings, and to lead the sightseeing tours arranged.

The great day arrived: Sunday 6th September. I went to the General Station and at the platform noticed Patricia Murphy and her husband Louis Friedman. They were to board the train from which His Eminence would emerge and Patricia asked me to pass on her good wishes. The meeting of the delegation at the train station was difficult, not because of the practicalities, but because of the excitement of seeing so many faces from the past combined with the demands of protocol and polite greeting of esteemed dignitaries. His Eminence was accompanied by Professor Sato, Jo-san\*, and the Reverends Isago and Honda. I had to remind myself not to hug everyone!

Over lunch, a bowl of *cawl* (Welsh soup) to begin the cultural immersion, we caught up on years of news. I think it was then that His Eminence commented upon his regular receipt of the *De Numine* newsletter. It was the ideal opportunity to pass on the editor's warm regards.

Professor Paul Badham's neighbours must have been intrigued as five Japanese gentlemen descended upon his home. I imagine this was a special time for Paul and Linda, as they have a long connection with Jodo Shinshu Buddhism in Japan. I believe it was Paul's encounter with Professor Matsunaga, at a conference in Korea during the 1980s, which began the long and fruitful relationship between the University of Wales, RERC and Tokyo Higashi Honganji Jodo Shinshu.

The meeting and greeting successfully concluded, we were able to be tourists in Cardiff Bay and the City Centre. It was almost impossible for me to resist the temptation to have all my family members 'casually' in town to meet this group of people who have made such an important contribution to my ongoing study and my life.

The next engagement was in Chester. Another cultural experience! Every coach of the train was packed with well-behaved but very lively World Cup Rugby supporters. Fortunately we had reserved seats but that did not save us from the group of young, over-excited, new college students who swayed over us with every movement of the train. I was concerned about the Primate's extreme introduction to the British Public Transport System, yet could not help but smile at the thought of the giggling girls not having any idea of the important identity of the man they were tripping over.

Dr Wendy Dossett was waiting for us at Chester. It was lovely for me to see Wendy, and even nicer to witness her joy at being reunited with His Eminence, with whom she had worked on a number of occasions. However, it was his father, the 25th Successor of Shinran Shonin who generously invited first Wendy, then myself, to Tokyo Honganji to study. That had been a wonderful opportunity and experience for both of us – but not without its challenges. We had both been relatively young; without the language, or previous exposure to Asia, its religion, food, or customs. The guardian who steered us through the adventure, guided us through our study, advised us in our work, introduced us to Temple practice, assisted us in our travel, found us food that was recognisable etc., was Reverend Masahiro Jo, our 'Jo-san'. We had not seen him for 24 years. It really was a re-union. That evening Wendy and her husband

Professor John Stoner entertained us in fine style. During our reminiscing it transpired that Reverend Honda was the six-year-old boy who lived in the apartment above ours whilst we were resident at Tokyo Honganji.

Professor Sato was joined by Reverend Ishii from Three Wheels Temple in London for the meetings at Chester University, with the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, followed by a lunch in the University's Senate House with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Secretary. One of the Faculty, Professor Elaine Graham, is also Canon Theologian of Chester Cathedral. This enabled the guests to have an extra special tour of the magnificent structure, where preparations were underway to celebrate the 63-year reign of Queen Elizabeth II, already longer than that of Queen Victoria's. Business complete, I continued in my role as guide to the City Walls, Roman ruins and River Dee walk. This experience was enhanced by John Stoner who is an expert on rivers.

The plans to visit Liverpool the next day were causing me some anxiety; I do not 'know' Liverpool. His Eminence's confidence that English was my first language and that I was capable of asking questions did little to reassure me. Again John came to our rescue. Having been a student in Liverpool, he volunteered to lead the expedition in search of Beatle history. Being my era of music it was a fabulous treat to see the site of the Cavern Club, its reconstruction, and to visit the 'Beatles Story'. A quick visit to the two cathedrals in Hope Street and we were soon rushing back to London.

What a reunion it had been. For Wendy and me, there were our student memories of being taught by Paul Badham and then of living in Jodo Shinshu Temple, of life in Asakusa under the careful leadership of Jo-san. These were followed by recollections of our working lives with Paul at RERC, His Eminence's contribution to conferences, and to our understanding of Religious Experience in Pure Land Buddhism.

Personally, I am once again indebted to His Eminence; this time for his trust in my ability and for the many treats that accompanied the honour of being the tour guide. We hope that the meetings were beneficial for His Eminence and his team and we all look forward to continued associations in our various fields of work and research.

*Anne Veronica Watkins*



Jo-San, His Eminence, and Dr Wendy Dossett, on the city walls overlooking Chester Cathedral

\* ' ~ san ( ~さん ) ' is a title of respect added to a name. It can be used with both male and female names, and with either surnames or given names. <http://japanese.about.com/>

## RERC News

### **Report from Professor Bettina Schmidt and Alison Harding, Directors of the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre, Lampeter**

The activities of the RERC at Lampeter have increased in the last year. We have now two part-time members of staff in the RERC office and someone is in the office nearly every day. Thomas Pitchford looks after the published material, including the David Hay Collection bequeathed to the Trust on his death last year. Jonathan Andrews, who took up his post as archivist of the RERC Lampeter last December, looks after the accounts of religious and spiritual experiences and other unpublished material. He has already incorporated a good number of new accounts into the online database, including the Indian collection that was donated last year by Jonathan Robinson, gathered in India as part of the RERC international research project. Currently Jonathan Andrews is working on the collection of accounts on angels donated by Emma Heathcote-James. Tom and Jonathan are also looking after the other material in the Alister Hardy Trust archive. We hope that the material can be made available for researchers in the near future.

Tom has also helped with the publication of the first issue of the *Journal of the Study of Religious Experience* that was launched in December 2015. The first issue includes an article by Peggy Morgan, the former director of RERC, on Alister Hardy and William James. The second issue will include an article by June Boyce-Tilman, based on the Alister Hardy Memorial lecture she gave at the RERC conference at Lampeter in 2015. The Journal is open access and all articles can be downloaded from the website:

<http://rerc-journal.tsd.ac.uk/index.php/religiousexp/index>

Another addition to RERC staff at Lampeter is Revd Dr Jeff Leonardi, honorary research fellow at UWTSd in 2015. His work with RERC has included co-hosting with Professor Schmidt a new research seminar series 'Spirituality and Health'. During the academic year we had three sessions: on Personhood, Community and Mindfulness. Next year we will have a series of four seminars (see Events, page 57). Jeff was also involved in the organisation of the one-day conference on 3rd of July 2016 on the topic of Spirituality and Wellbeing. The keynote speaker was the Revd Canon Dr Joanna Collicutt. We were also addressed by Karl Jaspers, Lecturer in Psychology and Spirituality at Ripon College Cuddesdon, who spoke about 'Being mindful and Christian'. The PowerPoint presentations of all the speakers will be uploaded on the RERC website:

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

During the last few months the final work was completed on the book *The Study of Religious Experience – Methods and Approaches* (Ed. Bettina Schmidt, published by Equinox). The book is based on the papers delivered at the one-day RERC conference in 2014. Another recent publication is the book *Spirits and Trance in Brazil – An Anthropology of Religious Experience* by Bettina Schmidt (Bloomsbury, June 2016). [See Books for Review, page 55]

By the way, please check out the Facebook site of RERC. It is a great way to be informed about our activities. Since the launch of the site last year we have gained already 150 'likes'.  
<https://www.facebook.com/Alister.Hardy.RERC/>

### **RERC teaching and post graduate research activities**

The last student on the MA Religious Experience pathway, Val Duffy-Cross, has graduated with Distinction and has won a full scholarship at Newman University. She will continue her research on the spiritual experiences of children.

Students on the MA Study of Religions regularly opt for the module Religious Experience Today, which has also become also popular among MA students on other programmes within the Faculty of Humanities.

The first student on the MRes Religious Experience has successfully finished the taught part of the degree and moved on to the research part last October. Currently there are two students enrolled on part two of the MRes degree and three students accepted for part one. So far no one has received one of the Alister Hardy bursaries which are offered to students on the MRes Religious Experience; for those who wish to apply, see details at: <http://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/bursaries/>



## **Is Heaven For Real? The significant implications of Near-death Experiences:**

**Weekend Conference at the University of Winchester, 29 – 31 July 2016**

The weekend was hosted by the Institute for Theological Partnerships (ITP) in association with the Scientific and Medical Network. It offered a comprehensive presentation of NDE research and the implications for our understanding of consciousness, as well as linking NDEs to wider types of spiritual experience, and considering the implications for theology and other disciplines. The AHT was well represented with presentations by Tanya Garland, Marianne Rankin and Paul Badham.

Delegates were warmly welcomed by ITP Director Professor Lisa Isherwood and Dr Shirley Firth. Dr Firth's research interests were the inspiration for the conference. The theme of the conference unfolded naturally as one session followed another in a clear logical sequence. We were privileged to have world experts in their field with us, and they were happy to chat about their work during free time.

David Lorimer of the SMN began the conference with a wide-ranging overview, 'The NDE and the Universal Mind'. Dr Pim van Lommel, the author of *Consciousness Beyond Life, The Science of the Near-Death Experience*, gave a fascinating account of his research into NDEs and consciousness studies in his lecture 'Non-local Consciousness: A concept based on scientific studies on Near-Death Experience'. As a leading cardiologist in Holland, he undertook a pioneering longitudinal study of NDEs, which was published in *The Lancet* in 2001. The question was raised of how patients experience



enhanced consciousness during a cardiac arrest when breathing has ceased. This led to fundamental questions about the relationship between consciousness and brain function, on which Dr van Lommel continues to write, research and lecture.

Tanya Garland then gave a moving account of her own NDE while giving birth (see page 11), a personal perspective which was much appreciated. Dr Peter Fenwick, a neuro-psychiatrist and neuro-physiologist and co-author with his wife Elizabeth of *The Truth in the Light*, joined us on Skype to discuss 'End of Life Experiences: the contribution of NDE and end of life experiences to our views about the continuation of consciousness after death'. Marianne Rankin spoke on 'NDEs and Religious Experience', widening the subject to other types of experiences that also challenge the materialist mindset, drawing parallels with NDEs and giving an account of the work of Sir Alister Hardy, the AHT, the RERC and archive.

On the final day, the focus moved to NDEs and religious traditions: Professor Paul Badham, Emeritus Professor of Theology and Religious Studies UWTSD, gave a most interesting and comprehensive talk on 'The implications of NDEs and NDE research for Christians and Christian Theology'. Patrick Gaffney, co-editor of Sogyal Rinpoche's *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* offered a fascinating insight into 'Tibetan Buddhism and NDEs' and Dr Shirley Firth showed a film interview (available on YouTube) with Dr Rajiv Parti, a Hindu, whose life was transformed by his hellish NDE.

All sessions offered time for questions and there were plenty of opportunities for delegates to participate during smaller group discussions, led by the speakers. It was a most enjoyable conference, a gathering of people with similar interests and a wide range of views.

*Marianne Rankin, AHT Director of Communications*



## **Reports from the Local Groups**

### **London Group**

We started off 2016 in March with a talk by Paul Maiteny under the title, '*Nonduality and Earth: A Contemplation on Spiritual–Ecological Life*'. Since our numbers have fallen, this meeting was held in a new, more suitable venue – the King & Queen public house in Foley Street, Fitzrovia. After holding two events there we find it most congenial and quite economical. Nevertheless, with our declining numbers, we shall be reviewing the situation again at a further meeting of the London Group committee.

In his talk, Paul spoke about his views on spirituality and ecology. A former member of the Alister Hardy Society, he runs a private practice in psychotherapy and ecological counselling, and teaches psychotherapy research methods, sustainability and trans-personal eco-psychology. Since childhood, he said, he had been motivated by two questions – why are

humans so cruel to each other and other species, and what is the true contribution of humans to the ecosystem? He wondered whether the ecological crisis we have created on Earth is symptomatic of fragmentation and duality, caused by ignoring and denying our purpose and the perspective of prophets and mystics for thousands of years – the dimension articulated by Alister Hardy and Teilhard de Chardin. We have arrived at a point threatening potential ecological extinction, and need to develop and create a harmonious world, with common co-operative attitudes and action geared to overcoming the problems we face. He said that to assume this responsibility we need to discern deeper values, and suggested that we could evolve towards reducing the negative impact we are having on our ecosystem. through clues that may be found in religious traditions and scriptures.

Paul mentioned Alister Hardy being intrigued by the invisible web that connected everyone, and wondered, himself, about the purpose and place within the world of the human species. He believes we are here for a reason greater than mere survival, indicated by our capacity for developing cultural belief systems. For this reason, Paul said, he had studied anthropology, psychology and psychotherapy. Industrialisation and discovery of fossil fuels had opened up new cultural ideas, resulting in our potentially killing ourselves, not just in a vain attempt at physical survival, but in ‘keeping up with the Jones’, a bid for cultural survival. He came back to Hardy, suggesting, as an antidote to ‘survival of the fittest’, that we can develop more of a sense of oneness and relationship – of being part of a larger planetary body. Our survival must be emotional and spiritual, not just physical. Meaning and purpose are part of our evolution and also arise from it – there is a greater work to be done. Paul’s talk was followed by a most interesting discussion, after which he was warmly thanked for coming to speak to us.

On 1st August, Dave Henley, a former member of the Alister Hardy Society, spoke to us on *The Logic of Enlightenment*, based on his recent book of the same title. He talked about enlightenment – also referred to as ‘salvation’ or ‘redemption’ in other religious traditions – as a major pursuit of Zen Buddhism, where self-contradictory phrases such as ‘the sound of one hand clapping’ are used to spontaneously generate enlightenment. Questioning how this could work, he quoted Sartre on the dilemma of a student of his in 1940, about whether he should go and fight for the liberation of France, or stay to protect his mother. He contrasted this situation with the Buddha’s approach to mental conflict, recounting the parable of the man caught on a dangling vine between a pursuing tiger at the top and another tiger waiting at the bottom – the man suddenly notices a luscious strawberry near him. He questioned the significance of the strawberry, whether it signifies ‘enlightenment’, and wondered how this might help in this situation and for life in general.

He then told a joke and, questioning why we laughed, showed how the mechanism of a joke makes use of a different kind of understanding, illustrated in this case by the use of contradictions. Humour, and also poetry, he said, are ways in which we can understand apparent contradictions. He then returned to Sartre’s dilemma of the student, and suggested that what is needed to resolve the problem here is a mental process similar to that in grasping a joke. He suggested that this is the ideal mind-set, holding that our capacity to understand contradictions, by altering the meaning of the terms of which they are composed, is genuinely useful in daily decision-making. He further suggested that this is the kind of pragmatic transcendence of conflict that Buddhists call ‘enlightenment’ or finding the ‘Middle Way’.

Zen exercises are not just seeking to produce a tranquil state of mind for its own sake, but are seeking to awaken in us a realisation that we actually possess this innate ability.

*John Franklin*

*[A fuller account of Paul Maiteny's talk, and a transcript of Dave Henley's talk are available from John Franklin, price £1.50 (cheques payable to 'AHS London Group'), or can be sent free by e-mail.]*

The **London Group Committee** will meet on Thursday 17th November 2016 at the Essex Unitarian Church, to discuss the future of the Group and John Franklin's retirement as organiser. There will be further news in the Spring 2017 issue of *De Numine*.'

## **Oxford and Swindon Group**

On the first Saturday of each month, a small group of us have met to hear a talk and to have tea and coffee at Hill Top Road in Oxford. This gave us time for discussion and for sharing experiences. Others interested in spiritual things have been welcomed as well as members, and these mornings have been very successful in bringing people together, and for providing a space where religious and spiritual experiences can be talked about with like-minded people.

Each meeting has had a theme:

6th February: Tanya Garland gave a talk on the 12th Century abbess and mystic Hildegard of Bingen, with illustrations of her amazing illuminations, and we listened to some of her famous music.

5th March: Dora Grebenar gave a very interesting talk on Bruno Groening. We saw a short film of his life in Nazi Germany, with footage of his miraculous healings.

2nd April: Rhonda Riachi gave a talk on the *I Ching*, using it to answer and help with one of the group who had a dilemma. Rhonda demonstrated to us all just how fascinating this ancient oracle is and how it made us think.

7th May: Dr Xiao-yan gave a talk on the history and meaning behind *Tai Chi*. She demonstrated these classic and ancient movements in the garden, and gave us the Chinese teachings on how movement improves our health, and how different movements are believed to heal the body as well as give peace to the mind.

4th June: Tanya Garland introduced the 'variety of spiritual experiences' with examples from the Alister Hardy Archive, and described how Sir Alister had originally grouped the experiences in categories as they were received. The talk was followed by the sharing of personal, and often moving, experiences.

2nd July: the local group, which has now become one of familiar friends, met in the garden for a social get-together over a delicious bring-and-share lunch starting at the later time of 12 noon and extending well into the afternoon.

There was a break for August with no local group meeting but the program of meetings recommences in September [see Events, page 56].

These meetings are free and have so far taken place at 37 Hill Top Road, Oxford, (tel. 01865 244260). They will continue for as long as possible although the venue may change to Rhonda Riachi's house at 109 Bulan Road, Oxford (tel. 01865 765847), due to the house in Hill Top Road being sold.

*Tanya Garland*

## South East Wales Group

### Meeting 24th March 2015

The subject of the meeting was *Reincarnation*. We began with a DVD which, though not to our tastes regarding its style, proved to be a stimulus to a fascinating discussion. One member felt an affinity with the concept of reincarnation, thinking there could be a link between the gross fear she experiences when viewing an image of a ship out at sea and her last life. Another felt that the soul is a drop in a great ocean, each drop being like a hologram that contains the image of the Whole. This idea could explain that, rather than being reincarnated, we are picking up on another soul's (drop's) experiences when being regressed under hypnosis. Another idea mooted was that Time itself is an illusion, that the whole past, present and future are here *now*, and that both history and future events could be known in detail if and when we sensitise ourselves to – are in resonance with – that alternative point in time we are witnessing.



Members of the group at Kilpeck in June

When I was in my twenties (a very long time ago) I regressed myself during meditation, through my life to before birth (thinking that when people are regressed, the hypnotherapist guiding the regression seems to ignore the period *between* lives), and found myself being studied by a group of wise individuals considering whether to agree to my forthcoming birth! Forty years on, I came across the words 'birthing committee' (in the journal of the Quaker Fellowship for After-Life Studies), which would exactly tie in with what I witnessed.

We visited examples from Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet*:

A little while and my longing shall gather dust and form for another body.

A little while, a moment of rest upon the wind, and another woman shall bear me.

Joe Fisher in *The Case for Reincarnation* tells us that in the fifth century BC, the Greek philosopher Herodotus had pointed to the Egyptians as the first 'reincarnationists', while the Egyptians themselves acknowledged that the teaching came out of India.

In the first work of Christian systematic theology, Origen declared,

Every soul ... comes into this world strengthened by the victories or weakened by the defeats of its previous life. Its place in this world as a vessel appointed to honour or dishonour, is determined by its previous merits or demerits. Its work in this world determines its place in the world which is to follow this.' (*De Principiis*, 6th century AD)

So, we find that even Christian theologians of the 6th century were firmly of the belief that reincarnation was a fact. Within our group we were not so sure, though intrigued, but we were all of the opinion that as far as this life is concerned reincarnation is completely irrelevant – we are here to live this life!

*Recent items from the media which we shared:*

'Woman's Hour', Radio 4 the previous week:

A family struggling to cope with their 2-year-old girl, who was very distressed at being a girl. She rejected everything feminine – could she have been 'remembering' her last incarnation? She is now at school, & the family is very concerned about the prospect of her facing adolescence.

'Digging for Britain' 14th March 2016, BBC2

This showed digs in the vicinity of Stonehenge, one of which was a 14-year-old boy buried in the foetal position, indicating that this could have been in preparation for his next life. He had come from eastern Europe somewhere around 2000BC, possibly connected with a pilgrimage to Stonehenge – which used to be a temple much visited by people from around Europe. (This ties in – a member had read – with the ancient Druids' belief in reincarnation, which was so strong that a person holding debts could agree, on his death bed, to pay back what he owed in his next life!) So the Britons, from 2000BC, together with wider Europe, had a belief in reincarnation, unless that is they just thought they were preparing the boy for birth into the afterlife.

'In the footsteps of Judas', Good Friday, BBC 1, 9 am

From the mouth of Jesus speaking of Judas: 'It would have been better for him if he had not been born'. (Matthew 26 v 24) Surely this shows that the soul was regarded as pre-existent, and that this incarnation of Judas was an unfortunate one in relation to his immortal soul.



### **Outing to Kilpeck church 13<sup>th</sup> June 2016**

Yesterday was our fifth annual outing, and the only one not connected with water, though by chance there was a swamp in the church grounds, rain was in the offing and I was told of a stream flowing underneath the church! There existed a hermit's cell from the seventh century on the site, and older buildings, possibly megalithic, lie beneath the present structure which dates from the mid 12<sup>th</sup> century and has been altered very little since.

The carvings that abound are unique, some showing persons and animals, both real and mythological, with all manner of poses and expressions, but with little apparent



Christian reference. There is a very disgruntled angel playing the harp above the wonderfully ornate doorway, an *agnus dei* bearing a large Maltese cross, and on the east side of the church a similar carving where a horse has replaced the lamb, while the cross remains the same. There is a further Maltese cross inside the church. A connection with the Knights Templar came to mind. The phoenix, a symbol of the Eastern Church is to be seen on the entrance door.

The overall feeling I got was that the sculptor had been given a free hand to represent whatever took his fancy, and an observer would note his powers of observation, and love of local life, and his sense of humour. One of our group sat in meditation in balcony pews, and said afterwards that he would digest what he had gleaned over the next few days. I'm sure we all came away with much to digest.

To round off the outing, we were taken to a craft centre near Abergavenny, where we could admire paintings, prints and wood artwork while refreshing ourselves with tea and cake!

### **Meeting 23rd June 2016**

The subject was *Near-death Experiences*

'Hello, how are you today?'

'Near death!'

So began our afternoon! We returned to the DVD that we had used at the last meeting ('Death and the Paranormal'), this time using the section called 'Near-death Experiences'. That the case studies in the presentation were uniquely from white Christians was a disappointment, as we would like to have known something of experiences found elsewhere. Unfortunately I could not produce the notes I had from Dr Fenwick's lecture on NDEs given in Lampeter some years ago, which would have been much more informative and convincing. Two of the group felt they had experienced effects under anaesthetic which had affected their minds in various ways, and remained unconvinced that NDEs were providing links with an after-death reality.

I recalled, following our meeting, that I had come across what must have been a near-death experience in Plato's *Republic*. Towards the end, Plato uses the fictitious Er to relate his own experience of the afterlife after being in a coma for days. Er returned when on his own funeral pyre with the specific mission to inform many of the reality of the next life. What made me realise that Plato was describing something from his own experience was a consideration of his early life. He was a trained soldier, and was brought up during a period of war. Like Er, he very probably nearly met his doom in battle, and following his own revelation he was to renounce fighting to become a student in the school of Socrates.

A lesson from our strawberry treat: our strawberries are delicious *today* – they were unripe yesterday, tomorrow they will begin to deteriorate. We, too, only can really live in 'the Now'. We can remember some of our past, and look forward to the joys and sorrows of the morrow, but can only act in the present.

*Mary Cook*

# Remembering Friends

## Christine Burns



It is with great sadness that we record the death of Christine, the wife of Andy Burns, former Chair of the AHSSSE, who died after a 15 month battle with cancer on 15th March 2016, aged 56 years. The Funeral, billed as 'A celebration of her life', took place at St. Mark's Church, Regents Park, London, NW1 on the 8th April, attended by many friends and colleagues.

Both Christine and Andy served in the Metropolitan Police; Andy had just retired and Christine was shortly due to retire herself (their son is a serving police officer). The funeral was arranged by the Metropolitan Police and conducted by the Senior Chaplain and the local Parish Priest. Christine was given a Guard of Honour on the arrival of the hearse at the church – and, at its departure at the end of the funeral service, the hearse was escorted by police motor cycles and by two mounted police officers – and as a farewell salute, a Police helicopter appeared overhead as the cortège left.

I attended the service to represent the AHT and pay personal respects, together with my wife, who was also privileged to have met and known Christine. We were both greatly moved at the dignity and warmth of the occasion. Tributes were paid by Christine's two brothers, Bill and John Scott; Superintendent Emma Richards of the Metropolitan Police Service; and by Andy himself, who spoke most bravely and touchingly of Christine. The service included a fine contribution by the Metropolitan Police Male Voice Choir singing the anthem *Gwahoddiad* – 'I hear thy welcome voice' – by John Tudor Davies.

The service was followed by a private cremation attended by family, and a reception attended by many of Andy and Christine's friends and colleagues.

All in all, it was a splendid and most fitting occasion, a marvellous send-off for Christine, and our thoughts go out to her family and especially to Andy in his sad loss.

*John Franklin.*





### **From the Editor**

I met Christine Burns when she came to LLantarnam last year with Andy, who was presenting his recent photographs of the Cotswolds in parallel with Sir Alister's water colours of many years earlier. Christine spent much of the time resting in the idyllic cottage in the Abbey grounds, with John Franklin's wife Andrée (with whom I also had a delightful first meeting) as her companion. But Christine joined us for meals and for Andy's presentation, and I was so pleased I got this chance to meet her. It must have cost her so much effort to travel from London when she was so unwell, and I sincerely hope she felt it was worth this to experience the special peace and beauty of the Abbey.

I was moved to tears by the pictures of her funeral cortège (above); such a splendid farewell. She must have been much loved and respected by her colleagues in the Metropolitan Police Force.

*Patricia Murphy*

### **Michael Garstang Hardy (1931-2016)**

It is with great regret and sadness that we have to report the death of Michael Hardy, Sir Alister Hardy's son and former AHT Trustee, who died on the 16th June 2016 at the age of 84 – less than three weeks after the death of his wife, Anne, who passed away on the 28th May. Michael, after serious illness and recovering from pneumonia, was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer; he died peacefully in his sleep, in no pain, at the same hospice where his wife had passed away. Michael became a Trustee of the Religious Experience Research Centre at its inception in 1985 – and he remained on the Board of Trustees when it took over the executive running of AHRERC after the winding up of the former Advisory Research Council in 1994. He retired as Trustee in April 2002, his place being taken in November of that year by Jane Winship, a great-niece of Sir Alister Hardy, who remains a Trustee of the Alister Hardy Trust today.

In writing about Michael Hardy, I'm indebted for information kindly supplied by his family. He was born in 1931, went to school at Marlborough, and following his father's footsteps, went on to Exeter College, Oxford (1951-1953) where he read zoology, obtaining a 1st class degree before going on to take his MA a year later. After completing a period of National Service, he spent a year in Naples researching marine zoology at the *Stazione Zoologica* there – following which he took up a post as lecturer in zoology at the Department of Pure and Applied Zoology at Reading University. He remained at Reading for the rest of his career, making occasional visits to the West Indies, retiring as Senior Lecturer in 1997. His interests were primarily in mammals, fishes, and freshwater biology – and in organising excursions which allowed his students to share his enthusiasm and deep knowledge of those subjects, whether catching invertebrates in local rivers and lakes, bat-detecting in the University grounds or going on the annual field trip to Loch Lomond.

The funeral, attended only by the immediate family, was held at West Berkshire Crematorium at Thatcham, Newbury, on 28th June. Michael and Anne leave their daughter Julia, and son Nicholas, Sir Alister's grandchildren. Condolences were sent on behalf of the Trust to Belinda Farley, Michael's sister, Julia Latimer, Nicholas Hardy, and to all the Hardy family on receipt of the news of his death. A joint memorial service celebrating the lives of Michael and his wife Anne was held on Friday 9th September at St Mary the Virgin Anglican church, Silchester near Newbury, Berkshire, attended by 150 people. This was followed by tea at the Beech Hill Memorial Hall. John Franklin attended as representative of the AHT. It was, altogether, a most charming and moving occasion, and a lovely tribute to both Michael and Anne.

It was my pleasure and privilege to have known Michael from the time of my joining the RERC in August 1986; his gentle, dry humour and support of the Alister Hardy Society when it was formed, and for many years after, was much appreciated. Our thoughts and very best wishes go out to Nicholas, Julia and the family at this time – he will be greatly missed.

*John Franklin, Trustee, and former Hon. Secretary, AHSSSE*



## Letters to the Editor

*The conversation about religion and spirituality continues here in correspondence between Mary Cook and others. The first letter here is Mary's reply to that on page 34 of Issue no. 60. See also the articles in this issue. Ed.)*

Dear ...

I am distressed that you felt that I am hostile towards church-goers. Nothing could be further from the truth! My daughter is a very active and faithful member of her church – to my great comfort. Each of us humans comes from 'a different place' so is on a unique journey. I am not hostile to anybody, nor have I ever been. So yours was a grossly unfair statement.

The statement 'Church gets in the way' was a suggestion, a comment, on the general rule found during the research mentioned. (Perhaps I should have prefixed it with the words 'Could it be that ...?') What follows from John Keeble's book [*This Unnamed Something*] is what my statement was also referring *forward* to. I used it as a link between two study materials. It was a cool, passionless interpretation of my reading. I tend to be a bit provoking and abrupt. Hence my original wording and the position of the severe short sentence in question. Having said that, having experienced a life changing – if that's possible at the age of 9 – experience, I began to go to church, though my parents didn't. I was looking for guidance there, but found none.

Nobody before has seen me as intolerant. Just the diametrical opposite in fact. In a short letter to the editor, things that are very involved and multifaceted may come out as 'blanket statements', but given space to write a thesis, you would see too, that I do not think that way.

In spite of being somewhat dyslexic and a very slow reader, I set myself the task aged 12 of reading the Bible from beginning to end. This didn't particularly help. The teachings of Jesus that had sparked my childhood search were reinforced, that was all. I was sickened by much of the Old Testament. It was at the end of this time of deep prayer that I had my Spiritual Experience. Though very much grounded in Christ's teaching, I found myself steered away from the physical church.

During my searches I have come across many deeply spiritual people, some of whom began their searches within their faiths and churches, but few had continued within their church background.

I am very glad that you are secure in your faith, but please, as a member of the AHT, read John Keeble's book!

Faithfully,

*Mary Cook*

Dear Mary,

I'm sorry that you were offended by my letter. But I was offended by yours, and reacted accordingly.

I don't go to church myself, and personally don't like most of what the Church has done to the teachings of Jesus (which I find true and inspiring). However, I respect the fact that many people find it comforting, encouraging and inspiring. When I read your letter I got the firm impression that you didn't respect this.

I would rather not give you my name and address, since we have met on occasion, and I was offended by what you wrote, and not by you.

*Name & address supplied*

Dear Editor,

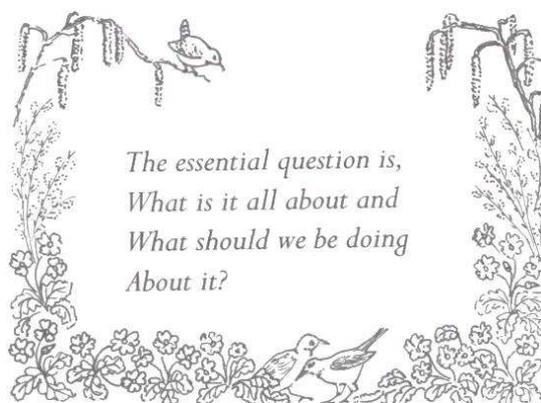
Like the anonymous correspondent in your last issue, I was astonished by Mary Cooke's letter in *De Numine* 59, with its apparently complacent conviction of spiritual superiority to anyone who attends church. However, the explanation given by your previous correspondent for the lack of response from churchgoers to Sir Alister's original request has another possible answer. It is evident in many of the accounts he collected that it was a novelty, almost a relief, to many of his correspondents to be able to describe their experiences to someone who would

take them seriously. Churchgoers may not have felt the same need, in an environment where the existence of the transcendent is taken for granted. In fact in my own village church (average attendance 25) chance conversations have made me aware that three members of the congregation beside myself have had such experiences; for all I know, they are not the only ones.

But might we not all do better to bear in mind that the saints have generally warned against seeking or over-valuing such experiences, which are not in themselves a sign of holiness or necessarily the best aid in the effort to attain it?

Yours sincerely,

*Margaret Forey*



***The two questions posed by John Franklin in Issue 60 (page 31) produced a gratifying response from readers. Here are the letters we received, and John's replies. The questions will also be taken up on Members' Day, in the form of an afternoon discussion.***

Dear John Franklin

Your challenge to members of AHT to consider the meaning of life on earth 'What is it all about?' intrigued me. Reacting to your request as a challenge made me contemplate the probability of that being the answer – life is simply a challenge. When times are difficult, I fantasize with the thought that it was my choice to accept this challenge and to just get on with it to the best of my ability. I am willing, therefore, to take on another of your challenges and attempt to explain why spiritual experience has been so important in my life.

Although I didn't realise it at the time, the beginning of my spiritual journey occurred when I was a child walking to Primary School. Clouds parting to envelop me in the sun's rays seems insignificant, but the euphoric memory can still be recalled. Only in hindsight, when the seed planted in my young mind blossomed, did I realise this had been my first spiritual experience.

The journey through life was not smooth-sailing as I concentrated on material pursuits; then in November 1984, I was awakened to a world beyond the confines of the world in which I normally live. My childhood experience recurred as I was gently reintroduced to the spiritual realm and, several days later, completely renewed by the tremendous Power and Purity of unconditional Love. For several weeks, I seemed to float through life, seeing the Holy Spirit (or Love's Energy) emanating from those around me. I returned to a place of worship not visited for many years to find Love bouncing back at me from all around the church.

These and other experiences changed my somewhat ordinary life, moving me in a different direction. Initially there was no doubt in my mind what action to take, such as returning very belatedly to educational pursuits, having left school early with no qualifications. Also, thanks to receipt of a small legacy, I became a life member of The Alister Hardy Society (AHS). I did not know why, but intuitively realised that these were the right decisions for me to make.

Following attendance at a local Secondary School, I gained a BA(Hons) degree with the Open University. My involvement with AHS eventually led to an MA degree in Religious Experience as one of the first group of students under the supervision of Peggy Morgan. This work was certainly a challenge – a rewarding challenge, but despite some of the jigsaw pieces recently falling into place, I still do not really know what it is all about. I am reminded of the donkey and carrot scenario.

Over the years, treading the right path or reading the signs correctly has not always been so clear. When I was struck down with a disabling, misunderstood illness in January 1986 – which is still with me – life became a real challenge, with intuition being more difficult to discern. Despite many setbacks, which seem to be part of the course, I have endeavoured to keep to my chosen path – or the path chosen for me? I have sensed for some time that there is still something important for me to do but have drawn a blank with every attempt made to bring this about. Since AHS was initially a significant sign on my spiritual path, could it be the final resting place for my challenge?

Signs and intuition seem recently to have returned to their initial clarity. Deciding to have a break from drafting this letter, I began clearing out items in preparation for moving house, and came across *Exploration into Spirit*. On finishing re-reading your book, I noticed the bookmark used had details of Capricornian characteristics – my star sign – one being 'Enjoys challenges'.

On the second question posed: 'What should we be doing about it?'

The Trust's focus on academia has not allowed for any personal involvement, or follow up, on reports received. You note, however, in *Exploration into Spirit*, that '... the question of counselling was raised in 1989' (p. 37). An informal service was set up to answer correspondence from members of the public 'which gave good service, but which gradually died out after a year or so' (p. 38). With modern means of communication, would AHT consider revisiting this question?

My MA dissertation on Perceptions of Spiritual and Psychotic Experience explores concern for those caught up in the psychiatric system due to inability to express what had been experienced. Ineffability, and scepticism from hearers, can lead to mental instability; even to

the extent of treading the indescribable sane/mad borderline. An understanding, open-minded point of contact, long before such a dire state was reached, could be a lifeline to those in need.

Trying to find a common core in spiritual experience is obviously a tantalising challenge for AHT. We all view life from our own perspective, fashioned by personality, life history, human relationships and many other factors. What intervention, therefore, could possibly touch each and every one of us irrespective of gender, race, creed, physical or mental ability? What force could reach the depths of our inner being to change, transform, enliven our existence. From my own experience, I believe LOVE to be the answer, the most powerful force in the Universe. There is, of course, the other side of the coin – the dark side – the eternal struggle between good and evil. I can relate to a disruptive force in the world seeking to obstruct spiritual progress; but without light and dark, positive and negative, cause and effect, there would be no call to account.

As I still do not know what it is all about, my only conclusion is that life is simply a challenge. What should we be doing about it? The answer to that despairing question is the greatest challenge of all: Love one another.

Thank you for posing such mind-searching questions, Mr Franklin. I hope my musings will give you some food for thought.

Kindest regards,

*Anne Drysdale.*

Dear Anne Drysdale,

Your fascinating letter raises a number of issues well worth pursuing. Life *is* a challenge, including the challenge of who we really are and the meaning and direction of life. Like you, and like many others, I too have had a number of spiritual experiences, including the ‘tremendous Power and Purity of unconditional Love’ you mention. Like you, these experiences deeply affected my life – and I have felt at times, and especially now looking back over my life, that my life has been ‘directed’, from the commencement of my spiritual experiences; being actually ‘forced’ by a power outside myself into a certain course of action which had beneficial results, to meaningful synchronicities and events transpiring almost as if ‘planned’. Like you, I feel that I, too, am treading a path chosen for me. I am minded of Shakespeare’s Hamlet to Horatio, ‘There’s a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will ...’

Indeed, ‘What’s it all about?’ Words come to me that it could be about ‘Contact’ and ‘Call’, though this is only part of it and could be a gross over-simplification given the vast range of spiritual experiences. What seems common is consciousness of contact with another dimension; of something ‘other’, out of the ordinary, another reality – all so difficult to describe, but words like spirit, mind, force, power, unity, Love spring to mind. Whatever it is, it seems personal, and can affect both the personal and social, well-being and health – it opens

our awareness and seems to make a 'call' on us to do something. 'Contact' might seem fortuitous, and can come through prayer, meditation, yoga or cry of distress – but also we ourselves may be deliberately 'contacted' by the 'other', by an outside transcendent spiritual or psychic agency, often with a call to do something. There is a theory that this might be through our individual minds being really part of and linked to a universal mind/spirit (God). There is much literature on the subject, one interesting recent book delving into consciousness and the mind being *One Mind: How our Individual Mind is part of a Greater Consciousness and why it Matters*, by Larry Dossey MD.

With regard to 'call' and 'intervention', the word you use, this indeed is purely personal and different in each case, the common factor being that it can happen to anybody anywhere. I believe too in the 'force' of LOVE that undoubtedly can transform lives, as possibly the answer – this being a possible primal 'creative energy', in all things, and the 'common core' of the major religions. The struggle is to understand, and follow, the 'call', but guidance is there.

Regarding 'What should we be doing about it?', and your idea of the AHT offering an informal counselling or answering service, the Trust is not able to provide a counselling service, I'm afraid – but, with regard to answering correspondence, whilst modern technology certainly might help, the problem is of lack of personal resource. Back in 1989 we had two researchers who were very interested in doing this; but, when they left, no one who was prepared to continue could be found. It requires special skills, and continuity, but if anyone were able to come forward ...

*John Franklin.*



Dear John,

Thank you for putting those two questions. It gives me an opportunity to write some words on behalf of our soul!

For me, the answers to those questions are contained in some of the later output of flash moments (lasting about 5 seconds) of a seeming all-knowing feeling I experienced on a day in March 1953, just before my eighteenth birthday:

Q 1---What is it all about?

A.---We are here to give birth to our soul (embryo of God's child) at our physical death.

Q 2---What should we be doing about it?

A.---We need to ensure that our inner environment keeps our soul nourished and healthy and that our mind is a good servant, always catering for the needs of our soul.

The words I have used in the answers are PRIMARY spiritual words, that is, they are all conceived by feelings coming from the physical structure of my soul, similar to how we have coined the words 'I am feeling cold' or 'I am thirsty', to represent feelings coming from our main physical body. We have to feel those conditions for ourselves to really understand them.

When those 5 seconds were over, my whole being went completely blank. I could not remember a single item within those moments of 'feelsight'. Over days it all gradually faded from my attention and I got back to routine, assisting my dad on the farm where I lived, in North Wales.

It was about 3 weeks later when I was 'stopped in my tracks' by a sudden urgent feeling of 'A wrong action, word or thought will damage me' and a few moments later 'A right action, word or thought will nourish me'.

Other 'soul' feelings, experienced during those 5 seconds and converted into words, have continued at intervals to the present day (usually about every 3 months), mainly in short sentences, one or two at a time, or in a single word and sometimes in sketches. They have all been about soul needs and 'being'.

Between about 1995 and 2005 I did express many of them to AHT via *De Numine*. Maybe, they are somewhere in the archives! Also, especially, Sheelah James of the Midlands Group gave me plenty of opportunity in her meetings to express the information I had experienced about soul, with good feedback and questions.

*Henry Houghton.*

Dear Henry,

Thank you very much indeed for your e-mail and for responding to the two questions above. An interesting point for me is that, like me, you experienced a 'seeming all-knowing feeling', with this followed three weeks later by another spiritual experience. At the age of 14, I had an experience of divine love, oneness with everything, and 'knowing' everything; this followed a month later by a 'force' that made me 'go for a walk', and in certain directions, which led eventually to a meeting and start of a meaningful relationship. I have heard of other such dual happenings. It's rather like an 'awakening call' followed by a 'call to action'(?). I wonder how many other people have had this experience, and have puzzled over it ...

*John Franklin.*



Letter to John from Jonathan

John Franklin asks a simple yet profound question. I am trying to gather my thoughts in a mood of great exasperation. Not John's fault! I had arranged to join a U3A [University of the Third Age] geological expedition where we were due to travel by coach to Cornwall. All arranged and I was much looking forward, but I got the time wrong, and arrived 15 minutes too late at the pick-up point. However, one disaster can be the trigger for another insight, not always of our making. I like the crystal idea. You rotate the crystal and the light flashes. We get different, and sometimes surprising, perceptions of truth.

I am a great believer in the theory that consciousness is not located in the body but is 'non-local'. Consciousness, I believe, has never been explained by scientific reductionist explanations, and I can see no evidence that those who research in these matters, whether they be neuro-scientists or anyone else, are anywhere nearer providing an explanation within a materialistic space-time framework. I find the 'One Mind' hypothesis far more convincing, that our individual awareness is a particular manifestation or expression of the 'One Mind' which is outside space and time, which is common to us all and which enables us to be who we are.

It's now later in the day, and my exasperation has worn off a little. It's not simple mental exhaustion, or I don't think so. I unexpectedly have just had an important telephone conversation which was in no way related to the intended expedition, which has significantly altered my plans for the future ...

So many times in my life I have found that the One Mind – call it God if you like, or the Universe or however you wish to name it – has had different ideas to my puny ideas. So often I have made plans, tried to arrange for something on a particular date, and it has not been possible, or would have ended in failure or disaster. But another date or time comes along, and everything fits into place.

David Hay observed in his research that the most common religious/spiritual experience that people recorded was that of synchronicity, or a 'patterning of events'. So: 'What's it all about'? I believe that we are all part of something infinitely greater than our individual selves. Indeed, I think the idea of an 'individual self' is an illusion, as the great spiritual traditions teach, and as I am increasingly coming to realise from my own experience. We are all so conditioned, from the moment when our parents first gave us a name. We live in an increasingly individualistic society. Life makes so many demands on us. There will be moments of disappointment for us all. We need a bigger vision. The encouragement to 'know who we really are' is very ancient, very important, and is too easily forgotten in the myopic state of modern living. But our bigger vision will never be big enough. In our present state we will only have partial answers to these questions.

So – may there be moments of truth, flashes of insight, for all of us, and 'the truth will set us free'. We can't expect it to be the same for all of us, but if we can share a little, it will help.

What should we be doing about it? A wise lady whom I knew well and who was a nun at a convent had a great belief in 'going with the flow'. Sometimes life does have a message, and we have to get on with it, and it's OK.

*Jonathan Robinson.*

Responding to Jonathon's letter I too very much believe in the One Mind ('God', 'the Universe', however conceived or named) as a veritably Reality. I myself, like many others, have experienced an 'other' state of consciousness from ordinary consciousness – and an 'other Mind' greater than my own little Mind which has influenced and, despite myself, has

directed my life – always, in my case as it has turned out, for the good. It is this, I feel sure, that has inspired the saints and founders of religions and scriptures of many cultures throughout the ages in the past, and is still active in the world today.

I agree with Jonathan in his belief ‘that we are all part of something infinitely greater than our individual selves’ – ‘No man is an island, but part of the main’, as John Donne put it. People’s spiritual experiences seem to have a common factor, that of either helping us, guiding us, or prompting us to take some action. This seems always to be for the best and our own good or for the good of others. Research into spiritual/religious experience would indicate that this is universal, to be found in other cultures, however differently expressed. The ‘main’ I see as universal humanity, and humanity part of that something ‘infinitely greater.’ I would submit that the answer to the question, ‘What is it all about?’ lies in a two-fold approach – first, as a personal question leading to a search for understanding and response to our own spiritual experiences; and secondly, in a societal approach in response to this question, and the implications of these experiences, in the light of an open-minded inquiry into what this aspect of human experience might be saying to us.

What should we be doing about it? I like Jonathan’s appreciation of ‘going with the flow’. I believe these spiritual experiences do ‘have a message’; and that it will indeed be ‘OK’ if we heed the message – and act on it. This I believe should be on both a personal plane – *and* on a societal plane. At societal level, I feel we should be seeing and recognising a universality in these ‘messages’, and a similarity in what they are saying despite their many diverse forms and interpretations according to time, place and culture. They seem to show, indeed, that ‘we are all part of something infinitely greater than’ our individual religions and cultures. I feel that, with the evidence and data now to hand, an understanding of this should be promoted at theological, inter-faith and political level. As we become ever more globally inter-connected with global problems, social, human, environmental and political, understanding of this aspect of human experiencing, and of what unites us as distinct from what divides us, could only be to the good. I believe the Alister Hardy Trust is in a unique position to contribute to this ...

*John Franklin*

*The two questions will be the subject of discussion for the afternoon session at the AHT Members’ Day on 15th October. See ‘Events, page 56 for details (Ed.)*



## Rosh Hashanah: *Turning*

As far south as Israel, now is the time of year  
when leaves are turning. Olives and grain  
are siloed, and our hemisphere  
begins its elliptic voyage from the sun.  
The Jews have set aside these darker days  
for *teshuvah* – the bending of our gaze  
inward and rearward. To move ahead  
the only way is back. We must confront  
the mess we've left on land, the wrong we did.  
To be forgiven, we must first repent.

Below deck, something shifts its viscid weight,  
burdens the sea, drags us out of true.  
We tanker-navigators of the North  
prefer to forge straight lines, forget  
that we must follow the curve of earth.  
Unwilling to change course, we argue  
such manoeuvres are too costly, and too late.  
Soon we will admit that we are askew.  
Soon we will stand and watch as our disgrace  
pumps by the tonne across the water's face.

It may be so, it may already be too late  
to go about – beneath our keel the lane  
is narrowing like the light. And yet  
the earth renews its circle round the sun,  
and Rosh Hashanah comes unfailingly  
as days begin to dwindle. A New Year:  
another chance to choose a better way,  
repair the ravaged land, reclaim old error,  
change breaches to bridges on that holy Day  
of Atonement when neighbour joins with neighbour.

*Stevie Krayner*



## Openings

Once, in Portugal,  
walking through thick forest;  
tall trees and many branches  
covering the sky,  
save for one patch of blue,  
which found its kin  
deep within  
and each knew  
and was not alone.

Once, in Hackney,  
emerging from a rough pub  
into the snow-filled streets,  
seeing a single red rose  
spot-lit by a lamp-post;  
and the rose knew its echo  
far forward in time  
and knew its rhyme  
in the world's poem.

Once in Galicia,  
raising my eyes  
from a field of maize  
seeing small, dark figures  
toiling in the landscape  
making notes on a stave  
whose music was played  
in all our days.

Once in Florence  
when a painted angel's gaze  
shook down my walls  
and I was naked  
and not ashamed  
and knew I'd always been home  
and had never left it.

And all these times  
are the same time  
in the place that is once only  
always.

*Michael Shearer*



## Request for Dreams

### **Numinous Spiritual or Religious Experiences in Dreams: Dream States, Spiritual Experiences and Mental Health**

In Alister Hardy's 1979 book, *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, in which he reviewed the first three thousand accounts in the Alister Hardy Religious Experience archive, Hardy highlighted the need for more in-depth research into the spiritual experiences that occur in dream states. He observed:

We have a good number of accounts which describe experiences taking place either in dreams or other allied states of altered consciousness, such as a trance or day dream ... Clearly a proper study of this material will require a critical follow-up, which will be made with many more examples. Of the importance of dreams to many individuals concerned as a channel for religious experience, there seems to be no doubt (p. 79).

The need for a larger sample has been met by over three thousand additional accounts having subsequently been contributed to the archive. But, as yet, there has been no systematic, focused research into the spiritual or religious experiences in dreams recorded in the archive. I aim to review the accounts associated with dreams and altered states of consciousness, such as lucid dreams and waking visions, to explore what themes, categories and concepts emerge from accounts such as the following:

During a period of awful mental and physical suffering a few years ago, I called in despair to God to help me. I then dreamt that I was travelling through space – the earth rotating on its axis before me – the stars all around me. I experienced within the dream a feeling of most wonderful peace and when I awakened I was both mentally and physically refreshed and my problems were given a different perspective. I had contemplated suicide. I have had many dreams which have restored my mental and spiritual balance.

(Account no. 000786 from the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre Archive)

As a researcher, writer, psychotherapist and dream guide, my long-standing area of interest is the connection between dreams and psycho-spiritual transformation. In 2012, with Dr Nigel Hamilton, I co-founded the Dream Research Institute (DRI) at the Centre for Counselling and Psychotherapy Education (CCPE), London, to promote research into the relationship of dreams to wellbeing from a spiritual perspective.

Following up on my MA studies in the Psychology of Religion and in conjunction with my work at the Dream Research Institute, I have begun research into accounts of dream-related spiritual experiences recorded in the AHRERC Archive, something I have wanted to do since I first learned of the archive some years ago during my post-graduate studies.

Out of the 6000 accounts in the archive, approximately ten percent contain the key word 'dream'. Adding the word 'vision' to the key word search increases the percentage to an estimated twenty-three percent. Both percentages suggest the data will have statistical significance. This result takes on added importance since Hardy did not mention the words 'dream' or 'vision' in his original appeal for accounts of spiritual or religious experiences.

Thus far, I have reviewed 100 dream-related accounts and believe the material warrants further study for which I intend to undertake doctoral research.

**As part of my DRI research, and with the support of the AHRERC, I am now circulating an appeal for additional spiritual or religious experiences in dreams.**

I would invite you to send me your most memorable and profound spiritual or religious experience in a dream by using the form on the DRI website Home page: [www.driccpe.org.uk](http://www.driccpe.org.uk) You are welcome to return your account either by post or by email to the DRI using the contact details on the form. Anonymity is assured, in line with the archive protocol.

May I thank you in advance for taking the time to write up and share your numinous spiritual or religious experiences in dreams. Your support will be much appreciated and I hope we may be able to contribute in this way to the continuing work of the Alister Hardy Trust.

*Melinda Ziemer*

## BOOK REVIEWS

*The first review in this section, described by Dr Howard Jones as an article, to me reads also like a personal journey that accompanies the book. I had requested something along the lines of Pamela Gaunt's experience/review in the Spring issue (page 10), but my reviewers' interpretation of this request so far is as individual as the experiences generated by reading the books. The second is, however, more article than review. Theolyn Cortens has offered the content of this remarkable book by Dr Greene in elegant and meticulous detail, bringing to light a period in the Esoteric tradition that has until recently been tantalisingly shrouded in mystery. Ed.*

***Seth Speaks: The Eternal Validity of the Soul, as channelled by Jane Roberts***  
**Amber-Allen Publishing & New World Library, 1972, 454 pp. ISBN 1 878424 07 6 /**  
**978 1878424075**

In 1945 philosopher Aldous Huxley published *The Perennial Philosophy*. The title is self-explanatory – it is about an idea that keeps on recurring through the ages. What is this idea? It is expressed in many different ways by various sages, but the fundamental core is belief in a deity. *Seth Speaks* is also concerned with a perennial concept, that of the soul.

This article was originally a book review but it was re-shaped at the suggestion of the editor as an article because it moved me to explore other writings on themes raised by the Seth dialogues. However, the book at the heart of all this for me was *Seth Speaks: The eternal validity of the soul*. This text is one of over two dozen books that are published as the thoughts of a mystical spirit called Seth, as channelled since the 1960s by the American author, poet and psychic Jane Roberts, a trance medium. The work is a treatise of spiritual guidance: it is a much more extended version of comparable channellings to be found, for example, in the Jeshua channellings to Pamela Kribbe, in *Life in the World Unseen* by Monsignor Robert Hugh Benson, channelled through Anthony Borgia, or from Stephen the Martyr to New Zealand priest Michael Cocks. The material here is compiled by Jane's husband Robert F. Butts.

Books such as these try to give us a glimpse of what our soul's existence in the afterlife will be like, but also give us practical and spiritual guidance as to how we should live a spiritually worthwhile and satisfying life on Earth. The messages are familiar ones. Our present human life is but one of a number of lives our soul is likely to experience. The most satisfying life we can lead is one that is devoted to understanding and developing ourselves – our souls, and in so doing serving others – a life dedicated to providing inspiration to as many people as possible. Focusing on material things may make our earthly life more pleasant, and will offer us opportunities for spiritual development, but it is our spiritual progression on Earth that provides us with greatest contentment and satisfaction in the afterlife.

If I list some of the topics covered in the twenty-two chapters it will give readers an idea of the scope of the book: 'My Present Environment', 'Work and Activities'; 'How Thoughts Form Matter'; 'The Potentials of the Soul'; 'The "Death" Experience'; 'Reincarnation, Dreams and the Hidden Male and Female Within the Self'; 'The Meaning of Religion'. The treatment of these subjects will give the enquiring mind much to ponder.

I found the whole book uplifting and mentally stimulating, but the authenticity of the experience was confirmed for me in the opening chapter, and by watching Jane speak as Seth on YouTube. Robert acts as scribe, but as Seth has known him from previous lifetimes he refers to him as Joseph. Jane herself also has lived before as both male and female, and is described by Seth as Ruburt and 'him'. I was also drawn into the book early on (p. 4) by the trenchant statement 'Consciousness creates form. It is not the other way around'. A statement such as this from an old spirit endorses the views of contemporary rationalists found in books such as *Mind Before Matter* (Trish Pfeiffer and John E. Mack, 2007).

The printed pages of a book do not *contain* information – they *transmit* information (p. 60), just as the notes in a manuscript score in themselves are merely symbols. It is only when the notes are played that they convey the feelings of the composer to the listener. (Skilled musicians of course can realise the sounds just by reading the score.) Similarly, it is our thoughts and feelings that create the material world we experience through our senses. Bishop George Berkeley is rarely read nowadays except by philosophers, but his contention that *esse est percipi* (to be is to be perceived) implies that material objects exist only in the consciousness of the perceiver. Our sense impressions, said Berkeley, are ideas in the mind of God. And if we interpret God as Universal Spirit, we get very close to twenty-first century scientific ideas as to the nature of consciousness. The deeply philosophical issue of the nature of those 'material objects' that give rise to our mental images is not discussed here. Then there is affirmation (also p. 4) that the soul lives on through many human lives: 'you have each lived other existences, and that knowledge is within you though you are not consciously aware of it.' The Bhagavad Gita tells us 'You always are and you always will be', which should reduce the fear of death for us all; it certainly has for me.

With deep perceptions like this about the meaning of life I hope it will be clear why I thought this book was worth working through. Chapter 4 deals with the controversial topic of the relativity of time – as space is relative and space-time form a continuum, time must also be relative: 'time is not a series of moments' (p. 47). The idea of our successive yet simultaneous incarnations is presented using the allegory of a series of plays upon the stages of the world. The multi-dimensional self participates in all of these activities simultaneously, though we are unaware of this. Thus, when we reincarnate, it is simply the soul within a different body and a different play – the continuity of the soul is unbroken and there is no awareness of our having played a different role previously. I would suggest that the rationalist who may find this concept difficult read Anthony Peake's *The Labyrinth of Time*. 'The soul is not something that you have – it is what you are' (p. 70).

Chapter 11 deals with a subject that I have always found difficult – that we choose the life path we are to follow in each incarnation. As someone born with somewhat debilitating congenital abnormalities I found it difficult to accept this contention, though there are others

who are far more disabled than I. Seth explains this with a clarity I had not found before; so often, the situation is either denied completely (as I used to do) or is dismissed glibly with 'Well, it was your choice'. Seth explains how these successive incarnations, whether easy or difficult, build up the experiences for development of the soul.

Chapter 13, 'The Hidden Male and Female Within the Self', finds an echo in C. G. Jung's concept of the *animus* and *anima*: aspects of male and female personality that are found respectively in every female and male. Just as Rupert Sheldrake has talked about the morphic field of universal memory, and Ervin Laszlo described the Akashic field of the Upanishads that shape our personalities and human consciousness, we continually meet in this book 'modern' ideas that have permeated the human mind for at least ten thousand years.

We struggle now to find commonalities in the concept of deity between the religions of East and West. The following chapter describes the Multidimensional God that all religions quest after, whether overtly or not. When Einstein combined 'time' with the three dimensions of space into a space-time continuum, this was a revolutionary idea. The suggestion that there may be eleven or more dimensions could not have emerged before quantum physics. But here, Seth is describing convincingly (at least to me) a multidimensional universe: 'The outer world is a reflection of the inner one' (p. 324) or, as we have heard before, 'as above, so below'.

The existence of what we call evil is often seen by religious adherents as incompatible with a loving God. But, as Seth explains, from a philosophical point of view, good and evil are simply the opposite sides of human morality – just as the top and bottom of an apple are still parts of the same apple, or light and darkness (often associated respectively with good and evil) are simply the consequences of Earth's universal situation with respect to the sun. So very many of the moral issues that torment us here on Earth are explained in simple terms by Seth in this presentation.

While I have great respect for the messages presented in these trance sessions, and I found so much that was reassuring as well as challenging to me as a rational scientist, I did find the notes and timings added by Robert rather irritating and a distraction from the message, especially when the more complicated issues arise. Overall, this is a very thought-provoking book with a comforting message of the immortality (or eternal validity) of the soul for those whose minds are open enough to absorb it. I find it encouraging and uplifting that sources both temporal and spiritual keep arriving at the same conclusion: that the happenings in our material world were initiated, and are continuously overseen, by a cosmic spiritual energy whose wisdom is slowly percolating down to the human world.

*Reviewed by Dr Howard Jones*

**Liz Greene: *Magi and Maggidim: The Kabbalah and British Occultism 1860-1940*  
Lampeter, Sophia Centre Press, 2012. 576pp. ISBN 978 1907767029 (pbk) £48**



Liz Greene is well known to astrologers of the Jungian persuasion as one of the co-founders (with Howard Sasportas) of the Centre for Psychological Astrology. The foundation encouraged a new generation of astrologers, keen to demonstrate the value of astrology as a significant treasure house of wisdom available to modern psychologists. In the '70s and '80s Dr Greene made several significant contributions to astrological thought: notably *Saturn: A new look at an old devil* (1976); *Relating: An astrological guide to living with others on a small planet* (1977); and *The Astrology of Fate* (1984).

*Magi and Maggidim* is a very long (four hundred and sixty pages with another one hundred for glossary, bibliographies and index) but very readable book. Dr Greene's research into the Jewish roots of British occultist *Qabalah*, was originally submitted to the University of Bristol as a PhD thesis, supervised by Ronald Hutton. It presents a detailed account of the British contribution to the development of Western Esotericism, from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries.

Dr Greene proposes that *fin-de-siècle* magicians did not re-invent Kabbalah with little reference to its Jewish roots, but that their occult rituals relied heavily on Jewish texts. She seeks to demonstrate that even the introduction of Jungian psychology, particularly in the work of Dion Fortune, was an unnecessary experiment, since Kabbalah tradition contains concepts that anticipate modern approaches to the inner life. She asks why Jewish Kabbalah was so attractive to non-Jewish occultists at a time when anti-semitism was rife in Europe, and analyses how and why Jewish Kabbalah was adapted and integrated, rather than reinvented or recreated.

A brief overview of each chapter will, hopefully, demonstrate the enormous scope and depth of this book, which is highly recommended for anyone with an interest in Jewish mysticism and Western occultism.

### **One: Introduction**

Liz describes the 'case of the missing Kabbalah', outlines her methodologies, presents a review of scholarly literature and provides definitions of terms. She claims:

the definition of Western esotericism as an exclusively Christian cultural phenomenon, and assumptions that the Kabbalah of this cultural current (including its manifestation in the British occult revival) is a discrete entity entirely separate from Jewish kabbalah, are seriously challenged by the historical evidence and may need to be entirely reformulated.

She quotes Alex Owen and Wouter Hanegraaff, both of whom suggest that one of the 'modern' perspectives of Western esotericism is the internalisation of deity and the recognition of divine powers as natural attributes in the world, and in the human soul. (p.20) She points out that this 'modern' perspective was alive and well in the medieval Kabbalistic concept of emanations from a supernal to a material world, which implied identity between deity and the psychic and physical life of the world and all its forms (pp.20-21).

The Jewish Kabbalah did not have to be recreated for the modern era in order to accommodate a new, interiorized perception of the relationship between human and divine. (p.23)

## **Two: The Great Secret: Eliphas Levi and the Hebrew Roots of the Victorian Occult Revival**

Eliphas Levi (1810-1875) was a Roman Catholic who, in his early forties, adopted a Hebrew name and devoted himself to the study of Kabbalah and Tarot. He developed a syncretic system that included ritual magic and filtered into British occultism courtesy of Kenneth Mackenzie, an English occultist and antiquarian scholar. Mackenzie's meeting with Levi in 1861 led directly to the founding in 1865 of the *Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia* (SRIA), a quasi-Masonic, quasi-Rosicrucian channel for Levi's system of Kabbalah, which was later 'rehashed' in 1875 by Madame Blavatsky in her *Isis Unveiled*:

... the prevailing understanding of the Kabbalah among British occultists preserves an allegiance to the core themes of Levi's pioneering vision. (p.128)

## **Three: Masonic Mysteries: William Wynn Westcott and his 'Rosicrucian' Kabbalah**

William Wynn Westcott was a doctor of medicine and a Freemason who joined the SRIA, and later co-founded the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (1887) with William Robert Woodman, also a medical practitioner, and Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers. Dr Greene collates a wealth of evidence for the Kabbalistic features in SRIA rituals and quotes from Westcott:

In our Freemasonry may yet be traced allusions and references to that system of esoteric teaching and dogma, which was undeniably the result of the destruction of the exoteric Monotheism of Judea ... I mean the Jewish Kabbalah ... (p.145)

In the section *Hermes and the Jews*, Dr Greene discusses the historical relationship between Kabbalah and alchemy, and how these two distinctive esoteric currents may have become entwined. (p.153)

We meet the charismatic Anna Kingsford, who founded the Hermetic Society (1884), and clashed with H. P. Blavatsky. Kingsford had been a member of Blavatsky's Theosophical Society (1875), but 'could not stomach H. P. B.'s Mahatmas' (p.186); she wanted to assert her allegiance to a Western esoteric Christian tradition, modelled on Levi's theosophy. Kingsford read Swedenborg, gnostic literature and the *Kabbala Denudata* of Christian Knorr von Rosenroth, partly translated by Mathers in 1887. She developed her own Kabbalistic theosophy which included Christ as the 'most perfect of initiates' (p.187). Her emphasis on the importance of the Shekhinah and the role of women as her mediators, was taken up by Mathers, who opened membership of the Golden Dawn for women (p.189).

## **Four: In the name of YHVH: Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers and the Ritual Magic of the Golden Dawn**

Here Dr Greene focuses on the content of rituals adopted by the Golden Dawn, and identifies the Jewish provenance behind various Golden Dawn publications, written and/or translated by Mathers, which were designed to educate adepts in aspects of ritual magic.

Mathers was married to Mina Bergson, sister of philosopher Henri Bergson. She was the first initiated member of the Golden Dawn. According to Dr Greene, occult scholars rarely mention Mina's contributions to the Golden Dawn's magical repertoire, or acknowledge that these were predicated on her Jewish background. Mina's Polish grandparents had been

movers and shakers in late eighteenth-century Hasidism, and her father brought up Mina and Henri in the Hasidic magical and mystical tradition. Mina brought to the Golden Dawn a rich treasury of Kabbalistic concepts, including the use of Divine Names as adjurations for the summoning and coercion of angels. Divine Names can be used to create infinite permutations according to the rules of letter combinations, and these are reflected in the infinity of angels or 'princes' who can be invoked. (p.256)

#### **Five: Arthwait and the Beast: Mysticism and Sexual 'Magick' in British Occultism**

'Arthwait' was A. E. Waite (1857-1942) and 'the Beast' (as most readers will guess) Alister Crowley (1875-1947). Crowley had caricatured Waite as Arthwait – a 'dull pedant' – in a satirical novel and was openly hostile in other publications. Waite did not return the hostility in public, and refused to acknowledge the existence of Crowley, making no mention of his work in any of his own writings. The problem between these significant members of the Golden Dawn was a matter of religiosity: Waite championed Christian mysticism whereas Crowley disdained Christian beliefs and cultivated pagan 'magick'. Dr Greene points out that both mystical and magical approaches are to be found, and are usually indistinguishable, in Jewish Kabbalah. Even the sexual excesses encouraged by Crowley as a route to *unio mystica*, can be identified in ecstatic writings found in *The Zohar*, and promoted by the colourful seventeenth-century pseudo-Messiah Sabbatai Zevi (p.305). She suggests that Waite and Crowley emerge as far more alike than either could bear to admit.

#### **Six: When she was 'Jung and easily Freudened': Dion Fortune's 'Psychological' Kabbalah**

Dion Fortune (1890-1946) was brought up as a Christian Scientist. In 1919 she was initiated into the London Temple of Alpha and Omega, a remnant of the Inner Temple of the Golden Dawn, under the leadership of Mina Mathers, whose husband had died in 1918. Dion Fortune had firm ideas of her own concerning the structure of an occult and the basis for its doctrines and soon fell out with Mina. In 1922 Fortune established her own Fraternity of the Inner Light.

In *The Cosmic Doctrine*, 'channelled' between 1927 and 1928, but published posthumously, Fortune echoes Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine*, and includes allusions to Lurianic Kabbalah [a school of kabbalah developed by the Jewish rabbi Isaac Luria (1534–1572)]. However, in her introduction to *Mystical Meditations on the Collects*, published in 1930 while she was still alive, Fortune insists that she 'withdrew successively' from Theosophy, New Thought and Spiritualism in order to return to Christianity. Dr Greene points out that no hint of Jewish lore can be found in this book – presumably written after *The Cosmic Doctrine*. However in her *Mystical Qabalah*, published in 1935, Fortune describes Kabbalah as 'the Yoga of the West', a belief supported by Jung, who emphasised that psychological insights are more readily gained from methods that have been established in the culture from which the individual has emerged. In an eightieth birthday interview, Jung acknowledged that Hasidism anticipated his psychological approach (p.410).

Fortune trained as a lay analyst with the Medico-Psychological Clinic in London and her experiences inform her theories about the relationship between psychoanalysis and occultism.

As soon as I touched the deeper aspects of practical psychology ... I realized that there was very much more in the mind that was accounted for by the accepted psychological theories. It was in order to understand the hidden aspects of the mind that I originally took up the study of occultism. (*The Machinery of the Mind*, 1922 – published under her real name Violet M. Firth; Liz Greene, *Magi and Maggidim*, p. 393)

Fortune felt Freud had missed the occult understanding of the individual as a ‘spiritual being’ and disparaged his materialistic view of the human psyche. By the late 1930s she had become a firm Jungian and in 1942 stipulated *The Psychology of C. G. Jung* as essential reading for her followers.

### **Seven: Conclusion**

In her concluding chapter, Dr Greene asks ‘Is Kabbalah Jewish?’ She cites the development of the Kabbalah Centre, founded 1922 and more recently brought to public attention when the singer Madonna became a member. The Centre’s mission is to bring ‘the wisdom of the Kabbalah to the world’ and its present director, Philip Berg declares that

Kabbalah was never meant for a specific sect. Rather, it was intended to be used by all humanity to unify the world. (442)

As Dr Greene says, the idea that Kabbalah is a ‘great reconciler’ has been a persistent aspiration since the thirteenth century, but Berg’s universalism has been heavily criticized by the Orthodox as a counterfeit ‘cult’ and as a serious distortion of Jewish spirituality.

### **Five star recommendation**

From my perspective, as I research the history of angelology and its recent popularity among British women, Dr Greene’s work confirms my own suspicions – that New Age angel lore is adapted from occultism, which in turn heavily relied on ancient Jewish mysticism. For anyone interested in the development of esoteric groups this is a fascinating, page-turning account, exploring and explaining the cultural influences, with detailed referencing, and primary and secondary bibliographies to die for! Not to mention the personal biographies of some very colourful magicians and the internal squabbles and relationships of those involved in the creation of occult groups.

*Theolyn Cortens*



## Two reviews by Marianne Rankin:

*This has turned into a double review. I had decided to review the former book, which I much enjoyed and then couldn't put the latter down. I feel that readers of De Numine would benefit from hearing about both books. Author of the first book and co-editor of the second, Revd Dr Canon Alan Race gave a fascinating talk to the AHT London Group in November 2015 on Seeking the Sacred: World Faiths, Secularity and Religious Experience (see De Numine No. 60, p.26). He is a familiar figure to all in the interfaith world. Rector of St Margaret's Church, Lee in South London, Chair of the World Congress of Faiths and Editor-in-Chief of Interreligious Insight, he approaches the relations between religions from a Christian point of view.*

*Marianne Rankin*

**Alan Race, *Making Sense of Religious Pluralism, Shaping theology of religions for our times* London, SPCK, 2013, 98pp. ISBN 978 0 281 06438 0, £9.99. eBook ISBN 978 0 281 07105 0. £8.99**

*Making Sense of Religious Pluralism* begins with what was for its time a radical statement by the 20th century Jewish sage, Abraham Joshua Heschel. In 1966 he maintained that 'In this aeon diversity of religions is the will of God'. For him religions are 'a means not an end' and as Race explains, 'not so much a function of humanity's cultural differences as of the transcendence of God' for according to Heschel, 'No word is God's last word, no word is God's ultimate word'. This introduces a wide-ranging overview of the subject of just how religions have reacted to the fact of their plurality.

Race begins with the award-winning novel by Yann Martel, *The Life of Pi*. Pi, born into the Hindu faith, explores Christianity and then Islam and feels an affinity with all three. After meeting a Sufi, Pi has a mystical experience of unity. He feels himself a follower of all three traditions, although the leaders of those traditions consider this impossible, insisting that he must choose between them. This illustrates how the debate is often framed – 'quietist private piety versus quarrelsome public confrontation'. 'New experiences' may be set against 'established tradition', which is how the issue of religious plurality is sometimes approached. However, Race, for whom religion is ultimately about 'transcendent vision and human transformation' means to explore 'the relationship between the unity of reality, which all traditions affirm in their different ways, and the facts of phenomenological difference between religious views of that reality.'

Religious scriptures are considered, and while not devaluing their importance within the various traditions, Race concludes that too direct a reading of texts is unhelpful to the present debate. He tackles John 14.6, 'I am the way, the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me', a verse so often regarded as exclusivist, and makes cogent points as to how such a verse may be read more inclusively. He moves on to give a clear and detailed exposition of the categories of Exclusivism, Inclusivism and Pluralism, citing a range of scholars from Karl Barth to John Hick. In the final chapter entitled 'Next steps', a new paradigm for interreligious co-operation is set out against the backdrop of changing values in society in the twenty-first century.

**Tony Bayfield, Alan Race & Ataulah Siddiqui (Eds), *Beyond the Dysfunctional Family: Jews, Christians and Muslims in Dialogue with Each Other and with Britain***  
**London, Manor House Abrahamic Dialogue Group, 2012, 300pp. ISBN 978 1468167474, £12.95**

Here is my second review; I feel that readers of *De Numine* would be ill-served if, while on the subject of religious pluralism, I did not draw their attention to another work in which Alan Race was also involved, as co-editor. This collection was edited by Tony Bayfield, Alan Race and Ataulah Siddiqui and incorporates the dialogical fruits of the Manor House Abrahamic Dialogue Group (1993-2010). As the title indicates, these three religions are so close as to be 'family' with all that entails. For about fifteen years, the participants 'experimented in walking in the shoes of one another' and the results of wide-ranging dialogue sessions are contained in this volume. The book brings together the personal experiences of Jews, Christians and Muslims, looking back on the history of their faith in the British context, and moving forward in dialogue with each other. There are five parts, and within each chapters are penned by individuals, describing their own experiences and offering their own interpretations.

Part One introduces the three faiths through a representative of each. They tell their own stories and explain how their community came to be where it is today. Part Two consists of dialogical encounters between two faiths at a time, with the third party as observer or 'eavesdropper'. In Part Three the editors expand on their own experiences and include wide-ranging critical scholarship, touching on subjects such as revelation, truth, scripture, communication, violence and gender issues. Here the feminist perspective is introduced with a chapter suggesting a way forward from the inherited patriarchal structure of all three faiths. Part Four presents an analysis of the preceding chapters and 'sets the scene for how Jews, Christians and Muslims might co-operate positively for the good of society.' Part Five, entitled 'Looking to the Future' cites a 'Platform Statement' drawn up in 2005 after dialogue undertaken in the years following 9/11, and then offers a way forward to a future of mutual acceptance, respect and co-operation.

Both books are comprehensive, thought-provoking and thoroughly recommended.

*Reviewed by Marianne Rankin*

**Stafford Betty: *The Severed Breast*, a novel**  
**Brighton, White Crow Books, 2016. 400 pp. ISBN 978 1910121849 (pbk)**

Having no affinity with the Christian faith, and reading and reviewing mostly non-fiction books, I thought this might be a difficult book to read because it is a fictional story of the disciple, Thomas (the doubter), travelling in India to spread the Christian word. But, as the story unfolds, the reader is aware of all life being within this story because it is told with such sensitivity. This is enhanced by some beautiful images conjured up out of what Thomas and his travelling companion, Kumaran, see. These are sometimes practical descriptions and at

other times lyrical, but the sordid squalor of India of the day is also graphically described. I have spent only a little time in India, but the images created made me feel as if I was there in the heat, dust and aromas of the country; it brought the story alive and drew me into the experiences of the characters involved. Clearly, the author has an intimate knowledge of India, its people and its atmosphere.

Each of the disciples is assigned a part of the world to convert to the Christian faith; they each have to pick a palm leaf on which is inscribed the name of the region they will travel to, and they have to abide by the choices they make. The one place Thomas does not want to go is India and, of course, that is the one that he draws. The story takes us through Thomas' experiences and adventures from the time he sets sail for India, sailing through the Red Sea and across the Indian Ocean. During the voyage on the boat he meets the aspiring poet, Kumaran, a Hindu and member of the lowly *pulaiyar* caste. The journey of their relationship ends in what turns out to be Thomas's final destination, Puhar. Thomas' experiences constantly lead him to question his beliefs, faced with not only Kumaran but, at the royal court, with philosophers from other prominent eastern religious traditions. His conversations with Kumaran give him particular challenges because he is the one Thomas most wants to convert to the Christian faith, and the one who proves most resistant.

The book points up the two crucial differences between western Christianity and eastern faiths. Christianity is focussed on one messenger of the divine Word, Jesus Christ, and the need to live a 'good' life to secure our place in the paradise of heaven. For Christians, the soul has only one existence on the earth plane. In the principal religions of the East, the soul strives to reach spiritual enlightenment or paradise, and avoid successive incarnations on Earth.

The book is written in the best dialogue tradition of Plato or Hume. Throughout, religious philosophy is explored through the characters, and the most enjoyable part of this is the natural and believable conversations they have; there is nothing contrived in the way the author presents his characters to us. I was reminded most vividly of David Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. The whole of chapter 37 comprises an intense philosophical discussion, arranged and overseen by the king and queen of the *Chola* region. They bring together representatives of the various religions in the region, and ask each of them to give a brief discourse on the nature of the world and what constitutes salvation from it. This is a fascinating distillation of some of the key points of each of these faiths, including Christianity and, as you would expect from a professor of religious philosophy, the arguments are coherent and thought-provoking. The discussion involves a Buddhist, represented by the real Indian poet philosopher *Ashvaghosha*, a Jain monk, a guru from the Hindu sect of *Shaivism*, a member of the *Charvaka*, the Indian school of materialism, and Thomas presenting the arguments for Christianity. There isn't room to go into the arguments here but they do highlight Thomas' own reservations about some of the tenets of Christianity and his endorsement of some of the principles of Hinduism.

Throughout the novel, the reader is drawn into consideration of the different philosophies as Thomas tries to counter the traditional beliefs of Indian culture. To his credit, he does try to live and experience the Indian way of life so that he can understand their philosophy more readily, but only as part of his passion for converting the people to Christianity. Part of this is

making himself familiar with the Vedas. As one who is more comfortable with the beliefs of the East, it was difficult for me to feel any sympathy for some of the imperatives of the Christian faith, but equally it became clear that there were also similarities between East and West as Bede Griffiths has written – and these were not lost on Thomas.

I felt invested in the characters and fascinated by their very human reactions to the events they were experiencing. Thomas came across as a very fallible human who was also sensitive, loving and lovable. I felt it gave me insight into the trials of trying to convert anyone to beliefs other than those with which they have grown up – and, to a great degree, the futility of this undertaking. This book shows the importance of the religion that is dominant in whatever region of the world we are born into. It also shows how friendships can be tested to the point where we all might do things that surprise and shock us, where we cannot understand why we did them.

This would be an ideal book for anyone who wants to find out about other faiths but who does not want to wade through academic textbooks on the subject. The author makes it very clear that the story is largely fiction, so there is an element of entertainment that might appeal to those who are curious about some elements of the philosophy of religion, or the fundamental beliefs of Eastern faiths. It can also be viewed as something of a travelogue as Professor Betty vividly describes the environments the pair encounter in their travels. This is a story of human feelings and spiritual challenges that holds the reader's attention throughout; it is a story that entertains and informs – surely the best one can hope for from any novel.

*Reviewed by Howard Jones*

**Colin Blakely, *Great Christian Thinkers: A Beginner's Guide to Over Seventy Leading Theologians Through the Ages***

**Peabody, Massachusetts, Hendrickson Publishers, 2014. 176pp. ISBN 978 1 61970 271 4 (pbk)**

This book is a reissue of the text published in the UK by SPCK in 2000. The author is editor of *The Church of England Newspaper* and has written widely on religious affairs. As the subtitle implies, it is not intended as a reference book but as an introduction to significant figures in the Christian tradition whose ideas have been handed down to us through their writings, or in one or two cases through the writings of their opponents. He presents the lives and teachings of his subjects in a light and accessible style of questions and answers.

The questions are not quite those of the person on the Clapham omnibus, but they might be those of the reader of a church newspaper, or emerge over coffee after a sermon. My experience as both a pastor and a teacher of theology is that many Christians are unaware of the rich intellectual traditions that have informed all parts of the church throughout history. Blakely engages us across the centuries and across the divisions of the churches; some of the thinkers in this book are better informed about their own part of the church, some on contemporary writers, some on a period of the past. His timeline starts with Ignatius of

Antioch in the 1st century and ends with Leonardo Boff who was born in 1938. He helpfully parallels the individuals he is including in his text with major world events. A glossary of terms is a useful addition.

This book illustrates the dilemma we face when we engage in the task of making lists; humanity is a taxonomic species and few of us can resist the appeal of a list. Few of us, however, have escaped the difficulties that arise when we ask ourselves, or are asked by others, to list our eight favourite records, or ten favourite books, or any other categories that we attempt. All of the figures he includes can indeed be seen as leading theologians. Some are regarded as being amongst those who led the faithful into error, such as Arius, Nestorius, Origen, and Pelagius. Reformation thinkers have also been the recipients of both praise and condemnation, as have liberation theologians in the 20th century. Blakely points out the significance of controversy amongst Christians and with the generosity of a historical perspective condemns no one to the flames.

This book will continue to be useful to church members, but I would also want to commend it to those whose approach to the study of spirituality comes from outside formal church structures, or indeed from a secular perspective. Many people today have had a very limited exposure to the Christian traditions and often express a limited understanding of its variety and historical nuances. This book provides a series of snapshots of the kaleidoscope that is the inheritance of Christian thought through the centuries. He links his information with contemporary concerns and gives pointers to sources of more detailed information for those who may wish to pursue them. A particular bonus, not often encountered in biographies of, or commentaries on, theologians, is that the book constantly brought a smile to my face.

One negative comment that might be made is that no editorial changes have been made from the original edition. Blakely had responded to questions that came from readers of his original paper, and this book is a compilation of what had been published there. Since then there have been some deaths among the more modern figures, Hildegard has been canonised, and John Henry Newman beatified. This, however, does not nullify the value of the book.

*Reviewed by Kevin Tingay*

**Kenneth D Keathley & Mark F Rooker (eds.), *40 Questions about Creation and Evolution* Grand Rapids, Mich. Kregel Publications, 2014. 430pp. ISBN 978 0 8254 2941 5**

I recently looked at a printed book from 1618 entitled *A Commentarie upon the Fourth Booke of Moses called Numbers containing the foundation of the Church and Commonwealth of Israelites as they walked in the Wilderness* by William Attersoll. He states that 'heerein also the reader shall find more than five hundred Theological Questions, decided and determined'. The writer of this book had found an excellent way to inform his readers about the setting up of the Christian church. I was so pleased to find that nearly 400 years later Keathley and Rooker in their book *40 Questions about Creation* used a similar approach which is equally effective.

For over 200 years, even before Darwin published his *Origin of the Species*, the creation/evolution controversy has been ongoing and the debate shows no signs of diminishing. This book provides a very clear and comprehensive overview from both the theological and the scientific perspectives, indicating poor arguments and misconceptions on both sides. Kenneth Keathley is a Professor of Theology, representing Old Earth Creationism, and Mark Rooker is a Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew, representing Young Earth Creationism.

*40 Questions* is written for the honest open student, having clear upfront writing, with Hebrew words in the Old Testament being given meaningful explanations; definitions are clarified and scientific theories explained for the non-scientist. The book is split into 6 sections covering:

- The doctrine of creation.
- Genesis 1-2
- The Days of Creation.
- The age of the earth
- The fall/the flood
- Evolution/intelligent design

The authors have produced a very useful book which could be read straight through to have a clear understanding of all the many possible views held by Christians and non-Christians, including the strengths and weaknesses; or it could be an encyclopaedia to dip into regularly to find the discussions on particular points.

Each of the 40 questions is divided into bite size pieces of information, followed up with a conclusion and a few reflective questions for the reader. These would be particularly useful for a church group studying the book together. Questions of particular note include:

What is the relationship of Genesis 1-2 to other creation accounts?

What is the extent of Noah's flood? (Both biblical and geological evidence is given.)

What are the evidences that the universe is young, or old?

How is Darwinism an ideology?

I can thoroughly recommend this book for all those who are interested in understanding the history of the debate, the interpretation of biblical texts, the scientific data and the strengths and weaknesses of the different interpretations placed on these by Christians today.

*Reviewed by Mrs Hilary Rosankiewicz,*



**Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality: A Guide for the Perplexed***  
**London, Bloomsbury, 2014. 202pp. ISBN 978 1 4411 9133 5 (pbk) £14.99**

Readers of *De Numine* will need no introduction to the work of Philip Sheldrake, who has contributed so much to the study of spirituality over the last twenty years. This book is one of a series from Bloomsbury Publishing; the series title is taken from that of Maimonides' work of 1190, *The Guide for the Perplexed*. A review of a previous book in the series, on western esotericism, appeared in the Spring 2016 issue of *De Numine*.

This volume will be useful to at least two groups of readers. There are those who have become conscious of the increasing use of the term 'spirituality' in social discourse and the media, but are unclear about what might be included in the meaning of the word. This group could include those who have grown up in the past two or three decades and may have had little contact with religious institutions. (This is observable in some journalistic comment on spirituality.) Sadly there are also those who are within particular religious traditions but for whom the term also seems somewhat mysterious. Both groups might want to describe themselves as perplexed, but your reviewer would wish to commend this book particularly to those who feel that they should be as well informed as possible on current trends in spirituality. It can certainly be recommended to anyone, whether within a particular tradition or not, who is seeking information or even wisdom on the subject.

In the first section of the book Sheldrake addresses the appropriate definitions and methods of study that might be applied to spirituality. What is it and how may it be studied? Helpful guidance is provided for the reader. He goes on to examine the relationship between spirituality and mysticism. This is important, given the loose way in which both terms are sometimes used. He then describes the many ways in which spirituality is expressed, other than the mystical, in the praxis of religious traditions. He looks at the fields of the arts and aesthetics, the historical contexts, and the doctrinal. He also points out how the social sciences provide the modern student with further tools for examining the manifestation of spirituality.

In the second part we are given concise outlines of the major themes of Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist spirituality. They are necessarily brief but provide pointers to more detailed study for those who would wish to take their enquiries further.

In the final section Sheldrake examines what appears to be a growing phenomenon in our own society, that which is termed secular spirituality. Many would wish to describe themselves as 'spiritual but not religious'. He examines what other frameworks of meaning are being used today. They include philosophy, science, human development, health care, gender studies, economics and social studies, and the implications of cyberspace. His thoughtful reflections will prove useful to those who position themselves in more traditional forms of religion, and perhaps find themselves perplexed by some contemporary expressions. A very useful bibliographic section is included which has a wide ranging coverage of recent publications, and some relevant websites.

*Reviewed by Kevin Tingay*

**Seamus O'Mahony, *The Way We Die Now***

**London: Head of Zeus, 2016. ISBN: 978 1784974268 (hbk) £13.48 (Amazon)**

This is a very important book, probably the best book on death that I've read in recent years because it is so honest and representative of the situations faced within our healthcare system. It is written by a highly experienced consultant gastro-enterologist and is both interesting and insightful. It is refreshing to see a doctor address the important issues around death that are so often disregarded, in his profession and in the wider society.

How many of us have thought about what it's like to die? Clearly, from the statistics presented in this book of how many people die in hospital, stripped of their dignity, very few people have considered their own mortality. In our society death is taboo and the majority of us view death as something to fear or 'battle against' rather than accept as the natural part of life that it is. O'Mahony confronts issues around death and presents the full reality of what it can be like to die in hospital. Many aspects considered are both dark and disturbing, unfortunately the result of our death-denying attitudes.

O'Mahony discusses how death has become medicalised and how the seemingly 'good death', with rituals and the deathbed scene at home shared by family and friends, has been obliterated due to our society's avoidance of discussing death, and has become a memory of the distant past. The majority of people now die in hospital and are cared for by strangers. At first O'Mahony's words seem quite harsh as he presents the stark reality of what it can be like to die now in hospitals, where technology and an excess of treatments are available. He rightly questions whether some of the treatments and seeming breakthroughs have really been in the best interest of the patients when considered from a long-term perspective, where patients have been hospitalised for months before reaching their inevitable death. When focussed on the short term we fail to consider the impact further down the line, yet such treatments are frequently demanded by those who do not fully comprehend the overall picture.

The role of the doctor is varied and demanding and O'Mahoney discusses how breaking bad news is never easy, yet is an essential responsibility of the doctor. It should be done with compassion and with a realistic outlook for what lies beyond this terminal stage of the illness. Sometimes this is avoided because it is easier to order another investigation rather than broach the subject of the gravity of the patient's illness, or to leave that task to the oncologist. Doctors are also faced with a multitude of dilemmas, ranging from pressure from families to administer ineffective treatments, or requests not to disclose to the patient they are dying or that no further treatment would be of benefit.

O'Mahony also tackles controversial issues that have been flaunted in the media, such as the Liverpool Care Pathway and the unrecorded, unexplained deaths at Stafford Hospital. He provides a balanced overview. There is an interesting discussion of the deaths of high profile personalities in the chapter called 'The Celebrity Cancer Ward' where he is candid and honest. The book is laced with case histories of some of the patients the author has encountered throughout his career, as well as of members of his family. In the backdrop to

the book, he also draws on the writings of the historian of death, Philippe Aries, and various other philosophers of death such as Michel de Montaigne, Geoffrey Gorer and Ernest Becker.

The need for control at the end of life is apparent with the rise of advanced directives and living wills, and O'Mahony refers to the work of others which demonstrates that a simple change of language can provide patients with better choices: rather than using the phrase 'do not resuscitate', using the words 'allow a natural death' gives a different meaning, much more conducive to the good death that we all wish for.

In this scientific era we have alienated the spiritual aspect of being human, and consequently death is a lonely process that is denied or viewed with embarrassment. An important fact that we must take into account is that we all have spiritual needs which usually become most apparent when we are dying. Yet, as O'Mahony rightly points out, spiritual needs are not medical. Hence it is time to reconsider death and fully integrate our spirituality within the healthcare system.

In this book O'Mahony does not sugar-coat death but presents the truth of what the medicalization of death has resulted in. You won't find comfort in this book but will instead find facts and be shown the wider picture about what death can be like for us all. The way to change this bleak reality is to heed the message of this book, which is to cultivate a new attitude towards death. This is an excellent book and one that I would recommend *everyone* reads.

*Reviewed by Dr Penny Sartori*

## Books Received for Review

Please see below the list of books we have received for review. If you would like to write a review of any of these, please contact **Marian MacPolin** – [mmacpolin@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:mmacpolin@yahoo.co.uk) – who will arrange for a copy to be sent to you. **Please send completed reviews to the Editor:** [theotokos66@gmail.com](mailto:theotokos66@gmail.com) copied to [denumine@gmail.com](mailto:denumine@gmail.com)

When we receive your review, the book will become yours. If you would like to review a book that is not on this list, please contact the Editor.

Peter Brown	<i>The Cult of the Saints</i>	(University of Chicago Press, 2015)
Anselm K. Min (ed.)	<i>The Task of Theology: Leading Theologians on the Most Compelling Questions for Today</i>	(Orbis, 2015)
Franklin H. Littell	<i>Understanding Early Christianity</i>	(Carta Jerusalem, 2015)
E.P. Lachence & P. Brunette	<i>The Earliest Franciscans</i>	(Paulist Press, 2015)
John Dear	<i>Thomas Merton, Peacemaker</i>	(Orbis, 2015)
Mary Bowmaker	<i>The Reality of the Unbelievable</i>	(Courtenbede, 2016)

- C. Coats, M.M. Emerich (eds.) *Practical Spiritualities in a Media Age* (Bloomsbury, 2016)
- Roger Haight *Spiritual and Religious: Explorations for Seekers* (Orbis, 2016)
- Jon Sweeney *Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Orbis, 2016)
- Bettina E. Schmidt *Spirits and Trance in Brazil: An Anthropology of Religious Experience* (Bloomsbury, 2016)
- Bettina E. Schmidt (ed.) *The Study of Religious Experience: Methods and Approaches*  
(based on the papers delivered at the one-day RERC conference in 2014) (Equinox, 2016)
- S. Bullivant, E.O. Genilo, D.F. Pilario, A.M. Brazal (eds.) *Theology and Power: International Perspectives* (Paulist Press, 2016)
- David L Mueller *Karl Barth* (Hendrickson, 2016)
- David Richo *When Mary becomes Cosmic: a Jungian Mystical Path to the Divine Feminine* (Paulist Press, 2016)
- Elizabeth A. Johnson *The Strength of her Witness: Jesus Christ in the Global Voices of Women.* (Orbis, 2016)



## AHT Events, September 2016 – March 2017

### Friday 7th October to Sunday 9th October 2016

4.00 pm Fri **7th Llantarnam Abbey Annual Gathering**  
to Theme: *Boundaries and Beyond: our spiritual selves*  
2.00 pm Sun Cost: £115.00 (£105.00 for AHT members)  
Venue: Ty Croeso Centre, Llantarnam Abbey, Llantarnam, Cwmbran, NP44 3YJ.  
(Contact: Mary Cook: [maryfrechfa@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:maryfrechfa@yahoo.co.uk))

### Saturday 15th October 2016

#### Alister Hardy Trust Members' Day 2016

10:30 Registration and Welcome  
11.15 Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture: *Taming the Spirit? Religious Experience and the Unsettling of Belief*, by Professor Jeff Astley.  
14:00 Panel, with AHT members, chaired by Tristram Jenkins, led by Professor Jeff Astley, to consider: *What have we learned from our study of Religious and Spiritual Experience and what we should be doing about it?*  
Venue: Oxford Quaker Meeting House, St Giles, Oxford  
Cost: £20; AHT members £16; students £5  
Enquiries and bookings: Marianne Rankin: [mariannerankin@icloud.com](mailto:mariannerankin@icloud.com) 07714 032643

### Local Groups:

#### Oxford and Cotswold Group

Contact: Tanya Garland: [tanya.garland.37@gmail.com](mailto:tanya.garland.37@gmail.com) Tel: 01865 244260  
Venue: to be arranged. See Local Group report on pages 21-22.

#### 6th October 2016

Talk by Tanya Garland on *The Visions of Mary, Mother of Jesus*, with personal accounts from saints and others.

#### 5th November 2016

*Levitation, what is happening?*

#### 3rd December 2016

*Celebrating Festivals and the Impact of Ritual*, with discussion

## **South East Wales Group**

Contact: Mary Cook, [maryfrechfa@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:maryfrechfa@yahoo.co.uk)

Venue: 12 Wood Close, Llanfrechfa, Cwmbran NP44 8UR.

### **Thursday 22nd September 2016**

2 - 4.00 pm: Reunion, DVD and discussion.

### **Thursday 8th December 2016**

*What ignited your interest in the Spiritual? What have we learned? How should we take our findings forward?* DVD and discussion

### **Thursday 23rd March 2017**

*The Attraction of Opposites*, a discussion led by Alan Underwood

## **RERC Research Seminar Series**

**organised by the Religious Experience Research Centre, Lampeter in collaboration with the Research Cluster 'Spirituality, Health and Wellbeing' of the Faculty of Humanities and Performing Arts**

### **Thursday 13th October 2016**

**Body** with presentations by Dr Sarah Wright on the body and renegotiating the normal, and Revd Dr Jeff Leonardi on Christian understanding of the body

### **Wednesday 30th November 2016**

**Shamanism** with presentations by Mario Puljiz on Santo Daime, and Dr David Wilson on Spirituality in the UK

### **Wednesday 22nd February 2017**

**Spirituality and Trauma** with presentations by Cath Thomson on spiritual care of the dying in Skanda Vale, and Dr Ralph Häussler on trauma and spirituality

### **Wednesday 15th March 2017**

**Mindfulness, Spirituality and the Medical Profession** with presentations by Becky Seale on Mindfulness and the person-centred approach to counselling, and Professor Bettina Schmidt on Spiritism and medical professionals in Brazil

**All seminars will take place in the Founders Library on the Lampeter Campus, 5.00–6.30 pm.  
All are welcome**

## Other Events

### Friday 23rd September 2016

Marking the **80th anniversary of the World Congress of Faiths**

One-day Conference: *Religious Pluralism and Inter-faith Dialogue: Learning for the Future.*

Speakers include: Dr Ankur Barua, Rabbi Dr Tony Bayfield, Professor Ursula King,  
Revd Dr Alan Race, Professor Chris Baker

Venue: Emmanuel College, Cambridge

Contact: [jenny@worldfaiths.org](mailto:jenny@worldfaiths.org) or call Jenny Kartupelis or Lesley Turney on 01223 781781

### Saturday 1st October 2016, 7.00 pm

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

Venue: Lecture Hall, Kensington Central Library, Campden Hill Road, Kensington,  
London, W8 7RX

Contact: Peter Johnson, [secretary@spr.ac.uk](mailto:secretary@spr.ac.uk)

### Friday 2nd October to Sunday 4th October 2015

**Wrekin Trust**: Round Table Gathering. Theme: *Being the Change*. All welcome.

Venue: Hawkwood College, Painswick Old Road, Stroud, Glos. GL6 7QW

Contact/further information: [office@wrekintrust.org](mailto:office@wrekintrust.org)

### Friday 4th November to Sunday 6th November, 2016

*Exploring Spiritual Experience* led by Marianne Rankin

Venue: The Ammerdown Centre, Ammerdown Park, Radstock, Somerset, BA3 5SW  
Full cost: £153.00 Deposit: £65.00 Non-residential

This course is nearly sold out – please contact Ammerdown to check for availability:

Contact: +44 176 143 709 or [admin@ammerdown.org](mailto:admin@ammerdown.org)

### Wednesday 9th November, 6.30 - 9.00 pm

**The World Congress of Faiths** Younghusband Lecture 2016

*The Riddle of the One and the Many: Reflections on Spirituality and the Brain*

Lecture and buffet reception. Lecturer: Iain McGilchrist

Venue: Heythrop College, London

Cost: £20.00; Concessionary cost: members of WCF and full time students: £15.00

Booking forms and enquiries: Contact: [jenny@worldfaiths.org](mailto:jenny@worldfaiths.org) or call Jenny Kartupelis or  
Lesley Turney on 01223 781781

Book online at [www.worldfaiths.org/younghusband-lecture-2016](http://www.worldfaiths.org/younghusband-lecture-2016)

### Saturday 19th November 2016

**Scientific and Medical Network** *Conscious Ageing and the Wisdom of Elders*  
Chaired by David Lorimer.

Speakers: Dr Peter Fenwick, Diana Clift, Dr Tim Read, Anne Geraghty

Venue: Colet House, 151 Talgarth Road, London W14

Cost: £30, bring lunch to share

Contact: [www.scimednet.org](http://www.scimednet.org) [info@scimednet.org](mailto:info@scimednet.org)

## Letter from Spain

On the last evening of our village's three-day fiesta, we came across a group of young people sitting on benches in the square, with shiny brass wind instruments on their laps or by their sides. They said they would be playing in about half an hour. So we came back later; we could hear solemn marching band music, but we couldn't see them because of the crowd of people following them in a long procession through the streets. When we finally got to see them, we found they were following four men holding up a platform with wreaths of white flowers and the Virgin Mary swaying and wobbling slightly on top (and a support party with cushions on their shoulders), and church dignitaries in simple robes. Then, after the youthful brass band, came the procession of maybe two or three hundred people, some of whom we had seen going into the church earlier.



This was the 15th August, the feast-day of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary – and this was the *raison d'être* of the whole three-day village Fiesta. The population of the village seemed to have doubled for the weekend – the bars expanded into the streets with huge tables and other extra tables, there were bands you could probably hear a couple of kilometres away until five o'clock each morning, stalls with food, and toys and games, two extra little bars with coconut-thatched roofs selling *mojitos* – and a lot of noise. One evening ten or twelve horses were ridden up and down the streets by men with plenty of panache but no riding hats. Piles of litter would appear overnight.

I was struck now by the melding of religious ceremony and everyday life which I've never seen in the UK. (I had seen it before in Thailand; a lady stopping on the busy main street to pray by a shrine on the pavement, a man across the street from our café who brought out a little altar from his house and knelt by it.) This was true village Catholicism – solemn but cheerful. There were men in the Mediterranean August equivalent of a smart suit – short-sleeved white shirts and assorted dark trousers; women in colourful summer dresses, short and long, smart and tacky, and some very high heels; there were kids in bright pink shorts, there were scruffy t-shirts and pretty skirts – all following the hallowed Virgin Mary swaying on her way to Heaven. No self-absorbed new age 'spirituality', no grim fear of damnation, no affluent splendour, no pompousness, just a simple, sincere, village ceremony.

*Jean Matthews*



## From the Editor

The local groups seem to be disappearing; only three remain, and of these only two have sent in a list of future events. The future of the London group hangs in the balance, not least I am sure because John Franklin is retiring from active service as organiser; we will have news of how the London group is faring in the Spring.

There are long standing alliances between the AHT and other like-minded groups such as the Wrekin Trust and the Scientific and Medical Network, and other more recent links which are strengthening, for example with the One Spirit Alliance. This could be a promising avenue of development for us, and we hope that our joint meetings with these and other groups will continue. Please would members let Marianne Rankin know of such events that may interest members, and we would really appreciate reports from those who attend relevant events.

