

**The Religious Experience Research  
Centre Conference 2019**

**The Future of the Study of Religious and  
Spiritual Experience**

**50th Anniversary of the Religious  
Experience Research Centre**



## Compiled Abstracts

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### Opening Session: Alister Hardy Lampeter Lecture 2019

**Chair: Prof Bettina Schmidt**

Prof Ann Taves: What Counts as Religious/Spiritual Experience? Contextualizing the Hardy data in light of a five culture study of nonordinary experiences

Professor Ann Taves

Ann Taves is Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies at the University of California at Santa Barbara. For almost thirty years, she has been studying unusual experiences that researchers variously characterize as religious, mystical, anomalous, and/or pathological. She is the author of numerous books and articles, including *Fits, Trances, and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton, 1999); *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things* (Princeton, 2009); and, most recently, *Revelatory Events: Three Case Studies of the Emergence of New Spiritual Paths* (Princeton, 2016). She is currently working with collaborators on validating and testing the Inventory of Non-Ordinary Experiences in order to further our understanding of what counts as religious experience across traditions and cultural contexts. She is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (2011), a past president of the American Academy of Religion (2010); and Deputy General Secretary of the IAHR (2015-2020).

Title: What Counts as Religious/Spiritual Experience? Contextualizing the Hardy data in light of a five culture study of nonordinary experiences.

Abstract

What Counts as Religious/Spiritual Experience? Contextualizing the Hardy data in light of a Sir Alister Hardy solicited first-hand accounts of people's religious experiences in the UK in the 1970s in order to understand spiritual feelings in a scientific age. His appeals, which focused on the experience of a power beyond the self, stressed that this could take the form of a continuing experience (a way of looking at the world) as well as dramatic, isolated experiences. Nonetheless, people overwhelmingly responded with accounts of sudden, dramatic experiences. Given that his appeals attempted to characterize what he meant by religious experience, we don't know to what extent the responses genuinely reflected his respondents' understanding of religious experience or were skewed by his prompt. If his results were valid for the UK, we still don't know to what extent they can be generalized beyond the British context. This talk will assess both issues by comparing Hardy's findings with data collected using the Inventory of Nonordinary Experiences (INOE) in five countries (the US, China, Thailand, Vanuatu, and Ghana). By querying experiences independently of

whether they are appraised as religious or spiritual, the INOE allows us to assess both Hardy's characterization of religious experience and the generalizability of his findings across cultures.

## **Panel 1: Research at the Religious Experience Research Centre**

**Chair: Peggy Morgan, Oxford University, former director of the RERC**

### 1. Wendy Dossett

Dr Wendy Dossett is Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies at the University of Chester. She is Principal Investigator of The Higher Power Project; a large qualitative project exploring spirituality among people in twelve-step recovery from addictions. Her most recent publications in this field are 'Twelve Step Mutual Aid: Spirituality, Vulnerability and Recovery' in S. Harvey, S. Steidinger, & J. Beckford (Eds.), *New Religious Movements and Counselling: Academic, Professional and Personal Perspectives*, Routledge, 2018; jointly with Cook, C.C.H., 'Addiction and Forgiveness', in Hance, S.(ed) *Forgiveness in Practice*. Jessica Kingsley, 2018; 'A daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition.' A commentary on Kelly, J. F; Is Alcoholics Anonymous religious, spiritual, neither? Findings from 25 years of mechanisms of behavior change research: How AA works. *Addiction*. 112. 6 (2017) and 'Addiction, Spirituality and the Twelve Steps' in *International Social Work*. May, Vol. 56, No.2. (2013)

Title- Wisdom's Garden and Higher Power in Addiction Recovery.

#### Abstract

Recovery from addiction in Alcoholics and Narcotics Anonymous commonly speaks of the intervention of 'a power greater than the self' or 'higher power'. Members describe transitioning from a tormented state which seems beyond all human help, to one in they are released from the prison of addiction, not only able to be abstinent, but comfortably so. They often describe this as an extraordinary, even miraculous, experience for which the language of personal religious and spiritual experience seems especially relevant and potent. The programme of recovery, the Twelve Steps, written in the 1930s in the US, refers to the role of God in the recovery journey, albeit that God may be understood however the practitioner prefers. Practitioners are exhorted to make use of prayer and meditation, and the Twelve Step programme offers the promise of 'a spiritual awakening.' Using John Wisdom's Parable of the Invisible Gardener as a point of departure, this paper will argue that the casting of addiction recovery as at heart a supernatural or extraordinary religious experience can be unhelpfully exclusive. Qualitative data collected in the Higher Power Project demonstrates that the range of ways people in recovery inside Twelve Step Anonymous Fellowships talk about their experiences varies and rarely conforms precisely to a normative supernatural metanarrative. The lexicon of religious experience is merely one amongst several alternative lexica, and there are pressing

pragmatic reasons to challenge the natural-supernatural binary in relation to this experience.

## 2. Marianne Rankin

Marianne Rankin is Director of Communications for the Alister Hardy Trust, which supports the work of the Religious Experience Research Centre at the University of Wales, Trinity Saint David. She is a linguist who lived in the Far East for about twenty years, working as a teacher, interpreter and translator and free-lance writer. On her return to UK, she gained a Master of Studies in the Study of Religion at the University of Oxford and is now studying for a PhD at Warwick University. She is the author of *An Introduction to Religious and Spiritual Experience*, has written on the Modern Hospice Movement and has illustrated a book on Zen.

Title- The 'Fruits' of Religious and Spiritual Experience

### Abstract

The focus of the paper will be on the 'fruits' or consequences of religious and spiritual experiences (RSEs) which is also the focus of my PhD. Fruits are defined as resulting inner transformations and changes in outward behaviour. The data for the study are derived from accounts of RSEs in the Religious Experience Research Centre. This database of approximately 6,500 accounts is held at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David and is also available online. A brief overview of the range of consequences as found through analysis of the Archive will be given. Study of the literature – religious and scholarly, plus several pilot studies, gave rise to the research question, 'Can the hypothesis that a turn from self-centredness to altruism is the dominant category underlying the variety of 'fruits' of experience, be supported through analysis of the RERC Archive?' Extensive and detailed analysis of the archive is being undertaken to explore this hypothesis. As many people these days would not describe themselves as religious, but as spiritual or secular, the category of Intense Experiences (IEs) as defined by Wesley J. Wildman in his *Religious and Spiritual Experiences* is evaluated as an alternative understanding, perhaps enabling RSEs to be accepted, as Sir Alister Hardy wished, as a natural part of human consciousness. If it can be shown that some of the most profound, life-changing experiences that people have, lead them to become more loving and compassionate and behave in an altruistic way, that would be of significance, particularly in today's secular, often selfish society. As instances of isolation, alienation and depression increase, there needs to be a change of focus from 'I' to 'we'.

## 3. Anne Morgan

Anne Morgan is completing a Master of Research in Religious Experience at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Lampeter campus. She completed an undergraduate degree in 2016 in Religious Studies and Philosophy also at Lampeter. Her area of interest lies in the study and research of gender differs in the religious experiences of women and men within the Christian tradition.

Title- Female conversion experience: a comparative study of gender experience within Christianity

#### Abstract

There is an ancient tradition of “conversion” within religion, especially with regard to Christianity. This is a specific aspect of religious experience that has been studied from many perspectives. From Saul’s classic transformative conversion on the road to Damascus to Augustine’s conversion from paganism to Christianity. Scholars such as William James and Edwin Starbuck instigated the concept that Christian conversion was worthy of academic study. Little contemporary work has been completed to identify whether the experiences of women differ from those of men within Christian conversion. The paper focuses on whether and if so, what differences exist within the Christian conversion experiences of women and men. The hypothesis was that as the gendered experiences of women and men differ within Christianity and religion generally, there would be a corresponding difference within their conversion experiences. Qualitative research was completed using face to face interviews with participants who were principally from churches with an evangelical and protestant theological ideology. In addition, research was conducted using the database of the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre. The research focused on the events that led up to the individual’s experience to include their background, the timescale of conversion, the effect it had on the individual’s life, did they have Christian friends and a Christian support system, did they have single or multiple religious experiences, how did they experience God, was their conversion experience slow or immediate? The findings were that equal numbers of men and women experience religious conversion. Evangelist interpretation within the UK focuses upon the precise interpretation of the New Testament when defining what is meant by “conversion”. The overwhelming finding, from an “insider’s” perspective, was that the conversion experience of women did not differ from that of men. The evidence implies that people who have existing connections with evangelical traditions use their cultural background to make sense of their religious experience.

## **Panel 2: Different Types of Religious Experience**

**Chair: Andy Burns, secretary of the Alister Hardy Trust**

### 4. Mara Steenhuisen- Siemonsma

Mara's research interests are the perception and interpretations of anomalous lights with particular emphasis on orbs. Mara holds a bachelor (of health) degree in pain management for which she researched the role of out-of-body-experiences during NDEs and lucid dreaming as aspects of consciousness in the relation to (chronic) pain and a Master's degree (2016) of the Sophia Centre for the Study of Cosmology in Culture, where during the research for her thesis the deeply felt emotions concerning orbs by orb enthusiasts made a lasting impact. This enduring fascination for the subject prompted her to embark on a PhD in 2017 at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David at Lampeter to access the perception on orbs broadly, but specifically focussing on the spiritual experiences of orb enthusiasts.

Title: Harbingers of Shadows or Messengers of Light? Spiritual Experiences with Orbs in The Perception of Orb Enthusiasts

#### Abstract

Orbs, considered from the perspective of orb enthusiasts, emerge as bright, usually circular anomalous lights in photographs, and are often associated with otherworldly creatures responsible for relating messages to humankind via orb enthusiasts mostly residing outdoors in nature. These messages entail the possible future relating to the current situation of the earth and all other living creatures inhabiting it. Preliminary research into the spiritual experiences with orbs indicates that these messages are usually regarded as beneficial to the whole of humankind and in which orbs are the 'messengers of light' from another realm or dimension. Messages point to concerns about the negative consequences of climate change, nuclear energy, ongoing wars and dictatorial regimes in the world. These messages take on an urgency as imminent disastrous occurrences with serious warnings insisting upon radical adaptations of humankind to minimise these negative consequences. How is it possible that circular spots in photographs evoke such connotations when generally dismissed as reflecting, out-of-focus specs of dust, pollen, insects or water droplets? The answer perhaps lies in the creative process of photographing orbs which could be best described as spiritual in nature, and even for some as resembling 'a personal religion' as William James described in his *Varieties* (1902, p.30). Could experiences of orb enthusiasts serve as an example of personally lived religion in the 21st Century such as James described? This paper will address these considerations against the backdrop of James' *Varieties* and explores themes emerging from preliminary, wider PhD research into the orbs phenomenon considered from the perspective of orb enthusiasts.

## 5. Melinda Powell

Melinda Powell, née Ziemer, MA, is co-founder and director of the Dream Research Institute (DRI), London, and has served as Vice President of the International Association for the Study of Dreams. A registered psychotherapist, she is on the Management Committee of the Centre for Counselling and Psychotherapy Education and is a former director of the charity Help Counselling Centre. Her experience as a lucid dreamer has led her to develop and teach “Lucid Surrender.” Melinda gives workshops and presentations on dreams and lucid dreaming in the UK and abroad.

Title: Presence in Spiritual Dreams

### Abstract

This study reviews 51 dreams from the Alister Hardy Religious Experience archive quantitatively and qualitatively, showing how the root metaphor of transpersonal “presence” is experienced in dreams described as “religious or spiritual”. This preliminary investigation suggests that an analysis of the root metaphor of presence across a collection of dreams experienced as spiritual or religious provides an understanding of 1) what makes such dreams meaningful for the dreamer and 2) how the dreamer may benefit therapeutically by bringing a reflective awareness of presence to the dream experience. Whether the sense of presence appears in an ordinary or extraordinary way, in a religious or non-religious context, such dreams provide a deeply felt spiritual value and generally prove to be a positive, life-changing experience. Therapeutic applications involving the withdrawal of projections and a receptivity to presence are provided.

## 6. Nicole Graham

Nicole Graham is a second-year Theology and Religious Studies PhD student at the University of Kent, Canterbury, UK.

Title- Laughter as Religious Experience

### Abstract

The pervasiveness of laughter in our lives often means there is an assumption of our innate understanding of it, as a result, its importance is often overlooked. However, this paper will argue that laughter can play a central role in religious experience. In general terms, laughter has – historically – been treated with suspicion by more ‘traditional’ religions of the West with the cultivation of a serious attitude and approach to life being deemed more appropriate (see for example Morreall 1989, Gilhus 1997, and Schweizer 2017). Since the Greek Church Fathers, laughter has been cautioned as placing too much focus on the self and this world, ultimately acting as a distraction from the Christian way of life. In the East, there has been a greater openness to considering laughter as means of religious experience (see for example Hyers 2004). Indeed, the charismatic leader and self-proclaimed spiritual guru/mystic, Osho Rajneesh, declared that “life is a cosmic joke” (Rajneesh 1998, 77) and he sought to place laughter (and humour) at the centre of his spiritual philosophy. I will argue that the above distinction rests on how the body and mind

are understood. Both the treatment of laughter with suspicion and the embracing of laughter have at their foundation the feature of losing the self; the mind becomes closed to this world and open to new possibilities. For the Church Fathers, the loss of control of the body and mind represented a lack of decorum. For Osho, this disruption of the body allows the reserved and constrained bodies to break free, to stop thinking rationally, to laugh, and experience an awakening. Thus, this paper will explore how laughter can be a contributing factor to religious experience and offer a deeper understanding of the incongruities of life.

### **Panel 3: Religious experience in different communities**

**Chair: Dr Thomas Jansen**

#### 7. Jennifer Uzzell

Jennifer Uzzell is a PhD student at Durham University working under the auspices of the Centre for Death and Life Studies and based in the Department of Theology and Religion. She is conducting research into death rites among contemporary Druids in the UK. She completed her MA in World Religions at the University of Wales, Trinity St David. In addition to her PhD research, which she is conducting on a part-time basis, she is also co-owner and director of a funeral home that forms part of a growing movement in the UK towards greater openness, honesty and authenticity in the way funerals are arranged and conducted. In this capacity she has helped to re-imagine and design funeral rituals that are relevant to those involved and has provided help and advice with 'home funerals'. She is also a senior examiner in Religious Studies with a Major awarding body and was a teacher of religious education for many years.

Title- Gods, Weights and Ancestors: The Varieties of Pagan Religious Experience at Ancient Sacred Sites

#### Abstract

This paper is based on research carried out among people self-identifying as Pagan. The research was carried out in 2017-2018 by means of an online survey which received 1,067 responses. One of the questions asked if respondents had had experiences that they considered to be extraordinary or supernatural that had taken place at or near ancient sacred sites. The majority responded in the affirmative, although a significant minority were reluctant to provide any further information. The results of the survey raised two interesting questions. The first concerned the ways in which white Pagans living in countries with a significant colonial past, and which still have an indigenous population, dealt with the issue of sacred sites that were not created by their own ancestors. The 'ownership' of such sites was, naturally, problematic for these Pagans as was the idea of being in relationship with the landscape and its gods or spirits. The other question concerned the types of religious experiences reported and the extent to which they can be mapped onto the terms that William James famously used in his book *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. This paper will briefly examine both of these questions and will suggest that James' criteria, need to be re-examined and possibly re-defined in order to account for experiences arising from those with a world view significantly different to his own. In particular, the term 'transcendence' as used by James, needs to be re-evaluated in the light of this research as an indicator of 'genuine' religious

experience.

The paper is condensed from a longer article which was published in issue 4 of the Journal for the Study of Religious Experience in 2018.

## 8. Daniel Sebola

Research Associate  
Researcher, Faculty of Theology  
Department of Biblical and Religious Studies  
University of Pretoria, South Africa

Title- "A narrow escape", results of a Divine intervention: Communal and personal religious experience in South Africa

### Abstract

The notion of religious experience has been a centre of debate in centuries ago. Researchers have found that 'religious experience' ranks amongst the basic terminology that theologians and lay believers have over the past two centuries and decades often used to refer to matters of faith. Many religious and mystical traditions see religious experiences (particularly that knowledge which comes with them) as revelations caused by divine agency rather than ordinary natural processes. They are considered real encounters with God or gods, or real contact with higher-order realities of which humans are not ordinarily aware. The researcher observes, identifies and analyses religious experience expressed by people of diverse culture and religious background in South Africa. The focus will be placed on the role of African Traditional Religion and Christianity respectively. Differences and similarities will be noted and evaluated in each context. Lack of information, misinformation, narrow-mindedness, superiority and inferiority complexes towards each extreme will be noted and corrected where necessary. The paper argues that "Religion" played a significant role in the transitional period (between the apartheid and democratic South Africa). The dawn of democracy was perceived by many people as divine intervention since there was no civil war. Equally of importance, the researcher explains his narrow escape in various deadlier situations as an act of divine interventions. Accounts by selective witnessed on the notion will be stated. With these and related information, the researcher argues that religious experience deserves special attention in one's faith.

Key Words: culture, democratic, escape, experience, period, religion, transitional

## 9. Julia Wright

Dr Wright has a career in international development research with a focus on agroecological farming and food systems. She is based at the Centre for Agroecology,

Coventry University, where she is developing a research programme on quantum and conscious agriculture.

Title- Agriculture and spirituality: can farming systems be sustainable if they ignore the hidden half of nature?

#### Abstract

In this paper, we set out to explore the relationship between spirituality and agriculture, and the implications of practising a spiritually-based agriculture. We commence by defining spirituality in the sense of its meaningfulness with agriculture. Does spiritual equate with non-material? This leads to a review of literature on the presence of spirituality in agriculture, from a historical and global perspective. This leads to the development of a conceptual framework for further exploring spirituality in agriculture. Current western farming systems with their focus on positivism-reductionism do not consider the non-material, yet there is one farming approach that bucks this trend: biodynamic farming. A survey questionnaire is applied to biodynamic farmers in the UK, to explore their belief systems and how this affects their farming practice and resulting farm performance. From this, the implications for improving the sustainability of farming systems is discussed.

## **Panel 4: Spiritual experience and health**

**Chair: Rev Dr Jeff Leonardi**

### 10. Emily Pierini

Dr Emily Pierini (PhD Social Anthropology, Bristol). Honorary Research Fellow at the Religious Experience Research Centre, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, and Adjunct Professor at the American University of Rome. She has conducted extensive and intensive ethnographic research in the Spiritualist Christian Order Vale do Amanhecer (Brazil and Europe), in Afro-Brazilian religions (Brazil) and on Goddess Spirituality (UK and Italy). Her work addresses spirit mediumship, health and spirituality, religious experience, religious learning, emotions and senses, body and selfhood.

Title: 'Beyond Belief: Therapeutic Trajectories and Mediumistic Experiences in the Vale do Amanhecer'

#### Abstract

Spiritual and therapeutic trajectories may overlap in the experiences of people seeking complementary or substitute assistance in different approaches to healing. In this paper I propose that a focus upon experience is crucial to understand non-biomedical approaches to healing moving beyond the analytical category of 'belief', especially when addressing spiritual practices that involve spirit mediumship or possession. As a matter of fact, the category of 'belief' is often used to create hierarchies of claims concerning questions of healing, resulting in misleading reductions of spiritual experiences to psychiatric categories. Whereas 'experience' may illuminate the fluid, relational, embodied and lived-through character of the notions involved in the therapeutic process. Ethnographic and, more recently, clinical approaches have both highlighted the importance of the role of experience in discerning between spiritual phenomena and mental disorders among mediums or shamans in different cultures. In my discussion, I examine the ethnographic case of the Brazilian Spiritualist Christian Order Vale do Amanhecer (Valley of the Dawn) with its approaches to healing involving 'disobsession'—namely the release of spirits affecting the person's wellbeing—and the development of mediumship. In particular, I approach the process of mediumistic development as learning a way of knowing. I consider specific cases of Brazilian patients who drew their trajectories across biomedical and spiritual contexts, developing mediumship as part of their therapeutic process. In discussing these cases, I argue that the process of learning mediumship was a key component of their therapeutic trajectories given the centrality of bodily experience and embodied knowledge for their recovery.

## 11. Nicole Holt

Biographical Information Nicole Holt MSc BA (Hons) is a PhD student at Canterbury Christ Church University UK. She has won several academic prizes, in particular, the David Steers Award and Dean of Canterbury's Prize for Christian Theology. Her most recent published works include: 'The Use of Therapy Dogs to Support Court Users' and 'Comfort, Christ and Man's Best Friend: The "New" Christian Role for Therapy Dogs.' Nicole's specific interests are: spirituality, health, wellbeing, animals, children and adults, particularly those with additional needs.

Title- 'Spiritual Experiences and Health: Perceived effects of spirituality on the health of the those who identify as Spiritual but Not Religious (SBNR) in the UK?'

### Abstract

The number of those who identify as Spiritual but Not Religious (SBNR) is on the rise. There is considerable research exploring the links between spirituality and health, but this often neglects those outside mainstream religious traditions. This research investigates how those who identify as SBNR perceive their spiritual experiences affect their health. This exploratory study took a pragmatic mixed-methods approach involving an online questionnaire (n=917) and follow-up interviews (n=24). All participants were healthy individuals from the UK. Participants' reported believing that their spiritual experiences had positive effects on their physical, mental and spiritual health but that the perceived impact on their emotional, social and societal health were more varied. Reported benefits included an increased engagement with physical activity, improved diets, better quality sleep and more peace of mind. Negative effects reported included increased stress, rumination and a decreased desire to engage with others. This leads to the development of a model of how individuals' self-reported experiences of spirituality affects their health. This model identifies key components of spirituality such as connection, self, beliefs, values, deeper awareness and experiences and how they potentially relate to different aspects of people's health. This research suggests that the impact of spiritual experiences on individuals' health can be significant and warrants further investigation both into their actual and perceived effects. It also demonstrates the benefits of a mixed-methods approach to provide a fuller perspective of the phenomena being studied.

## 12. Olivia Luijnenburg

PhD researcher at the School of Health Sciences and part of the International Care Ethics (ICE) Observatory, University of Surrey

Title: Exploring the spiritual needs of older people in residential care

#### Abstract-

Shifts in the economy, ageing of the population, and migration change the care demand in the United Kingdom. This is also reflected in residential care for older people, especially regarding the spiritual needs of its residents (Ballew et al. 2012). Due to issues such as a lack of education (Murdock 2005), the 'care-giver's burden' (Glueckauf et al. 2009) and an absence of acknowledgement for different spiritual needs (Calanzani et al. 2013), these changing demands more often than not stay unanswered.

'Spirituality' often relates to a search for 'meaning' or 'purpose' in life (MacKinlay 2010). This multi-sited ethnographic study aims to gain understanding of the ethical issues relating to spirituality that arise in residential care for older people. The focus lies on the spiritual needs of the care-recipient and the space and attention that are – or are not – given to these needs. 'Spiritualities' of residents were collected through interviews, observations and photographs in four care facilities with a different spiritual or religious background in the South-West of England. This study raises awareness of the importance of spiritual care. Findings of this study will potentially inform care home managements, care home staff, nursing students and policy makers on how to improve spiritual care for older people in residential care facilities.

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## **Panel 5: Shamanism and Mysticism**

**Chair: Dr Jessica Keady**

### 13. Tish Marrable

I am a senior lecturer in the Department of Social Work and Social Care at the University of Sussex. My teaching currently focuses on wellbeing practices related to spirituality, madness, and death. While much of my research has considered the experiences of people receiving social services, such as autistic people and children with 'additional needs', my most recent research looks at contemporary shamanic practice with bereavement, dying, and the dead. This also draws from my own experience of shamanic practice and working with the spirits of the dead.

Title- 'Becoming shamanic – how do people talk about their experiences of finding shamanism as a spiritual practice?'

#### Abstract

What we now call 'shamanism' in contemporary societies is drawn from what many consider the oldest spiritual and healing practices of humanity. In traditional societies which practice in this way, practitioners have localised titles, for example the Siberian Udigan, Korean Mudang, the Sami Noaide, Central American Curandera and the Inuit Andaqoq, and shamanism continues to be passed between generations. Disputes are lively over whether other spiritual and healing practices across the world should be considered 'shamanic', and whether shamanism has evolved or deteriorated as modern practitioners, mostly in the West, change traditional ways of doing things to fit with their view of the world. My interest has been on how contemporary people choose shamanism as their spiritual path, and the ways they develop within this. This paper draws from a pilot project which combined a qualitative online survey with a small number of interviews with established practitioners. The survey drew 184 responses from 22 countries, with the majority of replies from within the UK or the USA. While the work focused on contemporary shamanic practice with dying, bereavement, and the dead, the data gathered explored the ways people had found shamanism, the traditions they saw themselves allied with, and any healing practices they included in their shamanic work. Here I will discuss the findings, and their implications for understanding spiritual connection away from organised religion.

### 14. Paul Marshall

Paul Marshall is an independent researcher with interests in mysticism, religion, philosophy, science, and their interactions. He studied Natural Sciences at the

University of Cambridge and received his MA and PhD in Religious Studies from Lancaster University. His books include *Mystical Encounters with the Natural World: Experiences and Explanations* (2005) and *The Shape of the Soul: What Mystical Experience Tells Us about Ourselves and Reality* (2019). With Edward F. Kelly and Adam Crabtree, he co-edited *Beyond Physicalism: Toward Reconciliation of Science and Spirituality* (2015).

Title- Pursuing the 'wild facts': Metaphysical implications of mystical experience

Abstract

Perhaps more so than any other kind of experience, mystical experience invites us to question assumptions about the nature of reality and our relation to it. The experiences often bring an overwhelming sense of reality and seemingly bestow insights into self, consciousness, time, suffering, and ultimate meaning. But the metaphysical significance of mystical experience has not been a priority in the modern academic study of mysticism. Humanities scholars have focused on the more acceptable or amenable philosophical issues raised by the experiences, in the fields of epistemology, logic, language, and ethics, and to textual and historical matters. Social scientists have tended to "bracket" questions about reality, while neuroscientists have often ignored the reality claims of mystical experience in technology-driven efforts to identify biological mechanisms. With some exceptions, the metaphysical significance of mystical experience has not received the attention warranted by the powerful sense of reality it can bring. In this talk, I shall take a look at metaphysical efforts to explore mystical experience and other subversive phenomena that threaten to undermine the physicalist picture of reality, such as the psi phenomena and evidence for postmortem survival. Special attention will be paid to the work of Esalen Institute's Center for Theory and Research 'Survival Seminar' ('Sursem'), a long-running "alternative" research programme not bound by the expectations of mainstream academia yet supported by an interdisciplinary group of scholars. Having surveyed and assessed a broad range of 'wild facts' in *Irreducible Mind* (2007), in the tradition of William James and Frederic Myers, this programme went on to ask an unashamedly metaphysical question in *Beyond Physicalism* (2015): 'what kind of world do we live in if these phenomena are what they seem to be?'

#### 15. Zsuzsanna Szugyiczki

Zsuzsanna Szugyiczki - 2nd year PhD student at the Doctoral School of Philosophy at University of Szeged, Hungary. The topic of the doctoral research is the Philosophy of Mysticism and particularly the comparison of 'traditional' and 'modern' mysticism.

Title- Mysticism - Then and Now

Abstract

Richard H. Jones mentions the concept of the secularization of mystical experiences in the epilogue of *Philosophy of Mysticism* (2016). His argument is based on the distinction between mysticism of the past and present. He briefly describes the

differences: the prior is based on and supports mystical traditions, cultivates and emphasises the importance of an engaged, mystical lifestyle after the mystical experience. The latter – modern - version of mysticism is based on a watered-down version of the above-mentioned traditions; does not require much of a focused preparation; takes an interest in the mystical experience only and does not cultivate a devoted mystical lifestyle. According to Jones mystical experiences are cultivated mostly for their psychological and physiological purposes today.

In this presentation firstly, I am going to talk about the difference between “mysticism of the past” which intensifies religious traditions and modern-day mysticism. Secondly, I am going to reflect on the shift between these two forms of mysticism and the possible theoretical explanations of phenomena based on the theory of secularization and pluralism.

## **Second Keynote Lecture**

**Chair: Dr Thomas Jansen**

Keynote by Prof Jeremy Carrette

Professor Jeremy Carrette is Professor of Philosophy, Religion and Culture and Dean for Europe at the University of Kent. He has published numerous books and articles on the work of the French philosopher Michel Foucault, including *Michel Foucault and Religion* (Routledge, 2000), the edited collection of papers *Michel Foucault on Religion* (Manchester, 1999) and edited, with James Bernauer, *Michel Foucault and Theology* (Ashgate, 2004). He has also published extensively on William James, including editing, with Eugene Taylor, the centenary edition of *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Routledge, 2002), editing the Edinburgh centenary conference collection *William James and The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Routledge, 2005) and his recent study *William James's Hidden Religious Imagination: A Universe of Relations* (Routledge, 2013). In addition, he has published a socio-political study on the psychology of religion, *Religion and Critical Psychology: Religious Experience in the Knowledge Economy* (Routledge, 2007) and, with Richard King, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Take Over of Religion* (Routledge, 2005). His work also includes an edited work with Hugh Miall on the United Nations, following a five-year AHRC/ESRC 'Religion and Society' grant, *Religion, NGOs and the United Nations: Visible and Invisible Actors in Power* (Bloomsbury, 2017). His present research is a study of William James and love, following a British Academy grant to study James's diaries and notebooks at the William James Archive, at the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

In his role as Dean for Europe he is responsible for European strategic planning at the University of Kent – 'the UK's European university' - and for the management of the four University European Centres in Brussels, Paris, Rome and Athens. As part of his European work, he is Chair of the University Brexit Working Group and involved in setting up a regional university network across northern France and Belgium. A recent interview on his work as Dean for Europe can be seen in the Times Higher Education at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/people/interview-jeremy-carrette>

Title: *The Mystical Kiss: William James, Love and Attentive Consciousness*

### **Abstract**

This paper explores the nature of love and consciousness through the experience of loving God in the Western Christian tradition. What is it to love and experience love from God? While there has been much discussion of the issue of love and religious experience and continued fascination in the subject, there is little exploration of how this relates to human consciousness. In a new development of my thinking about William James and love, these questions are explored through the work of James and the Spanish pragmatist Ortega Y Gasset. Building on the work of James and Ortega, the paper argues that love is a specific form of conscious attention that parallels with the contemplative attention of Christian mystical writers, but which at the same time raises complex issues about love and its physical embodiment and presence, not least in the celebrated metaphor of the kiss. To resolve some of these issues, the paper explores different types of attention in

contemplative or mystical writers and examines the convoluted commentary tradition on the mystical kiss from the Songs of Songs. The kiss is explored in the Christian tradition from Origen in the 2nd century, through to Bernard of Clairvaux in the 12th century and Teresa of Avila in the 16th century and the relation to consciousness and attention unfolded in each of these articulations. The paper concludes by showing how the James-Ortega model of love enables us to understand the presence and absence of love and why attentive consciousness is such a profound part of the expression of religious experience and intimacy, as well as the foundation of human loving.

**Panel 6: Dialogic approaches to the ethnographic study and written narratives of spirit mediumship and esoteric or religious phenomena (panel organised by Fabian Graham)**

**Chair: Dr Fabian Graham**

16. Terence Palmer

Title- The Remote Spirit Release Database: Adding Value to Medicine.

Abstract

Addressing the subject of 'hierarchical imbalance' in anthropological and field discourse in academic literature, this paper attempts to avoid any ambiguous terminology by using the language of ordinary people who are suffering the impact of spirit possession in modern society. When experiencing so-called 'paranormal' or 'supernatural' phenomena, the seeker of help will normally call for either a paranormal investigator (ghost hunter) or a religious minister to 'exorcise' the offending spirit. For the anthropologist the latter may offer opportunities for discourse analysis when the exorcist engages the 'demon' in confrontational dialogue. Such dialogues may only be of special interest to a very small cohort of researchers with a specific interest in demonology. In contrast with this limiting approach, it must be acknowledged that ordinary people suffer the influence of a variety of forms of discarnate spirit on a much wider scope than is common knowledge. There is therefore an imperative to research these common phenomena, across all sections of society and ethnic groups, especially where they impact on mental health and criminal violence. The research protocol is a simple one that is structured to provide demographic data, qualitative analysis and, for the ethnographer, detailed qualitative discourse analysis. The protocol is in its early stages of development, but it is anticipated that it will provide the foundation for all systematic research into spirit possession and related phenomena in the future where the demand for more cost-effective methods of treating mental health becomes critical.

17. Dirk Scholttman

Title- The Future of the Study of Religious and Spiritual Experience: 50th Anniversary of the Religious Experience Research Centre.

Abstract

Visual-anthropological photography as a process of production and reproduction during an ethnological field research is a very subjective and individual act of description, usually reflecting the perspective of the researcher or photographer. This article examines a long-term field research on Korean shamanism, which ultimately led to several exhibitions on "spirit possession" in Korea and Germany. The mysterious, liminal character of shamanic rituals with episodes of spirit possession can often be better captured by a photo than by words. Especially the

photography of dramatic spiritual moments has metaphorical character and touches aspects of perception beyond rationality, transparency and verifiability. In this respect, a visual-anthropological approach to the subject of spirit possession is an aesthetic and individual challenge for the photographer. The analysis focuses on the mutual influence of shamans and visual anthropologists during the ritual, in the reproduction phase and then in the culture-specific reception of the photographs. Since the shamans were also present at a vernissage in Germany, it was possible to thematize the expectations of medial mediation (internet presence, newspaper articles, vernissage and visitor reactions at the exhibition) and document them in interviews and conversations. In a kind of Reverse Anthropology this allows a better understanding of the perspective on the photographic work from the shamans' point of view.

## 18. Fabian Graham

Title- Enlisting the dead to cure the living – Enlisting the living to cure the dead. A comparison between Chinese healing rituals in contemporary Singapore and Taiwan

### Abstract

Focussing on the contrasting cosmologies, ritual and material cultures that have come to dominance in Singapore and Taiwan, this paper compares two varieties of healing rituals. The first was performed by a spirit medium (tang-ki) in Singapore who prepares 'medicines' comprised of items collected at night from Singapore's largest ceremony to cure a devotee of leukaemia thereby 'enlisting the dead to cure the living'. The second focuses on a twelve-day lingji medicine festival held in Taiwan 'enlisting the living' to cure the souls of the dead to reduce conflict in the contemporary world. The research methodology was participatory in all rituals, and the paper includes discussions with the Hell deity possessing his tang-ki in Singapore, and with lingji mediums before and after healing rituals performed during the festival. As until perhaps forty years ago the two religious landscapes were essentially analogous, the purpose of the paper is to illustrate how two diametrically opposed cosmologies and attached ritual traditions have evolved and are enacted in Chinese vernacular tradition in the two locations.

## **Panel 7: Analysing religious and spiritual experience**

**Chair: Dr Wendy Dossett**

### 19. Adam Powell

Adam Powell is a Junior Research Fellow in the Department of Theology & Religion of Durham University and a member of the Wellcome Trust-funded project, Hearing the Voice. His research applies cognitive and social-scientific theories to the beliefs, practices, and spiritual experiences of minority religions. He is the author of *Hans Mol and the Sociology of Religion* (Routledge, 2017) as well as *Irenaeus, Joseph Smith, and God-Making Heresy* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2015). Peter Moseley is a cognitive neuroscientist working on the Hearing the Voice project at Durham University. He also holds a lectureship in Psychology at the University of Central Lancashire. His research focuses on the phenomenology, cognitive mechanisms and neural processes that underlie hallucinations in both clinical and non-clinical populations. As such, he uses a variety of techniques, including MRI, neurostimulation and behavioural testing paradigms in his research.

Title- The Conditions and Cognitions of Spiritualist Experience: A Mixed-Methods Phenomenology.

#### Abstract

Approximately 10% - 60% of the general population will experience post-bereavement hallucinations of deceased persons. These experiences are often strictly visual and many will occur only once. However, Spiritualism – and its adherents, commonly known as mediums or psychics – claims that many people are able to be visited by and to communicate with the dead. This is not relegated to the medium's own deceased loved ones and may occur repeatedly, sometimes at will. Whilst many historians and literary scholars have discussed Spiritualism as a product of nineteenth-century empiricism and democratised religiosity, or as an indelible symptom of western secularisation, few scholars have attempted to reckon with Spiritualism's contemporary practitioners/adherents in terms of their subjective experience of clairvoyance and clairaudience. In a landmark phenomenological study of clairaudience among British Spiritualists funded by the Wellcome Trust and contributing to Durham University's Hearing the Voice project, we have explored the socio-cultural influences, cognitive patterns, and sensory-spatial experiences of practicing mediums. Using qualitative interviews, cognitive measures, online questionnaires, and fMRI scans, our study seeks to reveal the bio-cultural elements related to clairaudience in addition to placing such experiences in conversation with psychosis research and debates around a psychosis continuum. This joint paper with cognitive psychologist Peter Moseley and religious studies researcher Adam Powell will serve to report initial findings from the study. Particular emphasis will be placed on findings related to socio-cultural influences and cognition among a group of nearly 30 members of the Spiritualist National Union. In addition to contributing to our understanding of one particular form of spiritual experiences, these findings represent both emerging approaches to the study of spiritual experience as well as

the growing acknowledgement that such complex phenomena require interdisciplinary mixed-methods collaborations to gain meaningful insights.

## 20. James Murphy

James Murphy is a doctoral candidate at Canterbury Christ Church University. His work investigates the relationship between religious/spiritual experiences and beliefs across a range of religious and non-religious traditions.

Title: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and the Study of Religious and Spiritual Experiences

### Abstract

Religious and spiritual experiences are a central element of the lived experiences of many but their diverse and subjective nature presents problems for their conceptualization and study. This paper will provide a brief introduction to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and a theoretical justification for its use in the study of religious and spiritual experiences. It will then briefly review four IPA studies of religious and spiritual experiences conducted by the author to evaluate both the strengths and limitations of the approach. IPA was originally developed in health psychology but has subsequently been used to explore human experiences in a broad range of contexts. It uses a rigorous, ideographic and analytical approach to explore both how individuals experience particular phenomena and how they create meaning from their experiences. IPA is flexible and inductive, allowing it to be used with a variety of epistemological and ontological assumptions, but is especially suited to working within a 'Meaning Systems' framework for the conceptualization of religiosity/spirituality. In the four studies reviewed, it will be shown how IPA captured and explored a rich diversity of experiences that the participants deem spiritual, untangling the complex interplay between them. However, IPA's idiographic and interpretative nature means care must be taken when extending findings beyond the participants studied. These studies suggest IPA is a fruitful and robust tool for the qualitative study of religious/spiritual experiences but that it is best used as one part of a multi-level interdisciplinary paradigm for the study of religion and spirituality.

## 21. Alison Robertson

Alison Robertson recently completed her PhD in Religious Studies at the Open University, conducting research into BDSM as lived religious practice. Prior to this she was a Religious Studies teacher and a Senior Examiner for GCSE and A Level Religious Studies. Ongoing research interests include lived and personal religion, edgework, self-inflicted and/or positive experiences of pain, and the boundaries people draw between categories such as religious and non-religious or 'extreme' religious practice and insanity.

Title- "You're shutting out everything except you and the other person": The Co-Construction of BDSM Experience

## Abstract

The potential of BDSM (Bondage, Domination, Sadism and Masochism) activity to create powerful, transformative or profound experiences is well known within BDSM communities. Academic discourse has also recognised that experiences of transcendence can be created by BDSM, but these have usually been presented within an essentialised framework that draws primarily on Christian mysticism to identify elements which are then presented as the core of all religious experience. This supports a common understanding of such experiences as wholly private and subjective internal states, separate from matters pertaining to the body of the experiencer or their inherent bodily relationality. It also creates an additional limitation to understanding BDSM experience, because it supports the assumption that such mystical-type experiences are only available to people taking the bottom/submissive role in a BDSM scene. By contrast, my research suggests that transcendence is only one of a range of possible peaks of experience. The qualities that have been used by scholars to identify (and categorise as 'spiritual') exceptional BDSM experiences are actually common in any successful play and are shared by all players. Such successful play involves the forging and expression of relationship, intimacy and connection between play partners as they co-create a shared as-if reality and become immersed, together, within it. A successful BDSM scene is therefore a complementary and relational experience. This paper will explore those processes of co-creation, examining BDSM as a deliberate process of creating profound experiences that explore the boundaries of fantasy and reality in ways which are necessarily co-constructed and shared.

## **Panel 8: Religious experience from a medical anthropological perspective**

**Chair: Dr Emily Pierini**

### 22. Simon Dein

Professor Simon Dein is a consultant psychiatrist in Essex UK specializing in psychosis. He holds a PhD in social anthropology from University College London. He is an honorary professor at Queen Mary College and Visiting Professor in Goldsmiths College Anthropology Department. He has written widely on religion and health among Hasidic Jews, Evangelical Christians and Sunni Muslims in the UK. He is founding editor of the journal *Mental Health, Religion and Culture*. He is Chair of the spirituality section of the World Association of Cultural Psychiatry. He is a member of the Royal College of Psychiatrists Spirituality and Psychiatry SIG Executive Committee

Title- The Efficacy of Religious Healing

#### Abstract

While the literature examining the links between religion and health has grown exponentially in the past decade, rather less attention has been given to the topic of religious healing, and more specifically whether it 'works' or not. To date anthropological work in this area has largely focused upon its symbolic aspects arguing that its efficacy is mediated by the manipulation of religious symbols and the experiential changes consequent upon this. After discussing what we mean by efficacy and the differences between healing and curing, I pose the question of biomedical effectiveness- can religious healing result in biomedical cure and what problems arise from the application of scientific and biomedical criteria to religious healing? I illustrate the talk by discussing three healing contexts: Intercessory prayer; Pentecostal healing and healing at the Catholic shrine of Lourdes.

### 23. Arjan Braam and Annemarie Noort

Arjan W. Braam (1969), psychiatrist, Utrecht, The Netherlands (department of Emergency Psychiatry and head of Residency Program, Altrecht, Mental Health Care); currently, he holds an endowed chair 'Religion/Life view and Mental Health' at the University of Humanistic Studies in Utrecht, Netherlands. Annemarie Noort is psychiatrist, with specialization in Old Age Psychiatry, PhD student on the subject 'Strict religious background and late life affective psychosis'.

Title- Religiousness as a possible correlate of religious delusions: a study among older patients with affective and non-affective psychosis

#### Abstract

Objective. Religious delusions (RDs) tend to occur relatively often in older patients with affective or non-affective psychosis. Little is known about the frequency and content of religious delusions (RDs) and religious hallucinations (RHs), or the relationship between RDs and RHs. The current study explores (1) the prevalence

and content of RDs and RHs, (2) the distribution of RDs and RHs across diagnosis, (3) how RDs relate to other types of delusions, (4) how RHs relate to RDs, and (5) the distribution of RDs and RHs (and other common types of delusions) across a range of aspects of religiousness.

**Methods.** Inpatients and outpatients in a Geriatric Psychiatry Department in The Netherlands (N=155, mean age 76,5 years) participated in semi structured diagnostic interviews, using the Schedules for Clinical Assessment in Neuropsychiatry 2.1.

**Results.** RDs (prevalence 32%) were most common among patients with psychotic depression (47%) and schizophrenia (32%), and clearly less common among patients with delusional disorder (3%). The prevalence of RHs (auditory, visual, and other) amounted to 10%. RHs always co-occurred with RDs. The RDs frequently co-occurred with other types of delusions, especially delusions of guilt, delusions of grandeur, and persecutory delusions. The presence of RDs was associated with a range of measures of religiousness, especially with religious background (strict Protestant religious denomination or Roman Catholic, more than non-affiliated or those with a moderate Protestant- or Evangelical religious denominations). Presence of RDs was also associated with church-attendance, salience of religion, dogmatic religious convictions, positive religious coping, and negative religious coping, frequency of prayer and a supportive image of God.

**Conclusions.** RDs and RHs do occur quite frequently in older adults with affective and non-affective psychosis. The RDs frequently co-occurred with other types of delusions. Also, in later life, RDs can be perceived of as independent marker of complex psychotic states, and as a denominator of severe arousal with respect to existential concerns, especially among those who endorse a religious background.

#### 24. Eva Ouwehand

Title- Explanatory models for religious and spiritual experiences in patients with bipolar disorder

Abstract-

Background: In clinical mental health practice and in theory on religious experiences, often a distinction is made between healthy and pathological religious experiences. Persons with bipolar disorder struggle to disentangle hyperreligiosity from genuine religious experiences.

Aim & methods: The current study explores religious experiences, interpretations thereof and treatment expectations in a mixed method design including 34 qualitative interviews and a questionnaire conducted in a specialist bipolar outpatient department (n=196), built on the results of the qualitative study.

Results: Two qualitative/quantitative diptychs showing 1a. various kinds of religious experiences and 1b. their prevalence and significant associations both with the

diagnosis of bipolar I disorder and religious variables, and 2a. explanatory models (EMs) of religious experiences/the lasting influence thereof and 2b. the prevalence of EMs and their significant associations with religious variables. Part of the experiences have a both pathological and religious character; another part has a transient character and no lasting influence on people's lives. Religious background and affiliation, mood swings, course of the illness and communication about the experiences all have influence on an ongoing interpretation process over years.

Discussion: Findings point to a view that religious experiences - related to illness experiences in bipolar disorder-, can both have pathological and religious features and may have positive transformative power in persons with this disorder. Half of the outpatients with such experiences wish to explore the positive and negative influence of this process with mental health professionals, but clinical practice is not yet equipped to do this adequately.

## **Panel 9: Religious experience and interfaith**

**Chair: Dr Angus Slater**

25. Johnson Elijah Amamnsunu

Johnson is currently in the final leg of his doctoral studies in Interfaith and Interreligious Dialogue at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David in the United Kingdom. He obtained a Masters degree in Christian Ministry and Leadership at the University of Roehampton in London and a Bachelor's degree in Religious Studies from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Ghana. He received the Commonwealth Shared Scholarship and the Harmony Doctoral Scholarship to study for his Masters and Doctoral degrees respectively. Johnson's current research project examines interfaith relations among African Christian and Muslim Migrants in the UK. He currently works closely with prominent Christians and Muslims groups in the UK to address issues related to community development, crime and violence, interfaith relations and unity and peaceful coexistence among migrant groups in the United Kingdom.

Title- Negotiating Experience, Meaning and Social Realities of Faith Communities: A Case Study of the Nasrul-lahi-li Fathi Society (NASFAT) in Nigeria

### **Abstract**

This paper examines the challenges of religious experience from the perspectives of the Nasrul-lahi-li Fathi Society (NASFAT) – a charismatic Islamic movement in Nigeria indexed by new and lax modalities of prayer, worship and proselytizing, including the organisational features, and repertoires of devotion that closely approximate forms and expressions associated with Pentecostal Christianity. It examines how the African social, economic and cultural context shaped NASFAT's lax interpretation and understanding of the central tenets of the Islamic faith, thereby challenging the settled scholarly assumptions that represent the religion as monolithic and rigidly uncompromising in its spirituality. NASFAT, currently the fastest growing Islamic movement in Nigeria was founded to provide what seems to be a necessary competitions and Islamic alternative to the growing popularity of the Pentecostal Christianity, especially among the youths who find the Pentecostal 'theology, dynamism and vibrancy' very attractive and akin to their spiritual needs – promise of hope, prosperity, healing and deliverance from evil forces. Thus, 'out of necessity', the African religious leader, ministers not only to the spiritual needs of the members, but also, to the relevant issues of their communities – poverty and hunger, corruption, economic inequality, opportunities and the growing spiritual hunger for the supernatural experiences, which seems to be woven into the African fabric. Given these realities, the paper examines how the spiritual experience-social realities tension can form the fulcrum for understanding the roles of religion in human society.

## 26. Julia Kuhlin

Julia Kuhlin is PhD student in World Christianity and Interreligious Studies at Uppsala University, Sweden. She received her master's degree in History of Religion from Lund University, Sweden. Julia's main field of interests are global Pentecostalism, Hindu-Christian relations, lived religion, and gender and religion. Her most recent publication "I Do Not Think I Could be a Christian on My Own" focus on how women in a Swedish Pentecostal church practice their religion in everyday life.

Title- Knowing God through experience: an ethnographic study of middle-class women in two Pentecostal churches in Gurugram, India

### Abstract

The Pentecostal movement has become one of the fastest growing religious movements in our time. One of the features that has attracted people to Pentecostalism and stimulated its growth is the strong emphasis on spiritual experience. Based on a six months long ethnographic fieldwork among women in two middle-class Pentecostal churches in India, my paper address how direct personal experiences of God play a critical role for the participants' understanding of God. In the interviews conducted with the women, it turns out that personal experiences of God played a prior role to perceptual knowledge (e.g. based on the Bible or sermons in the churches) for how the women described God. Furthermore, trials and struggles tended to form the basis for positive experiences of God, for it was God who had transformed these situations, who had turned feelings of despair, guilt, confusion into feelings of hope, peace, and clarity. Interestingly, there is a clear difference between the participants' experiences and understanding of God from what previous research on Pentecostalism in India has revealed. As previous research has mostly focused on the experiences of the poor and low-caste, the result from this study indicate that experiences of God might to a certain degree be class contingent. The paper is part of an on-going PhD project focusing on the lived religion of middle-class women in two Pentecostal churches in the city Gurugram.

## 27. Martin Lockley

A Martin G. Lockley PhD, (Birmingham, U.K., 1977), BA Spanish (CU Denver) is Emeritus Professor of Geology (palaeontology) at the University of Colorado Denver.

Research, teaching, general interests and activities. Palaeontology, evolution, morphodynamics, environmental, conservation and museum sciences, consciousness studies., e. g. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*. 17: 66-116. Member of and regular book reviewer for Scientific and Medical Network

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin\\_Lockley](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Lockley)

Publications: ~ 1000 papers books, book reviews, reports and abstracts on palaeontology, geology and evolution. Books include Tracking Dinosaurs (Cambridge, 1991), The Eternal Trail (Perseus, 1999), How Humanity came into Being: the evolution of Consciousness (Floris Books, 2010), The Island Artist (2015)

Title- The Kundalini Awakening phenomenon: a high energy species of Spiritually Transformative Experience.

#### Abstract

The Kundalini Awakening phenomenon is a very particular type of spiritually transformative experience (STE), that has until recently been little known and little understood in western culture. It is undoubtedly a form of experience akin what William James famously described among a “variety” of religious, spiritual, mystical or transcendental experiences: a ‘species’ perhaps in a ‘family’ of experiences. It is well known that such experiences have a strong ‘subjective’ component which experiencers often find difficult to put into words, thus challenging objective, non-experiencing investigators, who are equally at a loss for analytical terminology. Among the more objective and fruitful ways to ‘understand’ such STEs is to a) collect reports, and b) seek common themes, as done by the Religious Experiences Research Center (RERC) and other institutions. Results from such efforts indicate that subjects repeatedly report profound shifts in consciousness, a sense of communication with deeper and divine realities and subsequent long-term life changes with spiritual aspirations.

In this study, based on reports of Kundalini experiences reported to the RERC and elsewhere in the literature through the 2000s decade, common themes generally not reported in other TSEs involve very intense physical sensations associated with the spine and nervous system, and often described as, sudden, spontaneous and even “electric.” It appears that such experiences occur most frequently in mid-life (modal age ~30-35). Other Kundalini experience features such as a sense of ‘cosmic consciousness,’ being bathed in light, and life-changing shifts in intellectual and spiritual sensibilities appear common to other species of TSE, including NDEs and OBEs.

One of many unanswered questions is why the Kundalini experience, in comparison with many but not all TSEs, is often so ‘physically intense,’ in a minority of cases leading to detrimental physical and psychological after effects, beyond re-orienting to societal norms? As the Kundalini phenomenon becomes better known in the west, experiencers have learned how it is viewed by practitioners of yoga and meditation, especially those with deep roots in eastern (e.g., Vedantic and Tantric) traditions. These individuals have long recognized Kundalini energies (or prana) as powerful universal forces underlying the evolution of human consciousness. Authentic Kundalini reports that continue to flow into the literature and appear on the internet are adding substantially to the size and consistency of the database. They underscore the sense that Kundalini energy is universal and biologically and

psychologically understandable as a developmental or evolutionary phenomenon of spiritual (TSE) import. Whether visited on subjects gently or often with awesome power, spontaneously or through deliberate Kundalini raising practices, the phenomenon is becoming better known in the west as a distinctive species of TSE.

### **Third Keynote Lecture**

**Chair: Rev Dr Jeff Leonardi**

Keynote by Prof Leslie Francis

Leslie J. Francis PhD, ScD, DD, DLitt is Professor of Religions and Education at the University of Warwick and Canon Theologian at Liverpool Cathedral. His research is rooted in the fields of empirical theology and the psychology of religion.

Title: Exploring the fruit of religious experience within the Greer tradition: Effects on personal affect and on religious affect

#### **Abstract**

This study builds on a research tradition established by Greer in Northern Ireland in the 1980s and extends this tradition to the Republic of Ireland to explore the effect of having and acknowledging religious experience on religious affect and personal affect, after controlling for personal factors (sex and age), psychological factors (extraversion and neuroticism), and religious factors (church attendance). Data analysed separately for 3,523 students in Northern Ireland and for 3,848 students in the Republic of Ireland (aged between 16 and 19 years) found significant positive effects for religious experience on both attitude toward Christianity (religious affect) and happiness (personal affect). The research concludes from these findings that within the contexts of the Christian or post-Christian cultures of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland the fruit of having and acknowledging religious experience (as specifically captured by the Greer question) includes holding a more positive view of the Christian tradition and living happier lives.

Keywords: Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity, Oxford Happiness Inventory, religious experience, young people, Ireland