

Interdisciplinary approaches to the study of Religious and Spiritual Experiences

Annual conference of the Religious Experience Research Centre

10 July 2021

Via Zoom

The seventh conference of the **Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre** at the **University of Wales Trinity Saint David** will take place on Saturday, July 10th 2021, as an online event (via Zoom). The topic will be “Interdisciplinary approaches to the study of Religious and Spiritual Experiences”.

The keynote speaker this year is **Prof Jane Shaw**, University of Oxford and Principal of the Harris Manchester College, where Sir Alister Hardy founded the research centre more than 50 years ago. Prof Shaw will give the annual **Alister Hardy Lampeter Lecture** with the title **Religious Experience and the early twentieth-century Revival of Mysticism**. Prof Shaw is Professor of the History of Religion and a Pro-Vice-Chancellor at Oxford. She is the author of several books, including *Miracles in Enlightenment England* (Yale 2006) and *Octavia, Daughter of God: the story of a female messiah and her followers* (Jonathan Cape 2011).

Other speakers are Dr Jack Hunter on “Listening to the Land: Other-than-Human Voices in the Anthropocene” and Prof Marta de Freitas on her research on “Religious Experiences and Mental Health: Psychological implications.”

The conference is free of charge and will be hosted by the Alister Hardy Trust on Zoom. If you are interested in attending, email Mike Rush (mikerush@virginmedia.com) who will circulate the link a day prior to the conference.

The Harmony Interfaith Colloquium will take place also as online event (8-9 July). Anyone interested in it please contact interfaith@uwtsd.ac.uk.

Programme

11.30 Welcome by Prof Bettina Schmidt, Director of the Religious Experience Research Centre and Marianne Rankin, Director of Communication of the Alister Hardy Trust

11.40-12.30 **The Alister Hardy Lampeter Lecture**

Prof Jane Shaw, University of Oxford

Religious Experience and the early twentieth-century Revival of Mysticism

12.30-1 p.m. Discussion

1-2 p.m. Break

2.-3.30 p.m. Panel on Interdisciplinary Perspectives

Dr Jack Hunter, Honorary Research Fellow, UWTSD

Listening to the Land: Other-than-Human Voices in the Anthropocene

Prof Marta de Freitas, Catholic University of Brasilia

Religious Experiences and Mental Health: Psychological implications

Discussion

3.30 p.m. End of conference

Abstracts

11.30-1 p.m. Panel 1: Alister Hardy Lampeter lecture by Prof Jane Shaw, Oxford

Title: Religious Experience and the early twentieth-century Revival of Mysticism

Abstract:

The early twentieth century saw a revival of interest in mysticism through print culture and the rise of retreats and prayer groups. How did that revival influence and frame the articulation and expression of religious experience? Drawing on major works about mysticism from the period and archival records of people's prayer lives and spiritual diaries noting their religious experiences, this lecture will explore the place of religious experience in early twentieth-century spirituality.

Bio:

Professor Jane Shaw is Principal of Harris Manchester College in the University of Oxford, where the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Unit began. She is also Professor of the History of Religion and a Pro-Vice-Chancellor at Oxford. She is the author of several books, including *Miracles in Enlightenment England* (Yale 2006) and *Octavia, Daughter of God: the story of a female messiah and her followers* (Jonathan Cape 2011).

2.-3.30 p.m. Panel 2: Interdisciplinary Studies in Religious and Spiritual Experience

Dr Jack Hunter, honorary research fellow of RERC

Listening to the Land: Other-than-Human Voices in the Anthropocene

Abstract:

At a time of ecological crisis – such as the period in which we are now living – there is an ever-growing need for the incorporation of ‘other-than-human’ voices into our research agendas and decision-making processes. With dramatic losses in biodiversity, and continued ecological degradation through human activities, there is an urgent need to explore novel approaches to re-connecting with the ecological systems that sustain us. The ecological

crisis is just as much a cultural and spiritual problem as it is an economic and scientific one, approaches emerging from the study of religious experience, and other forms of extraordinary experience, have a role to play. Anthropological research on spirit mediumship – as well as other modes of communication with other-than-human persons – may provide clues as to how the voices of the non-human world can be brought into respectful dialogue with the sciences and humanities. This paper will be an exploration of these themes in the hope of encouraging further research in this direction.

Bio

Jack Hunter, PhD., is an anthropologist exploring the borderlands of religion, ecology and the paranormal. He is an Honorary Research Fellow with the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre, and a tutor with The Sophia Centre for the Study of Cosmology in Culture, both at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. He is a Research Fellow with the Parapsychology Foundation and a Professional Member of the Parapsychological Association. He is the author of *Manifesting Spirits* (2020) and *Engaging the Anomalous* (2018), and editor of *Damned Facts* (2016) and *Greening the Paranormal* (2019).

Prof Marta Helena de Freitas, Catholic University of Brasilia

Religious Experiences and Mental Health: Psychological implications

Abstract:

The paper discusses the ambiguity around religious experiences and mental health. It will reflect on the difficulties to come to a conceptual consensus between individuals, societies and cultures. The paper starts with some clarifications about how we understand religious experiences from a phenomenological approach within psychology. It is followed by some reflections about the relations between religiosity and mental health, illustrating them with some Brazilian cases. It is concluded with a brief discussion about the implications of that for mental health professional practices.

Bio

Psychology, Master in Social Psychology and Personality, Ph.D. in Psychology, University of Brasilia. Professor at the Catholic University of Brasilia - UCB, since 1989. "Coordinator of

the Lab "Religion, Mental Health and Culture", Graduation Program in Psychology at University Catholic of Brasília (UCB). Visiting scholar at the RERC, UWTSD, Lampeter in 2019/2020.