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**PLEASE NOTE CURRENT ARRANGEMENTS
FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO *DE NUMINE***

**Please send all contributions to the Editor: theotokos66@gmail.com
and copy to the Assistant Editor: denumine@gmail.com**

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

Please note suggested word limits for submissions.

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

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Editorial

I note with regret the loss of one of our patrons, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, who died recently at the age of eighty-five. There is a brief tribute to him on page 36, and his memoir *An English Spring* was published in 2015. We are happy to welcome Mike Rush, the current web-master for the AHT site, as a new Trustee, and Andy Burns as our new Honorary Secretary. Andy follows John Franklin who has retired from the post after thirty years of service. John is now updating his history of the Alister Hardy Research Centre and Society¹, so it cannot really be said that he has retired from service to the AHT. For many years John was also organiser of the London group, the demise of which, after 28 years, is recorded on page 32 by John himself, with Rowena Rudkin. We still have three local groups, very different from each other, and all still going strong. 'AHT in North Wales' particularly has branched out and evolved (see Dr Keith Beasley's report (Spring 2017, page 30).

This time there is as usual a wide variety of contributions, but the debate about spiritual and religious experience continues as a thread running through from issue to issue. The first two articles, on this theme, are responses to Professor Jeff Astley's talk at Members Day 2016, which he summarised in Issue 60. So the debate goes on, and is at present providing the gravitas which grounds *De Numine*, and keeps us mindful of Sir Alister Hardy's original aim, to explore religious/spiritual experience with academic and scientific rigour. Bridge-building between science and religion also continues, the challenge taken up here by Alan Underwood.

I always look forward to Mary Cook's original and sometimes zany musings on spirituality; they often strike a chord with more measured approaches. This time (page 17) what she says resonates with both Howard Jones' finely honed article on the concept of the 'zero point energy field' (Issue 51 p.5), and with a scholarly article about time-slip experiments (Issue 59 p.21) by Taras Handziy, an Erasmus scholar from the Ukraine on attachment to the the RERC in 2015. I hope Mary's poem (also on page 17) will raise a smile.

That is the joy of editing *De Numine*, the wide range of contributions I receive and allow myself to include, from academic articles to Mary's musings, to moving personal accounts such as 'The Last Gift' and 'The Healing Moment' and the review by Andy Burns of a book about Jo Cox (page 53). I quote from Andy's email to me, '... it's a very inspirational read and whilst not overtly "religious" it does offer hope and encourage tolerance in these difficult times'. In other words 'love thy neighbour', so I had no hesitation in including it. This was the thread running through Jo's life, and thanks to her husband's brave book it stretches beyond her death. And the thread of love stretches between issues; I have wanted a chance to quote from a review by Howard of a book by Irene Weinberg² which is about the love she and her husband shared before his death and after:

I hope most of all that you will see the bottom-line truth: the love you give and receive in your life now can and *does* go on. The love you manage to stumble through for your parents, your neighbors, your children, or your spouse, no matter how imperfect, *can* help stop the force of cruelty in the world and can help you overcome any tragedy life hands you.

As Marcus Braybrooke says in his sermon 'It is this religion of love that provides the strongest motivation to go on struggling ...' (extract on page 64, and sermon in full on the AHT website).

There have been several events at Lampeter which I feel would be of interest to AHT: the annual conference on Harmony and Sustainability, in its second year, was one I attended and my report will appear next Spring. Meanwhile there is an account online: search for 'UWTSD Lampeter/second harmony conference'. Also of interest might be events run by the Confucius Centre on the Lampeter campus, and I would welcome any reports of these.

Finally I would like to add a few practical **reminders for contributors**:

- Copy dates are January 31st (Spring) and July 31st (Autumn).
- Please send submissions to the Editor: theotokos66@gmail.com
- Copy to denumine@gmail.com
- Include references where appropriate, and try to keep to the word limits specified (although instalments are an option).
- Remember to ask the Editor for book review copies, as Marian MacPolin has left for Ireland.

De Numine online: All *De Numine* issues to date are on the Publications page of the AHT website: <http://www.studyspiritualexperiences.org/publications.html>

Patricia Murphy

¹ John Franklin, *Exploration into Spirit: A Power Greater Than ...* First Edition published by The Alister Hardy Society, 2006

² Irene Weinberg, *They Serve Bagels in Heaven: a story of love, eternity, and the cosmic importance of everyday life*, Self-published, 2016, reviewed by Howard Jones in Issue 62 p.45



ARTICLES

The following two articles are responses to Professor Astley's Lecture on the last Members' Day, and the summary of this that he kindly sent to *De Numine* (see issue 62, page 13). (Ed.)

Whither now?

Jeff Astley's excellent 2016 Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture, reported in the Spring 2017 issue of *De Numine*, raises many interesting issues, and I would like to pick up a few points, if I may. I wonder how much of the clash between religion and religious experience is due to differences of perspective, and interpretation of wording taken literally when this is often meant more in a figurative, metaphoric or symbolic sense. Words, indeed, are all we have to describe spiritual experience, to use in theology, scripture, creed and dogma; and of course discernment is needed to see what lies behind what is being said. Religion, in its broadest sense, from *re-ligio*, to reconnect or bind together, is universal and, properly, should unite all. The religions, each with its own universal element, seek to unite their followers, but in their coding, inevitably differentiate and separate themselves from each other through arising at different periods and in/for different cultures. Religion should seek to unite the 'religions',

there being only one transcendent Ultimate Reality, howsoever conceived. A Jesuit missionary once said to me, 'all religions are one, though different: all people are one, though different.' All religions are founded on 'revelation' (religious/mystical experience), each expressing particular revelation(s), but each seeming to have a common base: it is in human *interpretation* of this in theological constructs and doctrine that division and separation arise. If religion 'has priority over all its theologies' [Astley] the aim, surely, must be to seek and concentrate on what might link, or unite, rather than on what divides. One simple, universal 'theology' – the aim for the transcendent, Unity, and Love ('love God, and your neighbour as yourself'), and one common ethos, the Golden Rule ('Do not to others what you would not have them do to you') seems to lie within and behind all theologies and cosmologies¹, and surely it is just this that is really important. It is necessary to accept the differences, which have their part to play, but also, surely, to recognise and abide by the simple prime message to all. Is this really too simplistic? Jesus said we must '... receive the kingdom of God like a little child' (*Mark 10 13-16*)². 'Noetic, cognitive' religious experience, which can give rise to 'Ordinary theology', can get straight to the heart of 'religion', as the following poems by Jalal al-Din Rumi and Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi, Sufi mystics, show rather beautifully:

What is to be done O Moslems? For I do not recognise myself.

I am neither Christian nor Jew nor Jabr nor Moslem.

I am not of the East, nor of the West, nor of land, nor of sea.

I am not of this world, nor of the next, nor of paradise, nor of Hell.

My place is the placeless, my trace is Traceless.

'Tis neither body nor soul, for I belong to the soul of the Beloved.

I have put duality away, I have seen that the two worlds are One.

One I seek, One I know, One I see, One I call.

(quoted by David Hay in *Exploring Inner Space* p.92)

O Marvel, a Garden amidst the flames.

My heart has become capable of every form.

It is a pasture for gazelles, a convent for Christian monks,

A temple for idols, and the pilgrim's Kaba;

The tables of the Torah, and the Book of the Koran.

I follow the religion of Love, whatever way Love's camels take,

That is my religion and my faith.

(quoted by Stephen Hirtenstein in talk to AHS London Group)

Today, with better understanding of the world's religions, increasing interfaith dialogue, acceptance of pluralism and movements towards the development of natural theology (advocated by Alister Hardy³), pluralistic theology and theology of 'hiero-diversity'⁴. There's a new spirit abroad. Professor Astley said, of development of Christian belief being a recurrent concern, 'God's *continuing* inspiration and revelation ... which produces creative insights that enable the records of Christianity's "original events or words to be read in a new way" (Astley quoting David Brown).' If ever there was a time for the theologies and 'original events or words' of the religions to be read – and *expressed* – in a new way, I believe surely it is now ...

As spiritual/religious experience is, in a sense, 'revelation', this 'speaks', I believe, not only to the individual, but also, collectively, to theology, religion, and society. A further point might be that, whilst many such experiences are indeed therapeutic, and many are in answer to prayer, many others seem to come as a 'call', or as a 'direction'. There are many examples of such a seeming 'call', 'guidance' or 'direction', revealed in meaningful coincidences; in events taking a sudden turn, possibly against a person's will, but proving in the end to be beneficial. This happened in my case and I have known it in others. There are also cases of instruction given out of the blue: for example, Margaret Torrie, who said that 'out of the blue came a directive' to do something for widows, which led eventually to the founding of CRUSE⁵ – and in the 'direction' given to Dorothy Kerin, after her own healing, to create a healing centre, leading to the founding of Burrswood⁶. Also, looking back on life, one can see how events have formed a pattern, sometimes in a seemingly pre-planned way. As Shakespeare put it, 'There's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will' (Hamlet, V: ii). It is this aspect of spiritual experiencing that I find so fascinating: who or what is calling, or 'directing' us, when not made clear – God, Christ, guardian angel, departed ancestor? Who or whatever it is can see into the future, and these experiences, generally beneficial, can so often be seen as part of a deliberate 'plan' for us. I wonder how many readers might have had experiences of this kind – and what research might be done on this?

John Franklin

John would be happy to receive as personal communications any comments, whether in agreement or disagreement, or to hear the thoughts or experience of others in and around this topic. Email: johnfranklin35@hotmail.com or write to him at 13 Mullings Court, Cirencester, GL7 2AW.

Notes:

¹ The Perennial Philosophy and the essence of Theosophy.

² An interesting parallel in Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching:

'Be the stream of the universe!
Being the stream of the universe,
Ever true and unswerving,
Become as a little child once more.' (Tao, Chapter 28, Wildwood House 1972)

³ 'The systematic study of the experience of God carried out in the spirit of the seeking naturalists, the pioneers working towards a more natural theology, can I believe prepare the ground for a religious faith in harmony with the true spirit of science: an experimental faith which can go forward and develop just as science enlarges its horizons.' (Hardy, *The Biology of God*, pp. 233-234)

⁴ Marcelo Barras, *Dwellings of the Wind on Human Paths: Towards a Theology of Hiero-diversity* (Concilium 2007/1)

⁵ Mary Stott, *The Guardian*, obituary, 11 September 1999

⁶ Joanna Ernest, *The Life of Dorothy Kerin* (The Dorothy Kerin Trust, 1983)

What is Religious Experience when one has it without knowing it was religious?

Can a secular person in a communist country have an extra-ordinary or religious experience?

I was fascinated by Professor Astley's summary of the Alister Hardy lecture in *De Numine*, Spring 2017¹. It made me think about Eastern Europe – where spirituality is now openly accepted – which I remember clearly from growing up there in the time of communism as a place where there was no widely available common belief, other than a deep rooted secular ideology. It made me reflect on the development of my own understanding of spirituality.* But first, I must explain my present view.

I tend to agree with Friedrich Schleiermacher that doctrine or dogma must have come from the original experiences which later became religion rather than the other way around. Whether those experiences were disturbing flashes of insights, deep personal contact with the Spirit or simply gentle intuitions is not of major relevance. The question here is who taught dogma to the first religious or spiritual person and how? Are we presuming that religious or spiritual experience is reserved only for people who have some kind of spiritual or religious upbringing? Are we saying there was no such thing before the first ever doctrine or creed was established? How can we then locate the source of these in the first place? It is a paradox in its own right. Surely, there has to be an experience first before it can be classified as anything at all.

Simon Tugwell dismisses the importance of inner experiences if not related to a widely used doctrine or dogma. This however is only true if we forget that dogma only serves to underpin organised religion, but not necessarily to induce true experiences within the ones who follow it. Dogma only has a value if it guards a practical knowledge which cannot be changed as it has to work every time, as with Yoga or meditation or Martial Arts, for instance. In the modern world, where self-development can be just a matter of logging onto the internet, no one idea can have a monopoly on anyone's spiritual development. It appears, at times, that the heads of religions are far more concerned with defending and keeping the dogma and far less concerned with helping their members achieve their own deep connection with the Spirit. Once individuals experience a deep connection to Spirit do they no longer need another human to guide them as all the guidance is provided by the Divinity herself?

No 'truth' is the universal truth for every person at all times. No dogma serves all. Tugwell has yet to explain what *is* the 'truth which can fascinate and fulfil the mind' for all of us. The truth, in my view, is only the truth once it has been experienced. I am inclined to agree with St Thomas Aquinas – '*none written is really the real picture of what is experienced*'. The words and classifications are just a necessity so it can be explained to others who don't know what has taken place. At this stage concepts are useful but are not necessarily accurate. They are just tools used to convey the experience, but they don't guarantee the full truth about it, nor do they explain the reason or reveal the source of it. But they *do* help to put the message across and describe in some way complex inner processes which make up revelations of inner mysteries. This *is* the truth which is true for the person who experienced it, and if others can

benefit from it then this is even more valuable, but it is not always the case. Some of the most valuable experiences are personal instructions for the people experiencing them, helping them to proceed further in life.

The reality is that phenomena of extra-sensory experiences exist whether we relate them to things that are familiar to us or not. An experience itself is not always dictated by our prior knowledge; if it was it would not be extra-ordinary. Extra-ordinary experiences can be called spiritual or religious or special or extra-terrestrial or whatever one wishes, but the fact is they are happening, and have been happening to people, no matter what they knew about them. Just because we can track the religious records for religious and spiritual experiences of a few thousand years in the past, this does not prove anything, including that they never happened to cave women and cave men. We don't *own* the vocabulary or classification of those experiences.

A few years ago I decided I would only plant varieties of plants and trees which bear fruit for humans or insects so I could see a proper purpose to my garden. Two years later I caught myself worrying as I lost the label off my apple tree. I was worried I would forget which variety of apple it was. Then it suddenly occurred to me that the apple would bear its fruit no matter what I called it. This simple truth somehow appeared much deeper. The apple will follow its nature as it is not dependent on which words I use to decode its existence in my own mind, or anyone's for that matter. It comes from the order by which existence of *me* is also dictated, therefore I might have an impact on how it is *nurtured* but I have not brought it into *existence itself*.

So it is with extra-sensory experiences. We have experiences of them but we have not necessarily brought them into our reality to start with. With or without trying or even knowing, we might have *realigned* ourselves, our nature and our state of being with something greater than ourselves to be able to experience it, which is highly plausible as we humans are only *in* the order of things but are not *the* order of things. Just as my apple would greatly benefit from me knowing it is indeed a Cox apple, and the tree might have its own quirks, as to what it likes and does not, to produce fruit and thrive. Even this knowledge is only available to me through fruit growers who had experiences with apple trees and are able to verbalise in such a way I can understand and use for the benefit of my tree. For all I know, the apple itself might actually only thrive on the love and attention put into it given to it as cutting, pruning, feeding, sun exposure, watering and so on. No one knows. We just know the apple is there and it responds to certain conditions.

The same principle applies with humanity's – whatever you want to call it – spirit, religious side, soul, mind or heart. It helps if we can recognise it and use some kind of understanding to nurture it. If we happen to find a Christian to tell us what it is we might use Christian methods to nurture it, if on the other hand we find a Buddhist to explain the concepts other people build around it, we might use Buddhist methods ourselves to develop and nurture it. However, no matter which method we use to develop and nurture the fruit of our extra-ordinary experience it *has* happened on its own accord to begin with, possibly independent of the concepts available to us. Just as my tree is a creation of nature we call an 'apple', if we called it a 'zombie' it would make no difference to its existence and nature. It is humans that

give it the explanation relating to human experience of it but don't dictate its life or its source. Extra-sensory experiences happen regardless of who we are, and what we have or have not been told about them. They do not depend on our definition or rationalisations to exist. There are *no guarantees*, Extra-ordinary experiences happen to religious and non-religious people alike, and are beyond the logical pattern of cause and effect.

This, I believe, is an important contributor to the religious revival in Eastern Europe, the fact that people had these kinds of experiences *despite* not having religion. This has possibly made them more open to any relevant (religious) knowledge and concepts once they became socially acceptable and widely available. People wanted to know what possible explanations they could have to what was occurring. That local beliefs and superstitions were very much alive among the predominantly rural population had little relevance for townsfolk, including me. Some of us moved on to other theories, to which we had no access before the collapse of communism. So, apart from being helpful at times, I see no reason to limit the definition of these experiences by any particular term, whether or not it includes the words 'religious' or 'spiritual'. I had such experiences at a very early age while being brought up in a secular, atheist milieu.

The view that 'there are no pure (i.e. unmediated) experiences' can be challenged because it is based on accounts of experiences that come mainly from the Western world. Further research should perhaps include far more Eastern European examples; even if reports of these are rare, this is likely to be because they were not commonly shared; they were seen as indicative of a backwards, peasant mentality until quite recently. With the collapse of communism, all sorts of spiritual and religious revivals have started to take place and gain popularity. Once unleashed, a rich variety of beliefs were revealed to have survived the post-war militant atheism. While there is a value in defining and recording different ways of experiencing extra-ordinary events, as William James has done, there might not be a definitive explanation of how and why those experiences are taking place. To put it down purely to our previous experiences and predisposition is an exclusivist, simplistic and reductionist way of looking at this very complex and exceptionally individual issue.

Biljana (Billie) Krstovic

* See Billie's experience, pages 21-3



The Attraction of Opposites



You open the gates of the soul to let the dark food of chaos flow into your order and meaning. If you marry the ordered to the chaos you produce the divine child, the supreme meaning beyond meaning and meaninglessness.

(C. G. Jung: *The Red Book*)

Born of this earth we come into it, if things go well, with the necessary anatomy to make our way in the world. Several billion years of evolution have equipped us with two hands, two arms, two feet, two legs, two eyes and so on; all we need to thrive as humans. Even our brains have two hemispheres! At first we are as helpless babes but then we grow and learn control of our soft machines, we stride out, upright, as bilaterally symmetrical beings, all matching pairs in motion, reflected opposites, pretty much from top to bottom.

Given this bodily foundation it is perhaps not surprising that our minds seem to possess a similar innate symmetry. From a very early age we begin actively to construct the world from related dualities: we paint our picture of the world through pairs of opposites. From before we can speak we learn and are actively taught these opposites as a means to divide the world into compelling common sense pairs; up-down, left-right, in-out, hot-cold, big-small, mind-matter; on and on it goes, seemingly *ad infinitum*. The experienced immediacy of these opposites soon establishes them as coordinates of the map by which we navigate the everyday world. Very quickly such discriminations become embedded as second nature, establishing a hypnotic hold over us. While these distinctions are clearly necessary to navigate the everyday, difficulties may arise when, as we shall see, the attraction of opposites becomes all embracing – when we cling to such to concepts as fundamental aspects of reality on every level.

Science has achieved great things by refining these discriminations via the principles of reductionism, and this has gone a long way towards establishing dualism as the default mindset of society, while allowing any consideration of spirituality to wither on the vine. It has attained a triumph of predictive and explanatory success that has imbued its discoveries and theories with a strong, if not overwhelming, sense of clarity and certainty; all accomplished by dividing the world into smaller and ever smaller pieces. Science has constructed much of its compelling success through formalising these divisions and in the process carrying the splitting of reality to previously unimaginable degrees by utilising ever more sensitive and sophisticated technologies. These same technologies have enabled science to extend the reach of ‘reality’, the known extent of time and space, to billions of times the bounds once envisaged by our ancestors.

The objective and concretised world-view that emerged from the rational enlightenment of the 18th century was largely based on Newtonian science and its outlook. This has become so ingrained in society that it is still, even now, the prevailing world ‘myth’. It is a world-view in which there is little or no room for the spirit or psyche, other than as epiphenomena of a physical and material world, where space and time, energy and matter are viewed as the essential foundations for what is considered real. For many who are antithetical to the scientific endeavour, this perspective has become a convenient stick with which to beat science for it clearly dismisses and ignores, or at the very least explicitly puts to one side, any consideration of those aspects of human experience that do not readily fall under examination by the scientific method, namely spirit, subjectivity and consciousness.

Given that this particular world-view has been formalised and championed by science, religion and spirituality have, on a societal scale, increasingly been forced to take a back seat, seemingly required to fight a never ending losing battle against the prevailing materialistic perspective. Any defence of spirituality, conducted largely on the territory established by science, has necessarily proved unsuccessful, while any real attempt to articulate and establish a widely accepted religious or spiritual alternative has also largely foundered. The current worldview, established and coming to dominance on the greatly finessed 'objective' observation of the outer world provided by science, has proved highly resistant to any ingress of the spirit or psyche. At the same time the fruits of the scientific method and scientific experimentation have fallen with increasing rapidity from the tree of technological knowledge, emphasising both the power and utility of scientific wizardry.

This, perhaps, need not have been an inevitable course of events. In eastern religions such as Buddhism and Taoism the primacy of matter, form and objects was the subject of deep questioning and scepticism from the very outset; this led to a world view that gave primacy to process and change in nature, and was more inclined to focus on the fundamental interdependencies of things rather than the properties perceived as belonging or intrinsic to those things. This is a more relational world-view where objects exist not so much in and of themselves, but arise solely through the network of relationships in which they partake. From this viewpoint the phenomena of the world are frequently considered illusory. This position is maintained, not to deny the existence of the manifold objects of the everyday world, but rather to emphasise that they have no intrinsic or independent existence in their own right. The Buddhist emphasis on continual change and the dependent origination of all things sums this up succinctly. It is mirrored by Buddhist cautions as to the dangers of attachment, whether the object of desire is of a material, conceptual, emotional or ideological nature.

This 'eastern' world-view was largely established and verified, again on 'objective' observation of a persisting inner world, through reproducible meditative methods tested and confirmed by countless practitioners century after century. The attitude adopted here, of observing the inner world with an emphasis on personal verification and repeatability under constrained 'experimental' conditions, is one that I would argue has striking similarities to the scientific approach. Science itself is far from immune to such unifying and holistic trends. Not only can these be clearly discerned in science, they are of necessity the very essence of its global theories that seek to explain specific phenomena through the operation of all-encompassing fundamental laws.

By way of illustration, in the life sciences, having divided up the species of the living world via the binomial scientific nomenclature of Linnaeus, unifying tendencies become clear in Darwin's theory of evolution and in modern ecological theory; these theories bind the organic and inorganic world together through the planet-wide systemic processes of nature. However in physics, Einstein's General Theory of Relativity melds and dissolves all our common sense notions of space and time into one continuum where no objective, universal 'now', no universally agreed present moment, can be established and in which neither space nor time are absolute. The discoveries of quantum mechanics similarly dispose of our simple notions of here and there, this and that, throwing them into deepest confusion, while we are also forced to confess that we can find 'no stuff in matter'. There is nothing solid on which to

stand. All these advances do not prevent scientists from continuing to seek grander and more all-embracing concepts with overly ambitious names such as the Theory of Everything (TOE) and the Grand Unified Theory (GUT); but these still do not include spirit or psyche.

From my perspective it seems clear that two opposing trends can be discerned, both in the field of science and in religion/spirituality. One is the tendency to divide and categorise the phenomena of the world in an attempt to achieve an ordered and coherent world view, while the counter tendency is to unify and seek a common underpinning or source from which all phenomena draw their being. There is, it seems, a fundamental commonality here, which speaks to our most basic proclivities for comprehending the world, both inside and out.

As we might expect in a consideration of the attraction of opposites, there is a universal tendency: a desire to unite, to bring together that which appears separate, to view things holistically, to integrate and to dissolve barriers. It is not hard to find these ideas in spiritual texts both ancient and modern, but these same trends are also apparent in the scientific endeavour, where their importance has risen to much greater significance in the last hundred years or so. It is, I think, fair to say that in the west, in both science and religion the tendency to categorise and objectify has come to dominate, so that both these arenas of human experience have come to be subsumed within the commonly held western 'myth' in which reality is popularly taken to comprise objective matter and energy existing in absolute space and time.

I am inclined to view fundamentalists, of both the religious and scientific kind, as those of a conservative bent who prefer to have faith in fixed beliefs, the common (sense) currency handed down by their society or peers, those who seek to concretise in order to safely contain any fresh experience within traditional frameworks. This is not to be inherently critical of this position. In the case of religion, where a particular tradition is alive and vibrant and still has general social credence, it undoubtedly presents the possibility of sanctuary to those upon whom strong inner experiences are visited. Without such a framework the individual is left to come to terms with such events in solitude, not an enviable task. The downside is of course the chance of having the 'anomalous experience' dismissed or declared mad, if it cannot be accommodated in the current framework, either by the relevant authorities or the individuals themselves.

On the other hand there are the spiritual seekers, those who are driven to seek a more personal revelation of their inner world because they are, for whatever reason, unable to accept the traditional social frameworks, formulations and worldview. I would argue that across the major religious traditions, including Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, and Taoism, the revelatory path is one leading to the discovery and direct experience of a unity and universality of existence. Where the experience is far removed from that of common, or socially received, sense, its subsequent distillation and expression is inevitably couched in terms that appear paradoxical at best and completely irrational at worst. As here;

Concerning this the Lord says in a mystery, 'Unless you make on the right hand as what is on the left and what is on the left hand as what is on the right and what is above as what is below and what is behind as what is before you will not have knowledge of the kingdom.'

(The apocryphal Acts of Peter – XXXVIII)

The Gospel of Thomas provides many similar examples.

At their far frontiers perhaps both science and spirituality suffer a similar problem. How to communicate? How to describe phenomena which are beyond the normal horizon of experience, and which do not lend themselves to easy description using language that evolved to meet the context and needs of the everyday. The conventional means by which the universal laws of science or the anomalous experiences of spirituality are expressed therefore become problematic for both. Because our many languages are universally rooted in everyday experience, and are so attached to the apparent reality of the opposites, they do not adequately convey the nature of the reality inherent in unification and integration. Perhaps our words are better suited to designate things rather than to revealing process and dimension.



A Bit of This and That

Given that the two trends – to divide and combine, to multiply and unite – are clearly present in both religion and science, are we straining credibility to propose that there are similar archetypal notions that underpin understanding across the realms of human experience? When the traditional religions speak of ‘God’s heavenly eternal realm’, do we overlook the unconscious foundations this image may share with ‘man’s earthly temporal abode’ of scientific investigation? Are spirit and matter enfolded in a mirrored embrace in which each is a reflection of the other and both are reflected within something much greater still? Are spirit and matter both metaphysical beliefs?

At their far frontiers perhaps both science and spirituality suffer a similar problem. How to communicate? How to describe phenomena which are beyond the normal horizon of experience, and which do not lend themselves to easy description using language that evolved to meet the context and needs of the everyday. Science of course has its very own language of mathematics, which does a far better job than the spoken word in this regard, although this still leaves scientists with the hard job of translating all the niceties and ramifications of ‘simple formulae’ into a plain vernacular comprehensible to the average man or woman. Einstein’s $E=mc^2$ is probably the most famous scientific formula of all time, and like other scientific formulae it makes a universal statement concerning the manner in which phenomena of nature, in this case energy (E), mass (m) and the speed of light (c), relate to one another. Although universal in nature, the great strength of such a formula is that it can be used in every specific situation encountered, and also make predictions about what will occur under circumstances where such phenomena have not previously been directly encountered or observed.

If science has maths and mathematical formulae as its language of choice, what do religion and spirituality have with which to convey the universals, the ineffable, the eternal truths of the inner world? There are, of course, always the arts; painting, sculpture, music and poetry. However, there are also forms of words that at first glance appear as meaningless and mystifying to our verbal understanding as advanced mathematics appears to our everyday notions of number and arithmetic.

My favourite spiritual examples come from Buddhism, where some of its branches use words to logically de-construct the world while others, as in Zen, use them to present impossible counter-intuitive conundrums, the *koans*, which throw the very meaning of the words and any concepts they clothe into question. In both cases the common goal is perhaps to demonstrate or reveal the conditioned and habituated nature of our everyday experience of the world, to cut through the mundane to expose the root of all being and becoming, the immediacy of a fundamental reality, a pristine awareness, in which all experienced phenomena are subsumed in the 'knowing now'.

In the spiritual sphere the progression from the plurality of animism, through paganism and polytheism, culminating in the great unified monotheistic religions is perhaps one expression of this great archetypal transformation. Whereas in science the clockwork universe of Newtonian mechanics, with its clear causal lines connecting one of infinitely many atomic billiard balls to the next, has been subsumed in a system of quantum mechanics in which all phenomena become probabilistic events. Many physicists now would throw up their hands at any attempt to describe or understand any true, ultimately real, underlying reality.

There are many quotes from scientists that might be given lest anyone doubts that thoughtful scientists themselves are prepared to recognise the limits of scientific knowledge and certitude. Two of my favourites are from Arthur Eddington who, although not so well known now, was a renowned contemporary of Einstein. Given below, the first acknowledges the outright mystery of it all, while the second hints at the mysteries of relationships and identity, strongly suggesting that even our most basic notions require a radical re-evaluation.

'Something unknown is doing we don't know what.'

'We used to think that if we knew 1 we knew 2, as 1 and 1 are 2. We're finding we must learn a great deal more about "and".'

We are then forced to conclude that simple everyday words like Matter or Spirit or God (or even 'and') merely clothe our ignorance for we cannot in either case disregard them. We seemingly fail to find any firm bedrock on which to stand. We are forever condemned to build on sandy soil. But we are not quite done yet. Consider the following formulation of a well-known Buddhist perspective:

Not this

Not that

Not this and that

Not not this and that

Tautological claptrap? Not quite as concise as $E=mc^2$ perhaps but it strikes me as just as profound. Both take just a second to read but their ramifications are unending. Scientists are still discovering new aspects of Einstein's theories, still using them to ask new and universally pertinent questions. Similarly the Buddhist luminary Nagarjuna is probably most well known for his use of the Indian fourfold logical tool the *tetralemma*, given in an abbreviated form above. This seems to me like a convenient verbal formula into which you can plug any pair of opposites you choose. I invite you to give it a try and see where it leads you. I offer two examples to start you on your way.

Not inside
Not outside
Not inside and outside
Not, not inside and outside (Then where?)

Not matter (stuff)
Not mind (spirit)
Not matter and mind
Not, not matter and mind (Then what?)

(A do it yourself kit for 21st Century koans perhaps?)

This formulation with its emphasis upon NOT may strike some as unduly negative, even defeatist. That is not my intention. I take it as an ultimately positive expression which, by denying all the categories by which we habitually understand the world, points us towards, and encourages us to confront, the eternal mystery which lies 'beyond'. It encourages us to turn our everyday face to the 'knowing now' and in doing so come to a true recognition of ourselves. We might conclude that the singular and universal NOW, beloved of mystics, is not, as Einstein has shown us, about a temporally objective present moment in time, but rather it resides in the heart, the ever knowing spirit of pristine awareness?

Throughout this piece I have, quite naturally, attempted to be clear in my meaning and to be rational in my approach, but as my headline quotation from C. G. Jung makes clear this not enough. Facing the mystery requires holding hands with both the rational and the irrational which together lead to another world where feelings, symbols, dream images, visions and equations are the conveyors of meaning rather than words.

Nowhere else but in the psyche of the individual can the union be completed and the essential identity of Idea and Matter be experienced and perceived.

(C. G Jung)

We are therefore asked to be active participants in this endeavour. We cannot stand aside and pretend we are uninterested observers, for now even scientists, involved in researching the mysteries of quantum mechanics, must wrestle with how the role of the conscious observer may determine the outcome of an experiment.

In my own case, my conscious efforts to reconcile the opposites have, across a lifetime, displayed themselves in the form of dreams – in meetings with many spontaneous and autonomous personified entities from the unconscious realms. These have been among the most valuable experiences of my life and have done much to disabuse me of what is held to be common, or even scientific, sense. Such encounters have completely reshaped my world-view. The feeling, the power and the impact of such dreams is hard to convey but I offer the following example, where the interplay of scientific concepts with what might be viewed as more spiritual matters is plain enough.

Dream 405: 12th January 2001. Atop the Stepped Stupa

The sound, the feeling ... SSSSTTUUUUUUPPPPPAAAAAHHHHH ... whoosh and then I'm in. I am presented with a luminous field of being. In plan this is composed of concentric circles of awareness but when viewed in relief it is clear that is an energetic, rippling, rotating dynamic field. Like electrons in the concentric shells of atoms some parts of the field have the potential to

be in a much higher energy state, these are recognised as individual stupas, which equate to individual centres of awareness, individual centres of being, individual people. They are all part of one and the same field but they all experience the field from their own perspective. Zooming in on one 'individual' stupa I can see that it has its own concentric, stepped, quantised, energy levels. On the top level of this stupa I find myself laid out in my coffin. DEAD. It's true then. You can't see much of me. Just my feet protrude from under a striped funeral towel, which has a drawstring pulled tight over my head. I get the impression that the wavy lines of the towel are indicative of how it channels the energy of the field through my being and strongly suggests that although I am dead I am still energised by the field. The field is now my being, the 'thing' of *my* 'mind', *my* 'life' is no more.

Is it too much to imagine that in the modern world there is the hope that the apparently dissimilar approaches of science and religion might at last be coming together, that we can acknowledge some commonality? Science has, since the end of the 19th century, taken on fresh explanatory modes as a result Darwin's evolutionary theory, Einstein's relativity and the insights of the many founding fathers of quantum mechanics. These scientific developments have thrown all previously held western views of reality into profound question, and by any fair assessment have brought us back, face-to-face, with the very same mysteries of being that have always characterised human experience and that have been the focus of spiritual endeavours for millennia.

Within science it is not now at all clear where 'the answers' lie, and increasing consideration is now being given to the idea that at least part of 'the answer' may lie in the nature of human consciousness and awareness. This is an area that mystics and spiritual luminaries have always explored using the only 'consciousness meter' we have ever had at our disposal – the human mind. Can we embrace the best of both spirituality and science? Can we build the bridge of relationships across the seeming chasm between them? Such work is surely essential if any nascent worldview or myth that might now be emerging is to come to full term.

The self, which includes me, includes many others also. For the unconscious that is conceived in our minds does not belong to me and is not peculiar to me, but is everywhere. It is the quintessence of the individual and at the same time the collective.

(Carl Jung, CW 13, p.182)

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Further sources:

Thomas J McFarlane (ed.), *Einstein and Buddha: The Parallel Sayings*. ISBN 1-56975-337-7

This is one of my favourite small books. Anyone who is interested in the congruencies between science and religion will find this book a delight. The thoughts of many other scientific and mystic *luminaires* are quoted as well as those of Einstein and Buddha. Short explanatory chapters provide excellent background and context to the sayings.

Towards the First Revolution in Mind Sciences: a lecture by Alan Wallace (1 hour 2 mins) Available on YouTube. It is hard to imagine someone better placed than Alan Wallace to discuss the relationship and congruencies between science and spirituality. He holds degrees in both Physics and Religious Studies and for fourteen years studied and practiced as a Buddhist monk. Well worth a view.



Spiritual Cosmology based on my experiences

The Kingdom of God is the great space-time of spiritual experience where riches and mysteries lie for all seekers to find and to share.

(Judy Moody Stuart, *Patterns and Examples*)

I dwell within my centre – as we all do within our different centres. All seeking begins from inside ourselves; we are our centre point from where we build our cosmic understanding. Within me is my inspiration. Is it just my breath, or do thoughts and even spiritual entities live in the breath (in the air)? How do such phenomena fit into the known physical world? If they have no mass, they could exist everywhere – or nowhere! Yet there is sensed to be a *real* connection with our own life-force.

Do the disincarnate *need* us? Who helped me with my clay at Lampeter? I kept an empty mind when I worked with the clay, and later the hidden meaning behind what had taken place was revealed. I picked up a coloured pencil; I had my eyes closed when my hand turned the paper round, and scrubbed with a black pencil vigorously enough to virtually tear the paper. What was happening? I opened my eyes, being very concerned, and ‘Asad’ emerged, through absolutely no effort of my own. I had merely said in my head, while in the period of producing *Nathan the Wise*, ‘I need a picture of Assad’ [see Issue 58, page 15]. Was that spirit artist part of my soul, or a friend in spirit? Just writing about this sets my spinal cord alive – it feels like a mild, very benevolent electricity. Who drew Asad? Was it a part of me, or some spirit with whom I have a fine resonance?

Whose voice tells me (in a matter-of-fact, very fast voice) the Future? I always know when this voice is speaking. It is completely succinct and positive, yet one cannot tell anybody what has been given. So it is not comfortable. Apart from my life’s confirmation that the voice is 100% true, it seems to have no value. Everything I have been told has been personal to myself or to people close to me. I have no confidence in myself, only in my Guide, and am reminded of Jesus saying, ‘Without me ye can do nothing.’ And ‘all these things shall be added unto you’. I have no reason not to believe these pronouncements completely.

Mary Bowmaker in *The Reality of the Unbelievable* says that when things seem miraculously to work out for us, it is the complex process of heaven, arranging things on our behalf. I see it the opposite way – that there is a Matrix, a free-running state of things that follows physical

laws ... but ... that it is possible for us to be in tune with the future, which, within the eternal time-Matrix, already exists. It is a matter of our being in a state of resonance with this knowledge.

Cosmologically speaking, all this knowledge seems tied up with life on earth. There is so much to life and so much depth within us that we are told it is best not to delve too deeply. Yet we impoverish ourselves by not doing so. By skirting through life on the surface we miss 90% of what is here for us. The Spiritual is, as the Universe is, beyond our understanding. But we have a built-in need to know. Without that Inner Guidance, perhaps it is better not to try. We all seem to have that guidance, but can choose, as it were, not to activate it.

I don't know if spirit evolved from life, or if life evolved because of Spirit; but spirit (disincarnate) seems to be Time-less. So perhaps it did exist prior to matter itself? Evidence for this comes from people's experiences of witnessing the past, also of knowledge of the future, some in dreams, even from the extreme distant future.

A spiritual cosmonaut, aka Mary Cook



'God?'

To my sensitive ear
I'm OK with 'Dieu'
The 'Divine', Brahman, with 'Aum'
But not 'Gott'!

It's harsh, and oppressive;
Piercing, like a dart.
But 'Theus', 'Deus', even 'Zeus';
and ah! 'Allah...!'

'Jahweh', maybe; yet
'Jehovah' – not for me!
There's music in 'Allah'!
The music of the soul!

Then there's 'God'? No!
Discordant, abrupt.
Where's the caress, the love?
I don't 'do' 'God'.

Forgive.

Mary Cook

The Healing Moment

Just over five years ago, aged 58, I suddenly collapsed. I was rushed to hospital where after a five hour, extremely dangerous operation I woke to find the surgeon informing me that he had removed two malignant sarcomas. Unfortunately, the operation wasn't successful and two weeks later I had another five-hour operation. Then we waited for my digestive system to kick in and work again, which it didn't. So I went on to 'nil by mouth' for nearly 5 weeks. (Personally, I found the hunger easy to deal with, but the thirst – the unending desire to drink water, the dryness of the throat – is a torture almost beyond bearing.) I lost about four and a half stone in that period; I looked like somebody who was soon to die. I should say at this point that my parents were atheists, as I formerly was myself, but I had become a Christian in my mid-twenties, and a Quaker when I was about 50.

By the time I was taken ill I had no previous experience of strange or mystical experiences. However, it was during my 3-month stay in the Royal Bournemouth Hospital, that, early one evening, practising meditative breathing in order to control the pain, psychological and physical, and resisting the urge to activate the morphine drip, I had a healing experience which changed my life. I was staring at the blank ceiling above my bed. Without warning, effortlessly, I suddenly found that my consciousness was leaving my body and heading up and out into deep space. It was not alarming; I was curious. Ahead of me in the deep black I saw a light. Aware my body was far behind me on Earth, I willed my consciousness to head towards the light. As I approached I saw what looked like a huge, white, translucent index finger wrapping what appeared to be white candy floss round in a spiral, shell-like pattern. Intrigued, I willed myself closer. The finger casually flexed itself and just flicked the candy floss which spun off into space; as it did so, the finger seemed to trail lightly behind.

Then I realised with total astonishment that this wasn't candy floss but an enormous white star that the finger had created and set off into its orbit in the cosmos. I realised that God – the mere finger of God – has always been about: creation, and a star had been born. And as this sunk into my consciousness I became critically aware of the disparity between myself – helpless in pain, consigned to death on a hospital bed – and the Lord of all Glory, serene above the clouds, in deep space, creating a star. My whole consciousness was swept by an anguish that shook me to the roots of my being, and I cannot claim that I willed it, but almost involuntarily, as if I had been taken over by the Power who enabled me to do the only proper thing, my consciousness cried out in deep despair, 'God help me'. It was the simplest and profoundest of prayers.

And there in deep space as I made the cry, the finger instantly broke from its casual sauntering, and like a gun turned and aimed itself at me. Before I could think what it meant, the finger rushed straight at me – faster than light itself – and I simultaneously recoiled backwards and in one consummate movement I was abruptly back in my body as the finger went straight into me: straight into the point where the operation had opened up my intestines. It was like some pulverising shock, and I felt as if my whole body bolted upwards in the bed some six inches or more – though probably only less than an inch – and then thudded backwards, relapsing as it were, on the bed.

There I was: my whole being suddenly and immediately was immersed, was saturated, in joy, sheer joy. The physical and psychological pain had all vanished, all gone. I felt the presence of God – which even to recall now fills me with awe and fear and trembling, like nothing else – and I wept. Not tears of pain; I wept tears of joy. And I became aware that I could die now; and thoughts of my wife and children came to my mind, and I saw the pain of leaving them, especially their pain in not having me. But selfish as it sounds, it didn't matter – dying was better, to be with God. Because, anyway, this power, just as it had looked after me, would look after them; in His hand, everything was possible. So I wept more, and more, and became aware too of the deepest thing of all: the one word for me that described this God who held me now. The 'purity' of God. I struggle to convey my sense of it. How unworthy I felt in myself, and yet God held me: the disparity between my unworthiness and His purity; my weakness and His strength; between my mortality and His unquenchable life.

I wept yet I was in perfect peace, and in a perfect place where I never wanted to leave. My body curled up into a foetal position, and like some baby being rocked, slowly, slowly, I drifted into sleep. How long had the experience been? I do not know – maybe 30 mins – but it may have been 2 minutes or 2 hours. But here's the thing: in all my 3 months in hospital I never got one night's sleep. The maximum was 2 hours before we were awoken by something or other. Yet on this night, for some reason, I slept till the new nurses came on shift at 6.00 the following morning. A perfect and profound night's sleep of at least 6 if not 7 hours. I woke feeling as if I had had pleasant dreams, which I could not remember, and feeling so refreshed. But more than that I woke knowing one other thing: that I wasn't going to die from this cancer now, that I was going to leave the hospital, and that I was going to re-create my life.

Curiously, too, my youngest son came to visit me from his university sometime after, and he told me:

'Dad', he said, 'I had a dream. In the dream I was crying and crying. Suddenly a man – a woman? – a being of light stood before me and said, "Why are you crying?"

And I said, 'Because my father is dying'.

And he said, 'Stop crying, your father is not going to die. He has not finished his mission yet.' The being disappeared and my son instantly woke with the scene fresh in his mind.

So I have come to believe that what happened to me – the healing that has allowed me to re-enter life – that has re-claimed me for a mission – is not unique to me or even to do with my being special in some way. No, as I contemplate that finger, and those words, I realise that every single human being is precious to God, and everyone has a mission – that their words and actions count. When we abandon these beliefs we are no more enlightened than atheists. True healing is from God – the Spirit – the Light – the Christ, and I feel blessed to have directly experienced it. For this is the strange reality it has led me to: I am glad that I had the cancer – still have the cancer – I am glad that my pain and suffering enabled me to have the opportunity to experience the mercy, the compassion, and the healing of the Lord. And as a result I feel unafraid of death in a way that would have been impossible before this illness overtook me.

James Sale

Billie's Experience

I was born and brought up in Eastern Europe and in a country very strongly opposed to any religion, however very liberal otherwise and very bohemian. Beliefs among the predominantly rural population were regarded by the townsfolk as superstition; the majority of city dwellers were brought up in a very correct but liberal communist environment. I did not realise this until I was maybe seventeen years old, way past the age when I had my first experiences of the world. I thought everyone knew about the world inside of me that linked me to everything there is. The word religion had no significance for me, as religion was excluded from our daily life and was presented to us as something that was evil, that makes people go a bit crazy and weird. It was never really explained what it *is* or that there were countless different religions in the world. But in general religion was not spoken about, not because it was a taboo, but because it was nothing anyone I knew was interested in. I remember I was christened as a small child, but there were very small snippets of events like this in my memory which I never related to as important or relevant to me growing up. Apart from my mum's exceptionally rare and very low key visits to an Orthodox church in our town to light a candle, and seeing people going to the local mosque close to where I lived, I had no contact with religion. So I saw '*religious people*' going to their religious places but that is where my understanding or religious awareness stopped. It was the same as with someone's view on Goths or Punk or Hip Hop teenagers, I had no idea or interest in finding out what '*religion*' *entailed* when it was part of people's lives. Our society then was, in its deepest roots, militant atheist, and education, science, philosophy, chess and arts seem to be the highest expressions of what I would now call spiritual needs. Marxism was used to explain the distribution of profits and its influence in the development of higher being and human higher self. At the time I had no interest in analysing what religious people were doing. Religion was something I considered backward and ignorant, without actually knowing what it *was*.

Meanwhile, way before I was aware of any of this, when the slaughter of a 100 kilo pig in the back garden every year was part of our normal everyday life, I suddenly turned vegetarian. This took place completely out of the blue and coincided with me starting to do a lot of (what I now know is called) Yoga and which I thought was just some kind of gymnastics everyone did at home in their bedroom on their own. I never questioned it even though no one in my family knew what it was. I only saw another person doing 'it' for the first time when I was sixteen years old. My sister ran into my bedroom and shouted that there was a man on the TV doing the same weird stuff I did and it was called 'Yoga' and I must go and see it., so I did.

So at sixteen I went everywhere looking for information about 'Yoga' as I now knew what it was called. I found only two books about it but these expanded my practice considerably.. There was no internet in those days, but I read anything even slightly related to yoga and was quite at peace, not worried that I was weird or odd, or strange or 'religious' , which would have really troubled me at the time. I really did not want to be 'religious' as that was somehow bad, odd and certainly not what a girl of my age, or anyone, would aspire to. Instead, I felt yoga was normal as there were other people in the world doing it. I knew I had

never been to India, nor was I a Buddhist (by this point I found Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha* and read it in one breath) but I presumed people knew this stuff in different ways, not only by being taught by other people or being religious.

Then when I was nineteen, something else happened I returned home from a day at Uni with my usual pile of books late for dinner which my mother served as soon as I walked in. The evening finished quickly as I was tired and cranky. I went to bed and what felt like a couple of minutes later I found myself looking down at someone in my bed. There was a person in my bed! I was sure *I* was in the bed. Where was I then? There was a silver shimmer coming from the person in the bed towards the ceiling. At this point I realised I was looking at myself in the bed. This was very surprising, confusing, frightening even. I did not understand what was going on. I was in bed. Surely. Well my *body* was at any rate. I was on the ceiling attached to it somehow with what looked like a silver string. Before I had a chance to 'think' about it further (*'thinking'* is not the right word to use here but I have none other in either of the languages I speak), I 'felt' a strong presence near me on the right. Then I realised I was looking at a light. No light I had ever encountered before, but I had no time to ponder on this as I was swept by the feeling of peace and love I never knew existed. The light was pure love. The words are so inadequate but this is the only way to describe it. I was at the same time consumed by it and fed by it. I wanted to go with it. I somehow knew it was going somewhere. I suddenly had a realisation there was another, much fainter light in the room on my left. I realised this light was my mother. It wasn't belonging to her, it *was* her. At this point it was clear to me that the loving light had come for her. I offered to go instead. I did not mind, I actually really wanted it. At that moment I felt no ties to the world I lived in; I felt disinterested in my life and everyone and everything in it. I was full of this love that was given to me unconditionally, completely and there was no love like it. But it refused. It 'said' it wasn't time for me to go. I remember 'thinking' how I didn't want my mum to go. I remember processing at the same time the visible light I saw around leaves of a huge plant I had next to my bed. It glowed. I remember thinking it was the glow of life in it. I 'insisted' I go. At this point the light 'requested' I promise to do something and we both, my mother and I, could stay. The request was very clear so promise I did.

I found myself instantaneously in my bed looking at the ceiling. All was normal. The plant next to my bed was no longer glowing at the edges. The light vanished. I had no memory of what I had just promised to the light. I got up and went straight to look for my mother. I needed to know she was all right. The door of her bedroom was open. I looked at her trying not to wake her up but she was wide awake in the dark. She just said: 'Come and lie down.' I was nineteen years old and I had not slept in my parents' bed since I was a child. I just lay down next to her and fell asleep. I *knew* she was safe. She never woke me up in the morning to go to the university lectures. When I got up I asked her why she didn't call me. She just said: 'What was that thing last night? What happened last night?' I just said: 'Nothing, just a bad dream.' She said: 'But something happened didn't it?' I said there was nothing. 'Just a dream.' I had a strong sense I was not meant to talk to her about it, and I never did. I also never remembered what I had promised no matter how much I tried.

My mother died abroad on Christmas Day 2015. I had been living away from her for 23 years by then. The day she died I realised that whatever it was that I promised decades ago and

which I forgot about was at last completed. Done. I *knew* it was. I *know* it still. It had an enormous impact on my life. It is difficult to explain how in this short piece of writing. It took years of my life to unfold. I can only say the day she died the incredibly strong connection, which I was unaware I had to such a degree with my mother, was undone. It took about six hours for it to disconnect and disappear. I *knew* when it took place.

That was yet another in a never-ending line of experiences I have had in my life which had no explanation (but also have many, depending on who is explaining). I no longer worry about intellectually knowing what they are. I was lucky I kept the innocence of the eleven-year-old girl in my approach to extra-ordinary experiences, and the beauty of them. I am not worried about names. The wonder in me is way too sweet and fulfilling to try to catch the rainbow. I experience everything as it comes and I let it go. As part of my profession I teach young people about religions, but my gratitude for life and its wonders goes way beyond my academic and my professional interests. That which is sending the experiences *is* my teacher; that which I *know* is unchangeable by words. It is free, un-nameable, beautiful. And it is *here* right now, and it will always be as it always was. Everywhere. At all times. Eternal. Giving. Abundant. Sacred. Breath-taking. All, and none of these, because I use words to describe it, and words are faulty.

Biljana Krstovic



REPORTS

Report from the Director, RERC, Lampeter

The Religious Experience Research Centre in Lampeter has been quite busy over the last half year; one focus has been on the David Hay bequest. His books are now sorted and processed into the University library catalogue. As soon as they are fully labelled and included in the catalogue they can be searched under 'Alister Hardy Collection' as well as the new heading 'David Hay Collection'. A second focus was on the non-published material that the office stored in the basement. Currently all non-published material is being sorted and put in fully labelled boxes with inventories. The inventories will be incorporated into an Excel database and then into an online system. The aim is to make the non-published material accessible for researchers in the near future.

The highlight of the last half year was the RERC one-day conference held on 16th July 2017 in the Old Hall on the Lampeter campus, at the start of the Summer Graduate School. In addition to postgraduate students and staff, members of the public, including several AHT members, attended. The keynote speaker was Dr Wendy Dossett, now senior lecturer at the University of Chester, and formerly a RERC Director and lecturer in the Lampeter Department of Religious Studies. Dr Dossett gave the annual Alister Hardy Lampeter Lecture entitled 'Spiritus contra spiritum: spirituality and recovery from alcohol use disorder'. Dr Dossett is Principal Investigator of The Higher Power Project; a large qualitative project exploring spirituality amongst people in twelve-step recovery programmes for addictions. Amongst her most recent relevant publications is a volume co-edited with Hannah Bacon and Steve Knowles entitled *Alternative Salvations: Engaging the Sacred and the Secular* (Bloomsbury 2015) in which she has a chapter on this research, and a Special Issue of the journal *Religions*, 'Religion and Addiction', which she co-edited with Professor Christopher C H Cook. Other speakers at the conference were Dr Lymarie Rodriguez who also spoke about 'Alcoholics Anonymous, Recovery and Care of the Self', Patricia R. Souza, on 'The Role of Food in Candomblé's Healing Rituals', Dr Thomas Jansen on 'Food and Fasting in Chinese Buddhism', and Rev Dr Jeff Leonardi and Prof Bettina Schmidt on the first finding of their joint project on 'Spirituality within a Therapeutic Context' (the photo shows all but one of the conference presenters, as Dr Leonardi had to leave early).



Dr Lymarie Rodriguez, Prof. Bettina Smidt, Dr Wendy Dossett, Patricia R. Souza, Dr Thomas Jansen: presenters at the RERC conference, July 2017

PowerPoint presentations, handouts and some of the recordings will be made available on the RERC website. We are also planning to publish a selection of these papers together with some of the papers from the last one-day conference and the research seminar series, in form of an edited volume (details to follow in the next issue of *De Numine*).

This year RERC Lampeter published the third issue of the (online) *Journal for the Study of Religious Experience*, which contains the Alister Hardy Lampeter lecture given in 2015 by the

Revd. Professor June Boyce-Tilman, University of Winchester (see Issue 59, p.19). This time the online journal also contains contributions from former postgraduate students who have graduated with a thesis in the wider area of religious experience, thus giving a good insight into the links between teaching and research in the area of religious experience in Lampeter.

This leads me to the last point in this report – teaching. Two MA students graduated in July with a dissertation in the area of religious experience and religious studies. Two students are working currently on the dissertation of the MRes in Religious Experience and will hopefully submit in the next academic year. Meanwhile several students are in part 1 of the MRes. The module on Religious Experience Today also continues to attract students from other MA programmes across the Faculty. I want to end with a note of celebration: Anne Morgan was awarded the Alister Hardy Bursary. Anne, a member of AHT, began her MRes in Religious Experience in February.

Professor Bettina Schmidt

Report from the AHT Director of Communications

The Alister Hardy Trust continues to hold events and to be represented at gatherings of like-minded groups. Although we now have fewer AHT local groups, Andy Burns and I hope to ensure that our own events will be interesting, affordable and of interest to our members.

We plan to hold two main events each year. This year AHT held a one day conference with the Scientific and Medical Network in London [see report on page 29], and our next Members' Day will be on 14th October at the Quaker Meeting House in Oxford as usual. In 2018 we will hold a joint conference with the Churches' Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies on 14th April in Oxford, with Members' Day also in Oxford. We look forward to seeing you there.

Our AGM will be held in Birmingham on 23rd November 2017, before the Trustees' Meeting, and all AHT members are welcome to attend. On Members' Day there will be an opportunity to put forward suggestions to be included in the AGM agenda.

Events

On 3rd June we joined with the British Teilhard Association in organising a one-day conference on *Ecology, Science and Spirituality – Friends or Enemies? Building on the legacy of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Alister Hardy*. This was held at the Essex Unitarian Church in Kensington.

Our two main speakers were both familiar figures to AHT members, Professor Ursula King and Professor Keith Ward. Both Professors have given the Annual Alister Hardy Lecture in the past and their Occasional Papers sold well on the day. Stephen Retout of the BTA and I gave a short presentation each on the founders of our respective organisations. I handed out a

Timeline, showing the parallels in the lives of Teilhard de Chardin and Alister Hardy. Anyone who would like a copy, please get in touch (email: mariannerankin@icloud.com).

We ran a bookstall offering a mixture of publicity leaflets for various events, and selling books and Occasional Papers. People mingled and enjoyed a sunny lunch out in the garden.

Unfortunately, due to diminishing membership, the BTA had to close down at their AGM following the conference, which was their final event. It was a good note for them to end on and we hope to keep in touch with whatever future plans people may have to honour the memory of a remarkable and inspirational man.

As the Wrekin Trust has also folded, we at the AHT are grateful for the continued support of our membership and for the work of the two RERCs, at Lampeter and Glyndwr. I continue to attend events as a representative of the AHT and to speak to various groups, always about our vision and the work we are doing, and slowly but surely, I feel that we are becoming better known. This year I have led several Quiet Days and spoken at a state school in Southall (where I was greeted by the sight of the four 'A' Level students clutching copies of my *Introduction to Religious and Spiritual Experience* [see photograph below]. I also led an Away Day for the Chaplaincy Team of the local hospice, St. Richard's in Worcester. People seem very receptive to hearing about spiritual experiences and we often end by sharing our own stories. Many people no longer attend church, but still feel connected to a Higher Power and are concerned about the deeper dimension of life. We have some wonderful conversations.



6th formers in Southall with copies of Marianne's *Introduction to Religious and Spiritual Experience*

I received an unusual request for a FaceTime Interview with Danish reporter, Charlotte Roerth. She has written a best-selling book, *I Met Jesus* which has been translated into several languages. She is now working on a new book looking at, as she puts it, 'how very normal it is to have experiences like hers'.

I was invited to attend a House of Lord's Event on 11th July 2017, *A Whole World View: Transforming Emergency into Emergence*. This was hosted by Lord Stone of Blackheath, who

was joined by cosmologist and author Dr Jude Currivan. I review her groundbreaking book in this issue [see page 54]. Her message unites science and spirituality, bringing quantum theory and relativity theory together, and linking them with the wisdom of the mystics to offer an understanding of the universe as a cosmic hologram.

There are often opportunities for speakers to address meetings about our work and related issues, so please do let me know if you would like to be on a list of AHT members whom I could recommend, and any special area of interest.

Marianne Rankin, AHT Director of Communications

Update from the AHT Membership & Activities Group

The Trust is now in its second year under the status of a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) and members will find reports elsewhere about events, conferences and Group activities etc. I just wanted to provide a brief update about some changes to the Trust and also give advance notice of Members' Day and the AGM.

At the last Trustees meeting in May the Honorary Secretary, Professor Andrew Village, stood down due to an increased workload in his department at York St Johns University. I would like to record my thanks to Andrew on behalf of AHT members. Andrew took on the role at a time of transition from the old AHS to the new AHT, and arranged the first AGM under the new status. I was asked to take on the role of Secretary to succeed Andrew, and this was supported by the Trustees at a meeting in May.

Members' Day 2017 is on Saturday 14th October in Oxford. The Memorial Lecture will be given by Revd Professor June Boyce Tillman [See page 59 for details]. The **AGM** is on Wednesday 23rd November at St Martin in the Bullring, Birmingham. All members are very welcome to attend the AGM which starts at 12 noon.

A recent discussion with Sarah Boss, our Membership Secretary, concerned the question of a fixed annual renewal date for Members which will simplify the administration process. Sarah examined various options and these were discussed by the Trustees. It was decided that membership will run from either September to September or, alternatively, from October to October. It is anticipated that the change will begin this September (or October)

In order not to disadvantage anyone, those members whose renewal falls due in July, August or September of this year will be given membership until September 2018. Likewise those members whose membership falls due for renewal after October of this year will be allowed to continue membership until September 2018. Members who pay by standing order will have sufficient time to notify their banks accordingly. Further information will be sent out with renewals, but in essence this is an administrative change which will not unduly affect members.

Andrew Burns, AHT Honorary Secretary

Calling AHT Authors

At **Members' Day on 14th October** we are planning to offer members a chance to give a very brief presentation of their books (about 5 minutes) and to sell them.

We would much appreciate an idea of how many writers would like to take up this offer. Andy Burns and I will also give a very brief mention of our own work.

Please let us know if you would like a slot. If you are unable to attend, we would be happy to display publicity fliers for you.

Contact Marianne Rankin: mariannerankin@icloud.com

Spiritual but not Religious: Pastoral implications for Christian ministry A Day Conference, organised by The Churches' Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies

The conference was held at St. Benet's Hall, Oxford on Tuesday 14th March 2017, and was attended by members of CFPSS, AHT, clergy, members of religious communities, and staff and students of St. Benet's and other Oxford Colleges.

Fr. Oswald McBride, OSB, Prior of St. Benet's spoke on the role of the Chaplain in Roman Catholic educational institutions, with particular reference to staff and students who were not Roman Catholic, including those with no religious allegiance.

The Revd Kevin Tingay, a former inter-faith advisor in the Diocese of Bath and Wells, spoke on the diversity of traditions that were manifest in Glastonbury and the opportunities and difficulties that arise in exploring what is implied by the self-definition 'Spiritual but not Religious'.

The Revd James Matarazzo, a DPhil student, spoke on his thesis: an exploration of the concept of an optimistic eschatology, which sees final judgement in terms of a judgement of Divine Love.

Dr Santha Bhattacharji, Senior Tutor at St. Benet's, spoke on the relevance to many contemporary spiritual seekers outside the mainstream churches of medieval Christ mysticism, with particular reference to Julian of Norwich.

Time for creative discussion and individual conversation filled the space between the lectures and it is to be hoped that similar occasions may take place in the future.

Kevin Tingay, Conference Secretary
kgxt@btinternet.com

Report of the AHT/SMN Joint One-day Conference, 18th June 2016

The theme of this year's summer conference, held at the Essex Unitarian Church in Kensington, London W8, was *Health and Spirituality*, at which we welcomed as speakers, Revd Dr Jeff Leonardi and Dr Peter Fenwick. Chaired by Rowena Rudkin and Dr Bernard Carr, the day included the two principal talks in the morning, and an Open Panel discussion in the afternoon. Dr Leonardi and Dr Fenwick were joined for this event by Dr Natalie Tobart and Dr Dagmar Corry.

Revd. Dr Jeff Leonardi, Honorary Research Fellow at RERC Lampeter, started with a few words about his work there, and the current seminar series on 'Spirituality and Health'. In his talk, *Counselling, Health and Spirituality*, he said his personal and professional journey had the underlying theme of integrating Christian faith and spirituality with the 'person-centred' approach to counselling and other human relationships. He defined a working definition of the term 'spirituality' as that which gives meaning, value and purpose to a person's life – going on to develop a broader, twelve-point, definition of spirituality. Recognising that many people are moving away from the Church, he stressed the importance nevertheless of belonging and of ritual to many people.

Jeff discussed genuineness, or authenticity, in therapeutic relationships, especially within a religious context. He said that whilst many clergy do not have such relationships, a new culture can be found in many dioceses now, where mutual (and specialist) support is encouraged. He said his own dedication is to the person-centred approach to counselling developed from the work of Carl Rogers where importance is given to authenticity, or congruence, and to 'unconditional positive regard'. He stressed the profoundly spiritual dimension to this quality of acceptance, and also that health, wholeness and spirituality are intimately related within the psychological paradigm of the person-centred approach. He ended by saying that, from a psycho-therapeutic perspective, spirituality is clearly to be viewed as constituting a primary dimension of wholeness, health and well-being.

Dr Peter Fenwick, Consultant Neuropsychiatrist Emeritus at the Maudsley Hospital, spoke on *The Significance of Meditation practices in our understanding of Spirituality*. Dr Fenwick said that meditation has moved from being of interest only to the odd-ball scientific researcher, to becoming a widely-used instrument for promoting health-care. He said his interest in meditation dated back to 1969, and he identified two strands of effect – increase in physical and mental well-being, and increase in spiritual experience. Defining consciousness, he said there were two states – duality and non-duality: duality as experienced in ordinary life, the subject-object world, and non-duality as the experience, or consciousness, of all as unity. Dr Fenwick defined this state as 'Unitary Consciousness', a physics of the interconnected universe where you live in the moment only. This may be experienced in a meditation state, or as an individual 'one-off' spiritual or religious experience. He distinguished several types of meditation: loving-kindness meditation, mindfulness meditation, visualisation meditation, a withdrawal of the senses. He defined spirituality as spiritual seeking – a process of 'awakening' and ended by asking the question: how many of us want to awaken? – how many of us want to deepen our spiritual experiences?

Open Panel discussion:

This session began with Natalie Tobart speaking briefly of her work as a medical anthropologist, and Dagmar Corry describing her background and work as lecturer and research fellow at Glyndwr University. Discussion centred on the various topics covered by the two speakers, including meditation and spiritual awakening, the nature of non-duality and removal of the ego – the purpose of meditation, and the question of introducing it to schools and prisons. Comment was made on there being a dark side to meditation that could lead to distress, and it was agreed that not enough was known about this, and that therapists should be trained to give individuals the tools to deal with the dark side, and hurt and anger. Agreement was reached on the seminal importance of the patient/client relationship, which was felt to be of more significance than the professional capacity of the therapist.

The Church's view of psychical matters was raised; this was seen as generally negative, but it was felt there was little information available, to rectify this, no manual or compendium. This led to a discussion of religion and spirituality – while organised religion was rejected by many, the search for meaning was widespread, with many people on a spiritual journey; it was acknowledged that religion allowed us to live on a communal level and not just as individuals in isolation. Jeff Leonardi's point of the importance to many people of belonging and ritual was raised. It was generally accepted that people's perception of God as punitive and judgemental or loving and supportive would influence the therapy they chose.

John Franklin

[A transcript of the talk by Dr Jeff Leonardi, and a note and PDF of Dr Peter Fenwick's presentation are available, and can be sent by e-mail attachment on request. Contact John Franklin, e-mail: johnfranklin35@hotmail.com]



Dr Peter Fenwick



Revd Dr Jeff Leonardi



The Mythic Journey

a workshop given by Dr Alexander Shia on Good Friday this year

Dr Shia was born in the Lebanon and grew up with the ancient traditions of Maronite Catholicism. He was expected to become a priest, a family tradition since 1300, but he was, he says, 'led otherwise' and became an academic and teacher, founding Quadratos (www.quadratos.com)

His workshop, held in a hilltop house in Carmarthenshire, was about how the gospels came to be situated in ritual and myth, as metaphors for pilgrimage and initiation, and the significance of this for the times we live in now. This is the handout we were given at the workshop:

The Four-Gospel Journey
Quadratos in Northern Hemisphere

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Third Path – John/Revelation</u> <i>Resting in the Glorious Garden</i></p> <p>How do we receive joy/union <i>Receiving the Gift</i> Ecstatic, Calm, Visionary Opposites, Speak Truth w/Love</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Spring – East</i> First Light to Mid-Morning The Eagle (<i>visionary sight</i>)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Fourth Path – Luke/Acts</u> <i>Walking the Road of Riches</i></p> <p>How do we mature in Service? <i>Serving Life/Community</i> Gratitude, Integration of</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Summer – South</i> Mid-Morning to Fading Light The Ox (<i>perseverance</i>)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Second Path – Mark</u> <i>Crossing the Stormy Sea</i></p> <p>How do we move through suffering? <i>Enduring all Obstacles</i> Strained by Opposites, Exhaustion Doubt, Loneliness</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Winter – North</i> Late Evening to First Light The Lion (<i>noble strength</i>) (<i>announces new journey</i>)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>First Path – Matthew</u> <i>Climbing the Great Mountain</i></p> <p>How do we face change? <i>Hearing the Summons</i> Shock, Unease, Anxiety Betrayal</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Autumn – West</i> Fading Light to Late Evening The Angel</p>

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www.quadratos.com

Dr Shaia's book *Heart and Mind: The Four-Gospel Journey for Radical Transformation* is reviewed on page 45 by Jonathan Gaunt, who hosted the workshop. For this reason I will curtail my report, and refer readers to the review of Dr Shaia's book for a detailed account of his teachings. He and Jonathan met when both were walking the *Camino de Santiago*, an ancient

pilgrims' way that stretches from the French Pyrenees to St Iago de Compostella in Galicia, Spain. In the first century AD, in the Socratic tradition, Christians were called 'Followers of the Way' ...

I note from the above how this reading of the gospels mirrors aspects of Celtic spirituality in particular. However Dr Shia explores the imagery and narrative detail in the four gospels as they relate to the universal journey of the soul, thus illuminating their relevance to many other spiritual traditions, and to any time or place where we as individuals may find ourselves on the journey.

Patricia Murphy



Reports from the Local Groups

The AHT London Group

At a meeting held on 17th November 2016 at the Essex Unitarian Church in Kensington, London, our home for many years, and following much discussion, it was regrettably decided that the time had now really come to dissolve the AHT London Group.

It was recognised that circumstances had changed. It had been announced that John Franklin would be leaving London at the end of January, and that, regrettably, we had been unable to find anyone willing to take over as organiser. This, and falling numbers of members now actually coming to meetings, meant that carrying on in the same way as before was impracticable. This being accepted, a resolution was passed to close the London Group, and to transfer its remaining funds to the AHT for the use of other local groups and/or for membership activities.

All members on the Group's mailing list were informed – with it being mentioned that two members, Celine Corbin and Eileen Sheppard, had kindly offered to keep interested former members of the London Group informed of events of interest, and relay information on any members who might be interested in meeting for informal discussion.

During its twenty-eight years the London Group has welcomed many eminent speakers including Dr Peter Fenwick, Revd Cannon Dr John Polkinghorne, Professor Sam Parnia, Dr Martin Israel, Diarmuid O'Murchu and Julian Drewett. In recent years we have joined with

the Oxford and Cotswold Group in hosting joint one-day conferences with the Scientific and Medical Network, the British Teilhard Association and other associated bodies. Speakers at these conferences have included Lord Harries of Pentregarth (former Bishop of Oxford and former Patron of the AHRERC), Revd Martin Palmer and Dr Rupert Sheldrake. Speakers have also included former Directors of the AHRERC Professor Paul Badham, Peggy Morgan and Marianne Rankin who has played a supportive part in the life of the London Group. The Group also joined in two earlier fund raising events held in London, these being a concert at Lambeth Palace, and a carol concert at Brompton Oratory at which the then Papal Nuncio was present.

We ended this final meeting of the London Group with a farewell party to celebrate its 28 eventful years of existence – and bidding ‘good bye’ was a deeply moving moment. We give our warm thanks to the members of the London Group committee, and to all members who have helped in the running of meetings.

Rowena Rudkin and John Franklin.

AHT in North Wales

The local group has evolved into *Bangor ... Beyond* which now has a *Meetup* presence online. This has proved highly beneficial in finding new members.

We have also been holding weekly 'Unity' gatherings in the 2 Dragons Garden in Bangor University's Botanic Gardens (pictured), which has also attracted new members. This combines a shared experience of reflection with open discussion on a topical theme (e.g. How to respond to extremists) and offers those attending an opportunities to share insights, concerns or inspirations, and demonstrates the sort of group/community that the world so needs today.



Contact Keith Beasley via Bangor . . . Beyond Meetup: www.meetup.com/Bangor-Beyond/

The South-East Wales group

23rd March 2017

Talk by **Alan Underwood**: *The attraction of opposites – a bit of this and a bit of that*

Who wants an answer when you can have a question? (from Japanese Shinto wisdom)

Those of us who had attended the last Abbey Gathering recalled Alan's artwork, inspired by the *Vesica Piscis* art workshop, and were put in the picture as to how his reference to 'this and that' in his original title resonated with the 'opposites' also in the title of this talk. We heard about reciprocity, we ventured through macro-cosmology and touched on quantum theory and other paradoxes, realising that nothing is fixed in this universe, and that opposites are

not really so polar after all; that we cannot really say anything is absolutely true, and the only thing we can trust is the experiences of our own lives. From Einstein to Buddhism, time and space, and 'not this, not that,' we had a giddy ride! Descarte's 'I think therefore I am' was mentioned, followed quickly by a quip, 'Does that mean that if I don't think, then I am not?' (No answer to that one!)

We left time, however to think about Mary Bowmaker's recently published book, *The Reality of the Unbelievable*, which had been read by all of us. In a way, the ideas that came into our minds resonated with what we had been discussing beforehand, so it was not a question of either or, but in my mind at least, both. The book made it clear that what we have experienced is real to us, and shapes who we are, even though our experiences cannot be verified by others.

See Alan's article on page 10.

22nd June 2017

Spiritual Experience of Animals: are animals aware of the world of Spirit?

Our talk showed how the general perception of non-human species had changed over recent years, from one which treated all life-forms as though they were vastly inferior, and merely there for mankind to have mastery over. (Genesis 1:28 has much to answer for!) Now, thanks to the advancement of wildlife study, we can see the uniqueness of each species, and cannot continue to ignore the wondrous abilities of the 'lesser' species.

We can no longer deny that they do possess the full gamut of emotions – love, tenderness, rejection, empathy, compassion, joy, misery, sense of humour, healing knowledge, and other qualities we had limited to ourselves. Whether they possess a 'soul', is a matter of concepts – our understanding of the word 'soul'. - or 'spirit'

We shared stories of animals possessing very sensitive feelings. There was the blue tit in 'the Tweet of the Day programme' who feigned a broken wing as it approached the RSPB man who was watching, then it led him to the bird bath, where two of its fledglings were drowning. Another example came in the form of a dream: my spaniel had been put down when her cancer was preventing her from walking. During the night that followed, I dreamt that she was racing distractedly as if over the whole country, desperately looking for something. Then she found me, and her peace was restored.

There is much evidence that animals detect subtle forces. The 'spiritual' dimensions *are* all around us, so it follows that they *are* detectable by sentient beings, and that we do not need to evolve to a higher plane to be aware of them. There seems to be a resonance between the world of spirit and all forms of life (God in everything). We (for are we not all researchers?) seek to explore the unknown, or indeed, the unknowable.

Mary Cook

Mary Cook's article on the spiritual experience of animals will appear next Spring



The Last Gift

In the first few days after David died, I found myself walking in the garden, half-wailing and half-singing,

*Mon mari est mort!
Je l'ai cherché dans le jardin,
Mais il n'est pas là . . .*

I guess using French words must have taken the edge off the pain, made it more poetic and so slightly more bearable as I looked in vain for him all over the garden – his garden – where he had spent so many hours tending to the plants and trees, listening to the birds, watching the minutiae of insect life among the grass, and small brown frogs in the damp earth.

The first gift he ever gave me came from a garden he was working in: Darby's garden in the Carmel Valley. Sometime in 1991, Jacquelyn and I had stopped there on a sunny afternoon for some reason connected with the peace movement. He picked a pink rose and gave it to me, and from that moment on, our courtship was littered with pink roses. They showed up on the wallpaper of the Pelican Inn – the small hotel that loomed out of the fog on the trip to Oregon where we first made love, on nightgowns, curtains, book-covers, and, prolifically, in the garden of our cottage in Wales where we moved in 2007.

One of the last things he was able to do ten years later, before the cancer took away his remaining strength, was to prune the rambling rose on the trellis outside the kitchen window. It was February, and it was brown and bedraggled. He trimmed it severely with sure, skilful strokes until it was nothing but arching bare stems, studded with thorns. It looked dead and

remained that way until May when tentative new leaves began to appear. By June it was miraculously ablaze with more buds than I've ever seen on it before, that blazed into flaming pink and peach blossoms, tipped with gold.

One evening when I was alone in the kitchen, I could not take my eyes off it. It seemed to glow with an inner luminosity out of the grey dusk. Although it was late, I felt impelled to run out into the garden to touch and smell one of the flowers. As I gently pulled one of the blossoms towards me, I could feel David's presence so clearly, as if he was there in the rose itself. Then I realised: he really is there – and this is his last special gift to me.

Then quite unbidden came the rest of the song I had been singing earlier, only this time it was complete:

*Mon mari est mort,
Je l'ai cherché dans le jardin,
Et je l'ai trouvé
Dans les belles roses.*

Mara Freeman

Remembering Friends:

Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor



It was with regret that we learnt on the 1st September of the death of Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, Archbishop Emeritus of Westminster, who died aged 85. Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor had been a Patron of the AHT/AHRERC for seventeen years. He became



leader of the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales, as the Most Reverend Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, Archbishop of Westminster, in March 2000. Shortly after he was installed, he became a Patron of the AHRERC in the place of Cardinal Basil Hume, our former Roman Catholic Patron who had died in 1999. Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor became a Cardinal, himself, in 2001 – and retired from his active role as Archbishop of Westminster in 2009. May he rest in peace.

John Franklin

<http://www.studyspiritualexperiences.org/news>

Letters to the Editor

Dear Paddy,

Congratulations on yet another excellent issue of the newsletter. I am so grateful for the inclusion of Professor Jeff Astley's transcript of his 2016 Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture in the Spring 2017 *De Numine* – it was a most stimulating lecture raising many points of interest. Thanks also to Marianne Rankin for her excellent report of the afternoon discussion on the theme of, *What's it all about, and what should we be doing about it?* Just one correction, if I may – the report mentioned 'AHS member Joan Ashford' – this, in fact, properly should read, 'Joan Ashton'.

With best wishes,

John Franklin

See page 4 for John's response to Professor Ashley's Memorial Lecture; a summary of the lecture was printed in Issue 62 page 13. Ed.

Hello

Just read the latest *De Numine* (Issue 62). Not sure who is responsible but Alan's and my own reports seemed to have got mixed up! [LLantarnam Gathering report pps 36-37] It was I who have been to 3 gatherings with one 'gap' year. Also, disappointed not to see Annarita's contribution in there. Perhaps you did not receive it?

As a new (and young!) member it might have inspired other new members to be more active. But, again, you may not have had the printing space.

all best,

Ken {Rees}

So sorry Ken and Amarita, mea culpa on both counts, see Amarita's letter below (Ed).

To the Editor

When I was invited to join the meeting Mary had arranged in the beautiful setting of Llantarnam Abbey, I did not know what to expect. Being truly honest, I did not even know who Alister Hardy was. What immediately struck me was the size of the group and a profound sense of connection with the other attendants. I had initially thought I was going to join a very formal meeting of 30-plus people, but I found myself in a warm and cosy circle of 8 informal 'friends'.

The programme for the meeting had been exceptionally outlined and I was looking forward to each session. A general feeling of harmony and non-judgemental attitude prevailed during the whole meeting and I soon came to appreciate how no-one belief/path/faith tended to prevail over others. As the topics discussed were easily approachable from different viewpoints and religious backgrounds, we all felt encouraged and open to participate, bringing our own contribution and being enriched by those of the others.

The very fact that we all came from different religious/spiritual paths allowed us to focus on the 'essence' of the main subject which was 'Boundaries and Beyond', thus bypassing the risk to get stuck into the details and limitations of a specific tradition. I found this approach invaluable and rare.

I decided to join the Alister Hardy Society because I trust it provides a way forward towards integration and, although I was sorry to hear some of the groups are disappearing, I am confident a new revival could be promoted and I do look forward to a new turn of the wheel. Needless to say how much I would love to repeat the experience in the Llantarnam Abbey and bring my humble contribution if requested and appropriate.

A special thank you to Mary, Paddy and Alan for organising such a beautiful experience.

May your path be lighted from above.

Annarita Ressa

Thank you Annarita. As Ken points out above, your lovely letter should have been printed with the Llantarnam report in the last issue. Sorry, but better late than never. Thanks again. Ed.

Dear All

In the Spring issue of *De Numine*, I shared a letter from the Wrekin Trust announcing its dissolution. On March 21st I represented the AHT at a celebration in Hawkwood College to acknowledge the achievements of Wrekin.

Although a sad occasion, it was nonetheless an enjoyable gathering of like-minded people, determined to keep in touch. The day included a presentation by David Lorimer, President of the Wrekin Trust, on Sir George Trevelyan's work and legacy. We reflected on Sir George's vision and all that had been done over the years in so many fields of activity through the activities of the Trust.

But the day was about the future as well as the past and we heard about various legacy projects being planned, details of which are set out in the letter from Tessa Maskell below. I feel that these initiatives will resonate with AHT members, who may well wish to become involved. I left Hawkwood in a far more optimistic mood than when I arrived.

Marianne Rankin, AHT Director of Communications



From Tessa Maskell (Outgoing Wrekin Trustee)

Now that the Wrekin Trust has officially closed, it has given way directly to a number of exciting **Green Shoots**, some of which emerged during the event at Hawkwood on March 21st when we celebrated Sir George's remarkable achievements throughout the many years that the Trust operated. The form may have changed, but the Spirit of Sir George Trevelyan, the founder, is still alive and well!

An embryonic idea, that encompasses that Spirit of the Trust, is for us to form an Association together, possibly to be called The Goodwill Association. At the moment, its present form looks something like this:

The **Goodwill Association** plans to be teaching already established courses using Mindfulness and Holistic techniques to understand and heal our mind, body, feelings and spirit. It aims to provide affordable Holistic Life Coaching sessions for those going through a deep life-transition, having maybe recently survived trauma or loss; and to provide a healing space for these people to attend short residential retreats. We are currently looking for suitable accommodation for this part of the project. For details contact **EmmaMary Gathergood**: emmamarygathergood@ymail.com

Below is a list of friends associated with various Green Shoots and their contact details. There are many more shoots beginning to show themselves.

The **New Story**: the paradigm shift heralded by Sir George Trevelyan is now being termed 'The New Story of Oneness and our essential interconnectedness with all Life'. A film of the international event where 350 people, including indigenous leaders from all continents, anchored this movement is available on www.newstoryhub.com 50,000 comments indicated that indeed 'the tide has turned'. **Janice Dolley**: janice.dolley@btinternet.com

Yelders is an opportunity for younger people and older people to talk to each other, really hear each other, resulting in life changing times together. The first meeting of people exploring the whole idea of Yelders was planned for May 7th 2017 at the Fold, Bransford, near Worcester. **Tessa Maskell**: tessamaskell@btinternet.com

The Heart of Light builds on the concept of the Silent Minute and the Lamplighter Movement to encourage people to take a silent pause at 9 p.m. each evening in their time zone, lighting a candle and saying a short prayer to bring more light, love and peace into the world.

David Lorimer: dl@scimednet.org

Character Scotland's Young Start – a new project, supported by the Big Lottery Fund. Young people and their grandparents will complete a poster, reflecting on personal values and qualities, choosing a WW1 image, an inspirational story and inspiring quotations, then considering how the process may have 'made you more grateful to be alive and how you can contribute to a more peaceful world'.

www.inspiringpurpose.org.uk **David Lorimer**: dl@scimednet.org

The Soul-Voyagers Network is a 'community of spirit' open to those with experience and interest in transpersonal fields. See www.soul-voyagers.net for articles, newsletters and details of our annual retreat. **Jen Kershaw:** jenkershaw@aol.com

The Fold with **Satish Kumar** as its patron, operates between Worcester and Malvern. It now involves over 70 people and is about to celebrate its tenth birthday. It hosts courses, events and celebrations of life, has art and craft studios, a care farm growing organic produce, an award winning café and farm shop. **Will Tooby:** will@thefold.org.uk

The Reading Group aims to deepen our understanding of the spiritual, and holds workshops for speakers such as William Meader, has a monthly Full Moon group and a silent meditation group. We have a study group that has worked with books by Alice Bailey, Charles Eisenstein and Anne Baring. **Heather Giles:** heathergiles@tiscali.co.uk

One Spirit Alliance is an on-going co-creative initiative arising from the impulse to connect spiritually minded people and organisations. It offers a flexible framework for mutual support in raising awareness of all spiritual traditions and approaches within society.

Claire McDonald: clairemcdonald62@msn.com

David Furlong PhD is working with the development and understanding of how we can work constructively with our own 'Higher-Self'. We work with clients who may have disturbed psychic and psychological issues, and this aspect of our being has a profound insight into the therapeutic processes needed to bring about a restoration to good mental and physical health. davidf44@btinternet.com

100 Women of Spirit This initiative was inspired by the 100th birthday of Dadi Janki, the spiritual head of the Brahma Kumaris, whose life has been about empowering women. Having asked for nominations of women in the UK who were examples of bringing spiritual principles into working life, we narrowed it down to 100 women with true feminine leadership qualities. In May we go to the House of Commons, calling for the 'feminine' way to be included alongside the more 'masculine' approach in taking society forward.

Phillipa Blackham: pip.blackham@hotmail.co.uk

The Spirit of Humanity Forum is a global network of organisations, communities and individuals committed to help bring about change in governance and decision-making, based on core human values. It creates a safe space for deeper encounter, exploration and dialogue among leaders and change-makers to discover new ways to move forwards. The Forum focuses on spirituality in leadership, and explores new forms of governance underpinned by care, respect, trust, dialogue and relationships. **Sister Maureen** (see email address below).

India One: The World Renewal Spiritual Trust and its sister organisation, *the Brahma Kumaris* combine spiritual values with research and development of renewable energy technology. In February they completed a solar thermal power plant near the Shantivan Campus in Abu Road, Rajasthan, the first of its kind in the world. In 2014 the trust was awarded an assignment for the Development of Awareness Cum Training Centre on Concentrating Solar Thermal (CST) Technologies under the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). **Sister Maureen:** maureen.goodman@uk.brahmakumaris.org

I do trust that some of the excitement and joy represented by these new Green Shoots can be felt by you and that you can experience some of the enthusiasm that we are feeling here. If you would like to talk further about any of these projects, and especially the possible embryonic Association, please get in touch with Emma Mary Gathergood or myself.

Kind Regards

Tessa Maskell

tessamaskell@btinternet.com



Book Reviews

Bettina E. Schmidt (ed.), *The Study of Religious Experience: Approaches and methodologies* Sheffield and Bristol, Connecticut, Equinox, 2016. ix 197 pp. ISBN 978 1 78179 257 5 (pbk) £22.95; ISBN 978 1 78179 256 8 (hbk) £75; ISBN 978 1 78179 418 0 (eBook) £22.95

This collection comprises ten essays mainly from researchers and scholars associated with the University of Wales Trinity St David, and edited by Professor Bettina Schmidt, the Director of the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre in Lampeter. Its explicit aim is to show how a range of disciplines and subject areas – including anthropology, philosophy, religious studies, theology, biblical studies and history – ‘approach the topic of religious experience, how this approach is applied and what contributions they make to the study of religious experience’. After a helpful editorial introduction, the contributors’ work – which includes some excellent chapters – is collected into four sections: anthropological approaches, methodological challenges, theological and philosophical approaches, and ‘reflections on types of religious experience’.

The concluding section is likely to be the one that is most accessible to non-specialist readers. This reviewer found two of its essays particularly illuminating. Catrin Williams’ chapter recounts the recent resurgence of interest in the role of religious experiences in the literature of the New Testament, before focusing on the language of ‘seeing’ (faith perception) and ‘not seeing’ in the ‘experience-inducing text’ of St John’s Gospel. In ‘Music as Spiritual Experience’, June Boyce-Tillman of the University of Winchester explores the potential link between the aesthetic and the spiritual that incorporates a welcome recognition of the use of music ‘as a medium for spiritual transformation in a variety of contexts’, and not just through overtly ‘sacred music’ or the ‘lyrical theology’ of hymns.

The first two sections of the book tackle some of the challenges to methodology and practice that face those who undertake a social-scientific study of religious and spiritual experience. In an overview of the place of experience in the anthropology of religion, Fiona Bowie of King's College London contrasts the classical naturalistic explanations of religion with an alternative tradition that derives from scholars who have had direct personal experience of the paranormal or transcendent. This is exemplified today among researchers who, at the least, 'retain an openness to experience that is allowed to inform their analysis', and which Bowie builds on in her method of 'cognitive, empathetic engagement' that allows for personal transformation ('or at least the possibility of it').

Two other contributors defend here, from different perspectives, the evidence-based notion of cross-cultural and universal features in mysticism, NDEs and OBEs as pointing back to 'an experience without normal conceptualisation that embodies the essence of the unspeakable sacred' (Michael Winkelman, who takes seriously the biological undergirding of spiritual experience). Although culture and language play a part in the enabling of such experiences and their later narration and interpretation, 'accepting that experience is culturally *mediated* is not the same as accepting that it is entirely culturally *fabricated*' (Gregory Shushan). The methodological challenges to the study of religious experience discussed by Bettina Schmidt, however, particularly relate to the significance of context. In her empirical work in Brazil, Schmidt encountered an openness towards paranormal phenomena that went along with a 'relatively widespread tolerance towards varieties of forms of understanding' of them. She argues convincingly that the student of religion may also properly embrace 'a polyphonic reading of any form of religious experience'.

In the section on theological and philosophical approaches, Robert Pope addresses Christian theology's struggle with the concept of religious experience that stems from the priority it gives to particular revelations and doctrinal formulations. While theology must find a place for experience, interpreting it without the categories developed by theology appears to give experience too much emphasis and may result 'in speaking about the self rather than God'. While theology sees itself as shaping rather than being shaped by human experiences, Pope nevertheless concludes that theological reflection may still be informed by religious experiences insofar as the latter help more generally 'to form our patterns of knowing, whether tacit or explicit'. Traditional philosophical arguments concerning religious experience either use it as evidence for the existence of God as its source, or judge it by the coherence or moral value of whatever the experience reveals. In his brief chapter, however, Tristan Nash seeks to open the way to a different argument, in which we speak of religious experience as a revelation of a truth that we value and in which we may find 'the truth [or proof] of God's existence'.

Altogether, this is a most useful publication and a valuable addition to the literature. The book illustrates very well the signal importance of approaching the phenomenon of religious experience from a variety of directions, using a range of disciplinary methods and insights. It deserves to be widely read.

Reviewed by Professor Jeff Astley

Cassandra Vieten and Shelley Scammell, *Spiritual and Religious Competencies in Clinical Practice*

Oakland CA, New Harbinger Publications, 2015. 256pp. ISBN 978 1 626251052

This book came to my attention in an impressive way, in that I received two emails about it just three hours apart, from separate and unrelated individuals, having never heard about it or either of the authors before. I am very glad that it did so, because it provides a solid and useful underpinning for research (such as my own) into the relational aspects of spiritual experience. More widely it asserts the vital importance of mental health approaches, and practitioners, incorporating an understanding of their own and their clients' spiritualities in their practice.

One of the happiest insights provided by the book might be summarised by the aphorism 'The whole is greater than the sum of its parts'. In itself this statement can be seen to transcend the obvious and empirical, and its truth can best be comprehended intuitively. In the context of the present work we can discover a welcome addition to our working concept of Wellbeing: that we are individually enhanced by our relationships to 'something larger' than our individual selves, be it other people or a sense of transcendent reality. (One of the persistent insights of group therapy is how the resources of the group are so much greater than that of individual therapists, however gifted).

The authors began to write this book to 'promote the incorporation of basic spiritual and religious competencies into the field of psychology' because they know that both psychology and the major spiritual and religious traditions have significant understanding of how to enable human thriving and reduce suffering, and that the absence of such an element 'limits clinical effectiveness'. Of particular note is that they wish all mental health practitioners to be better informed and self-aware in these areas 'without them having to become spiritual or religious themselves'. They also want practitioners to be self-aware about their own values and attitudes in these regards, to be alert to how their therapeutic receptivity is affected towards others' spirituality and experience.

They ask why the psychological disciplines, academic and applied, are lagging behind other disciplines, e.g. healthcare and medicine, in catering for these factors, and they suggest that the desire amongst psychologists to establish their discipline as credibly scientific may be relevant here. Hard science struggles to engage with subjective states or accord them validity, even though every human being knows that these are cardinal dimensions of what it means to be human. As psychology wants on the whole to be accepted as hard science, it prefers to operate in the clear domains of quantitative evidence and behavioural studies.

In our contemporary secular cultures, multi-ethnic and -sexual diversity is acknowledged and provided for in many contexts, including the psychotherapeutic, but spiritual and religious diversity less so, or much less so ('inadequate') according to the authors, quoting research by Frazier and Hansen (2009).¹ They have accordingly created a training programme for techniques and approaches in these competencies, 'that all psychologists and other mental health professionals should possess', which is the main focus of the book. They recognise that any specialist resource in this area amounts to proficiency beyond basic competencies, and they suggest that this requires a deeper and greater engagement than they can offer in one

basic text (and they make extensive appropriate suggestions for this further development). The programme they offer was drafted and then tested extensively with a cross section of practitioners to evaluate its suitability and helpfulness, and refined accordingly.

The outcome is a set of 16 'spiritual and religious competencies', classified in three subsets of Attitudes, Knowledge and Skills respectively, and these form the focus of each of the subsequent sixteen chapters. The chapter headings summarise in each case the competency to which they refer, and are largely self-explanatory.

Under 'Attitudes' we have

1. Demonstrating Empathy, Respect and Appreciation;
2. Appreciating Religious and Spiritual Diversity;
3. Being Aware of your own Beliefs.

Under 'Knowledge':

4. Exploring Diverse Beliefs and Practises;
5. Understanding Spirituality and Religion as Different but Overlapping;
6. Knowing the Difference between Spirituality and Psychopathology;
7. Recognising Life Span Development;
8. Learning about Clients' Spiritual and Religious Resources;
9. Recognising Harmful Involvement;
10. Being Aware of Legal and Ethical Issues.

Finally, under 'Skills':

11. Working with Religious and Spiritual Diversity;
12. Taking a Religious and Spiritual History;
13. Helping Clients Access their Religious and Spiritual Resources;
14. Identifying Spiritual and Religious Problems;
15. Staying Up to Date;
16. Acknowledging your Limits.

I am particularly interested in Chapters 6 and 9, which are, in a way, converse and complementary to each other. Chapter 6 addresses 'spiritual crises' and suggest how to distinguish these from episodes of mental ill health. To one who has explored, for example, spiritual phenomena such as 'the dark night of the soul', it is clear that this is not at all the same thing as clinical depression. To an uninformed practitioner, symptoms of the former might well suggest the latter diagnosis, and therefore inappropriate treatment. Similarly, it is very important to distinguish genuine spiritual experience of the mystical kind from hallucination and delusional states; we need to recognise aspects of spiritual and religious behaviour which are actually or potentially obsessional, compulsive and harmful to the individual or community concerned. Indeed a good and wide debate can and should be held to help our society to recognise 'good' religion and spirituality, and distinguish it from 'bad', rather than generalising in either direction.

Chapter 9 addresses some of these issues in terms of: Negative religious coping, Religious scrupulosity, Over-involvement with such matters, Cults, Unresolved issues and Difficulties integrating such experience. Most of these topics require discernment, because one person's cult is another person's authentic spiritual path, and one person's verdict of over-involvement

is another's assertion of an appropriate level of commitment. Be that as it may, common sense is helpful in making such discriminations. As with many religious cultures, the decisive test can often be made in terms of the applications and outcomes of religious and spiritual engagement, and whether the person concerned is growing more or less loving, towards themselves and others.

The authors provide training guidelines for assessing the competencies they have outlined, and a good selection of resources for further development. As was observed earlier, they recognise the ambitiousness of addressing such a profound and necessary development in any kind of depth in a single volume, and caution against any assumption that deep understanding could be so easily achieved. The whole text and the recommendations for further resources are an encouragement to take these matters very seriously and in whatever depth one's practice requires and deserves.

For readers of *De Numine* this book may seem to be outside or beyond the prime focus of the study of religious and spiritual experience, because it is plainly addressed to mental health practitioners and members of the psychological disciplines as such. I believe that this review will have indicated how much more widely helpful it should prove to be, in helping us all to proclaim the immense value of such experience in the human enterprise, as well as making important recommendations for exploring and respecting these dimensions in psychological care.

Reviewed by Jeff Leonardi

¹ (2009, 'Religious/Spiritual Psychotherapy: Do we do what we believe to be important?' *Professional Psychology Research and Practice* 40 (1), pp 80-87)

This review will appear in the 'Person Centred Journal' of the Association for the Development of the Person Centred Approach (Summer 2017). An amended version will appear in 'Thresholds', the journal of the Spirituality division of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (Vol. 23).

Dr Alexander J Shaia with Michelle L Gaugy, *Heart and Mind: The Four-Gospel Journey for Radical Transformation*

Morning Star Publishing, 2016. 398pp. ISBN 978 1925208603 (pbk) from £25.23, ISBN 1498231373 (Kindle Edition) £8.00

After meeting Alexander while walking the Camino Santiago de Compostella pilgrims route through northern Spain in 2012, I was intrigued to read his book.

Despite having a parish vicar father and a Cathedral Precentor grandfather I had lost my way with Christianity for many years. So I was delighted to come across a radical new way to explore the renewal of Christian faith through a lens of personal development, based around a simple 4-stage sequential journey of spiritual, emotional and intellectual transformation that can be adopted as a regular cyclical practice.

The book calls us to see beyond the historical Jesus and focus on his teachings; to see the four gospels as a universal human experience of attending to the everyday themes of change and loss (Matthew), moving through suffering (Mark), receiving joy and grace (John), and maturing/growing up through service (Luke). And in so doing, to embrace God at the very heart of what is to be human. Alexander argues that this is entirely consistent with early Christianity's view – but nonetheless, far different from Christian thought and interpretation of the last few centuries.

The first three introductory chapters are my favourite and an absolutely essential portal into his new paradigm of the four gospels.

The first chapter is Alexander's personal odyssey leading to the discovery of the gospels as a fourfold journey. He shares both his traumatic experiences and the loving, supportive family framework with its mythic Semitic and Middle Eastern traditions that he grew up in. Alexander tells us how early on, the God he understood was founded in poetic mystery, not reason; and that worship was an experience he could feel in his body, not an ideology. He then leads us on his fascinating study of spiritual, psychological and anthropological theory and practice (including John Dunne, Jung, Joseph Campbell, Mathew Fox, Teresa de Avila, Scott Peck, Ignatius Loyala and Lauren Artress) that revealed to him a common four-stage journeying pattern.

This pattern asks the journeyer to begin some form of inquiry. Next comes a time of trial, often involving pitfalls, and sometimes trickery, but always bringing new and hard-won understanding. The gift of enlarged comprehension, wholeness, and greater perspective is third, sometimes coming suddenly, often with the sense of outside assistance. The fourth step requires actual practice of the wisdom gained, with some component of bringing that knowledge back to the community or those who follow after the journeyer.

The second chapter provides five keys to understanding this new integrative perspective. Particularly interesting is Alexander's perspective on why he believes there were four gospels, and why these four. The third chapter holds an overview of the full four-gospel journey, and each gospel as one of its four paths. It identifies the different times, places and specific audiences for whom the gospels were individually written. Each gospel re-frames the core story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection; emphasising and even altering its elements, incorporating specific recurring imagery. The different imagery in each particular gospel provides relevant guidance for the singular cultural/historical realities and dilemmas of its audience. Mark, directing his gospel to Christians under the sentence of death, uses the metaphorical imagery of wilderness, deserts and bodies of water (in much of semitic culture a place of the demonic); in Matthew, the metaphor is 'climbing the mountain'; in John, its 'the garden' and in Luke, 'the road'.

Each of the four gospel texts, which are called 'paths', has a chapter which is then discussed in terms of its role in the transformational journey; employing different particular events/stories from which flows discussion, questions and insights. His discourse on John I find the most illuminating. These four chapters are very rich and detailed, so reading a few selected passages at a time helped me absorb Alexander's insights that follow.

Matthew challenges the desire for permanence following the second destruction of the great temple of Jerusalem, and teaches about a new temple to be built within the heart of each follower as a direct and personal relationship with God. It uses every segment of Jesus' life to direct us to the development of our own inner resources, most particularly those of honesty and compassion towards ourselves in the face of loss, and to set out on the journey with courage and trust in the divine.

At the time of Mark's gospel, Messianic Jews were made scapegoats, tortured and murdered by Nero for an immense fire that had burned much of Rome. Lost, alone, struggling to have hope, Mark offers them messages that hold both despair and hope; images of endurance through faith and prayer, most notably those of Jesus and his disciples making multiple night-time crossings of the Sea of Galilee during violent storms. With increased awareness of inner opposites and the tensions, the task is to stay in this uncomfortable place; shedding old beliefs, habits, inappropriate guilt and assumptions that no longer serve a purpose

John's gospel was written in Ephesus at the time of a diverse population, no religious persecution, and highly skilled religious teachers. It proclaimed 'All are one; no one is excluded; join us'. This resistance to division and inner knowing of all-in-union is the joy of John's Garden. While Matthew and Mark asked us to continue moving, John asks us to receive and enjoy while resting in his Glorious Garden. We have re-entered a paradise, but if we leave too soon, we won't completely absorb our lessons, as our insights will not yet have fully matured. We must hold to an inner stillness and reflection: wisdom is a much longer journey.

Luke's gospel was written to assist and instruct various communities of Christians throughout the Mediterranean region, in learning the behaviour – not just the theory and the revelatory experience of – a new way. Although growing and thriving in their faith, many Christians carried new pain, as they were formally cast out from Judaism, their mother faith. How were they to respond to hurt? To injustice? Part of Luke's answer was contained in his primary metaphor – 'the road'. Everything happened 'on the road,' while travelling; a passionate adventure in discovering, through patience and persistence, how to recognise and seize our strengths and navigate our relationships, and bring grace into everyday life through compassion and service. (The transcendent and enduring parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son are found only in the Gospel of Luke). The destination is secondary, not the focus. Our journey will never end. The fourth path leads back to a new first path, in a perpetual cycle of new beginnings and fresh opportunities.

Chapters 4–7 each close with a prayer, a summary, and 'exercises' as recommendations for practice that build sequentially from each gospel path to the next. The penultimate chapter has eight continuing, suggested practices for individuals and communities. The last chapter gives final thoughts for moving forward on the journey.

To conclude, for me the book provides a wonderful resonance with the importance in our lives of 'process, pattern, cycles, intuition and our emotional responses' as a counter balance to 'so-called facts and scientific interpretation of our world'. A glorious read!

Jonathan Gaunt

See Report on Dr Alexander Shaia's workshop on page 31.

Rahim Snow, *Remember Who You Are, 28 Spiritual Verses from the Holy Qur'an to Help You Discover Your True Identity, Purpose, and Nourishment in God*
Remembrance Studio, 2017. 214pp. ISBN 978 0 9988262 0 2 (hbk) £20.99

In this beautifully presented hardback, Rahim Snow distils the wisdom of the Qur'an and shares his understanding of Islamic spirituality. Before the title, the cover states, 'for Muslims, Christians, Jews, and all seekers of knowledge'. In today's world, where Islam is too often equated with terrorism and sexism, this book offers simple but profound insights into the truths at the heart of the Qur'an, from which Muslims and non-Muslims can benefit.

Each of the 28 chapters takes a verse from the Qur'an, translated into simple English, and expands on its message. So rather than approach the whole text, Rahim Snow offers the reader his interpretation of these key verses and shows how the teachings can be applied in everyday life. Each chapter concludes with a declaration summing up the message, enabling readers to reflect on the insight, to internalise it, and to incorporate it into their lives. He deals with a range of different aspects of life, including sexism, as he exhorts men to be more than merely a 'nice guy' but to be 'a fierce ally' in the fight against inequality. The chapters are arranged in sections which reflect progress from First, Understand; Then, Practice; Now, Serve; and the Epilogue – Be God's Helpers. The approach is coherent and clear, and the teachings are explained in an extremely accessible style.

At the beginning of the book, Rahim explains why he wrote it:

This is the book I always wanted to read and carry about with me while I was a teenager, a college student, and a young man trying to figure out how to be a good Muslim, a good human being, who lives in a multicultural, multilingual, multiracial, and multi-faith world. ... No-one was writing the kind of books I wanted to read. So I had to write one myself. ... I wanted a book written in my own style of talking and thinking that helped me better understand the essential message of the Qur'an.

The book also aims to help 'Christians, Jews and all seekers of knowledge' to use the Qur'an to strengthen their own faith, without the need to convert to Islam. Finally, the book is for 'people who are simply curious to know more about the spirituality of Islam.' Some abstract thinkers may find the intimate language, speaking to God as a teacher or a friend slightly off-putting, perhaps too anthropomorphic, but the perspective is altered when it is made clear that 'God is everywhere. He is inside you and he is outside you. Better yet, you are inside him. You are always surrounded and immersed in his presence.'

This is a personal reflection and Rahim begins with his parents and a tale told by his mother, *The Lion and the Sheep*, which frames his approach. He poses ten fundamental questions, such as 'How do I properly identify who and what I am?' and explores what it means to remember that we come from God or Allah – Rahim equates the two. His insights point the way to a spiritual life. Almost twenty years ago, I studied religion at Oxford with Rahim Snow and I am delighted now to review the fruits of his thinking and research since then. He has written an illuminating book on Islam, which can also contribute to inter-religious harmony and understanding. That is a hugely important achievement.

Reviewed by Marianne Rankin

Keidi Keating (editor), *The Light – A Book of Knowing: How to shine your light brighter and live in the spiritual heart*

Ojai (CA), The Light Network, 2017. 296pp. ISBN 978-0997572711 (pbk) £12.99

This is the second book in *The Light* series of three books – the first was about wisdom (2014) and the last will be about truth. It is divided into three sections with a short introduction to each that talks about the spiritual traveller's journey – 'an evolving journey to enlightenment for a true experience of our spiritual essence'. The Preface begins the journey.

The chapters are contributions from twenty-two different authors, teachers and speakers who have been, or who are currently, adding to the knowledge about our spiritual essence. Although I have been an avid reader for many years of this type of book, I must confess to knowing few of these luminaries, so I was interested to read their impressions of this complex subject. For those who are new to exploration of their spiritual journey I think it would be helpful to them to read a chapter every few days and then meditate on the contents. I was reading it for the purpose of reviewing it and my impression was that others might find the mass of profound writing all rather intense and even, perhaps, overwhelming. The chapters are, of course, written in different styles and cover various aspects of spirituality and the extent to which we make it the main part of our lives. The concept of ourselves as spiritual beings having a human experience rather than human beings having a spiritual experience shines through the whole book.

To consider just a few of the contributions: Patricia Cota-Robles, in her chapter 'We are All One', comments 'For millennia the various world religions have programmed into us the grossly inaccurate information that we are "worthless sinners and worms in the dust"'. Her rebuttal was refreshing to read because I believe this attitude lies at the root of many of the emotional problems that individuals experience today. In fact, her whole article was very 'down-to-earth' despite being about our spiritual connection, thus re-emphasising the universal truth that our purpose here is to have a human experience.

Richard Waterborn's chapter on 'The Healing of the Soul' was another deeply profound distillation of our purpose here on Earth. If young people could be inspired to read just this chapter it would give them a good base from which to lead their earthly lives successfully, and also be aware of how much Spirit is part of them and their overall journey. It is simply written and makes sense of a life that can seem complicated and confusing to many youngsters.

Melanie Hoffmann's 'Finding the Light through Past Lives' gives a slightly different perspective on how we view what has gone before. With the increasing popularity of past life regression under hypnosis, this chapter is highly relevant. Melanie suggests that it is simply a method of letting go of the fears we have accumulated on our journey. Practical details of our past lives are unimportant because those same fears are tethered to our current lives – it is the fears we need to focus on if we are to develop and grow during this lifetime.

Puyja Swamiji's 'Peace: for Ourselves and all the World' was refreshingly honest about the way the world is. Spiritual gurus are forever telling us that we must not focus on the darkness in the world as seen in local and world events, but think about the good things. Whilst this is

good in theory, we are nevertheless confronted by so much that can be overwhelmingly negative and it was good to have someone being honest about this. His attitude was not to simply ignore the dark but to understand it so that we can bring about peace and harmony. This, combined with Keidi Keating's chapter of the Dalai Lama's teachings, entitled 'Compassion', gives us a way forward that is logical and possible, focusing on our similarities and bringing compassion to everything in our lives.

I have highlighted some of the chapters that I found very interesting and enjoyable to read because of the relevance of their profound messages, but the whole book is inspiring. Every chapter has something purposeful and helpful to say, and all the chapters have been collated in an intuitive order. The knowledge contained within it is appropriate for all points on the spiritual path – many of the chapters are good starting points for those at an early stage, but equally good for those who have been developing for some years. We all need to be reminded of the knowing that is within us; none of us is learning anything new because it is all part of the spark of Great Spirit that we each have.

Reviewed by Howard Jones

Curtis D. Coats & Monica M. Emerich (eds) *Practical Spiritualities in a Media Age* London / New York, Bloomsbury Press, 2016, 265pp. ISBN 978 1 4742 2316 4

This fascinating collection of essays on the theme of 'practical spirituality in a media age' has been brought together by Curtis D. Coats & Monica M. Emerich, two scholars in the field of media and communication studies in the US. Coats is an Associate Professor of Communication Studies, and Co-director of Film Studies at Millsap College, USA. He explores the intersections of media, religion, identity, gender, tourism and sacred space. Emerich is a journalist, president of Groundwork Communications & Research and teaches on the Sustainable Practices Program at the University of Colorado, USA, with a specific interest in the spiritualisation of sustainability. They have gathered contributions from a wide range of international scholars of both religious and media studies which enrich and widen the approaches and the scope of research into the practical side of spirituality in our era.

The editors and contributors of the book are introduced at the outset in short paragraphs outlining their field of work and if applicable previous publications or related activities, a helpful feature which makes it easier to situate an essay within the framework of interests and approaches of its author. Collated at the end of the book is a wealth of notes on each chapter, as well as an extensive bibliography and good index, very useful elements for cross-referencing and further in-depth research on specific themes, theoretical backgrounds or authors referenced in any given contribution.

In their introductory chapter Coats & Emerich outline definitional parameters of the main topics presented in this volume: practical spirituality, the media age and the 'relational turn' in these areas. Since David Hay & R. Nye (1998) proposed relational consciousness as the bedrock of spirituality in children, the importance of a relational dynamic in spirituality has

been further studied and brought into focus. In this volume Coats & Emerich consider 'relational turn' in both fields, religion as well as media studies: a re-evaluation of the 'outward' aspects of spirituality in everyday practises in relation to, and with, other people and the world at large. They mainly follow Graham Harvey's concept of religion as fundamentally relational (Harvey, 2013), an argument which he tests here on a study of what 'spirituality' means in the context of everyday life (Harvey, 2017: 189). In conclusion they connect the two fields of media and religious studies by the so-called 'relational turn' apparent in recent academic approaches. They elaborate on how this can help to expand research and scholarship and place the separate chapters in the contexts of these relational dynamics. On the difficult issue of an actual definition of spirituality they examine various approaches to the outlining of definitional *boundaries* instead, and explain their choice of the qualifier 'practical' in more detail. They define and conceptualise the term 'media age' as used for our current era, and place the contributions to the book into a framework of media theory, referencing the main theoretical backgrounds of the field relevant to the work presented.

In each chapter very different case studies are presented. Each of them is set within the framework of the elements introduced above, yet concerned with totally different approaches and practises, e.g. hula-hooping (ch.5) *vs* servant leadership (ch.3). Each chapter is subdivided into headed paragraphs, thus affording an easily accessible, clear structure. The refreshing mix of case studies involving the expression of spirituality, or the results thereof, embedded in rich theoretical backgrounds, makes for a satisfying and balanced read. The essays, while offering a wealth of academic approaches and theory, never lose sight of the practical side of their themes. They are an exploration into real meaning-making for practitioners, and a consideration of what implications these insights may have on the field of academic study and conceptualisation in the context of spirituality and the media.

In chapter two Florence P. Guignard reviews the rediscovery of baby-wearing, i.e. carrying a baby on your body in a specially designed carrier, and in how far this is an embodied spiritual practise.

In chapter three Ruth-Ann Ritter and Jeffrey H. Mahan look at concepts of servant leadership in the workplace and explore the convergence of media and spirituality in this arena.

Marion Bowman takes a new approach toward the material aspects of commodified spirituality and the ensuing growth of commerce and community in Glastonbury in chapter four.

In chapter five Jenna Grey-Hildenbrand and Martha Smith Roberts discover how hula-hooping can take on a spiritual dimension and how, through online sharing and teaching, internet communities of hoopers are created.

In chapter six 'Another Way' Jeremy Garber analyses a group of artists in the process of forming a spiritual community. He discusses their attempt to create a space to connect via the discussion of their creative works and their difficulties in doing so.

Chapter seven is concerned with material culture and practical spirituality in the context of the 'jam band' scene, in which Lucas F. Johnstone reconsiders the formative power of embodied experiences in this specific community and its ritualistic approaches to their events.

In chapter eight Garry Tregidga explores the relations between practical spirituality, place and cultural identity and how the formation of these is influenced by the media, using the example of the 'spirit of place' in Cornwall.

In the ninth chapter Liz Barr introduces the concept of dis-identification: meaning-making through reworking elements of dominant discourses in an opposing position, using a study of the Icarus Project as an example. She uses the concept to bridge the fields of religious studies and communications, including specifically the internet as a major space for forming communities.

In chapter ten Rachel Liberman and Steward. M. Hoover discuss the implications of the media empowering a reflexive spirituality to challenge religious authority. His example is the PostSecret project, which invites the public to share a secret ('confession') on anonymous postcards, a selection of which are put on a weekly blog. His aim is to demonstrate how this turned into something of a media empire and an online community.

Anna Huffman, in chapter eleven, studies the adjustment of the Baby Boomer generation to the realities of ageing, describing what has been typified as the 'spiritual seeker' personality in their generation, and how they adopt the internet in their negotiation with these realities. .

Chapter twelve, Graham Harvey's 'Food, Sex and Spirituality' concludes the volume with the approach, mentioned above, of a way of defining spirituality in our times through a closer look at the relational turn in religious studies, and how the discussions of very individualised spiritualities show that in ordinary life people's spirituality is actually very practical and relational in its orientation.

In the course of reading through this book, I found that each single article brought new, exciting insights into lived spiritual practise; I gained a new understanding of the approaches to the vast field of media studies and enjoyed finding elements of spirituality recognised in the less obvious places, for example hula-hooping. While the contributions in this book are of a high academic standard, the main points of the case studies and the theories behind them are also accessible to the lay reader, and the read is so interesting, one can enjoy it in any case!

A recurring issue in several of the contributions is the formation of online communities as spaces for the growth, transmission and expression of spirituality nowadays, and the dependency on the internet for building such communities. To see this re-evaluation is personally satisfying to me, since my MA thesis was directly concerned with online communities of real-life Jedi (as opposed to role-play groups) basing their world-views and spiritual practises in part on elements of the Star Wars movies. At the time (2002/2003) not much scholarly material on similar groups existed. This has obviously changed and the articles in this volume are a confirmation that the direction into which my research took me then was no coincidence.

Reviewed by Karen Asmuss, Germany

References:

Harvey, G. *Food, Sex and Strangers: Understanding Religion as Everyday Life*, Routledge: New York 2013

Hay, D. & Nye, R. *The Spirit of the Child*, Fount Paperbacks: London 1998

Brendan Cox, *Jo Cox: More in Common*

London, Two Roads, 2017. 340 pp. ISBN 978 1 47365 918 6 (hbk) £16.99

Most of us will recall the tragic murder of Jo Cox, the MP for the West Yorkshire area of Batley and Spen in June last year. Many will also remember how measured her husband was when addressing the media following that terrible event. This book was written by Brendan Cox in the months following his wife's murder and the setting up of a Foundation in her name to promote tolerance in local communities. The title comes from her maiden speech in the House of Commons in 2015, where she spoke about the diversity of her constituents and concluded by saying that, 'we are far more united and have far more in common than that which divides us'

The book is not primarily about religion, so it might seem odd to include a review in journal specifically dealing with aspects of religion. However, the story offers positivity in a time when many of our values appear to be under threat, and when class and political divisions and the threat of terrorism are all very real.

Brendan Cox skillfully tells the personal story of their life together and avoids making the account in any way sentimental. This is much to be admired; in spite of the terrible way that she died, he is keen to capture the energy, humour and passion that his wife displayed in life. This is fundamentally an account of an ordinary woman from a working class background who won a place to Cambridge, worked for Oxfam, campaigned for the plight of Syrian refugees and fulfilled her ambition to become the Member of Parliament for her home town. Brendan manages to weave the story of Jo's early childhood, adult life, marriage and the birth of their children, all within the context of her death and the days and months afterwards. He includes a lot of humorous stories too, recalling for instance an account of a phone call received via Airforce One, saying that Barack Obama wished to speak to him; he thought this was simply a friend pulling his leg until the President came on the line to talk about Jo and, even more surprisingly, to invite him to the White House with his two young children.

Brendan says that he wrote the book to make sense of his own emotions, and also to capture memories in a set of stories about his wife that might help his young children remember their mother. In doing so he also tells the story of her life in a way that ensures she is not defined by the way in which she died but remembered for the person she was, and would become as a newly elected Member of Parliament.

The book is inspirational on several levels, not least in how he and the family dealt with their grief following her murder, but also for the effect that the events had on the wider population, leading to the setting up of the Jo Cox Foundation. I didn't know Jo Cox, but like her I was born in the Spen Valley, spent my formative years in the area that she represented, and I understand her passion and commitment to the people of Batley and Birstall. This book offers hope, and Cox notes how the murder was intended to set back Jo's own fight for tolerance and fair play, but did in fact have the opposite effect. He says, 'there is a wider struggle at hand, it's not about party politics, it's between those who want to bring communities together to take on the challenges that face society and those who seek to turn us against each other to distract from them'.

We live in the shadow of the recent terror attacks in Westminster, Manchester and at London Bridge, and also across many other European cities, and tolerance and a determination not to be divided by these events are crucial. I recommend the book as both a heart-warming and inspirational read.

Reviewed by Andrew Burns

**Jude Currivan, *The Cosmic Hologram, In-formation at the Center of Creation*
Vermont, Inner Traditions, 2017. 256pp. ISBN 9781620556603 (pbk) £12.99, Kindle £6.99**

Dr Jude Currivan has written a ground-breaking book. She has brought cutting edge physics, the ancient wisdom of the mystics and universal spiritual experience together. She offers a worldview in which information is fundamental, overcoming the incompatibility of quantum and relativity theories, which deal with minute and massive scales respectively, by re-evaluating them as informational theories. She reveals scientific evidence showing that the information that upholds our technologies is exactly the same as the universal in-formation that we call physical reality. We are shown that Reality *is* Information, Mind *is* matter and Consciousness isn't something we have, it's what we and the whole world ARE. But more than this, she makes this understanding relevant to our daily lives.

At the beginning of the book, Jude Currivan describes the image of Indra's Net, 'a shimmering net of light, without beginning or end. At each node of its weave and weft sits a shimmering jewel, and these myriad multifaceted jewels reflect and are each reflected by every other in rainbow-hued radiance of ever-changing illumination.' This ancient Indian vision is now 'being rediscovered and restated in a less poetic but equally majestic and scientifically based language'. The implications of this new understanding of an ancient vision will, according to Currivan, transform how we understand the universe, our selves and the way we live.

The text explains how information is increasingly being considered as more fundamental than energy. It takes the reader to the smallest Planck scale of the world, showing that information is physically real. This underpins the new understanding of just how the Universe is in-formed. Planck himself regarded consciousness as fundamental, with matter derived from it.

Dr Currivan is a cosmologist, planetary healer, futurist and author, who was previously one of the most senior business women in the UK. She has a Master's degree in Physics from Oxford University, specialising in quantum physics and cosmology and a PhD on research into ancient cosmologies. Her research in these fields has led her to a 'WholeWorld-View' – a view of reality as a unified whole, an understanding which can heal our fragmented world. At a WholeWorld-View event organised through the House of Lords, I met with a group of people who will keep in touch and work together to support this vision.

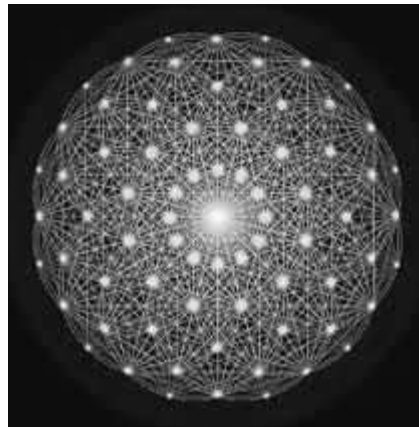
AHT members will be particularly interested to read about Jude Currivan's own experience which led to her lifelong quest. As she relates at the end of the book:

I first directly encountered the cosmic hologram of Indra's net and the realities of multidimensional consciousness when I was four years old. One day as I hovered between sleep and wakefulness, I had a vision that was as real as my bedroom ... In it I seemed to be at the center of a vast interconnected and pulsating web of rainbow light, which shimmered in geometrical shapes that repeated and mirrored each other from the smallest to the largest scales I had a sense of and as far as I could see. Instead of merely being fixed, they changed from moment to moment, and I became aware that there were living forms of light made up from their patterns.

Since that first revelation, numerous psychic perceptions, altered states of consciousness, out-of-body experiences, and the validation of what they've taught me and the insights I've gained from them have, over my lifetime, convinced me of such realities far beyond the physical level of existence and of the interconnected unity of an intelligent Cosmos.

As she says, she both sees and experiences 'reality as the consciousness of an infinite cosmic mind being dynamically co-created and experienced on multidimensional levels of existence.' Although beautifully written, the book is not an easy read. The physics is challenging but it is worth persevering to reach the view from the top of the mountain, a perspective which may well change how you see the universe, your self, life and death – in fact everything.

Reviewed by Marianne Rankin



Indra's Net

Lyndal Roper, *Martin Luther: Renegade and Prophet*

Vintage (Random House UK), 2017. 577pp. ISBN 9781784703448 (pbk) £14:99

This is a timely publication which was recently reissued in paperback to mark the 500 year anniversary of the start of the Reformation, when Martin Luther is said to have nailed his 95 Theses to the doors of Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany.

The book is the sum of ten years of research by its author who is an expert in early Germany history. She is currently Regius Professor of History at Oxford and the first woman to hold that position.

This new biography is impressive in its range of historical research, and Roper firmly sets out to examine Luther within the context of his life and times. She is able to challenge some of the accepted evidence, including the possibility that the 95 Theses were not actually nailed to the door of the church, but were perhaps instead glued to a door or, more likely, posted to Archbishop Albrecht who was one of the most important church figures in Germany. Whatever method was used may never actually be known, but the impact of their content was immense and far reaching. Luther was an unlikely revolutionary, having lived as a monk in the Augustinian order for 12 years and published very little prior to this time. The Church was slow to respond to the Theses, but they became widely read within Germany and Roper notes, 'the Reformation truly was sparked by a single text'.

This current biography is not intended to be a history of the Reformation, even less of what became Lutheranism, but rather an in depth examination of the man himself which seeks to understand and explain the contradictions in his thinking and character. Roper remarks 'I want to understand Luther himself ... it was his remarkable courage and sense of purpose that created the Reformation; and it was his stubbornness and capacity to demonise his opponents that nearly destroyed it'. The book provides a balanced and in depth account of his life which will add much to previous studies, although I suspect that Luther will always remain a controversial figure amongst Christians. If anyone should doubt the continued relevance of his theology, I refer them to the recent statement by the Orange Order in Northern Ireland, that the use of the phrase 'RIP' is 'unbiblical, un-Protestant, and a form of superstition'. Luther's view of 'by faith alone' is cited in support of this argument, at the same time as Protestants are urged to desist from the use of the phrase. I am tempted to wonder what Luther would have made of this.

In summary, there is a wealth of published material about Luther, including at least one other book marking the 500 year anniversary, but this well researched, highly accessible and very readable book is likely to become the definitive biography for many years to come. It will appeal to both the undergraduate and general reader alike. Highly recommended.

Reviewed by Andrew Burns

Jonathan Robinson, *Give me the Wings*

Libertas Publishing, 2017. 70pp. ISBN 978-0-9929211-2-5 (pbk) £7.00

Words are fickle creatures. Sometimes they serve us well ...

(from 'Words', Jonathan's first poem)

Reading Jonathan's anthology is a pleasure indeed; his theme he says is the connection between inner and outer worlds. To me, his poems are descriptions of the journey between the two, often his own journey, and many of them are about obstacles encountered and overcome. Nearly all of them end on a high note that conveys the strength of his faith, and his personal joy in Creation. For me his poetry contains two main elements, which I will try to convey:

In **Listen**, the second poem, I find something of the shamanic; this poem puts me in mind of Taliesin the Bard who is, and was, part of everything in creation:

Taliesin: 'I have been the foam of water ... I have been a drop in the air ... I have journeyed high as an eagle ...'

Jonathan: 'The air is breathing you, Water is moving you ... You indeed are the birds singing ... You are the trees, dancing ... You are all things'

And on to **Time** with its elegant structure, reminiscent of a ticking clock, a structure for our earth bound selves that our spirits struggle to fly beyond.

In **Who am I?** the theme continues: 'In you the universe breathes /Do not corrupt its breathing' Words become the poet's wings – this is the holy magic of poetry when words work together with the heart and the soul

But **Give me the Wings**, the title poem, although it accurately references the theme running through this collection, sends me plummeting back to earth; it is elegant, accomplished, it has been commended (see page 10), it is fine as a religious homily. But for me it seemed self-conscious (outside the self), magic sacrificed to worthy sentiments – a prayer, or homily, a fine hymn for church maybe, but not a celestial flight. Whereas **Time** with its ticking clock rhythm has the spirit's flight as successful counterpoint, the wings in the title poem were out of my reach. Maybe not better or worse, just different from the poems that went before ... the Shaman and his heartbeat drum vanishing over the hill ... and we are back in an earthbound reality.

I rest while reading with pleasure the next few poems, in which the poet muses (sic) and explores the beauty of the world around us, but still seems to me somehow outside his poetry, until I catch my breath again at the last three lines in **Child of Earth**:

Stand tall, that stars may tumble from your mouth /To move the world to sing a song forever new /A song of peace, that peace may reign for evermore.

We are free again, the poet and I to feel with our whole beings, soaring and wheeling from celestial imagery to glorious incantation.

Then, four poems of the seasons that are fine celebrations of nature, but it is when I read **My Strong Tower** that the words excite all of me again:

I who live in the strong towers of my achieving /Gathered and built with the sweat of my pride ... Strong towers to protect my proud isolation /That I may feast in the bright garish caverns of my desires

He's good when he gets angry! This from **On Self-righteousness**:

Self-righteous ... lustful for their cause /And eager to believe that they are chosen /To parade the will of heaven before the world

And **The Rape of Innocence**:

What unholy things do we invent /What energy abuse ... /Dishonour that Divinity /That nurtures human calling? ... /What brutish power do we invoke /Bend to our advantage ... /I see the stars drop tears

These poems remind me of Hissa Hilal, who reached the finals in a Pan-Arab poetry competition with her poem 'The Chaos of Fatwas', in spite of reciting from inside a black tent: 'When I unveil the truth, a monster appears from his hiding place /Barbaric in thinking and action /Angry and blind, wearing death as a robe ...'



I really like **Icons of Eternity** – a hymn of praise, with pleasing rhyme and rhythm, which seems to me to blend the two elements in this anthology, achieving the aim of connection between inner and outer worlds. This is a good place to mention the beautiful photos that go with each poem; it is the simplicity and completeness of this one; the poem is mirrored by 2 tiny flowers floating in a sea of grey mist, so that the whole satisfies in its simplicity.

Overall Jonathan's celebration of nature, and human and divine love, give him the right to be compared to these illustrious ones. I include among them Gerard Manley Hopkins, whose sublime celebration of nature is echoed in the best of Jonathan's poetry.

Gerard Manley Hopkins: 'As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame /As tumbled over rim of roundy wells /Stones ring ...'

Jonathan: 'Let the deliciousness of Spring become your symphony /Lift you above the arteries of earthly power'.

This vivid imagery is what I love in Jonathan's poems, the rest I admire.

Reviewed by Patricia Murphy



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 the Editor, theotokos66@gmail.com who will arrange for a copy to be sent to you. (N.B. Marian MacPolin has gone home to Ireland with many good wishes from those of us who worked with her, so is no longer available for book review requests.) If you would like to review a book that is not on this list, please contact the Editor.

I suggest readers look at publishers' websites for more titles (see publishers below for suggested sites). They will have details of book contents, which we do not have room for here. I will be happy to send for any books requested that are within our remit.

Please send completed reviews to the Editor: theotokos66@gmail.com copied to denumine@gmail.com Review copies which we supply will be yours on receipt of your review.

- S. Bullivant, E.O. Genilo, *Theology and Power: International Perspectives*
D.F. Pilario, A.M. Brazal (eds.) (Paulist Press, 2016)
- Roger Haight *Spiritual and Religious: Explorations for Seekers* (Orbis, 2016)
- M. Juergensmeyer, M. Kitts, *Violence and the World's Religious Traditions*
& M. Jerryson (Eds.) (OUP, 2016)
- David L Mueller *Karl Barth* (Hendrickson, 2016)
- Lamin O. Sanneh *Beyond Jihad: The Pacifist Tradition in West African Islam*
(OUP, 2016)
- Bettina E. Schmidt *Spirits and Trance in Brazil: An Anthropology of Religious
Experience* (Bloomsbury, 2016)
- Jon Sweeney *Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Orbis 2016)
- Mohammed Girma *Christian Citizenship in the Middle East: Divided Allegiance or Dual
& Cristian Romocea Belonging?* (Jessica Kingsley Publishing 2017)
- Ursula King *Spirit of Fire: The Life and Vision of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*
(Orbis books, 2017)



AHT Events, 2017-2018

Saturday 14th October 2017

Alister Hardy Trust Members' Day 2017

- 10.30am Registration and Welcome
- 11.00am 2017 Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture: *Religionless Spirituality and the spiritual experience in music*, by the Reverend Professor June Boyce-Tillman
- 12.30pm Book Fair: AHT Authors speak about and sell their books
- 1.00 pm Lunch: bring your own lunch, buy sandwiches nearby or enjoy local venues (tea/coffee provided)
- 2.00 pm Members' Update and Feedback: A chance to hear what is happening in local groups, find out about members' activities, and suggest items for the AGM
- Venue: Oxford Quaker Meeting House, 43 St Giles, Oxford OX1 3LW Tel: 01865 557373
- Cost: £20; AHT members £16; students £5
- Enquiries and bookings: Marianne Rankin: mariannerankin@icloud.com Tel. 07714 032643

Saturday 14th April 2018

Churches' Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies/Alister Hardy Trust Joint One Day

Conference: *Meditation, Stillness and Spiritual Experience*

10.30 am to 4.00 pm

Venue: Oxford Quaker Meeting House, 43 St Giles, Oxford OX1 3LW

Speakers to be confirmed

Contact: Marianne Rankin: mariannerankin@icloud.com Tel. 07714 032643

Oxford and Area Group

Meetings on the first Saturday of the month, as previously.

Topic for October: sharing what each of us have found helpful in teachings we have received, lessons read, or examples from other people's lives which have left us changed and helped us in our understanding of our own spiritual journey.

Contact: Tanya Garland 01865 244260; tanya.garland.37@gmail.com

South-East Wales Group

23rd September 2017

A Day at Llantarnam Abbey

9.30 am onwards

21st Century Shaman, presentation by Ken Price.

Grounding Spiritual Experience – the Role of Ritual, presentation by Ken Rees

Venue: Llantarnam Abbey, Cwmbran, Newport.

14th December 2017

Historical figures who had a special spiritual relationship with animals, presentation by Val Evans

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

March 22nd 2018

Spirituality and Science, presentation by Ken Davies

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

Contact: Mary Cook, e-mail: maryfrechfa@yahoo.co.uk 07794 294432

AHT in North Wales

Contact: Dr Keith Beasley: Contact Keith Beasley via Bangor ... Beyond Meetup:

www.meetup.com/Bangor-Beyond/

Other Events

The Ammerdown Conference & Retreat Centre in Radstock has a programme for Autumn which may interest AHT members, including:

29 September to 1 October

John Main, Desert Father and Celtic Monk led by Stefan Reynolds. One of the greatest challenges that Christianity faces today is the practical rediscovery of its age-old traditions of prayer and contemplation, and one of the main attempts to do this in recent times was begun by the Benedictine monk and priest John Main. Bede Griffiths called him 'the most important guide in the Church today'.

24 – 26 October

Understanding Islam with Dr Chris Hewer. Chris writes: 'A good understanding of Islam is a must in Britain today, where Muslims are by far the biggest religious group after British Christians. In many of our major towns and cities, they make up a substantial minority of the population. This should encourage us all to get to know Islam and Muslims better and to explore ways of building bridges of mutual respect and understanding.'

Further information from: www.amerdown.org 01761 433709

Thursday 16 November 2017

The World Congress of Faiths, Younghusband Lecture 2017: Rehumanising Public Space?

Can a renewed interest in religion, belief and spirituality contribute to political and civic regeneration? Are we living in a postsecular society or an age of radical new ethics? And where is the modern 'public square'?

18:30: Registration & refreshments

19:00 - 20:30: Lecture and responses

Venue: Montagu Centre, 21 Maple Street, London W1T 4BE

Information: www.wcf-yhl2017.eventbrite.co.uk

Saturday June 16th 2018

10.00 am to 5.00 pm

Sheffield Steiner Group: Angels: their significance today

Three perspectives given by **Mark Vernon**, philosopher, psychotherapist, former priest and Anglican; **Marianne Rankin**, Alister Hardy Trust; writer and researcher of contemporary spiritual experiences; and **Siobhan Porter**, Christian Community priest.

Awareness of angels, which are common to all religions, gradually faded out in the West. Now more and more people have direct experiences, or at least intuitive feelings, of non-physical presences which they call 'angels', - often in times of distress. Are there different kinds of angels? How do contemporary accounts of them relate to the traditional teachings? Can we nurture a relationship to them? These and many other questions will be explored in a day of talks, conversations and shared experiences, with live musical interludes.

Venue: Freeman College, 88, Arundel St, Sheffield. S1 2NG

Further information from: www.markvernon.com www.studyspiritualexperiences.org
www.thechristiancommunity.co.uk

Admission: donations towards expenses.

Please reserve a place by email: robertchamberlain43@outlook.com

'They will be met with fire and fury like the world has never seen.'

Donald Trump 9th August 2017

Plus ça change ...



Nagasaki: Midori's Rosary a poem by Rowan Williams

The air is full of blurred words. Something
has changed in the war's weather. The children
(whose children will show me this) have been sent
to the country. In the radiology lab,
Takashi fiddles, listening to the ticking bomb
in his blood cells, thinks, once, piercingly,
of her hands and small mouth, knotting him in
to the long recital of silent lives
under the city's surface, the ripple of blurred Latin,
changing nothing in the weather of death and confession,
thinks once, in mid-morning, of a kitchen floor, flash-frozen.

When, in the starburst's centre,
the little black mouth opens, then clenches,
and the flaying wind smooths down the grass
and prints its news black on bright blinding
walls, when it sucks back the milk
and breath and skin, and all the world's vowels
drown in flayed throats, the hard things,
bone and tooth, fuse into consonants of stone,
Midori's beads melt in a single mass
around the shadow with its blackened hands
carved with their little weeping lips.

Days earlier, in Hiroshima, in what was left
of the clinic chapel, little Don Pedro, turning
from the altar to say, The Lord be with you,
heard, suddenly, what he was about to claim,
seeing the black lips, the melted bones,
and so, he said, he stood, his small mouth
open, he never knew how long, his hands
out like a starburst, while the dialogue
of stony voiceless consonants ground across
the floor, like gravel in the wind, and the two
black mouths opened against each other,

Nobody knowing for a while
which one would swallow which.



One God of Many Names

In the midst of the chaos and disasters of recent weeks, one good thing has been the way that local communities – people of faith or no faith, faith and civic leaders have come together to affirm the bonds that hold the community together – as has happened here in Oxford. In the same way Christian Aid and Muslim Hands and many people of faith are working together to help those whose lives have been shattered here and in Syria and many parts of the world. They try to build bridges of reconciliation in areas of conflict, they campaign together to protect the environment.

One good example of such collaboration is the ParliaMentors programme of the Three Faiths Forum, which, last Monday, marked its tenth anniversary. The programme brings together in groups of three undergraduates of different faiths to be mentored by a Member of Parliament and to do a project together. It was evident from those we spoke to that for most of them it had been an amazing experience and that they had formed deep friendships. It had also been a good experience for the MPs to be reminded of the idealism of so many young people who want to make by their lives and work a much better world than we their parents and grandparents have achieved. Interreligious dialogue is now also a significant concern of politicians and economists. Indeed religious leaders get invited to the Global Forum. But politicians tend to use religion as an antidote to terrorism or to soften their cuts to benefits. But interfaith is not just an instrument. It is a call to a new perspective not just on religion but on our whole way of life.

Even in the interfaith movement there is a reluctance to accept this call. The present mantra seems to be 'Respect for the Other.' Obviously this is a good thing, but it evades the question of truth or more precisely whether traditions other than our own have spiritual treasures that can enrich our lives. For example, if as a non-Muslim you read the Qur'an do you read it just to find out what Muslims believe or because you hope that it will enrich your spiritual life? I personally now read it or the Vedas or the Guru Granth Sahib in the same way as I read the Bible – hoping to hear God's word and to be brought closer to the Holy One.

It is this religion of love that provides the strongest motivation to go on struggling for peace, for seeking reconciliation with those who are seen as enemies, for ensuring that immigrants are cared for and not left to drown, for protecting animals from cruelty and treasuring the beauty of the Earth. 'Without vision, the people perish. If the faiths of the world fail to offer that vision, whatever practical good work they are doing, they are failing in their responsibility.

The abstract artist Naum Gabo was asked early in the Second World War why he continued with his abstract art – it seemed irrelevant. He replied, to 'keep alive the vision of our dreams that has been left behind.' Each of us can help to keep alive that vision by following the religion of love.

Taken from a Sermon given by Revd Dr Marcus Braybrooke for the Chapel Society at Manchester College, Oxford in July this year. There is a plaque to Sir Alister in the chapel, and Manchester College is the birth place of the AHRERU. Dr Braybrooke, an AHT member, has spoken for us on several occasions. Ed.