

PLEASE NOTE CURRENT ARRANGEMENTS
FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO *DE NUMINE*

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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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Pictures of Angels supplied by Theolyn Cortens, also taken from Angel Images on www.google.com
'Life on Earth by Ham' cartoon from The Guardian 17/10/2008

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Editorial

We have more and longer articles in this issue, which I hope will please readers, but there are fewer book reviews, so I would like to draw members' attention to my request on page 51. I am asking people to look at the publishers' websites in the list of books for review (and any others of course, within the relevant fields) to find a possible book to review and keep. Address requests to me and I will ask for books to be sent. I will of course also continue to print a list of suggestions.

We have welcomed a number of new members this year, some of whom are engaging in the MA modules on religious experience at UWTSU, or the MRes in religious experience; both are under the auspices of the RERC. There are also some members who have joined in order to access the online archive database for research. The academic activities of RERC have expanded dramatically since Professor Schmidt took over the Directorship (see page 30 for her report), and the content of *De Numine* demonstrates the variety of activities and interests pursued by Trust members. On a practical note, please remember to inform the Membership Secretary, Margaret West, if you change your address, also if, sadly, you lose a loved one who is a Trust member. Should this happen, we would be very pleased to print reminiscences in *De Numine*.

The Christian concept of 'the stranger', who appears in so many guises in the Bible, crops up in Keith Beasley's report on the North Wales group. His open meetings in Bangor University's beautiful botanic garden resulted recently in a new arrival, a stranger, who came alone, and with whom he 'shared insights and experiences on the deeper aspects of being human, on conscious evolution and all manner of related topics' (page 34). Keith does not say, but I feel sure they did not part as strangers. The stranger appears again in Marcus Braybooke's review of *The Role of Religion in Peacebuilding*. Marcus says 'The most urgent question, of course, is what can we actually do to build peace?' (page 45). One of the answers in the book is about kindness to strangers. The author quotes Richard Kearney: 'Radical hospitality is not about a facile consensus ... but is an effort to retrieve a unique hospitality to the stranger at the very root of each belief.' In our times there are many strangers at the gate; remembering the parable of the Good Samaritan, I wonder how Christian, or indeed how charitable in the wider terms Kearney talks of, is our response to refugees? A far cry it seems from a radical hospitality approach. The building of walls, in our minds or on the earth, is not going to keep everyone out for ever; Joshua and the walls of Jericho come to mind ...

Jonathan Robinson in his article *The God Shift* has alluded to the way institutions can lose touch with the wider world, and thus lose the power to do good in the world. This reminded me of how I sometimes ponder on AHT and Ivory Towers, although on the whole I believe that our mission to explore spiritual experience, and the attention we give this collectively, does contribute to the greater good. How do other AHT members feel? I would welcome letters about this.

The cartoon by Ham (see page 39) has been on my office notice board since it was printed; I so wanted to share the joke, and Philip Tyers' letter does rather invite it; I hope no-one, especially Philip, finds it in poor taste (I really don't think God will mind).

Patricia Murphy



The God Shift

Part II

Exploring spiritual awareness

The modern contemplative and Jesuit priest Richard Rohr has said, 'There is one sacred Universe, and we are all part of it'. We are not separate, thus the observable universe around us, which we can see and touch, is as much within us as outside us. So if you harm another person, you also harm yourself. If you help another person, you help yourself. As simple as that. Nothing ultimately exists *per se*, 'in itself'; all is interconnected. Outwardly things may change, that is their nature which we cannot escape, and no 'thing' is permanent. But in essence all is One. As the poet Shelley puts it: 'The One remains, the many change and pass.'

There will always be many perceptions of truth, and all our human perceptions are relative, never absolute and unchanging. Shelley gives us that wonderful phrase 'The dust of Creeds outworn', as a comment on the absurdity of trying to define absolute truth. So the lesson seems to be this: don't try to grasp the things of the Spirit. People have been trying to define what constitutes our inner life for so long, and they always get into problems. Our inner life is not confined to the body or the brain. It is beyond boundaries. Trying to describe it can only get as far as 'It is like ...' For instance, there is power in story-telling, in myths and metaphors, so Jesus tells parables. Indeed, perhaps all religious language is metaphor because it needs to point beyond itself to the deeper reality which is known in the heart.

Our deepest experiences point us beyond language and beyond our time and place bound physical existence, as so many people have testified from their own personal experiences. As intimations of the non-locality of consciousness, these accounts can provide a context for such anomalous phenomena as telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, spiritual healing, and other phenomena we can't explain from a physical perspective. This includes the well documented cases of NDEs. All this indicates that there is life beyond these temporal boundaries, beyond physical death. At a deep level we discover that everything is interconnected, all is ultimately One, and the One is beyond boundaries, timeless, eternal. The poetic imagery of the mystic William Blake brings us close to this spiritual reality: 'To see a world in a grain of sand, and a heaven in a wild flower. Hold infinity in your hand, and eternity in an hour.'

In the Hindu tradition they have the concept of 'illusion' to define our physical existence. Not that all existence is unreal. It is too often horribly real. Suffering, fear, poverty, violence, war, the reality of human selfishness, greed and ignorance, all that we do to abuse this planet of which we are part....we experience all these things. But beyond all this there is a deeper reality, beyond boundaries, beyond separations and divisions: 'Never the Spirit was born, never the Spirit will cease to be. Never was time it was not, end and beginnings are dreams' (*Bhagavad Gita* 2:12)

The human mind cannot visualise this. We are locked into past and future, our minds are only equipped to see separation, only equipped to see the parts, the boundaries, and never the whole. The mind wants to be rational and analyse things, it sees the opposites, light and dark, high and low, subject and object, past and future, beginnings and endings. The Spirit sees beyond the parts. In her book *The Cosmic Hologram* Jude Currivan says 'Consciousness is not something we have; it's what we and the whole world are.* Some people fear all this indicates a loss of our individual selves, but this

need not be so. In reality it can be the ultimate fulfilment of ourselves, as those who have been privileged to have deep spiritual experiences testify; experiences which are so often characterised by a child-like sense of awe and wonder and a generosity of love. That is what true worship should be about, about what energises us, renews us and inspires us. Worship should take us beyond ourselves and unite us in community and shared concern, unite us in love within a greater whole.



This is what the mystics, the genuine spiritual masters, have been telling us for so long. Our problem is that the way we see things is conditioned, by our background, our education, our culture, our life stories. It is never the whole truth. It is so easy to mistake relative truth for absolute truth, for what lies on the surface, the 'physicality' of things for what lies beyond. Like the sky, as Buddhists remind us. We too easily see only the clouds, and not what lies beyond the clouds. Or the marks on the window, and not what lies beyond. So we need to go deeper, experience the reality beyond the boundaries!

Where do we go from here?

Life today is often too much about the individual, creating a 'me first' society. Separate. Often lonely, and a contradiction of who we really are. We know we cannot continue in the way we are now going if human society is to survive and flourish. The inequalities are becoming too great between the wielders of power and those who have no power; the damage we are inflicting on our planet is becoming irreversible. And the Church, sadly, is not beyond the temptation to use power and control according to its own agenda of self-interest. So our spiritual diet is often feeble.

I find a big gap, a yawning mismatch, between our institutional church services and what resonates with so many people today. People are leaving the institutional churches in droves. Why? Where are they going? Probably nowhere. There is a great spiritual vacuum. This gets reflected back into the way we live our lives, both as individuals and as a society. If we in the Church care about this, if we care about our young people, if we care about our future, if we care about our world, we will be concerned. If we wish to reach people, we must also be able to inspire them, and to inspire them is to resonate with them in their deeper self, take them beyond their finite selves to where there are no boundaries, take them 'into God'.

I believe we need appropriate and relevant forms of liturgy, worship and prayer. However, many clergy and religious ministers are reluctant to depart from set forms of institutional worship. They prefer to work within defined boundaries, to feel safe, especially when it comes to Biblical interpretation. Some are afraid of falling out with higher authorities. Then there are those people who enjoy power and control for their own sake. It takes courage, vision and also creativity to go beyond set boundaries, to risk a deeper encounter with the Spirit.

My own attempt to compose suitable spiritual expressions is contained in my book '*Beyond Boundaries*'. It aims to be inclusive, gender free and independent. It is contemplative, with economy of words and space for quiet and reflection. It is for everyone. It seeks to remind us that we are all of infinite value, as part of the one human family, as part of the One Cosmic Consciousness which is beyond all boundaries. I try to avoid religious jargon. Bishop John Saxbee has observed that my book seeks to combine respect for traditional forms with an openness to contemporary creativity and

imagination. It seeks to be accessible. Someone said, 'I like it because it is easy to understand and follow'. It seeks to lead us beyond words, indeed beyond ourselves, beyond the little, time-bound, finite and illusory ego, into the deeper experience of the Spirit: 'Dwell in me, as I dwell in you' (John 15:4). How can we understand this? We can only be silent, and allow the deeper feelings of the heart to inform us. 'I and the Father are One', (John 10:30). I and the universal, I and the Absolute, are essentially One.

My book, and the liturgy, have evolved through use with many different types of groups and individuals. Comments have been welcomed and valued and where appropriate incorporated. I do use Christian imagery; imagery and structure in worship can be helpful if used wisely. It helps us link together and connect with our shared culture. But this imagery must provide an effective pathway to spiritual awakening. In sacramental Communion, the celebration of Mass, for instance, imagery can help us commune with the Divine. It must facilitate our beliefs, not confine them. It must point beyond itself to a deeper reality. This is the core of all true spiritual teachings, to go beyond this illusion of separate ego consciousness, beyond this sense of 'mine'. These words of Jesus are expressed in all four Christian gospels: 'He that will find himself, will lose himself, and he that will lose himself for my sake will find himself.' It is a hard calling which asks for our all, but is also a pathway to true freedom, or liberation. This is also the goal of the Hindu journey (*Moksha*).

Life, as we all know, is changing, and changing fast in this internet, social media and increasingly global age. People are generally better educated. Young people don't want to belong to institutions which require them to sign up to rules and regulations, to accept prescribed systems of belief which are not part of their experience of life. But the Church finds it so difficult to adapt – or simply doesn't want to adapt. I dare to suggest that it must adapt if it is to fulfil its deeper purpose and have a future. I believe something deep inside us cries out for meaning in life, and I do believe there is a reality greater than our little selves that will answer that cry. Call it God. Call it love. Call it what you will. Otherwise, in our search to find life, we may find ourselves in a downward spiral which can lead to the sadness of depression and the disaster of drugs, alcoholism, suicide and despair

So here we are, conditioned by our circumstances, and shaped by our illusions. Let us try to be open, truly open, to new understandings and new ways of seeing and believing, so that, in Christian language, we may awake to the mystery of the Christ child within each of us, the real 'you', and discover what this can mean for us. This is what the Incarnation is truly about. It is the central message of the Christian faith. It is to awake to the eternal reality of the Spirit which lies in the depths of our lives. It is about learning to discern and trust this Spirit, and believe that, as we follow, life will be good. With the world as it is today, this is an urgent call. So let us look beyond the finality of death and all the darkness that is thrown at us, and have hope.

I want to end with a story. The pupil went to his Zen master and asked: 'What must I do to achieve enlightenment?'

The master replied: 'You can do nothing, in the same way as there is nothing you can do to make the sun rise in the morning.'

'Then what is the use of all the spiritual practices?'

'To make sure you are not asleep when the sun does begin to rise.'

Jonathan Robinson

*A review by Marianne Rankin of *The Cosmic Hologram* is on p 54 of issue 63. The quote above is on p.233 of the book. (Ed.)

Children, Silence and Spirituality

I almost feel that every part of nature and every single plant ... has a mind of its own ... and helps us live, as a sacrifice of its own life. (Sandra, age 12)

In School

Scene 1

I am sitting with an OFSTED inspector observing a Humanities lesson. I am slightly confused by the speed as I watch the highly skilled teacher setting the teenagers their tasks: 5 minutes' group work, 7 minutes' writing, 5 minutes' exposition, back to the group for another 5 minutes and, finally, the bell. The inspector is delighted – 'such pace!' – 'such progress' – outstanding. I reel.

Scene 2

Children are coming in twos and threes, or alone, into the geodesic dome, placed in the gym. It has been rented and designated a place of silence for the week, and staff and children come and go and write their comments on leaving. Many children write of a feeling of peace and calm, others sleep, some say they have never had the experience of silence in their whole lives, some are afraid, and one declares, sadly tongue in cheek, an experience of transcendence.

Scene 3

The RE teacher is absent. Glad to be diverted from head-teacherly stresses, I take the group. They are studying the artefacts of world religions. I interrupt them mid-work and make comments. Many children look up and one asks 'Why do you think we are here Miss?' They all look up. Of course, I don't know – but ask them their views. By now they are all engaged and they talk of love, of evil, the purpose and the meaning of life, what happens when we die and of their various joys. The classroom assistant joins in, an equal participant in this discussion that is full of lively, genuine interest and excitement. These are their urgent questions and I was privileged to hear them. The bell goes. The OFSTED grade would definitely be *inadequate*. (Fortunately no inspector was there, had there been I might not have deviated from the prescribed syllabus.)

Scene 4

I retire.

The Research

Over 38 years in education I had become aware of the gradual increase in academic and social pressures on young people and a reduction in their free, non-organised time, particularly quiet time, exacerbated by a focus on social media and digital gadgetry. Over the same period there has been such a deterioration in child mental health that two thirds of teachers, in recent research by the health charity Stem4,¹ had noted anxiety in a young person in the previous year.

Twenty-first century global and national studies of the mental well-being of young people also reflect problematic levels of distress and anxiety, particularly amongst those children from western nations. The Varkey Report², a global study partnered by Populus, a research and strategy consultancy based in the UK, having surveyed 20,000 young people (15-21) saw the UK placed 19 out of 20 countries for mental well-being.³ Respondents expressed concern not only about insufficient rest but also about having little time for reflection, and, globally, lack of money and school expectations were regarded as particular pressures. An influential USA-based report, *Hardwired to Connect*, was jointly commissioned by the YMCA, Dartmouth Medical School and the Institute for American Values in response to rising rates of mental health problems and emotional distress amongst the young in the

USA, despite relative affluence for many. Citing research on the biochemistry of connection, the commission suggested that this situation was due to a lack of connectedness to other people via social institutions and to moral and social meaning. To alleviate what is described as a crisis for young people, they emphasise the critical importance of involvement in *authoritative communities*, which, they suggest, should reflect ten key findings derived from a wide range of published research in multiple fields (Education, Medicine, Psychiatry, Psychology, Neuroscience *inter alia*). In the UK, Janet Seden⁴ in the faculty of Health and Social Care at the Open University, suggests that neglecting children's sense of truth, justice or mystery, may leave them expressing their terror and pain in ways which society might find unacceptable. Such views are also espoused by, *inter alia*, Psychologist Craig Schlarb (USA), Theologian Katarina Westerlund (Sweden), and Educationalist Leigh Burrows (Australia).⁵

There is a broad consensus across continents and academic fields concerning the importance and need for acknowledgement of child spirituality and its effect on well-being. These findings provided an impetus and context for my current research with children: exploring the connection between children's spirituality and their access to silence and solitude. My research began as part of an MA in Religious Experience at the University of Wales Trinity St. David, and now continues at The University of Winchester. Such a focus on the relationship between silence spirituality and children's well-being is not new in educational fields. The ten Quaker schools in the British Isles regard the offering of a weekly gathering in silence as 'opening ourselves ... making ourselves ready to listen to others and to that of God within us'.⁶ This is purposeful silence: 'a light within us will enable us to see ourselves and what we are doing ... it might even show us, if we are receptive enough, that it is the self that gets in the way'.⁷

Two Enlightened Practitioners

The Italian physician Maria Montessori (1870-1952) through careful scientific research and observation of children (focusing particularly on the socially disadvantaged in terms of cognition, physical disability or poverty) insisted that educators acknowledge 'the inner teacher that dictates within'.⁸ Regarding children as 'spiritual embryo'⁹ she stressed that education was not simply what the teacher imparts, but that children respond instead to a 'severe syllabus' imposed by nature, and this requires a 'life-giving environment of calm and peace'. Given this environment, she found that the children taught *her* rather than the converse, revealing their spiritual secrets, as long as their souls had not been deformed.

Montessori's view of silence was iconoclastic. She deemed the traditional imposed silence current in Italian schools as leading nowhere and instead sought to actually teach silence to primary children in a session known as 'the silence game'.¹⁰ Children were exhorted to *feel the quiet*, the better to achieve *a conquering of the self*, leading to spiritual development. She felt that this allowed the children to know their own souls and involved the drawing of attention to every part of the body. In this state, with the mind isolated from outside voices, the teacher was able to whisper softly the names of each child and *to call upon their souls*. Witnessing such a session in a Henley-in-Arden primary school was a moving experience indeed.

She saw that children love silence to an extraordinary degree, and that the children in her *Casa dei Bambini* quickly recognized that listening intently was privileged over other activities, with impulses restrained in a collective effort to achieve silence.¹¹ This non-doing was not about emptying out, but rather about creating space for inner experiences.¹² She promoted child-centred education as a social

and human imperative; this was critical in a western society which was attempting to rebuild itself after the First World War. Of particular interest is her emphasis on the value of joy and the way it can be seen in children emerging from the inner silence that is found in utter focus – a joy that she deems to be part of human inheritance.

In an in-depth small scale research project I conducted in 2015, I noted how joy was such a significant aspect of children's spirituality. The children described, often tearfully, 'going beyond themselves' during unexpectedly joyful moments – moments possibly never related to others. They indicated what Ron Best has described as 'affects'.¹³ When he cautioned against the over-inclusive nature of definitions of spiritual experience, leading to 'just about everything', he advised that we examine what the experience felt like from the inside, beyond emotion: 'I am the recipient or object of an unpredictable affect, which happened *to* and *in* me'.

During the same time frame as Montessori's work and not too geographically distant, another significant movement was emerging led by the Austrian social reformer, philosopher and esotericist Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925). Steiner set great store by silence and also movement. Telepathic experiences connected with the suicide of an aunt when he was seven led him to the conviction that 'though we carry body, soul and spirit with us, we are conscious only of the body' and we must gain the ability to see what is ordinarily invisible.¹⁴ As with Montessori, we see in Steiner an urge to find consonance between science and matters of the spirit, and the application of scientific rigour to research – unsurprising given his university background in Maths, History and Chemistry. On leaving his active involvement in Blavatsky's Theosophical society in 1907 and asserting that Christianity was a superior spiritual path (countering Annie Besant's proclamation that Jidan Krishnamurti (1895-1986) was the new Messiah)¹⁵ he developed his own theories based on a scientific vision. This was available to him and to those accessing 'supra-sensible' cognition, potentially all humans, leading to a *Geisteswissenschaft* or spiritual science – such teachings being designated as anthroposophical. Both Montessori and Steiner believed the education of children to be of paramount importance.

Steiner believed the human body to be 'the expression of far greater powers of wisdom than any than can be grasped by the individual ego consciousness'.¹⁶ Of particular relevance to my current research is Steiner's advocating of withdrawal for 15 minutes a day to meditate¹⁸ and the silencing of our own self to meet others, both human and spiritual, realities around us¹⁹. It is the emphasis on the spiritual nature of children and the necessity of honouring, even revering it, that is most striking in his educational theories. For him it is the divine in children's souls that enables them to actually see the divine in their surroundings²⁰ and it is in silence and solitude that we see the world differently.

In these quiet moments every flower, every animal, and every action will disclose mysteries undreamed of. (Steiner 1994)

Steiner set up his first school in the Waldorf Astoria cigar factory at the behest of its manager. Currently there are 1,080 'Waldorf' schools worldwide.¹⁷

The movements described here place access to silence as central to their educational philosophies and yet we are only now in the 21st century seeing schools beginning to introduce mindfulness and meditation into the curriculum. Many of these initiatives focus on well-being and this is laudable. The link I am seeking to explore, however, is whether the putative lack of silence and solitude in a child's life impacts negatively on their expressions of spirituality – and hence on well-being.

Reflections

I have to own to prejudices, borne of a 25-year involvement in a Julian of Norwich meditation group and early training in Transcendental Meditation, of valuing the mystics of all religions and faiths and a belief that in silence we can come to know the deepest mysteries.

Yet, confoundingly, following my earlier small scale in-depth research with ten Midlands children (12-13 years) I found that the children, *without exception*, exhibited a frequent and wide variety of those forms of spirituality already identified by leading researchers in the field. These include expressing life as mystery, being in flow, and a sense of connectedness or relationship with the world, as described by David Hay and Rebecca Nye²¹, and this irrespective of the children's access to or desire for silence, and often in the context of busyness and noise. This suggested that they were accessing and able to live in a non-binary, inner silence; after all, many feared silence, associating it with grieving and death.

When they do, however, experience silence, perhaps in nature, they speak as Sandra (age 12) did, in a low voice, taking herself back to a precious moment:

You can just finally hear the trees ... I always just smile to myself, 'cos you just hear nature itself and hear the birds and see the trees ... and it's really beautiful ... and it's just the hint of nature, almost like a speck of dust in the universe. Like seeing just one tree can just make a person smile forever ... if you look at it truly and just think about it, 'cos nature is giving you life, with oxygen and it's working its whole life to preserve nature in a way... I almost feel that every part of nature and every single plant, kind of has a mind of its own ... and helps us live, as a sacrifice of their own life.

I now have the privilege of approaching 120 children from diverse secondary schools (Catholic, Secular, Steiner, Quaker), interviewing 40 for a total of an hour each, and I would be pleased to share my findings with readers of *De Numine*. In the meantime, I will bear fully in mind Maria Montessori's discovery that the children will teach me rather than the converse.

The Silence of the Kids²²

How many Haikus does it take
To keep the drowsy world awake

Just one

– If understood. The slightest ray
Of light reveals the source of day:

The sun.

How long's the longest meditation?
No longer than one respiration

– Mindfully done.



Valerie Duffy-Cross

Bibliography and Resources:

- ¹ Denis Campbell, 'Teachers Warn of Pupils' Mental Health Epidemic', *The Observer*, 24.06.18, p.11.
- ² The Varkey Foundation is a not-for-profit organisation established to improve the standards of education for underprivileged children throughout the world.
Varkey Report: Generation Z. The Global Citizenship Survey <https://www.varkeyfoundation.org/> (accessed 5.6.17)
- ³ Well-being was calculated using the Warwick-Edinburgh mental well-being scale. It was noted that well-being in N. America, Australasia and European nations achieved lower scores on the scale than the global average.
- ⁴ Janet Seden, 'The Spiritual Needs of Children', *Practice*, 10:4. pp.57-67.
- ⁵ Craig Schlarb, 'The Developmental Impact of Not Integrating Childhood Peak Experiences', *IJCS*, 12, (3), 2007, 249-262.
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- ⁶ Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) (2017) Quakers in Britain. Available at: <http://www.quaker.org.uk/>. (Accessed 30 May 2017).
- ⁷ Rex Ambler, *The Quaker Way – A Rediscovery*. Winchester and Washington: Christian Alternative, 2013.
- ⁸ Maria Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*. Adyar, Madras, India: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1949, p.6.
- ⁹ Edwin Mortimer Standing, *Maria Montessori: Her Life and Work*. London & New York, Penguin, 1998.
- ¹⁰ Maria Montessori, *The Discovery of the Child*. Delhi, India: Aakar Books (First published 1948), p.17.
- ¹¹ The detrimental effect of auditory overload is well documented (Wohlwill and Heft 1987; Cohen, Evans, Krantz and Stolkols 1988 et al, cited by Lillard 2005), and the contribution to improved cognitive function of silence or at least a stimulus shelter (Wachs 1976) similarly so.
- ¹² Catherine Haskins, 'The Gift of Silence', *Montessori Life*, 23, (2), 2011, pp.34-39.
- ¹³ Ron Best, 'Emotion, Spiritual Experience and Education: A Reflection.' *IJCS* 16, No.4. (2011) 361- 368 p.4.
- ¹⁴ Rudolf Steiner, *How to Know Higher Worlds: A Modern Path of Initiation*. Trans. C. Bamford. New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1994, pp.57.
- ¹⁵ Katharina Brandt and Olav Hammer, 'Rudolf Steiner and Theosophy', in: Hammer, O. & Rothstein, M. (eds.) *Handbook of the Theosophical Current*. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2013, pp. 113-134.
- ¹⁶ Alfred Cecil Harwood, *The Recovery of Man in Childhood: A Study in the Work of Rudolf Steiner*. 1992 (1st edn. 1958). New York: A Myrin Book.
- ¹⁷ Pam Jarvis, Louise Swiniarski and Wendy Holland, *Early Years Pioneers in Context*. London & New York, Routledge.
- ¹⁸ Heiner Ulrich, *Rudolf Steiner*. Translated by J. Duke and D. Balestrini. London, New Delhi, NY & Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2014.
- ¹⁹ Rudolf Steiner *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds: How it is Achieved (Volume 10 of the Collected Works)*. Trans. D. S. Osmond and C. Davy. Forest Row, East Sussex: Rudolf Steiner Press, 2011, x introduction.
- ²⁰ Rudolf Steiner *How to Know Higher Worlds. A Modern Path of Initiation*. Trans. C. Bamford. New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1994, p.23.
- ²¹ David Hay and Rebecca Nye, *The Spirit of the Child*. Revised edn. London & Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2006 (First published 1998).
- ²² Robert Ilson, *Quaker Voices*. September 2017

Experiences of Dust: Some initial thoughts about the importance of Spiritual Experiences in Philip Pullman's *'His Dark Materials'*

Part II

Philip Pullman's latest volume *The Book of Dust Volume 1: La Belle Sauvage (LBS)* in the well received and read fantasy series about Dust was published in October 2017 as the first of a new trilogy to be set alongside the three volumes of *His Dark Materials (HDM)*, being *Northern Lights (NL)*, *The Subtle Knife (SK)* and *The Amber Spyglass (AS)*. In the first article we explored the spirituality of the story in *La Belle Sauvage* and the concept of Dust as the universal consciousness. In this article we explore the significance of spiritual experiences to the story.

Spiritual Experiences

A brief exploration of three of these will serve to illustrate how the story not only includes spiritual or supernatural or peak experiences, but is dependent on them.

The Alethiometer

The alethiometer (meaning truth measure) is introduced early in the story (NL) and in the prequel (LBS). It is an object of great value because in the right hands it is prophetic. It can provide answers to questions and predict what will happen. These instruments are very rare, probably only six in existence (LBS p. 251) and part of the story is the pursuit by some characters to obtain one and use it for their own aims. Lyra's use of it is different. She uses it to help with her destined task and the salvation of the multi-verse is dependent on Lyra reading it.

The alethiometer is studied by scholars and they have produced books about how it works and how to use it (possibly an allusion to religious texts). However using books to interpret its symbols is much inferior to being able to use it intuitively. Indeed a rational and systematic approach to reading the alethiometer is far less productive (again a possible comment about the nature of theology!). An important assumption in the story is that children are less reliant on the rational than adults, and more open to the mysterious. Lyra, having these qualities and this intuition, is able to read the instrument with only very little instruction because she is a child and moreover the child of destiny. She realises that the instrument is driven by Dust and therefore has consciousness. Although Gribbin considers that the alethiometer only allows Lyra to concentrate her mind and use her imagination (Gribbin, 2003, p. 60), it is the Dust that makes this happen (Donna Freitas & Jason King, 2007, p. 27) and so the real operation of the instrument is about a relationship between Lyra and the Dust.

Dust seeks relationships. In fact it requires them for its own survival. It wants not simply to be but to be loved. It needs to be loved. (Donna Freitas & Jason King, 2007, p. 29)

It is the childlike faith and imagination that allows this to happen so that the relationship is dynamic and allows Lyra to use the alethiometer by instinct and in faith. The angel Xaphania tells Lyra that the alethiometer is read by 'grace' that is freely given (AS p. 520.) This is lost when puberty approaches as the childlike faith and trust diminishes. The loss is the loss of relationship with Dust and the means of manipulating the alethiometer (AS p. 517). However it should be noted that at the end of the story Xaphania also claims that the grace needed to read the alethiometer can be attained by 'a lifetime of thought and effort' that comes with 'conscious understanding' (AS p. 520) which seems to reflect Pullman's secular humanism (Gooderman, 2003, p. 157).

Consequently the instrument will only operate well when the user has a relationship with it. Lyra needs to both concentrate hard but also be relaxed and have an open state of mind to be able to read the instrument (Tucker, *Darkness Visible: Inside the world of Philip Pullman*, 2003, p. 137). A similar approach is needed by Will when he uses the Subtle Knife and when Mary Malone introduces Lyra to the shadow particles, another name for Dust (SK p. 92.) When Dr Relf is asked to concentrate her research on the alethiometer (LBS ch. 13), the discussion allows the reader to know more about the instrument and it is presented as a special object that works in a mysterious way:

'... but I think it's to do with the alloy of which the hands or needles are made: but the instrument itself is only part of the matter. Each one forms a unity with its reader. Neither is complete, when it comes to working without the other.' 'Which is one of the very mysteries we have to solve,' said Al-Kaisy. (LBS p. 251)

The alethiometer, then, becomes an instrument through which the user can communicate with Dust, the universal consciousness, and therefore using it becomes a spiritual experience. But as the Dust is considered to be part of the material world, albeit the life-giving force, the experience of using the alethiometer only hints at the possibility of there being something other than the material.

Mary Malone's Spiritual Search

When Mary Malone is introduced into the story (SK) she is presented as a lonely character. Indeed her name is suggestive of such as Malone might suggest 'M alone' (Poole, 2001, p. 21). This represents the feeling that she has when she loses faith in God. It leaves a hole in her life and she is searching for something to fill it. Although she tells of a former romance Mary only really finds love to replace the lost relationship with the Divine late in the story.

The curve of her life-experience is revealing. Mary is a scientist and an ex-nun. In her early adulthood she was driven by an intense sense of vocation and belief in God. Abruptly, however, she lost that belief. Discovering human love, she became convinced of its superiority to the love she'd entertained for the deity, which suddenly struck her as self-serving and narcissistic. At the same time, the departure of God from her life left a hole which nothing seemed to fill – until, that is, Mary much later in life becomes persuaded of the consciousness of the Shadow-particles, and hence of the holistic nature of the universe, its positivity and purposiveness. The hole in her world is filled: she has recovered belief again. (Poole, 2001, p. 21)

Her life is one of searching – she tries scientific investigation – putting her trust in material things, and discovers the consciousness in the shadow particles. This is a spirituality that is fixed within the material world.

She discovers that the shadow particles are Dust and in the world of the Mulefa (AS) this leads to her understanding of an holistic spirituality and the relationship of all things that are created. She observes Dust from a scientific perspective and the observation shows her that Dust is disappearing from the world of the Mulefa and so life and in particular procreation is diminishing. The only way to save the world is to reverse the process. This is achieved by Lyra and Will when they experience love for each other and this becomes saving love. This love needs to be practical and part of its task is to ensure the windows onto the worlds have to be closed. The story is then so constructed that to allow the dead to be released from the prison of the place of the dead, they have to have the only open window. Will and Lyra have to make a sacrifice of their love so that the dead can become part of the worlds again. Eternal life is to return to the material and be part of the universe (or multi-verse). A thoroughly materialistic spirituality.

Mary does find meaningful relationships throughout the story. First, with the Mulefa, whom she finds caring and communal creatures. Through them she discovers the importance of relationships for the individual and the community. Indeed their physical makeup requires that they cannot exist on their own but only by being part of a community. Theirs is a symbiotic existence, which is first seen in the relationship with the seed pods, which enables them to develop a means of transportation and in return enables the seeds to be spread and broken so that they can germinate. They also need each other as they have to co-operate using their 'trunks' in order to be creative. Mary finds them welcoming and a great example of holistic relationship. The draining away of Dust is threatening this relationship and the holistic nature of the Mulefa's world.

Second, Mary develops a relationship with Will and Lyra and becomes something of a surrogate mother. They become something of a family for her. Her role in their lives, the story and the means of salvation is significant. While Mary calls Lyra 'Eve' and therefore the new mother of creation, Mary takes the role of the mother of the saviour of the world and so the new Mary. (Donna Freitas & Jason King, 2007, ch. 9).

Third, the final chapter in the story indicates that Mary starts a new relationship with Will and with his mother and so the loners develop relationships, which have been brought about by their circumstances and shared experiences.

The major changes in Mary's life are due to spiritual experiences. We know little of what led to her becoming a nun, but we do know why she rejected that life and lost faith. This occurred as she experienced love with her Italian boyfriend. Here she discovered love, symbolised by the memory of marzipan. She undergoes an out-of-body experience while she is on her platform in the trees, pondering on what is happening to the world of the Mulefa (AS Ch 27, pp 384–386). Having constructed an 'amber spyglass' which enables her to actually see Dust, she discovers that it is changing from just drifting down onto the earth to being driven away from the world. As she watches it accelerate, she is drawn out of her body into the stream of Dust and is pulled along with it. She could see her body still lying on the platform and becomes afraid, wanting to stop being pulled away from it. She manages to achieve her aim and return to her body through her memories of being in her body, of the physical sensations and the joys of food and comfort. This enabled her to resist the flow of Dust, and have a feeling of 'stillness.' She connects with the consciousness of Dust and for a brief while a relationship develops. Dust feels her anxiety and fear and it responds to her need and carries her back to her body.

Back in her body, and at ease again, she is able to understand that Dust is part of everything, and that she is related to the whole cosmos. She feels that there is a sadness and sorrow in the Dust and the cosmos because of the decay of creation, and the fear that all would be destroyed.

Finally she sat up and tried to take stock. Her fingers found the spyglass, and she held it to her eye, supporting one trembling hand with the other. There was no doubt about it: that slow sky-wide drift had become a flood. There was nothing to hear and nothing to feel, and without the spyglass, nothing to see, but even when she took the glass from her eye the sense of that swift silent inundation remained vividly, together with something she hadn't noticed in the terror of being outside her body: the profound, helpless regret that was abroad in the air.

The Shadow-particles knew what was happening, and were sorrowful.

And she herself was partly Shadow-matter. Part of her was subject to this tide that was moving through the cosmos. And as were the mulefa, and so were human beings in every world, and every kind of conscious creature, wherever they were.

And unless she found out what was happening, they might all find themselves drifting away into oblivion, every one. (AS p. 386)

Mary has a spiritual experience, which gives her a new understanding of the cosmos and her place in it. She finds a new purpose through the experience of the Mulefa and her out-of-body experience. However the experiences are presented as a phenomenon of the material world and there are only allusions to the possibility that there might be something more.

Malcolm's Migraine Aura

Malcolm is the central character in *La Belle Sauvage* which is also the name of his canoe, an essential element in the story. The name may reflect the nature of the boy, who is very equable, considerate and helpful, and yet risks his life, and is willing to kill, to save Lyra. That Lyra is saved from the flood, and yet the flood is also the means of her salvation, has clear allusions to the biblical stories of Noah and Moses.

Malcolm first experiences a migraine aura as he works on his geography homework and ponders on the torrential rain and the possibility of a flood. He is fascinated by it and discusses with his daemon, Asta, what it might be. Rather than being frightened by it he has a sense of calm and clarity. He realises that while it is real, it is not tangible and that it is 'inside him.' Malcolm's experience is of a scintillating scotoma aura common to many migraine sufferers. He is fortunate that it does not develop into a headache.

He has a number of such migraine auras during the story. They do not seem to be related to any particular events or situations and they give him a sense of wellbeing rather than discomfort or pain. He has one such migraine when his canoe is filling with water due to the torrential rain and they were being swept away by the flood. On this occasion the description suggests that it is also a spiritual experience.

Malcolm sat still in the wet discomfort and tried to feel calm. He did feel something, the kind of thing Asta had described on that evening when it came to them during his geography homework, a sort of peaceful disembodied floating, in a space that was immense or even infinite in all directions. The spangled ring grew larger, just like before, and as before he was helpless and paralysed while it came closer and closer and expanded to fill the entire circumference of his vision, but he was never frightened; it wasn't alarming; in a way it was even comforting, that calm oceanic drifting. It was his aurora – it was telling him that he was still part of the great order of things, and that that could never change.

He let the phenomenon run its course, and came back to himself, exhausted, as if the experience had been strenuous and demanding. (LBS pp. 306–7)

The phenomenon, although associated with his physiology, was for him like a special experience through which he was given reassurance and the suggestion that he could feel part of the whole cosmos, and that he had a place in this and its destiny. This is not an uncommon outcome of spiritual experiences. Apart from this, while Pullman introduces the migraine phenomenon into the story, it is not clear what role it is going to play. Some scholars make an association between the scintillating scotoma and the reports of people seeing bright lights as part of their spiritual experiences and visions. For example it is suggested by some that Paul's vision on the Damascus Road might have

incorporated a migraine with a scintillating scotoma and that his 'thorn in the flesh' was the continuing recurrence of migraines (Bullock, 1979) (Gobel, 1995). If this is true, then Paul associated this with his conversion and his new vocation and destiny. Does Malcolm's experience suggest that he might be some sort of Paul as well as Noah and Moses?

Conclusion

In all the above examples the characters involved have entered an altered state of consciousness as part of the experience. Using the alethiometer requires the reader to develop a conscious connection with the instrument which is more highly developed than a general awareness of and knowledge of its abilities. It requires a consciousness which is both fully concentrating on the alethiometer but at the same time is calm and relaxed. Mary Malone, as part of her out-of-body experience also becomes aware that she is in a different state of consciousness which is more than a dream and she is able to work with this to both connect with Dust and to return to her body. Malcolm through the migraine aura seems to develop a second level of consciousness alongside his awareness of what is happening around him, and this new consciousness gives him a sense of peace and calm.

Second, all these experiences have specific outcomes. The alethiometer gives guidance and direction; Mary feels a connection with these worlds and receives understanding of what is happening to Dust and to the environments of the worlds; Malcolm finds peace and contentment in difficult situations.

Third, while Lyra is able to generate the experience when needed, much as meditation or prayer might do, Mary and Malcolm's experiences are not manipulated but are received at times of need, yet all can be considered types of revelation. All of them occur when there is an unresolved issue to deal with and through the experiences the issues are resolved.

Fourth, Lyra's and Mary's experiences involve connecting with Dust, which is the quasi-divine, cosmic consciousness or life-giving force in the worlds of *His Dark Materials*. As yet we do not know enough about Malcolm's migraine aura to be sure whether Dust is the instigator of these experiences. There is one hint in the story that they are brought about by Dust, in that Malcolm calls the experiences his aurora. The aurora borealis being investigated by Lord Asriel in the story in *Northern Lights* is the means by which he discovers Dust – as it seems that the aurora is a visual revelation of Dust. Similarly, the Mulefa are able to see Dust (they call it 'sraf') and compare it to 'sparkles on the water' and 'reflected light like the glare of the sea' (AS p.232)

All these experiences could be described as spiritual experiences as they include elements common to spiritual experiences.

Pullman would want to avoid the term 'spiritual' because of its connection with religion and the Divine, yet he is clearly using the device of spiritual experiences in the story. He may prefer to use the term mystical, because this is clearly part of the genre of the story, and as he relates this to the material or physical world, it is more of an eco- or a Gaia type spirituality (Tucker, 2017, p. 135). Yet the use of the device of spiritual experience as an essential element of the story, through which the characters find direction, purpose, meaning and the way to salvation, has clear religious and spiritual overtones.

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Natural History of Angels: Part Two

Last time

In Part One I began with the earliest historical references to angels, in texts and bas-reliefs from the Ancient Near East, and biblical stories. I looked at the influence of Assyrian theology on the exiled Jewish population in the 6th-century BCE and examined early Christian adopters, Kabbalah, Renaissance Neo-Platonists, English Protestants, the writing of Emmanuel Swedenborg, and William Blake. Turner's painting, *An Angel Standing in the Sun* (1846), brought us to the middle of the 19th-century, a turning point for a re-flowering of angelology.



The Oxford Movement

In the early 19th-century, members of the Oxford Movement,¹ argued for the reinstatement of older Christian traditions into Anglican liturgy. Smells, bells and colourful images were welcomed back. This re-visioning of Anglican style created a cultural gateway for architects and artists to create vivid decorations in English churches that had been previously whitewashed during the Civil War – an ideal opportunity to reintroduce angels into stained glass windows and tapestries.



The Pre-Raphaelites

In 1848, just two years after Turner's luminous *Angel Standing*, a group of English painters and poets – William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais and Dante Gabriel Rossetti – founded the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. All three included angels in their art, but a later member, Edward Burne-Jones was the most prolific creator of angelic paintings, tapestries and stained glass, commissioned for British churches and chapels. His work will be familiar from modern Christmas cards, angel books and oracle decks. Jane Burden, who married William Morris, became the face of many Victorian angels.² Roger Homan³ comments

that Jane was the first brunette seen in celestial spheres. While Turner attempted to capture pure luminosity with little form, the Pre-Raphaelites painted from life and their angels are embodied. Their images provided a backdrop for the Victorian fascination with fairies, angels, nature spirits and ghosts.

Victorian Spiritualism

Spiritualism in this era was a 'sisterhood'; notable in this movement were Leah, Margaret and Catherine, the Fox sisters of Hydesville, New York. The concept that a dead relative might become a guardian angel developed from Spiritualism: it was thought that a small, presumably innocent, child who had died was most likely to become an angel. These ideas are still prevalent today and influence some modern angel authors, such as the UK's 'leading expert', Jackie Newcomb, who specialises in the afterlife and paranormal experiences.

Theosophy

Blavatsky's Theosophy

Madame Helena Blavatsky, a Russian aristocrat who moved to New York, originally espoused Spiritualism but in 1875 founded the Theosophical Movement, a foundation stone of today's 'New Age' movement. Modern angelology also owes a great deal to her syncretic theology. Her magnum opus, *The Secret Doctrine*, cross-fertilised Eastern cultural traditions with Western religious content. She introduces the *Agnishvatha*, solar deities who evolved from primeval fire and were instrumental in creating the 'Inner Man'. She describes these 'first beings' as 'Sons of Fire', who give birth to the 'Sons of Mind'. In her cosmology they are planetary *Cohans* or angels and she references biblical quotations to support this concept: 'The Lord is a consuming Fire' (Deuteronomy 4:24); 'The Lord (Christos) shall be revealed with his mighty angels in flaming fire' (2 Thessal. 1:7, 8).⁴

Theosophical diversions: Rudolf Steiner and Alice Bailey

Rudolf Steiner broke away from Theosophy in 1907 and established Anthroposophy. While this movement was also oriented toward an [Eastern](#), especially [Indian](#) approach, Steiner was trying to develop a path that embraced [Christianity](#) and [natural science](#). Steiner's angels are Christian – he frequently refers to Archangels Michael and Gabriel, but also to Lucifer and Ahriman, demons who lure humans into spiritual vanity or material greed. Ahriman is Angra Manyu, the opposing twin of Ahura Mazda, God of Light in Zoroastrianism. Steiner's philosophy is essentially Christian dualism that looks towards a final showdown, just as we find in Essene writings.

In 1923, Alice Bailey set up her own Arcane School along the same lines as Theosophy. In her extensive legacy of esoteric writing, Bailey delineates occult cosmological hierarchies of etheric, astral, mental, causal and higher inhabited levels of existence. In 1936, her seminal *Treatise on the Seven Rays*

theorises a 'Solar Logos' as the central intelligent 'vortex', manifesting Creation via 'Divine Rays' or 'Creative Builders': 'seven living qualified emanations ... composed of untold myriads of energy units ...' (Bailey, 1936, 27). Archangelic names are not mentioned, but the qualities of these 'emanations' echo Kabbalah (See Part 1, issue 59, page 10). Blavatsky's successor within the Theosophical movement, Annie Besant, challenged the veracity of Alice Bailey's cosmological concepts, which purported to be channelled communications from a 'hidden master'.

In the nineteen thirties theosophist Geoffrey Hodson made an original and detailed contribution. In *The Brotherhood of Men and of Angels*⁵ and *The Coming of the Angels*⁶ he includes methods for communicating with angels, who he describes as 'shining embodiments of the omnipresent life, power and consciousness of the Supreme' (Hodson 1932, xvii). His studies convinced him 'of the practical value of communion and cooperation with the angels ... as allies in the service of the world there is hardly any limit to their usefulness...' (Hodson 1932, xv). He expected humanity to evolve to a higher state of consciousness by cooperating with angels. Unlike Blavatsky, his angelology contains remnants of Christian Cabala:

Christians ... think of angels as messengers who come from God ... only on very important occasions ... normally, separated from man and invisible ... I wish to retain this conception, I also wish to extend it ... the angels are always with us ... not only ... on important occasions ... always within our reach.

Another Theosophist, H. K. Challoner, published a collection of poems with vivid angelic illustrations. In *Watchers of the Seven Spheres* (1933), seven archangels watch over the planets. Challoner prefers to use the word *deva*, although he doesn't shy away from using 'God'. He prefaces his poetry with a detailed account of the qualities of the '*devas*, and the invisible worlds they inhabit'; like Hodson, he believes humans can – and should – collaborate with these 'shining ones':

... for them all is vibration. It is their language, their key-note, the manifestation of God ... They dwell in a realm ... of perpetually whirling atoms of matter, changing, coalescing, separating in response to the propulsions of creative energy which the devas themselves live solely to express. (Challoner 1933, 19)

New Age Angels

Alice Bailey's work, like that of Madame Blavatsky, was a forerunner of the New Age movement, and seeded New Age groups in the United States. The Kabbalistic idea that humans could summon and commune with angels, either for personal advancement or for the advantage of humanity as a whole, became popular currency. New Age descendants of Theosophy include angels in their pantheon of otherworldly guides and claim mystical sources for 'channelled' revelations.



The 'Church Universal and Triumphant' (CUT), based on Bailey's teachings, was founded in 1975 by Mark Prophet. CUT published archangel messages channelled by Mark's wife Elizabeth, who devised archangelic 'decrees' designed to combat intrusive 'entities' and 'fallen angels'.



Californians Guy Ballard, and his wife Edna, were influenced by Mark and Elizabeth Prophet and Alice Bailey. The Ballards' proactive 'angelising' activities had a distinctly commercial edge and encouraged New Age enthusiasm for angels, as popularised by Doreen Virtue, a psychotherapist who trains 'angel therapists'. In the UK, Diana Cooper's angelology appears to have been derived from the teaching of Elizabeth Clare Prophet, which in turn is a dilution of Theosophical and occult angelology. Diana encourages readers to pronounce their needs – such as finding a

parking slot – and use magical rituals to summon angels to get into action on their behalf.⁷ This is not a long way from the activities of the 16th century alchemist and magician Dr Dee (see Part 1 issue 59 page 12).

In the late 20th century, authors and publishers jumped on the angelic chariot with watered down versions of Jewish Kabbalah, Christian Cabala and Occult Qabala, often basing their own angelology on earlier ideas, and often without acknowledging this. A notable example has been the plagiarising of content from Gustav Davidsons' monumental scholarship presented in his magnum opus, *The Dictionary of Angels*.⁸

The Angels of Findhorn

In 1962, Eileen and Peter Caddy, and their friend Dorothy MacLean, committed together to a spiritual path and found themselves in caravans on a bleak Scottish campsite. Dorothy had previously been in Quaker groups and also taken time to explore the Sufi tradition. They had no income, and called on inner guidance to support them as they tried to grow vegetables on the thin, sandy soil. Dorothy spoke to nature spirits, and subsequently Peter began to grow forty-pound cabbages and other remarkably large vegetables.⁹ Gradually, their success attracted like-minded seekers to the site. Dorothy describes how a new being, the Angel of Findhorn, came into existence 'gathering life from all of us'. The Findhorn Foundation was established in 1972.

Joy Drake and Kathy Tyler, members of the Findhorn Community, developed a set of Angel cards, first published in 1981. These cards were the prototype for many subsequent angel guidance or oracle packs, most of which lean on Renaissance or Victorian artwork for their sentimental and feminised Angel images – a far cry from Rilke's 'terrible' angels, or the powerful angels of biblical prophecy. These cards may, it is believed, awaken 'angelic' consciousness for a wide audience who have been deprived of this intermediary realm since the Protestant Reformation.¹⁰

Angels in the modern world

Spacemen and angels

In July 1985 three Soviet cosmonauts were temporarily blinded when space station *Salyut 7* was enveloped in an orange cloud. When their eyes cleared, they saw 'seven giant figures in the form of humans, but with wings and mist-like halos', who followed them for ten minutes, then vanished. Twelve days later, three more cosmonauts arrived who also reported seeing the angels 'smiling, as though they shared a glorious secret.'



Six Soviet cosmonauts say that they've witnessed the most awe-inspiring spectacle ever encountered in space – a band of glowing angels with wings as big as jumbo jets!

Accounts of two bizarre sightings by Russia's leading space travellers are contained in a top-secret report smuggled out of the their lives. "What we saw were seven giant figures in the form of humans, but with wings and mist-like halos as in the classic depiction of angels," said Legre following their capsule for about 10 minutes and then vanished as suddenly as they had come. But 12 days later the glowing figures returned – and this time they were seen by six Soviet cosmonauts.

Soviet cosmonauts Vladimir Solov'ev, Oleg Atkov and Leonid Khvinko said they first saw the seven colossal beings last July during their 19th day in space.

The cosmonauts in an account signed by all three. "They appeared to be hundreds of feet tall, with a wingspan as great as any jetliner."

But the evidence seems to indicate that what they saw was more surreal than natural. "The comments in an account signed by all three. "They appeared to be hundreds of feet tall, with a wingspan as great as any jetliner."

Angels in war time

World War I

A famous wartime angel story describes a mass vision experienced by British soldiers at the Battle of Mons in Belgium, August 26th 1914, when hundreds of armoured soldiers were seen riding in the sky, led by a young man on a great white horse. The golden-haired leader might have been St. George, or perhaps Archangel Michael. This colourful story was debunked when it became clear it was based on a current fictional short story. However, a less dramatic report appeared in the field-notes of a Brigadier General who confirmed several men had reported seeing angels. A lance corporal also told the *Daily Mail* he had witnessed a strange light over the German line:

I could see quite distinctly three shapes, the one in the centre having what looked like outspread wings, the other two were not so large...they appeared to have a long loose-hanging garment of a golden tint. We stood watching them for about three-quarters of an hour. All the men with me saw them ...



The Angel of Mons

World War II

During World War Two, a Hungarian champion swimmer, Gitta Mallasz, became a 'scribe' for the angels. With three other young Hungarians, Gitta spent seventeen months in dialogue with angels, receiving bright wisdom from celestial sources during a time of extreme darkness. Her colleagues and friends Lili, Hanna and Joseph, perished in concentration camps. Gitta survived in communist Hungary, eventually escaping to France with the group's records in black notebooks. The contents were eventually published in France in 1976. This article does not give space for more details about this remarkable record of human-angel collusion, but I highly recommend *Talking with Angels* to all readers.



Near-Death Experiences

In 1973, before the publication of Raymond Moody's famous book, *Life after Life*, I was working in the costume department of the Oxford Playhouse with Betty, the wardrobe mistress, who had been a young war widow with two young children. During a health crisis she found herself travelling into a tunnel of light, where she was greeted by two shining figures. She could choose whether to continue and be reunited with her husband, or to return to her

children. If she returned, it would be a long time before she would meet her husband. Many years later, when Betty died in her late eighties, I spoke to her daughter. We agreed the angels had been right to warn Betty it would be a 'long time'.

So many people returning from NDEs report meeting angelic or spiritual figures of light, that only fundamentalist atheists will deny the veracity of these experiences, or dismiss the clues confirming that, beyond our everyday landscapes, we can experience other worlds, populated by benevolent guides.

Modern Fiction, Movies and Television

Angels abound on the internet, and there are a great many novels, movies and TV shows that have included angels. Many images are of romantic, eternally young looking figures. A notable exception is in Philip Pullman's *Dark Materials* trilogy, where Metatron appears as the 'Ancient of Days' looking literally ancient, worn out and toothless. [This image brings up the intriguing, and perhaps disturbing idea that angels can age, just like humans, even if it takes them a lot longer. (Ed)]

Are they real?

As esoteric researcher Egil Asprem suggests, people who encounter such beings are prone to ask if they are 'really real?'

How can they be effective? Where do they come from? Are they perhaps part of our psyche? If so, how is our psyche to be understood? As a subjectively real realm of imagination and experience, ultimately reducible to neurochemistry? Or as a shared, inter-subjectively real collective consciousness? ¹¹

People who claim to experience angels will also claim to receive positive effects in their lives, some of which are significant and dramatic. The imagination is a powerful tool, often beyond conscious control, which can produce surprising experiences that may seem to be 'otherworldly'. If our individual and collective consciousnesses contain all possible worlds, then neurochemistry is only an indicator of inner experience, not a causative factor.

Do we need them?

Twentieth century historian F. Edward Cranz identified a 're-orientation of categories of thought' during the time of Anselm and Abelard (c.1100 CE), leading to a dichotomy between the mind and what is outside of it: '... against an ancient reason which is primarily a vision of what is, we find a movement towards a reason based on systematic coherence of what is said or thought'.¹²

If Crantz is right, we can identify an historical rubbish chute for the angels that might have started long before the Reformation, or later industrialisation. Our creeping separation from what is real has happened over an extended period of time. Our thinking has gradually become more conceptual in that we have lost our deep connection with what IS. When we extend our sense of self, our imaginal capacity opens windows into the depths of reality. Samuel Taylor Coleridge asked: '... what if in your dream you went to heaven and plucked a strange and beautiful flower? ... what if, when you awoke, you had that flower in your hand?'

From personal experience I find that when I extend my sense of self, and my inner and outer worlds are coherent, such 'magical' things begin to happen. Like the Findhorn pioneers, we can commune with angels, fairies or other inter-dimensional beings. When we feel connected to the *anima mundi* and natural healing unfolds, our ecological concerns will be addressed from a deep knowing of how to nurture ourselves, and our planet.

The Physics of Angels

Fore-shadowing modern physics, Geoffrey Hodson theorised in the 1930s: 'they are here and all about us, but out of our perspective ... bodily material beings, but ... super-physical and therefore emit light... the frequency ... beyond the ... visible spectrum. They have location and dimension, yet are beyond the space limitations of the three-dimensional world.' (Hodson 1932, xv).

More recently psychoanalyst Antony Storr, describing Rudolph Steiner's view of angels, dismissed them as 'so eccentric, so unsupported by evidence, so manifestly bizarre, that rational sceptics are bound to consider it delusional'. However, a more considered approach is taken in *The Physics of Angels*, written in 1996 by scientist Rupert Sheldrake and theologian Matthew Fox. The book records conversations in which the two authors, ostensibly on opposite sides in terms of metaphysics, consider mediaeval descriptions of angelic worlds in relation to sub-atomic physics.

The way seems to be open for further developments in the natural history of angels.

Theolyn Cortens

References

- ¹ The original members of the Oxford Movement were associated with the University of Oxford. The movement's philosophy was known as 'Tractarianism', after its series of publications, the *Tracts for the Times*, published from 1833 to 1841. Tractarians were also called 'Newmanites' (before 1845) and 'Puseyites' (after 1845) after two prominent Tractarians, John Henry Newman and Edward Bouverie Pusey. Other well-known Tractarians included John Keble, Charles Marriott, Richard Froude, Robert Wilberforce, Isaac Williams and William Palmer.
- ² <http://www.socialaffairsunit.org.uk/blog/archives/000614.php> [accessed 8 August 2016].
- ³ Homan, R., *The Art of the Sublime: Principles in Christian Art and Architecture* (2005, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Company).
- ⁴ Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *Collected Writings* (1988, Wheaton, Illinois: Theosophical Publishing House).
- ⁵ Hodson, G., *The Brotherhood of Men and of Angels*, (1927, London: Theosophical Society).
- ⁶ Hodson, G., *The Coming of the Angels*, (1932, London: Rider & Company).
- ⁷ www.dianacooper.com [accessed 9 August 2018].
- ⁸ Davidson, G., *A Dictionary of Angels* (1967, London: Free Press).
- ⁹ Hawken, P., *The Magic of Findhorn* (1976, New York: Bantam Books).
- ¹⁰ My personal view is that angels may have been stripped of their agency in this process. Rather like the Andean spectacled bear has been 'cuddlified' as Paddington.
- ¹¹ Aspren, E., (2016) 'Intermediary Beings' (p.654): *The Occult World*, ed. Partridge C., Oxford, Routledge.
- ¹² Cranz, F. Edward (2006) *Reorientations of Western thought from Antiquity to the Renaissance* ed. Nancy S. Struever Ashgate. I discovered Crantz through Cheetham, T., (2015) *Imaginal Love: the meanings of imagination in Henry Corbin and James Hillman* Spring Publications. Again, highly recommended.

EXPERIENCE



Sign – Voice and Four-leafed clover

I was standing at my kitchen sink peeling the potatoes for lunch, looking through the window and across the lawn to our garden studio set in nearly an acre of grass. On that day there was an art workshop in progress, open to the public, and I was watching an elderly lady who was searching in the grass for something half way up the path to the studio. Thinking she must have dropped a ring or something, I went out and asked her if I could help. She seemed embarrassed and after declining my help she eventually confided that she was looking for a four leafed clover. Before I thought what I was saying, I heard myself say, 'I'll find you a four leafed clover.' I could feel her discomfort as she explained that she couldn't stay as there were people waiting for her. So I said to myself, 'Well, I had better start looking if I'm going to find her one.' Just as I put my mind to it and looked down at the grass, a clear message was implanted into my mind, 'Not here, over there.' I responded by slowly walking across the lawn back towards my house – not looking, but intensely listening and waiting to be told where.

I was just about to step off the grass onto the step near my kitchen door, and I was already thinking, 'There now, aren't you silly to think anything else' when I heard the word 'Here' cutting across my thoughts. I bent down and picked a fresh four-leafed clover growing at my feet on the very edge of the lawn. My mood became exalted. I wanted to laugh out loud as it was so ridiculous. These things couldn't happen. I felt tremendously happy. I wanted to run to the old lady who was still making her way carefully down the rather slippery grass path – but I made myself walk. I reached her just before she got to the gate and with some delight, I held up the clover for her.

She looked quite stunned for a minute and then said, 'No, it is yours. You found it.'

I told her that I didn't know what was going on but whatever it was, it was for her not for me. She said, 'How did you do it?' and for the second time I found myself saying words which were not from me. I said, 'All you need is faith' and while I heard myself saying this, I thought to myself, 'You hypocrite, *you* don't have faith.' for I was not conscious of 'believing' in anything in a religious sense. She had tears in her eyes when she took the clover and told me that it had very special meaning for her and that she had prayed to God for a sign. It was something to do with her grandson and although she said it would take too long to explain, she told me that the sign she had asked for was to receive a four-leafed clover that day, and it had been given her. She turned away and I never saw her again.

Conversion; grace and a current of love

However the story didn't end there because the four-leafed clover had been a sign to me as well. I knew I couldn't have done what I had just done on my own, and I knew that something had worked through me. I went back into my house – still in a state of intense expectation – and said to the air, 'Well, that wasn't me. I could never have done that to order. Who are you? If you are good, if you are God, come into my life and use me like that to help others.' Silence.

I walked into the sitting room and heard the sound of wind. I thought, 'It is going to rain,' (I had lived for a couple of years in Africa where you often had a wind sweep through in front of the heavy rains and it sounded just like that). I went to the window and was puzzling over the fact that none of the

trees were moving although I could clearly hear the wind but suddenly my attention was diverted as I was being bathed in currents of love pouring down on me. That is the only way I know how to describe it. I had never felt a physical current of love before. It came from above me in waves of vibrations right through my body from my head to my feet in what might be likened to a gentle and beautiful warm electric current. I felt it pouring all over me and I knew it must be God responding to me. It must be something to do with my asking. It was love. There *was* a power outside of me after all.

The faith I spoke of to the old lady has been mine ever since that day, now forty years ago.

Vision – a picture given

There was another part to the experience I have just related. Years before, when I was about 24 or 25, and living in Ghana, I had read an account of WW2 where a whole village had been crucified by the Germans for sheltering a soldier who was working against the Nazis. I think it was somewhere in Poland but I don't remember where, nor do I really know if such a terrible event really happened, but my reaction to the story was significant. I was reading this in the old schoolroom where I had been teaching; I cried and thumped the table and said out loud, 'I will *never* believe in a good God that could allow such a thing to happen. Surely those people called to God to help them and no help came.' So, when I felt this outpouring of love and felt it must be God, my mind returned to that time when I swore I would never believe in a good God and I said to God, 'Well what about that village?'

Nothing happened for a few seconds and I walked over to the door of the schoolroom, and there I stopped. On the wall a picture appeared as though on a television screen, and on it was a scene of a green countryside viewed from above, as though seen from a low flying plane. Part of the scene showed clumps of trees darker green. I felt directed to look at this wooded area and in my mind, in answer to my question, a voice said, 'That happened there one afternoon in the whole of time.' I had to look hard because of the trees and could not see any buildings nor a trace of any village. While looking hard for where this had happened I realized that while looking for evidence of such a terrible thing I was not seeing all that was good in nature, the trees and fields surrounding the place and sustained by God in the picture before me. I realised that I had been ignoring all the beauty of creation because of something that had happened one afternoon in the whole of time, and when I realised this and thought about it, it sort of put my arguments against God into perspective. There was no explanation or denial of evil and suffering in the world, or any other teaching given me – rather an acceptance that that had happened. Somehow it (the voice) was suggesting that by only concentrating on the evil and suffering in the world, I was not seeing all the balance and beauty, and all the evidence of good in the world around me that was also always present over the whole of world and over all of time. It was enough and I accepted. I felt very light and graceful and I knew I was in communication with a higher intelligence and was contacting a higher spiritual plane, and felt a presence which was leading me and responding to my asking.

There was a low bookshelf running along the wall under the window in the school room and in it were some books on spiritual matters. I walked over to them to pick a book to help me explain what was happening, but then I had the very strong feeling of 'all knowing' as though I knew it all within me – everything – and had no need to seek further or to go to other writings. No book could add anything to what I was being taught. I also felt I was shining with light and all my movement felt so graceful and in utter harmony as though I was a dancer. I wanted to see myself and see the light shining from me and ran to the bathroom mirror. But I was disappointed and surprised to only see

my familiar image showing itself in the mirror. I was *so sure* my appearance must have changed as I could feel light in me, but I could not see any evidence of it. This sense of being made new stayed with me and I have never since doubted.

Later, when I read the New Testament for the first time and learnt more about the history of the church, I realised that my experience had taken place on Whit Sunday – the day of Pentecost – the coming of the Holy Spirit onto the disciples (Acts 2).

Tanya Garland



REPORTS

Update: the General Data Protection Regulations (2018)

Most members will be aware of the changes to how personal data is stored and used and will have received notifications and requests for consent from their banks, building societies, online shops, in fact any organisation that retains personal information.

The Alister Hardy Trust falls within the new regulations so this report is intended to advise members about the changes and explain what information the Trust holds.

The General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) is the new framework for European data protection laws and came into force on the 25 May 2018. It is designed to harmonise data privacy laws across the EC as well as give greater protection and rights to individuals.

Any organisation in possession of data belonging to another has an obligation to ensure that such data is stored securely and not used for any unlawful purpose (such as identify theft)

The Alister Hardy Trust collects information about its members including names, addresses, dates of birth, telephone numbers and email addresses (where applicable) These details are essential to maintain contact with members and are used in the following ways:

- for membership renewals and administration, including annual subscriptions
- to forward the journal
- to supply information about events, conferences and Members' Day
- to post (or email) any necessary information as and when required
- to run local affiliated Groups

Membership details are stored on password encrypted computers but may also exist in printed form and are available to the Membership Secretary, the Honorary Treasurer, the Journal Editor, the Director of Communications, and the Chair and Vice Chair of the Trust together with the Honorary

Secretary. Group Leaders may also retain details of local Group members with their explicit agreement in order to facilitate contact and arrange local events.

Future requests for AHT members' contact information from other members will now be declined and the current Trust 'Rules' will be amended to reflect this change under rule 2.

In addition, the professional qualifications and areas of professional interest for the current Trustees are also retained and available to the Chair and (where appropriate) other Trustees with prior agreement. The names and personal images of the Trust's officer roles are displayed on the AHT website with the agreement of the individuals concerned and this information is open to public view.

A significant element of the GDPR is 'consent' – this must now be explicit; inactivity or silence from an individual will no longer be regarded as consent. The AHT membership renewal form (including new applications for membership) will now include a consent element which members will be asked to sign allowing consent for the Trust to hold and use their personal data in the ways indicated above.

It is important to note that consent can be withdrawn at any time by contacting the Membership Secretary, Margaret West: canolfanysantesfair@gmail.com

Please contact the Membership Secretary or Honorary Secretary if further information is required about how the AHT stores and uses personal information from its members.

Andrew Burns, Hon Secretary

Membership and Activities Group

Andy Burns and Marianne Rankin

2019 is the 50th Anniversary of Sir Alister Hardy setting up the Religious Experience Research Unit in Oxford.

To celebrate, we plan a special **Members' Day** to be held on 19th October 2019 with the Anniversary Annual Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture to be given by Rupert Sheldrake

We also plan two special issues of *De Numine* and are asking YOU to send us YOUR memories, articles or photographs relating to Sir Alister Hardy and his research

What has it all meant to YOU?

Please send to: Marianne Rankin: marianne.rankin@studyspiritualexperiences.org

Tel: 01684 772417

Report from the Director of the Religious Experience Research Centre, Lampeter

This year the work of RERC Lampeter has centred on the preparation of the July conference and a research seminar series, the unpublished material in the archive, the David Hay collection, and teaching and publication.

Thomas Pitchford has continued incorporating the David Hay collection. In addition he has supported the guest editor of the next issue of the online Journal for the Study of Religious Experience, Dr Gregory Shushan. This issue will be released in July. He also looks after AH members visiting the RERC office, and deals with requests for books by post. Jonathan Andrew has been focussing on the non-published material in the Alister Hardy Trust archive, and is still updating the archive database online. Both Thomas and Jonathan have been working on a small exhibition about Sir Alister Hardy for the library. This will be on display in May 2019, and will be the first of several exhibitions planned for the coming year.

Together with the membership secretary, Margaret West, I conducted an audit of the current users of the online database and checked whether they are still paying members of the AHT. We then emailed everyone who did not pay membership fees and after a month deleted those who did not respond to reminders. After the audit, 40 members remain who have current access to the online archive. We have also received the first publications coming out of the use of the online archive, and these will be added to the RERC library.

Other activities have been focussed on the research seminar series and the preparation of the annual RERC conference which was held in conjunction with the third Harmony Conference at Lampeter in July 2018. The topic is *Spirituality and Wellbeing: inter-religious perspectives*, and the Keynote speaker was Professor William West who gave the Alister Hardy Lampeter Lecture on *Counselling and Faith: Allowing religion and spirituality to have a place in the counselling relationship*. Professor West is a Visiting Professor to the University of Chester and Honorary Senior Research Fellow in Counselling Studies at the University of Manchester, where he was noted for his interest in counselling and spirituality. He has written 34 academic papers, 22 book chapters and 35 professional articles. He has also co-written/edited 6 books, the most recent being *Therapy, culture and spirituality: developing therapeutic practice*, co-edited with Greg Nolan and published by Palgrave 2015. Other presenters included Mark Seed: *'Wherever we find ourselves' – the spiritual health of children, young people and families*; Brenda Llewellyn Ihssen: *Moves like Jagger – teaching and Learning with Disability in the Room*; and Jayne Timmins: *How counselling training, being a counsellor and neurobiology have deepened spiritual awareness – a personal journey*.

The seminar series was set up with one paper per semester. Unfortunately, one speaker, Prof Alejandro Parra from the Instituto de Psicología Paranormal, Buenos Aires, had to cancel in the last minute due to illness. The second paper, given by Helmar Kurz of the University of Münster, Germany, was organised in collaboration with the Faculty's research seminar series Past People, Present Society, and was held on 2nd of May. With regard to publications, Equinox has accepted the proposal for a second edited volume featuring selected papers of the last two conferences and the research seminar series in 2016/17. Jeff Leonardi and I will co-edit. The submission date for the draft is September 2018 and we hope that it will come out mid-2019.

Turning to teaching, we have a growing number of research students in the area of religious experience. We have currently 7 students in part 1 of the MRes Religious Experience and 8 students in part 2 (one suspended on medical grounds). The first student's dissertation will be submitted in

September. The module Religious Experience Today is increasingly popular among students of other MA programmes in the Faculty: 24 students have enrolled on the module during this academic year. Several have joined the AHT and refer to the material in their essays. In the next academic year we will also offer a new module on spiritual and religious experience to undergraduate students which will raise the profile of the RERC.

Overall it has been a successful and busy year. As we turn to the next academic year we would like to begin preparation for an international conference to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the RERC. In an initial discussion we agreed it would be good to have a three day conference in Lampeter, with two keynote speakers as well as other presenters. In line with the first RERC conference set up by Sir Alister Hardy in 1979, we suggest that the topic should be a reflection on the study of religious experience over the last 50 years, and a look to the future. While our events are usually free to the public, we may need to charge a small conference fee which would also cover food and refreshments. Accommodation would be available on campus, but would need to be booked separately. I plan to circulate a Call for Papers in the autumn when the conference website is set up and the keynote speakers confirmed. We are very grateful to the Trust which is sponsoring the conference in 2019.

Professor Bettina Schmidt

From the Director of Communications

Members and Activities Group

On April 14th 2018 we held a joint conference with the Churches' Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies in Oxford on the theme of *Meditation, Stillness and Spiritual Experience* (see report, page 30). Both speakers, Dr Serena Roney-Dougal and the Reverend Professor June Boyce-Tillman were excellent and those who attended thoroughly enjoyed the event. However, with an attendance of less than 40 people in all, both organisations made a loss. If numbers do not increase in future, we may need to rethink such events. Conferences are richly rewarding, but they require a lot of work, both in preparation and on the day itself and it is only thanks to the help of hard-working volunteers that they can take place.

Members' Day

This will be held on 20th October 2018 at the Quaker Meeting in Oxford as usual. The Revd Dr Marcus Braybrooke, Joint President of the World Congress of Faiths and a long-time supporter of the AHT, will give the Annual Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture on *Meeting in the Cave of the Heart, The importance of religious experience to theology and interspirituality*.

In the afternoon, MAG will update members on activities, particularly in the local groups, and take note of any items which members would like to be forwarded for discussion at the AGM.

A Discussion Panel will then take place, with Revd Professor Leslie Francis, Revd Professor June Boyce-Tillman and Professor Bettina Schmidt on *Current research into religious experiences and what this is telling us*. This will be a good opportunity to hear about this research from those involved.

(See events page 52)

Anniversary Celebrations

Plans are afoot for 2019, to celebrate 50 years since Sir Alister Hardy founded the Religious Experience Research Unit in Manchester College, Oxford. Andy and I have suggested a special issue of *De Numine* and Patricia and Jean are discussing possibilities. Everyone is invited to contribute memories and photos please.

As Dr Rupert Sheldrake gave the first Annual Memorial Lecture in 1987, I have invited him to give the 50th Anniversary Lecture and he has accepted. The special Anniversary Members' Day will be held in Oxford on 19th October 2019.

DoC Activities

I have updated our publicity leaflets, bringing Patrons and Trustees lists up to date and am now the contact person for events, working with Margaret West, the new Membership Secretary, and with Andy Burns and David Greenwood. I compose all our leaflets, working with a local printer and arrange for their distribution.

This year I will lead two Quiet Days at Holland House and one at Stanton Guildhouse. Last June I spoke at an Anthroposophist conference on *Angels* in Sheffield. Janice Dolley of the One Spirit Alliance has invited me to speak at the 2018 CANA (Christians Awakening to a New Awareness) conference, *WE ARE ALL ONE, Towards Universal Spirituality: Journeying with Christianity* on Saturday 3rd November 2018 at the Essex Unitarian Church, London (see Events, page 54). As always, I take AHT publicity material to distribute at all these events.

The AHT was well represented at a celebration in honour of Professor Ursula King's 80th Birthday at Bristol University, organised by her former PhD student Dr Dominic Corrywright and our own Professor Bettina Schmidt. A beautifully illustrated Festschrift was produced and presented to Ursula to mark her huge contribution to the field of the study of religions. It was a wonderful event.

In July the Danish reporter, Charlotte Rørth, with whom I had a FaceTime interview last year, came to visit me. I am trying to help her get her best-selling book, *I met Jesus* translated into English and published in the UK. As a result of our conversation, and her familiarity with my own book, it includes a chapter about the work of the AHT and the RERC. She has written another two books since and if she were not so busy, would like to set up an AHT Group in Denmark. We will keep in touch.

BTA

The British Teilhard Association was officially dissolved as of 31 December 2017, due to diminishing membership. The old BTA website has been reformatted as the British Teilhard Network, still with the previous link: www.teilhard.org.uk. Paul Bentley of the former British Teilhard Association is now editor of the British Teilhard Network. The BTA used its funds to endow an annual Teilhard Seminar at Durham University's Centre for Catholic Studies.

The AHT continues to thrive, with students joining for access to the RERC Archive, local groups enjoying informal meetings and with our two main annual events.

Marianne Rankin

Joint meeting of the Alister Hardy Trust and the Churches' Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies, 14 April 2018, Oxford

The two societies held a joint meeting arranged by Marianne Rankin (AHT) and chaired by Davina Thomas (CFPSS). The speakers were Dr Serena Roney-Dougal, a parapsychologist, and the Revd Professor June Boyce-Tillman, MBE, Professor of Applied Music at Winchester University.

Dr Roney-Dougal gave an account of her work, at the Yogic University in India, studying the effect of meditation on psychic awareness. Her research involved groups of novice monks, *rinpoches** and lamas, who after meditation were shown four pictures, one of which had previously been chosen as the target by the experimenter. Members of the group were asked to identify which was the target picture. For people with five years or less experience of meditating, the effect was minimal, while for those with 15 years or more experience the positive effect was marked. However for *rinpoches* who were old enough to have had horrific life experiences when the Chinese invaded Tibet in 1950s, the effect was negative; they were blocking out aspects of psychic awareness because of these painful experiences.

General aspects of Tibetan philosophy were discussed. Some of us have a talent for meditation, while others do not but may have an aptitude for, say, enlightenment, psychic awareness, etc. Nevertheless it is worth persevering. The analogy used was of playing a violin – we may not be very good but it is useful to try!

Psychic abilities bring their responsibilities and must be used with discipline. Our senses can deceive us and psychic power can corrupt even more than political power. Enlightenment is perfect wisdom allied to infinite compassion. In the holographic model of the universe the whole is in every part (i.e. in you). Karma is connected with this in that what you say and do affects the whole – you and your actions are not isolated from the rest of the universe. The ideal psychic state is compassion/empathy with others and perfect action in all life.

In the question session it was pointed out that we must understand cultural differences; failure to do so can lead to confusion and misunderstanding. Finally the speaker said she had not worked with women in her studies because until very recently their status in Tibet was so low that they did not come forward to take part.

The Revd Professor June Boyce-Tillman spoke about Music and Spirituality, with practical demonstrations and audience participation. Initially she held, but did not sound, a drum – a demonstration of John Cage's composition: 4 minutes 33 seconds of silence. Afterwards we were asked what we had heard. She explained that silence is divided into 'inner' and 'outer', the noumenal (something inferred from the nature of experience) and the phenomenal (outer manifestation). Unfortunately many people are afraid of true silence.

Music (classical and popular) has magic and mystery. It can unlock previous memories; we now realise for instance how this can help people with dementia. Professor Boyce Tillman told us how mindfulness is also helped by music. She said that mindfulness is another fashion in meditation, in the way that Transcendental Meditation was in the 1970s. These are examples of the many paths to enlightenment among which we have to find our own. Unfortunately in the West we tend to take 'nibbles' at different meditative methods.

We then approached silence through body/hand exercises, with movements related to water, fire, anger (pummelling our thighs and stamping our feet) and air. A bell brought us back and we were permitted a really good scream to purify us. Wonderful! Our attitude to silence in life is related to our fear of death. Unfortunately we live in a death denying society, so we find it difficult to confront silence. Nowadays we have lost the ritual in our religious worship, we are too rational and this is the reason why people turn away from conventional religion to beliefs that allow for the re-establishing of rituals.

In a question/answer session there were pleas to re-emphasise the teaching of music and art subjects in our schools. Humans need more than rationality to believe in. These were two stimulating lectures and I would like to thank both speakers. Having a joint meeting of the two societies is an excellent idea as we have so much overlap, and I hope we shall have more of them.

Neil Hancox, Member AHT and CFPSS

**Rinpoche is an honorific used for important teachers in the Tibetan tradition. It literally means 'Precious Jewel'. When a teacher is called 'Rinpoche' it usually means they are a tulku, who has been recognized as the reincarnation of a prominent master. Ed.*



Reports from the Local Groups

AHT in North Wales: Spontaneity and Intuition

When your group is small and everybody has so many commitments, it's unrealistic to expect members (or guests) to turn out regularly for meetings. Here in North Wales we've thus adopted a different approach. We advertise a regular (weekly) time and place in which we may meet if we're able to, and guided to. We've chosen a peaceful and inspiring place, Bangor University's Treborrh Botanic Garden, so that even if only one person turns up they get chance to quietly reflect, connect with nature and enjoy some much needed 'me' time. They may even manage the sort of experience Alister Hardy was so interested in.



I've found that making the most of this arrangement requires following my intuition, being spontaneous and 'going with the flow'. For example, a few months ago, as the appointed meeting hour was approaching I felt that this was a week to make the effort. As I sat enjoying the blossoms that were out at the time, a 'stranger' approached and introduced herself. She'd seen the meeting

announcement on Meetup*. To cut a long story short, we spent the next hour or so sharing insights and experiences on the deeper aspects of being human, on conscious evolution and all manner of related topics. We both agreed it to be a highly successful meeting.

Last week I hadn't intended to go, but got a phone call an hour or two before from one of our regulars. He could give me a lift, did I want to go? 'Why not?' I thought! I texted another regular who, we found, had also been drawn to attend that day. After months not meeting, on that day, we met like old friends, caught up on our respective journeys ... and had just the shared meditation we all needed. Another successful meeting.

So, out of many months of potential meetings, the two meetings we had were felt to be highly beneficial. We could bemoan the fact that nothing (as far as I know) happened on the other weeks, but why? Nobody was out of pocket, nobody wasted their time hanging about. Being whole, being in the flow, is not about the numbers, is it!?

Dr Keith Beasley, Co-ordinator, Bangor...Beyond (local hub for the Alister Hardy Trust, the SMN and the One Spirit Alliance)

* <https://www.meetup.com/Bangor-Beyond/>

Oxford & Cotswold Group

We are enjoying lively monthly meetings on a Saturday morning, kindly hosted by Clare Phillips in Kidlington, or Eleonore in Witney. Members take turns to present topics for discussion, which in the past six months have included the Rosicrucians, FWH Myers, Dreams and psychotherapy, and the Gospel of St Thomas.

Our numbers have reached a dozen or more each month. If we keep growing we will need to think about bigger venues ...

If you'd like to join our mailing list please email alister.hardy.oxford@gmail.com

Contacts: Rhonda Riachi: rhonda@riachi.free-online.co.uk +44 7533 248659

Clare Phillips: phillipsclare@me.com +44 1865 373393

South East Wales Group

Thursday 22nd March: *Science and Spirituality – a talk by Ken Davies, held at Llantarnam Abbey*

The Spring meeting was notable for being the first South East Wales local group meeting held at Llantarnam Abbey, now to be our regular venue. For the last seven years or so all previous ordinary meetings have been held at the home of Mary and Eric Cook, and those present took the opportunity to extend their grateful thanks to Mary for the hospitality received throughout the period. Deepest sympathies and condolences were extended to Mary on Eric's recent death, on the 7th March. His incisive, knowledgeable, individual and frequently witty contributions to proceedings would be greatly missed.

Ken's talk, which will be printed as an article next Spring, addressed the gaping void that frequently seems to exist between science and religion, especially as portrayed in the modern media. Here the popular champions of each way of knowing are seemingly happy and all too ready to set up straw men on the opposing side; all the easier to knock them down of course. Ken was at pains to point out that a more thoughtful approach was possible, and that the valid challenges that science and religion pose to one another are a potential source of development and growth for both if approached with an open and undogmatic mind.

Ken drew on a wide variety of examples from many fields of knowledge and many individuals to illustrate areas where science and religion converge, illustrating this with examples of phenomena that, although well researched and documented, still manage to evade a clear explanation or even a broad comprehension. Ken led us through evolutionary biology, ecology, quantum physics, cosmology and consciousness studies before examining phenomena such as out of body experiences, lucid dreaming, reincarnation and telepathy.

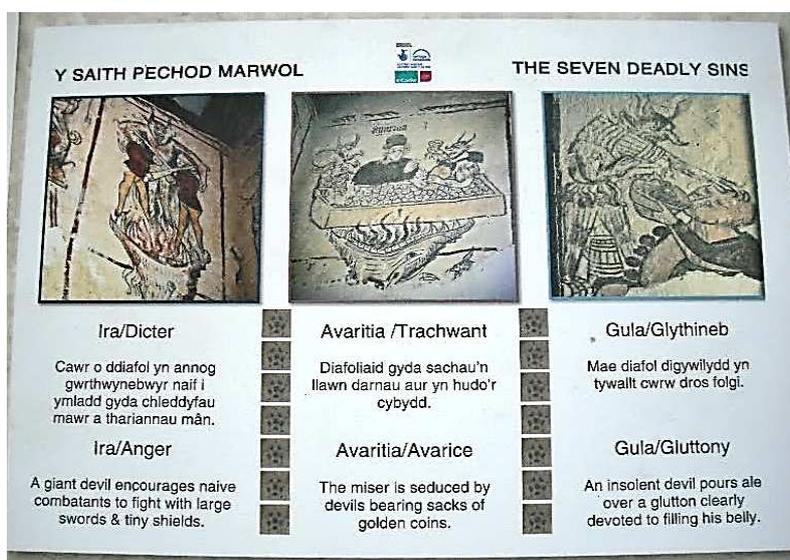
We were left in no doubt that, just as pondered by Shakespeare's Hamlet, there are indeed more things in Heaven and Earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy. To be fair to Ken he did not leave us adrift on a sea of confusion but delivered us to a safe port by way of a suitable vessel named Conclusion, where we were encouraged to embrace the waiting paradox with all the exhilaration it deserves.

Alan Underwood

Annual outing, 31st May 2018

Despite the threat of thunder, lightning and flash flooding, our group set off to visit **St Cadoc's church, Llancarfan, Glamorgan**, permission kindly granted by Cannon Derek. It is on the site of an important 6th Celtic Monastery, founded by St Cadoc, which was burnt to the ground during the 1066 Norman invasion. It had been a very important pilgrimage site. The church is nestled in a beautiful valley and is overlooked by an Iron Age Hill fort. We had more than a thousand years of visible history surrounding us, complete with beautiful trees, greenery – and quiet peacefulness but for a million birds! From the Fox and Hounds (first pub of the day) we viewed the church and its weather vane, a stag. These brought us into connection with the survival and hunting periods of the past.

In 2008, excavators found a line of red ochre beneath the lime worked walls; this led to a wall of frescoes, including St George and the Dragon and the seven deadly sins. We looked at these through the barrier of time, seeing the church as our ancestors had. During the reformation churches were stripped of art but these paintings were hidden away under layers of plaster. Ken P. was able to explain the significance of St George killing the dragon to us and Ken D. explained the use of the small door into the south of the church.



After lunch, which we shared on the top of a very large tomb, big enough to seat us all, Norman our navigator took us to Monknash, a Cistercian monastic grange, related to Neath Abbey. It was established in 1130 and the remains are still visible within the walls. A later barn and dovecote were also found here and overlooking the farmland once worked by the Monks, we found The Plough and Harrow (our second pub of the day).

In spite of the threatened storm, the sun shone on us all day.

Trudy Porter

Spiritual Experiences that were shared, 28th June

What follows is a précis of my talk, and I report on some of the lively discussion that followed.

Could there be profound truth behind our 'spiritual' experiences – or are they merely glimpses into an infinitely wide Consciousness given to us to intrigue us? Whatever the case may be, they *do* stretch our breadth of understanding. Some are even spiritual experiences that have to be shared, and reported by another person. The first example is one shared by myself and my husband Eric.

Helicopters

It was the middle of the night and I was fast asleep. Violently, Eric sat bolt upright, shaking the bed in the process. 'Helicopters!' he shouted, then just as suddenly resumed his usual peaceful sleeping position. In the morning he had no recollection of this happening, nor of the dream. This word turned out to be the answer to a code competition that he was to attempt months later, that nobody was able to crack. It was *his* insight into the future – his gift, *but I had to be woken up to receive it, and to register it!* Eric was devastated when eventually the non-result was published, and he remembered he had been given the answer and had not made use of it!

Alfred's 'spook'!

Laure and Alfred (both spiritual healers, and very sensitive to the spiritual) were visiting us from Cornwall, and it was mid-afternoon. It was nearly time for them to leave. I needed my diary, and couldn't remember where I had left it – it was not in its usual place. I was sitting in the armchair near the lounge door. Alfred got up and left the room. While I was waiting for him to return, I thought the diary might be in the music room. On a whim, I decided to visit the music room in my mind, whilst remaining in my chair. Alfred returned, and looking rather surprised, said, 'have you got a "spook"?' I was taken aback, and said in surprise, 'No!' After a second or two I added, 'Why?' He said, 'I just saw something go from the lounge through the hall to the music room.' I was even more startled. *He had 'seen' my mind's journey, and thought it might be a ghost!*

Shackleton and South Georgia

In his book, *Exploration into Spirit: a Power Greater Than ...*, John Franklin records that 'In 1924, Alister Hardy became chief zoologist on the Royal Research Ship, *Discovery*, which then sailed on an expedition to the Antarctic (1925-1927).' It could have been on this expedition that his attention was grabbed by a press article about Shackleton and his two crew members, who each independently told of feeling a guiding presence during their arduous trek across the land. Could this press cutting have triggered Sir Alister into collecting such articles at the very inception of his personal research.

Afterwords

We touched on mediumship such as 'spirit-led art', also on dowsing, and the pendulum, as these, whilst not directly involving a second person, are examples of experiences that are definitely meant to be shared.

When asked for feedback. The group's consensus was 'Best not to think about it – accept it as magic, maybe, and leave it at that'. All very well, but we have inquisitive natures, and surely in the spirit of research into spiritual experience and related phenomena we should be prepared to delve deeper? If we see an apparition, could it be the spiritual body, or a visual thought, of some living person? So many questions remain.

Mary Cook

* John Franklin, *Exploration into Spirit: a Power Greater Than ... The History of the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre and Society, Origins, Development and Vision*. Religious Experience Research Centre; 2nd edition, September 2014



Request for participants in research project

My name is Anne Morgan, I am an MA student based at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David and I am conducting research for my dissertation. The title of my research project is: 'Conversion Experience: a Comparative Study of Gender Experience within Christianity'. I aim to identify whether differences exist within the conversion experience; identify how such differences are manifested; and find out why such differences exist, if they do.

I am interested in meeting with people who have had conversion experiences or a change in religious orientation in their lives, and are happy to talk about these.

I intend to meet participants either in person if they live within the Cardiff area, or via Skype or similar video link if they do not. The meeting will take up to one hour, and if agreed by the participant, I will record the sessions.

If you are interested in taking part, and for further information, please contact me by email: 1603982@student.uwtsd.ac.uk

Thank you

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor

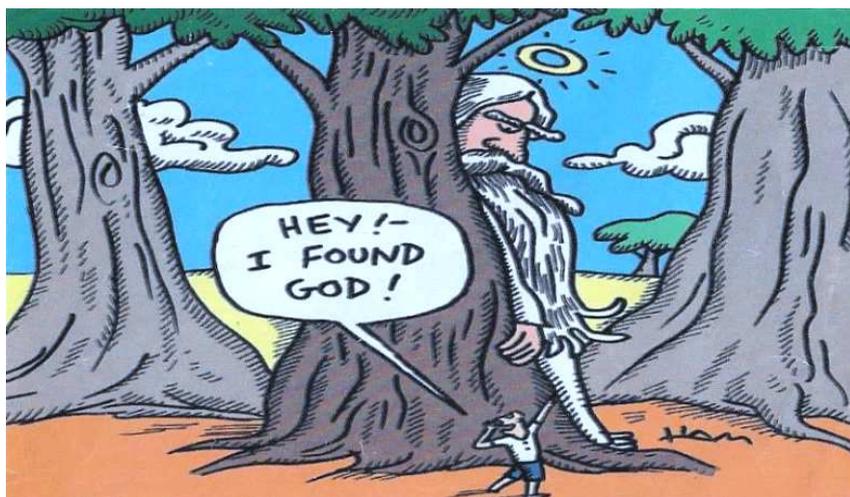
I was intrigued by John Burgess's article on Philip Pullman's work (*De Numine* no. 64, Spring 2018). I read the first trilogy, looking forward to the 'death of God'. When at last it happened, it was such a tiny incident in a faster story that I was several paragraphs further on before I realised I'd missed it, and went back to re-read it.

I took it, not as the death of God, but as his release from the church, who always want to keep him enclosed and predictable. He is released from his box, and becomes one with the universe with an expression of relief. As I saw it, he simply returned to where he always is, and always belongs – to the real world. I found this a liberating and revealing image. As I reread it yet again, I agreed with God's release, and committed myself never to imprison him again. It reminded me of the Sydney Carter song: the Bird of Heaven, which invited us to 'follow where the bird has gone ... keep on travelling on'.

One recent commentator, speaking about the death of the Physicist Stephen Hawking, said he had 'become at one with the universe'. Pullman's image of the release of God invites us to become one with the universe now.

Philip Tyers

Life on Earth, by Ham



Dear Mary,

I want to say how much I appreciate your article re animals and spirituality [*De Numine* 64, page 19]. I do agree that we too easily take for granted that we are spiritually 'evolving'. Perhaps we don't do such horrible things to those who disagree with us as they did in the Middle Ages – or perhaps we do, in more subtle form. Human weaknesses still creep into the religious domain, and probably always will.

As you say, anyone who has ever closely watched animals, or has a close link with them, will see the marks which we associate with spirituality in them, often more evident than what we find amongst ourselves.

Love and best wishes, Jonathan (Robinson)

Sent to Mary Cook, reproduced with permission,



Dogs in the Garden of Eden

There has been a recurring theme of animals in *De Numine*, and I would like to add some thoughts. The animals I've lived with have taught me more about spirituality than any human being has: cats have taught me patience – a cat won't come to you unless you don't particularly want it to. Ponies and horses have taught me faith, trust: they're a lot stronger than me, and yet I can control them if there's mutual trust, and if I have faith: 'I had to learn to forget my fear, to have faith in them, and in myself; in whatever makes things go right.' (*De Numine* Autumn 2008, p.13)



What dogs have shown me, about love, is more complex – and humbling:

Accepting what is is good; it's peaceful, uncomplicated, and sometimes the happiest and wisest way to be.

Some months ago we were 'adopted' by a young stray dog who came to our house and refused to leave. Although sweet-natured and affectionate, she was difficult to manage, as she had spent her formative months scavenging and generally fending for herself; with us she gradually became less wild. She was bitten by another local dog and provided with a 'lampshade' (cone-shaped collar to

stop her licking her wound. One day she slipped her collar and her 'lampshade', overpowering my attempts to prevent her running after a cat. 'Treats' obviously weren't going to bring her back, so I had to wait for her to join me of her own accord.

What surprised me was how easy it was to put her collar back on – she didn't seem to mind losing her freedom in the slightest. Even more surprising was the ease with which, back home, we slid the narrow end of the 'lampshade' over her ears and round her neck. It's not 'as if she knew' it was best that she didn't lick her wound – without the lampshade that is what she would naturally have done. And it's not that she 'knew' that that was what we wanted; she wasn't 'trying to please' – as it's often said that 'good' dogs do. It seems more just that she had accepted the fact that a collar and now a 'lampshade' lived around her neck, and that's the way it should be, because it was. It took her surprisingly little time to learn to eat and drink and navigate (the most difficult part) with the lampshade on, and so she accepted it.

For dogs there is no 'what if ...?'

We humans have the power – and the burden – of making judgments and choices based on those judgements. Adam and Eve ate fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and bad; they then had to leave their innocent blissful state and to make choices. We are now cursed with having to make decisions often based on 'what if ...'

Dogs are incredibly good at picking up on the tiniest signs and clues that are meaningful to them. (Incredibly, that is, to us with our inferior senses.) Sometimes it seems that this cannot be anything but telepathy, but I don't think it is – we find it difficult to believe that their **super-sensitivity** is just that – super-sensitivity. I cannot think in terms of animals having a spiritual side (as we are said to have). Their enhanced sensitivity, and their love, are simply the way they are. Quite natural – the way we were probably, before we 'developed' and 'progressed'. Sometimes we should be willing to go 'back' instead, to be more dog-like.



Being social pack animals dogs are organised by and thrive in **hierarchies**. Top Dog will boss the others – this can sometimes look quite vicious, but blood is very rarely drawn. Humans are also social animals, and also have hierarchies. Relatively recently these are often seen to be wrong – immoral – but very often it is not the hierarchy that is at fault, but the misuse of power. Dogs accept their hierarchies so there is no misuse of power. The dogs that live with us accept our higher status – otherwise the relationship doesn't work, though obviously we have to remember not to abuse our dominance.

Dogs are **completely selfish, and completely selfless**. The phrase 'unconditional love' has become an almost sentimental dog-cliché – as if it were a value-judgement. Their loving is just a natural way of being, as it was for us until we learned to distrust, as a baby loves its mother – and the whole world – until it learns not to. Dogs will put up

with punishment and bad treatment to an amazing extent because they have a need to belong to, and have the approval of, the pack. And they love because it feels good to be with other members of the pack. They don't have to think why they love, or whether they should love or not. Love is necessarily unconditional. It has to be, or it isn't real love.

Sarah Whitehead elaborates on this in her book on learning to live with dogs:

Dogs walk around with a full set of weapons in their mouths. The fact that they so rarely use them with intent to do real damage is a miracle. [...] Why do [some dogs occasionally] bite people? The answer is pretty simple: because humans annoy the hell out of them! From morning to night, people irritate dogs. [...] You think you don't annoy your dog? Did you eat something today that your dog didn't have? [...] there we sit, eating packets of crisps, biscuits and other delights, usually on the floor next to the dog's ear, in the car next to his head, or on the sofa close to his nose. [...] Every day, I cuddle my dogs when they probably don't want to be cuddled; usher them into the garden when they had been sleeping peacefully on the sofa only seconds before; move them from room to room, just by getting up and going myself, and then come back again to the first spot mere minutes later. I get ready to take them out for a walk, then make them wait while I talk on the phone. I stroke them when they don't want to be stroked. I tickle their feet. I pull them away from things they mustn't touch. I talk too loudly right next to their ears. All this, and that's without taking them to the vet, training them, or any of the other events that are probably all highly frustrating or purely nonsensical to dogs but perfectly rational to their human guardians.

So perhaps the question is not 'Why do dogs bite people?' but 'Why don't they?' This can be summed up in one word: sociability. A truly sociable dog will put up with all the annoyances of everyday life with a human family because ultimately he is bonded, attached and dependent on you. True sociability is a wonderful thing. It is the buffer against aggression, allowing dogs not just to cope with humans and their odd ways, but to love them too.

(Sarah Whitehead, *Clever Dog: the secrets your dog wants you to know*, 2012)

So, being human, we have a dilemma, all the time. Human/animal. Balance. Although we need and are accountable to our human judgement, we cannot ignore our inner dog – it will always be there and we have to acknowledge it. We can learn from it too: to live more in the present, to accept what is without wishing for something other, not to think too much – just to be. The analysis of a mystery destroys the magic and wonder of the mystery – and without those we are too human, and not enough animal. We can't go back to the Garden of Eden, but animals like dogs can help us to remember how good it was, in their innocent simplicity and uncomplicated joy.

Jean Matthews



God and Beauty

There is no God without beauty;
there is no beauty without God.
How can I feel again, O God,
the love I had for you in my childhood and youth?
Sometimes now, not seeing you,
I ask: 'Who is it I loved?'
'Love me in those you love,
and in all the creatures.
Find me in the beauty you feel in Nature.'
There is no God without beauty;
there is no beauty without God.
Jaqueline Ward

September

Is a month of leaves
Patterns of sunlight
Leaves weaving
One to another
'We are friends'
They say
And blow gently
Before they are blown away

PM



BOOK REVIEWS

Pauline Kollontai, Sue Yore and Sebastian Kim, (eds) *The Role of Religion in Peacebuilding* London and Philadelphia, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2018. 416 pp. ISBN 978-1-78592-336-4

Many people have prayed 'lead us from war to peace ... let peace fill our universe.' Sadly, even when the intention is there, the peace process is complex and multi-dimensional, as this very valuable book makes clear. The papers from the 5th International Conference on Peace and Reconciliation, arranged by the Centre for Religion in Society at York St John University, reflect on situations in many parts of the world and discuss relevant theological and philosophical reflection. With such wealth of material a review has to be selective.

Considerable attention is given to Forgiveness. Pan-Chui Lai, from the Chinese University of Hong Kong, is concerned that the Chinese Christian emphasis on reconciliation is at the expense of liberation. 'Christian theology should avoid justifying the oppressive status-quo with a one-sided message of reconciliation prematurely without liberation and justice properly accomplished.' He also compares Confucianism's teaching on self-power with Christianity's confidence in other-power. Moreover, for Confucianism, social order and harmony are the priorities, and the legitimacy of both forgiveness and retaliation depend on which is most likely to achieve such harmony and order.

Sangduck Kim, from Korea, is afraid of 'cheap forgiveness' and tells the story of Lee-Geun. He worked for the military government in the 1970s-1980s and was a specialist in torture. After a change of government, he was imprisoned from 1999-2006. One of his victims was Kim Geun-tae, who became a minister in Roh Moo-hyun's administration (2003-2008). Soon after he came out of prison, Lee Geun became a pastor and met with Kim Geun-tae to ask his forgiveness. Kim said afterwards, 'I couldn't help wondering, "Is he saying truly? Then why does he not cry?"' In the press, too, questions were asked about how God could forgive a man who had been so cruel?

Margaret P. Pfeil's contribution on 'Approaching Racialized Violence through the Lens of Restorative Justice,' deals with some of the same issues. She concentrates on 'structural and institutional racial injustice' and hopes that 'a nonviolent spirituality of resistance will ultimately lead toward a radical structural transformation at every level of society.'

Many of the same issues arise when Christians ask Jewish dialogue partners, 'Can you forgive the Holocaust?' To which the reply is often, 'We cannot speak for those who were murdered.' They will also say that forgiveness requires prior repentance, whereas Christians often talk about unconditional forgiveness. Part of the difficulty is that people often mean rather different things by forgiveness and it is helpful to recognise that there are several stages in the process of forgiving, which Joanna North identified in her chapter *Exploring Forgiveness*.¹ I am surprised that, as far as I can see, there is no discussion of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions and no mention of Desmond Tutu in the book, but I should not complain as there are extensive bibliographies to each chapter.

Another important issue is the place of religion in public life – to which former Archbishop Rowan Williams gave much attention.² This is discussed by Kjetil Fretheim, of the Norwegian School of Theology. He quotes E Harold Breitenberg's definition of public theology which, while convincing to adherents of its own religious tradition, seeks also to be comprehensible and possibly persuasive to those outside it. Issues relevant to the larger society are discussed, relying on arguments that are open to all.

Too often public theology is seen as apologetic and emphasises speaking, Fretheim says, and ignores listening. Others see it as pragmatic and focused on moral problems which are of concern to the general public. Elaine Graham has called for another possible model which is 'post-secular theology'. This has three key features: Christian apologetics concerned with the 'welfare of the city;' speaking truth to power and 'the secular vocation and formation of the laity.'

The most urgent question, of course, is what can we actually do to build peace? There are at least three specific suggestions. 'The first is the giving of gifts.' Cosimo Zene, of SOAS in London, suggests that giving of gifts can help heal the wounds of communal violence. She tells the story of a Sardinian shepherd, who on his safe return from the Crimean War, vowed to give 'bread and cheese' to the children of his village – a custom that still continues. He quotes Richard Kearney who says, 'Radical hospitality is not about a facile consensus ... but is an effort to retrieve a unique hospitality to the stranger at the very root of each belief.'

The second is 'welcoming the stranger.' Michael John Tilley, of York St John, reflecting on the 26 year civil war in Sri Lanka, contrasts the efforts of those, often forgotten, Hindu Tamils who sought to welcome and be welcomed by the Buddhist majority, compared to supporters of the armed struggle of the Tamil Tigers (LTTE). Even in this country, there are still many people who have never invited a member of another ethnic or faith group into their home.

The third is 'the sharing of our woundedness'. Kevin P Considine of Calumet College of St Joseph in Whiting, Indiana, highlights the way that African Americans have been narrating their woundedness and scars. Too often the perpetrators refuse to listen, but when they do it is a moment of resurrection. I witnessed this at a retreat arranged by the Brahma Kumaris, when towards the end, a Vietnamese woman, who had lived through the war, found herself sitting next to an American, who had served in that war. As each shared their wounds, they found healing.

If this timely book makes clear the complexity of peace-building, it also provides evidence that it is possible. And when you come to page 412, you are given the names of another five hundred authors, to whom reference has been made, that you may wish to consult.

Reviewed by Marcus Braybrooke

¹ Robert D Enright & Joanna North (eds), *Exploring Forgiveness*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1998 0 299 15774 1

² Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, Bloomsbury, 2012. ISBN 978-1-4081-8758-6

**Dr Bryan Maier; *Forgiveness and Justice, a Christian Approach*
Grand Rapids, Kregel Publications, 2017. 150 pps. ISBN 978 0 8254 4405 0**

We have all experienced making a mistake, and seeking forgiveness. We have suffered from others doing things to us, perhaps inflicting trauma on us, and we have had to come to terms with it, and in many cases forgive them. I wanted to review this book, because I work in criminal Justice, as a prison chaplain. I am part of the State's justice system of punishment. Occasionally, the State temporarily forgives someone; they receive a 'suspended sentence'. If they re-offend during the period of suspension, the full sentence is applied. If they do not, no punishment ensues. I teach prisoners that God forgives them and that they should forgive one another.

The author approaches the subject from a different angle. He is a counsellor, working primarily with victims. He is also a Christian preacher, publicly teaching from the Bible. He challenges the predominant theme in counselling literature, that the victim must forgive the offender in order to receive healing. He says that to simply forgive an offender violates the victim's 'moral compass'. He encourages them to recognise their instinct, which says 'wrong has been done and must be punished'. I agree with him, that forgiveness must start with an honest recognition of wrong and harm. The counsellor, the victim and the offender alike must not pretend nothing happened, or make excuses. The offence must be looked at clearly.

The next step, he says, is to affirm the victim's desire for retribution, even for vengeance. We should recognise this instinct. He recommends using those psalms which call on God to take revenge, and quotes other passages which say that God is angry and will, sooner or later, punish. It is God's job, not ours. There is no discussion of 'karma': the popular idea from Indian cultures that 'what goes around comes around'; that all bad actions will be punished, all good ones rewarded.

He defines and discusses forgiveness, asserting that it is the victim's right to withhold forgiveness until the perpetrator recognises that he or she did wrong, and also intends not to do it again. In addition, the offender might replace or restore what has been taken or damaged. In any case, forgiveness can only be offered once the victim feels safe. He recognises that in some cases, the only relationship between offender and victim is the offence itself. In others, the offender has damaged a relationship that might have run for many years, or the offence might have ended the relationship. In these cases, forgiveness might include restoring the relationship. This, he says, can be messy and time consuming.

Dr Maier mentions specifically Christian elements in forgiveness and justice. All forgiveness is based on God's forgiveness. Every sin (there is no discussion of any difference between sin, offence, and crime) is a rebellion against God's law. God is the one against whom all sins are committed, even though God can never truly be considered a victim. There are many verses in the Bible that say how angry God is at sin, and how he will avenge it on behalf of all victims. God can, and normally does, exact payment for sin, either before or after death. However, in Christ, God took the punishment due to the entire human population. Any sinner who repents is forgiven, and therefore any payment or penalty will not be exacted. Dr Maier has found that a victim who can entrust God with the task of vengeance, and is aware that he or she has herself been forgiven, can more easily accept that no resolution may be found, and then be able to forgive when due repentance is shown.

As a counsellor, Maier takes seriously the experience of the victim, and that of the offender. He is committed to the accuracy of the Biblical revelation of God's mind and is thorough in searching Scripture for his evidence. I particularly appreciate his insight into the importance of recognising that wrong has been done. However he pays scant attention to current secular research into forgiveness or criminal justice. When fully researched, the Bible shows many worthwhile and even surprising insights, but I do not think that it should be taken as the final word on any subject. Experience is definitely not the primary source of his material, and his evidence would be inadmissible in a court of law, but it offers intriguing angles which counsellors could find helpful.

Reviewed by Philip Tyers, Church of England prison chaplain.

Mike Castelli and Mark Chater (eds.), *We Need to Talk about Religious Education, Manifestos for the Future of RE*

London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2018. 264 pp. ISBN 978 1 78592 269 5. £24.99.

Professor Linda Woodhead, who wrote the forward to this book, has researched and published widely in the field. She gave the Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture in 2008 on *The Changing Shape of Religion in Britain*, and with former Education Secretary Charles Clarke wrote *A New Settlement: Religion in Schools* in 2015. In her foreword, Professor Woodhead stresses the need for change in Religious Education (RE) teaching in Britain today. She welcomes this book as offering a valuable contribution to an informed debate about the necessary changes in RE teaching.

The book is a collection of analyses of the present situation and offers recommendations for the future. It is clearly presented in two sections, each with its own introduction: Part 1: Context, and Part 2: Futures. In their introduction, the editors offer an overview of the current situation in RE and explain the need for a conversation, beyond schools and academia, in the face of the changing religious landscape in Britain. Hence the pluralistic title: they argue that society as a whole needs to be involved in the discussion. Attitudes to religion have changed dramatically since the predominantly Christian culture that produced the 1944 Education Act, which specifies the right of withdrawal from RE. Nowadays a majority in Britain self-describe as having no religion and many lack any understanding of Christianity or any other religion. In today's multi-faith context, this is untenable. Religious illiteracy is dangerous, and there is a need for discernment and analysis. Education in the world religions is essential and is now widely accepted practice, but the editors fear that a string of facts are learned, while the essential heart of what drives religious belief and action may be lost.

Sixteen authors, 'informed by theory and practice' give their assessment of the present situation and offer a variety of suggestions for the way forward. Each has written a chapter with an introduction summarising the argument and at the back of the book there are helpful 'Biographical Notes on Contributors'. This format leads to a range of widely differing views, which stimulate reflection and would offer a good basis for discussion. The contributions in the book range from Peter Schreiner's 'European Perspective', considering the economics orientation of education, to Neil McKain's 'Religious Education as a Safe Space for discussing Unsafe Ideas'. Each author has his or her own perspective on just how to tackle the problems associated with RE, while stressing the importance of the subject as helping students to engage with some of the most challenging issues of the day.

All contributors acknowledge the low point RE has reached in schools, often poorly taught or even omitted altogether, although that is against the law. All stress the necessity for young people to understand the various faith traditions as well as their need to be able to debate how such ideals are interpreted or misinterpreted in today's world. Only an understanding of history and what faith means can enable that understanding and that, according to the first writer, Clive Lawton, is not happening. He refers to embarrassing school assemblies, which reinforce the contradictions at the heart of the approach to RE, the confusion between confessional religion and learning about religion and belief. In his view the right of withdrawal should be removed and open debate encouraged.

Many AHT members are engaged in RE at various levels and in different contexts and I would heartily recommend this wide-ranging collection of scholarly and stimulating contributions to the debate on the future of the teaching of Religious Education.

Reviewed by Marianne Rankin

**Roger Haight, *Spiritual and Religious: Explorations for Seekers*.
Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 2016. 196 pps. Index. ISBN 978 1 62698 161 4**

I enjoyed reading this book, as I had a previous book of his, *Spirituality seeking Theology*; both books were written to tackle the supposed divide between Spirituality and Religion. His thesis is that in order to communicate with people today, the Church needs to go back to putting spirituality first, and to seeing religion as the expression of spirituality. When I wrote my Masters dissertation, I made the assumption that everyone had a religion, and that all they did and thought was an expression of this. Haight's assumption is the same, but for spirituality. 'Spirituality refers to how people live their lives in the face of transcendence' (p.49). In Alister Hardy's approach, we start by analysing religious experiences. Haight has little room for these, but emphasises the need deliberately to cultivate our spirituality, rather than simply pondering something that might have happened. I appreciate his emphasis on action, but think the neglect of experience in itself is a definite omission.

Haight makes a very helpful distinction between three constituents of spirituality; Conscious, Unconscious and Cultivated. He reminds us that spirituality is what we *act* on; to be truly spiritual we need deliberately to cultivate our spirituality – to decide on how we will develop it, and according to which principles. He chooses one aspect each from Calvin, Luther, Loyola and Eckhart, reinterpreting each for today to show how a person uses them to work for personal and societal liberation: a sense of being individually called, chosen, created and loved. Thus we seek union with truth which overflows in practical love for all.

He explores 'liberation, spirituality and eco-spirituality', analysing how we feel that something is wrong and we must put it right – that we have a sense that there is a way things really ought to be, which leads us to take action and collaborate in order to effect the change. He observes that such spirituality can be either secular or religious, before expounding what Christianity has to offer. To Haight, Christianity is following Jesus appropriately to our culture and time. He sees the energy of the universe as the expression of God as spirit. This is part of his analysis of the Christian Trinity, but he has a couple of chapters on other religions.

This is a generous contemporary expounding of the Christian faith into a largely secular, but multi-faith world, where more and more people have lost their religion but still claim to be spiritual. He suggests that as we explore and express our spirituality in action, the treasures of the Christian faith will become attractive and empowering once again.

Reviewed by Philip Tyers

Louis M Savary and Patricia H Berne, *Teilhard de Chardin – Seven Stages of Suffering: A Spiritual Path for Transformation*.

New York, Paulist Press, 2015. 128 pp. ISBN 978 0 8091494 0 7 (pbk)

Louis M Savary and Patricia H Berne, *Teilhard de Chardin on Love: Evolving Human Relationships*.

New York, Paulist Press, 2017. 256pp. ISBN 978 0 8091532 2 0 (pbk)

These two volumes, written by a theologian (Savary) and a psychologist (Berne), assemble concepts from the original Teilhard de Chardin texts, but they also incorporate many of their own suggestions, and other writings, in order to apply the ideas to everyday life. These books are designed for the US college text-book market and may either delight or infuriate the reader. What I had expected on seeing these titles was something more academic and giving more prominence to de Chardin's

writings. The lens through which de Chardin is viewed here is a form of contemporary American Catholicism, intertwined with aspects of US cultural life (including references to US films, TV shows, Bill and Melinda Gates, et al). I can understand why the authors used these examples, given their desire to appeal to American college students, but it may well limit the books' appeal among international and (dare I say) older readers.

The 13 chapters of *Teilhard de Chardin on Love* are split into Theory and Practice. The authors warn the reader that much of the text is 'in the spirit of Teilhard' rather than *by* him, including a good many thinkers who came after him. Some of the examples of married love described in Chapter 1 made my toes curl; not a good start when there are 12 more chapters to navigate through!

Teilhard de Chardin – palaeontologist, geologist, philosopher, theologian and Jesuit priest – asserted that love is 'the most universal, the most tremendous and the most mysterious of the cosmic forces', which may well sound almost main-stream to spiritual seekers in our time, especially New Age adherents. Yet even now his idea that love is the driver of human evolution still seems revolutionary. More could have been made of this important concept in *Teilhard de Chardin on Love*, and how he applied his scientific knowledge in his arguments, but the authors quickly move on to quote other writers such as St Paul.

De Chardin's ground-breaking work to integrate evolutionary theory with Christian teaching was so threatening to the status quo that the Vatican exiled him from Paris, where he had been a popular lecturer, to a geological museum in China. There he stayed for 20 years, apart from a few visits to France to present scientific papers. Continuing opposition from his Jesuit Order meant that his work was never published in his lifetime.

De Chardin's adult life certainly gave him plenty of opportunity to develop his insights into suffering. In *The Seven Stages of Suffering* the stages are organised into the three parts of de Chardin's model – Resistance, Transformation and Union – with the authors providing 'guiding principles', spiritual practices, questions and prayers for each stage. Some of the spiritual practices were new to me, such as *kything* (i.e. making a spiritual connection with someone who is not physically present). This structured approach to Teilhard's ideas (which are rarely quoted here) is ostensibly to help readers apply the concepts to their own situations; but one is again left with the feeling that de Chardin's philosophy is being used as a springboard to something else, rather than occupying the main space of the book. There are also very few references to de Chardin's writing in this volume.

Reservations aside, a strength of these two texts lies perhaps in their plain language approach to what might be difficult ideas to many readers. They have certainly motivated me to find and read the original texts, as I hope the students of Berne and Savary will be moved to do.

Reviewed by Rhonda Riachi

**Bullivant, Stephen et al (ed.), *Theology and Power: International Perspectives*
New York, Paulist Press, 2016. xiv 230pp. ISBN 978 0809149452 (pbk). £19.99**

This collection of 13 essays arose out of the joint symposium held in Manila in July 2013, involving the International Network of Societies for Catholic Theology, the Catholic Theological Society of the Philippines and the European Society for Catholic Theology. This book is therefore an examination of power written from the Catholic perspective.

It has three main sections: the first deals with the nature and context of power as depicted in biblical narratives and as understood within the practise of pastoral theology. The second section examines three case histories concerning bioethics, the cultural domain and the exercise of political power with specific reference to the Philippines. The final section of six chapters is devoted to the crisis of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church.

In this short review it will not be possible to deal with all the chapters, but I have picked out a few examples to give a flavour of the book as a whole. The first chapter concludes by recognising the 'helplessness of God' and the need for those exercising power to model it on this rather than engage in the arrogant attempt to dominate in their exercise of absolute authority. It is also essential that the exercise of authority is undertaken in the Church by 'listening, conversation and dialogue' (p.14). The second chapter examines power in the Bible, but the third, which I found particularly interesting, was an analysis of kenotic power. This suggests that those giving pastoral care should use that power kenotically, which means relinquishing all hierarchical notions of status (emptying oneself, like Jesus). The chapter describes the interplay of power between the pastor and the one receiving pastoral care. This will be of interest to many of us, whether or not we are ministers involved in pastoral care, social workers professionally involved with clients, or just trying to help our neighbour come to terms with a particular problem.

The fourth chapter will be of especial help to all those in a position of leadership – highlighting and examining three levels of leadership, ranging from the extremely ambitious (level 5) to the highly capable individual (level 1) (p.51). The characteristics of each are examined, providing much material for personal reflection. The first of these case study chapters deals primarily with medical ethics, ranging from a highly controversial definition of personhood which would rule out for example, the new-born baby and those with an IQ of below 20, to a discussion of the extent to which we should embrace biomedical means of moral enhancement. This leads to a consideration of the power balance between the practitioner and the patient and such topics as euthanasia and infanticide. To many readers this will be a most challenging chapter. The next two case studies relate particularly to the specific situation in the Philippines where at one time there was 'a hierarchical relationship between all things 'Spanish' (and therefore already 'Christian') and all things 'Tagalog' (yet to become 'Christianised') (p.88). The other major theme is the power struggle between the Marcos regime and the Catholic Church.

The final section of the book is concerned exclusively with an examination of sexual abuse within the Catholic Church, concluding with this statement from the *Report on the Crisis in the Catholic Church* 2004 (U.S. conference of Catholic Bishops): 'Ultimately the crisis besetting the Church is not a legal crisis, a media crisis, or a personal crisis, but a crisis of trust and faith; and it is only by the living out of their faith by bishops, priests and the laity that the Church will be able to regain trust and fulfil its mission.' (p. 226). I find this difficult to accept, wondering whether or not this passage should have read '... the crisis besetting the Church is not *only* a legal crisis ...'

Overall this is a fascinating collection of essays ranging from carefully argued theological disquisitions to the very controversial, almost outrageous, comments on bioethics.

Dr David Greenwood

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, or of a book that is not on this list, please contact the Editor, theotokos66@gmail.com who will arrange for a copy to be sent to you.

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 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.

- | | | |
|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| Ashley Cocksworth, | <i>Prayer: A Guide for the Perplexed</i> | (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018) |
| Stephen Hance | <i>Forgiveness in Practice</i> | (Jessica Kingsley, 2018) |
| Pia Matthews | <i>Ethical Questions in Healthcare Chaplaincy:
Learning to Make Informed Decisions</i> | (Jessica Kingsley, 2018) |
| Michel Odoul | <i>What Your Aches and Pains Are Telling You:
Cries of the Body, Messages from the Soul</i> | (Healing Arts Press (2002) 2018) |
| Ben Ryan (ed) | <i>Fortress Britain?: Ethical Approaches to Immigration
Policy for a Post-Brexit Britain</i> | (Jessica Kingsley, 2018) |
| Herbert W. Bateman &
Benjamin I. Simpson (eds) | <i>Understanding the Gospels: A Guide for Preaching and Teaching</i> | (Kregel Academic Publications 2017) |
| Aki Cederberg | <i>Journerys in the Kali Yuga: A Pilgrimage
from Esoteric India to Pagan Europe</i> | (Destiny Books, 2017) |
| Edward M. Curtis | <i>Interpreting the Wisdom Books: An Exegetical Handbook</i> | (Kregel Academic, 2017) |
| Thomas L. Leclerc | <i>Introduction to the Prophets: Their Stories,
Sayings, and Scrolls</i> | (2nd edition, Paulist Press 2017) |
| Andrew T. Le Peau | <i>Mark: Through Old Testament Eyes</i> | (Kregel Academic, 2017) |
| Bettina E. Schmidt | <i>Spirits and Trance in Brazil: An Anthropology of
Religious Experience</i> | (Bloomsbury, 2016) |
| David L. Mueller, | <i>Makers of the Modern Theological Mind: Karl Barth</i> | (Hendrickson, (1972) 2016) |
| Anselm K. Min (ed) | <i>The Task of Theology: Leading Theologians on the
Most Compelling Questions for Today,</i> | (Orbis, 2014) |

EVENTS 2018

Saturday 20th October 2018

Alister Hardy Trust Members' Day 2018

10.00am Registration

10.30am Welcome

10.45am 2018 Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture: *Meeting in the Cave of the Heart; the Importance of religious experience to theology and inter-spirituality* by the Reverend Dr Marcus Braybrooke

12.30pm Lunch: bring your own lunch, buy sandwiches nearby or enjoy local venues (tea/coffee provided)

1.30 pm Members' Update

2.30 pm Discussion Panel: *Current research into religious experiences and what this is telling us*; Revd Professor Leslie Francis; Revd Professor June Boyce-Tillman; Professor Bettina Schmidt

4.00 pm Close

Venue: Oxford Quaker Meeting House, 43 St Giles, Oxford OX1 3LW Tel: 01865 557373

Cost: £22; AHT members £18; students £5

Enquiries & bookings: Marianne Rankin: marianne.rankin@studyspiritualexperiences.org
Tel: +44 (0) 1684 772417

Thursday 22nd November 2018

12.00 noon: **The AHT AGM and combined Trustees Meeting**

Venue: St Martin's in the Bullring, Birmingham

Contact: Marianne Rankin: marianne.rankin@studyspiritualexperiences.org

50th Anniversary Members' Day

will be held in Oxford on **19th October 2019**.

As Dr Rupert Sheldrake gave the first Annual Memorial Lecture in 1987, he has been invited to give the 50th Anniversary Lecture and he has accepted.

For more information contact Marianne Rankin: marianne.rankin@studyspiritualexperiences.org

More details in the Spring issue next year

For **details of more AHT events, contact**

- local group leaders (details on inside front cover); or

- Marianne Rankin: marianne.rankin@studyspiritualexperiences.org

- AHT website: www.studyspiritualexperiences.org/events

Other Events

Scientific and Medical Network:

3-4 November 2018

Beyond the Brain 2018 – *Further Reaches of Consciousness Research*

Venue: CentreEd at ExCel, London

Speakers: Stan Grof MD, PhD, Professor of Psychology at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS)

Lynne McTaggart, journalist and author

Eben Alexander III, MD, neurosurgeon and author

Pim van Lommel MD, cardiologist and author

Les Lancaster PhD, Professor Emeritus of Transpersonal Psychology at Liverpool John Moores University

Charlie Morley, bestselling author and lucid dreaming teacher

Jessica Bockler PhD, Applied Theatre practitioner and Transpersonal Psychologist

Rosalind Pearmain PhD, Lecturer in Psychotherapy at the Minster Centre

Luigi Sciambarella, Outreach Trainer at the Monroe Institute

David Luke PhD, Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Greenwich

Karen Newell, co-founder of Sacred Acoustics

Information: <https://explore.scimednet.org/>

17th November 2018, 9:30 am - 6:15 pm

70th Birthday Celebration for HRH the Prince of Wales

The Quest for Harmony: A unifying principle in spirituality, science, sustainability and healthcare
Scientific and Medical Network with the Temenos Academy, the Resurgence Trust, the College of Medicine, the Health and Wellbeing Trust and the Sustainable Food Trust

Speakers: Prof Keith Critchlow (film), Dr Rosy Daniel, Richard Dunne, Patrick Holden CBE, Dr Tony Juniper CBE, Satish Kumar, David Lorimer, Ian Skelly, David Wilson LVO

Venue: Canterbury Cathedral Precinct, CT1 2EH

Information: <https://explore.scimednet.org/>

World Congress of Faiths

Tuesday 13th November, 6:30pm-8:30pm

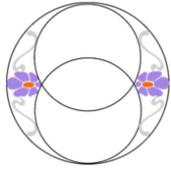
The Annual Younghusband lecture: *People in Pigeonholes: the Impact on Faith Relations*

Speaker: Dr Chetna Kang will explore how identities and belonging can bring people together or keep them apart.

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

This will be a FREE event but there will be a retiring collection to support the work of the World Congress of Faiths.

Information and Registration: www.wcf-yhl2018.eventbrite.co.uk



CANA Christians Awakening to New Awareness

Saturday November 3rd 2018, 10.30am–5.00pm

CANA Conference 2018: *We Are All One: Towards Universal Spirituality – Journeying with Christianity*

Leading-edge science now confirms what the mystics have said. The world and its diversity emanates from an underlying one intelligent consciousness. How does science show this? What does this mean for our spiritual beliefs and practices?

Speakers: Dr Jude Currivan: How Science is now Evidencing Oneness

Rev Don MacGregor: How Mystics have Testified the Reality of Oneness

Fr Diarmuid O' Murchu: How might we Together promote a Flourishing Life for All?

Marianne Rankin: The Spiritual Experience of Oneness is Universal

Venue: Essex Unitarian Church, Notting Hill Gate, London W8 4RT

Cost £40, concessions by arrangement

Information & Bookings: Jane Upchurch, 20 Manor Road, Ruislip HA4 7LB, 01895 639476,

janeupchurch@blueyonder.co.uk or book via our website www.cana.org.uk

Centering Prayer at Lampeter

A newly-forming group of meditators (and would-be meditators) is meeting at UWTSD Lampeter campus, with Krystyna Krajevska

The proposed format for the first few meetings is to start with 20 minutes of Centering Prayer, followed by 30 minutes for tea and coffee during which we can share our experiences of using this approach to prayer, and discuss any practical issues that arise. This will be followed by a final meditation session of another 20 minutes.

For more information contact **Jayne MacGregor** on 07491985180 or email:

jaynemaGregor@yahoo.co.uk.

Jayne MacGregor is also the contact for COMMON GROUND: Christian meditation groups in West Wales. Five groups are currently in existence in the West Wales Region. They are composed of small groups of people who practice meditation, centering prayer, silent prayer and contemplative prayer from within the Christian tradition. The individual groups meet for ongoing support to help people with their chosen path of meditation

www.commongroundpembs.org.uk

