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1822 - 2022



CYMDEITHAS DDYSGEDIG CYMRU
THE LEARNED SOCIETY OF WALES

Mystical Experiences: Past and Present

The 2022 Conference of the Religious Experience Research Centre
Supported by the Alister Hardy Trust and The Learned Society of Wales

9 July 2022, in the Cliff Tucker Theatre, Lampeter
(also streamed online)

Keynote: Prof Rowan Williams, Cambridge

The Soul and the Trinity in Julian of Norwich



Programme

-10 a.m.-

Welcome

Prof Bettina Schmidt, Director of the Religious Experience Research Centre

Prof Medwin Hughes, Vice Chancellor of the University of Wales Trinity Saint David

Prof John Harper, Vice Chair of the Alister Hardy Trust

-10.20 a.m.-

The Alister Hardy Lampeter Lecture

Prof Rowan Williams, University of Cambridge

The Soul and the Trinity in Julian of Norwich

-11.40 a.m.-

Prof Lisa Isherwood, University of Wales Trinity Saint David

Margery Kempe: God's wild housewife!

-12.30 – 2.00 p.m.- LUNCH BREAK

-2.00 – 4.30 p.m.-

Prof Ron Geaves, Cardiff University

The "Inmost Heart" of Islam

Prof Marta Helena de Freitas, Catholic University of Brasilia - UCB

Brazilian psychotherapists' narratives about mystical experiences in clinical contexts

Prof Bettina Schmidt, University of Wales Trinity Saint David

Rudolf Otto and a reflection on mystical experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic

Abstracts and short biographies

Prof Rowan Williams, University of Cambridge

The Soul and the Trinity in Julian of Norwich

Abstract:

Julian understands her revelations as enabling her to know herself and creation in relation to God; In this paper, I shall discuss how her very distinctive language about the Trinity allows her to reimagine the life of the soul in the context of desire as well as intellect.

Short bio:

Rowan Williams, Baron Williams of Oystermouth, PC, FBA, FRSL, FLSW, was the 104th Archbishop of Canterbury before he became the 35th Master of Magdalene College. Educated at Christ's College, Cambridge, he studied for his doctorate at Christ Church and Wadham College Oxford, working on the Russian Orthodox theologian Vladimir Lossky. His career began as a lecturer at Mirfield (1975-1977) before returning to Cambridge and later to Oxford as Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity before becoming Bishop of Monmouth, and, from 2000, Archbishop of Wales. In 2002, he became the 104th Archbishop of Canterbury.

Among his many honours are the Oxford higher degree of Doctor of Divinity in 1989, an honorary DCL degree in 2005; an honorary DD from Cambridge in 2006, and numerous honorary doctorates. In 1990 he was elected a Fellow of the British Academy, in 2003 Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and in 2010 Fellow of the Learned Society of Wales. In addition, he is a noted poet and translator of poetry, and, apart from Welsh, speaks or reads nine other languages. He learnt Russian in order to read the works of Dostoevsky in the original. This led to a book; he has also published studies of Arius, Teresa of Avila, and Sergii Bulgakov, together with writings on a wide range of theological, historical and political themes.

Prof Lisa Isherwood, University of Wales Trinity Saint David

Margery Kempe: God's wild housewife!

Abstract:

Conventional views place Margery as a hysterical woman who was attention seeking and probably paranoid. However, other views are emerging through feminist and queer voices which are reassessing her life and asking what she may offer us today. In Margery we see a woman who was immersed in the religious conventions of her day and by using these in her own flamboyant way she expanded her world and the sense of the divine.

Short bio:

Prof Lisa Isherwood is a Feminist liberation Theologian and as a liberation theologian she believes theology to be a communal project fuelled by notions of radical equality and empowered by divine companionship. Her work explores the nature of incarnation within a contemporary context and includes such areas as the body, gender, sexuality and eco-theology. She has written, co-authored or edited 26 books and is an Executive Editor of the international journal 'Feminist Theology' [Sage] and sits on the international editorial board of the Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion(USA). In 2010 she was Vice President of the European Society of Women in Theological Research.

Prof Ron Geaves, Centre for the Study of Islam in the UK, Cardiff University

The “Inmost Heart” of Islam

Abstract:

The paper will address why Sufism remains the heart of Islam. There will be a brief assessment of Sufism’s origins, followed by a focus on the essential teachings, illustrated by the poetry of prominent mystics. It will continue with an assessment of Sufism as a lived religion, remaining as the “inmost heart” of Islam in many Muslim countries, both at the periphery and in the Middle-East. The paper will end with a summary of why academia has been led to believe that Sufism is either in decline or separated from the mainstream of Islam.

Short bio:

Ron Geaves currently holds an honorary visiting Chair in the Centre for the Study of Islam in the UK based in the School of History, Archaeology and Religion at Cardiff University. He has previously held Chairs in Religion at the University of Chester and Liverpool Hope University. Since the 1980s he has been researching and writing on the religious organisation and sectarian divisions introduced by Muslim migrants into the western world, observing their transformations. His focus has been on lived Sufi traditions, Islamic religious education and the early history of Islamic mobilisation in Britain His works include *Sectarian Influences within Islam in Britain* (1994), *Sufis in Britain* (2000), *Islam and the West Post 9/11* (2004), *Aspects of Islam* (2005), *Islam Today* (2010), *Islam in Victorian Britain: The Life and Times of Abdullah Quilliam* (2010), *Sufis of Britain* (2014), *Islam and Britain: Muslim Mission in the Age of Empire* (2017). He has recently edited *The Poetry of Abdullah Quilliam* in conjunction with Yahya Birt (2021).

Prof Marta Helena de Freitas, Catholic University of Brasilia - UCB, Brazil

Brazilian psychotherapists' narratives about mystical experiences in clinical contexts

Abstract:

The paper explains how Brazilian psychotherapists deal with mystical experiences of their patients during clinical sessions. It is based on in depth interviews with psychotherapists about their perceptions and experiences with regard to the religiosity and spirituality of their patients. The focus is on the question how they deal with mystical experiences with regard to mental health. The paper will also discuss the tendency to pathologize the mystical experiences and analyse the criteria used by the psychotherapists to connect, to distinguish and to differentiate mystical, spiritual or religious experiences from psychopathological symptoms.

Short bio:

Marta Helena de Freitas is Professor at the Catholic University of Brasilia - UCB, since 1989. She is a psychologist with a Master in Social Psychology and Personality, Ph.D. in Psychology, University of Brasília. Post-Doctor in Psychology of Religion, University of Kent at Canterbury, UK, in Culture Psychology, University of Oporto, Portugal, and in Anthropology of Religion, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, UK. Among her research topics are: psychology of religion, thanatology, gerontology, the Rorschach psychodiagnostic, phenomenology, training in psychology and mental health. Member of International Association for the Psychology of Religion – IAPR, and also of the UNESCO MIL Alliance Brazilian Committee.

Prof Bettina Schmidt, University of Wales Trinity Saint David

Rudolf Otto and a reflection on mystical experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic

Abstract:

In *The Idea of the Holy*, Rudolf Otto argued that the feeling of the numinous was a worldwide phenomenon and not restricted to any religion, culture or time. Based on Otto's perception of the numinous, the paper reflects on experiences people had during the recent pandemic while struggling with Covid-19. Highlighting some of the common themes of the narratives, the paper shows how people interpreted Covid-19 as a spiritual contagion that infected the world.

Short bio:

Bettina E. Schmidt, DPhil (habil.), PhD, MA, Professor in Study of Religions and Anthropology of Religion at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, UK. Her main areas of research interests are Latin American and Caribbean religions, identity, and wellbeing. Her academic interests include religious experience, anthropology of religion, diaspora, and medical anthropology. Among her most important publications are *Spirit and Trance in Brazil: An Anthropology of Religious Experiences* (2016, Bloomsbury), *Caribbean Diaspora in the USA: Diversity of Caribbean Religions in New York City* (2008, Ashgate), *Handbook of Contemporary Brazilian Religions* (edited with Steven Engler, 2016, Brill) and *Spirituality and Wellbeing: Interdisciplinary approaches to the study of religious experience and health* (edited with Jeff Leonardi, 2020, Equinox).

