

Spirituality, Therapy and Wellbeing

One-day conference of the Religious Experience Research Centre and the
Research Cluster “Spirituality, Health and Wellbeing” of the Faculty of
Humanities and Performing Art

16th July 2017 (Old Hall, Lampeter)

10.00 Tea/coffee

10.30 Welcome by Prof Bettina Schmidt, Director of the Religious
Experience Research Centre

The Alister Hardy Lampeter Lecture

10.45 Dr Wendy Dossett, Chester University

***‘Spiritus contra spiritum’*: Spirituality and recovery from
alcohol use disorder**

11.30 Discussion

12.00 Prof Bettina Schmidt and Dr Jeff Leonardi, UWTSD

**Spirituality within a Therapeutic context: A comparative
study**

12.45 lunch break (lunch will be not provided)

2.00 Dr Lymarie Rodriguez, UWTSD

**To thine own self be true: Alcoholics Anonymous, Recovery
and Care of the Self**

2.45 Patricia R. Souza, PUC SP, Brazil

**Speaking to Gods: The Role of Food in Candomblé’s
Healing Rituals**

3.30 Dr Thomas Jansen, UWTSD

**Embodied Spirituality: Food and Fasting in Chinese
Buddhism**

4.15 End

The conference is open to the public. No charge.

Abstracts

The Alister Hardy Lampeter Lecture

Dr Wendy Dossett, Chester University

‘*Spiritus contra spiritum*’: Spirituality and recovery from alcohol use disorder.

Abstract

The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous suggest that the solution to alcohol addiction may be found in ‘a power greater than the self’. Carl Jung, who engaged in a correspondence with one of AA’s founders, Bill Wilson, asserted that medicine, even analytical psychology, could be of limited use to a sufferer. A spiritual awakening was necessary. The lecture explores the ways in which contemporary members of Alcoholics Anonymous talk about the role of a Higher Power in their recovery. It argues that the language of ‘horizontal’ as well as ‘vertical’ transcendence (Streib & Hood, 2016) provides a useful analytic frame for understanding the narratives and experiences of recovering people.

Biographical statement

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 amongst people in twelve-step style recovery from addictions. Amongst her most recent relevant publications is a volume co-edited with Hannah Bacon and Steve Knowles entitled *Alternative Salvations: Engaging the Sacred and the Secular* (Bloomsbury 2015) in which she has a chapter on this research, and a Special Issue of the journal *Religions*, on religion and addiction, which she co-edited with Professor Christopher C H Cook. Her 2013 article on the Higher Power Project in the journal *International Social Work* was selected by Psychology Progress as a ‘Key Research Article’, judged to be ‘of major importance in its field.’ Wendy is a former Associate Director of the Religious Experience Research Centre.

Rev Dr Jeff Leonardi, UWTSD and Prof Bettina Schmidt, UWTSD

Spirituality within a Therapeutic context: A comparative study

Abstract:

This research project is a collaborative project between Jeff Leonardi, Honorary Research Fellow at UWTSD, and Bettina Schmidt, the director of the Religious Experience Research Centre in Lampeter. Leonardi’s section (the Relational Spirituality Project) focuses on the part played by spirituality in counselling and psychotherapy. The inquiry operates at two levels: spirituality as a *dimension* of the therapeutic relationship, and spirituality as a part of the *content* of therapeutic discourse. So far Leonardi has conducted two group sessions with counselling trainees and four extended interviews with experienced counsellors. The other

section (the Place of Spirituality in Therapy) examines the situation in Brazil. Loosely based on Leonardi's questionnaire and in collaboration with Dr Everton Maraldi, from the Institute of Psychology at the University of São Paulo, an online survey was set up (in Portuguese) and then circulated to various mailing lists for psychologists and other professionals working in the sector in Brazil. So far we collected over 100 replies which will be analysed with the help of Maria Cristina M. de Barros, research student at the Institute of Psychiatry at University of São Paulo.

Biographical statements

Jeff Leonardi is a Person-centred Counsellor and an ordained priest of the Church of England. His doctoral studies explored the spirituality of the therapeutic encounter in relation to Christian spirituality and his continuing research, as an Honorary Research Fellow of the Religious Experience Research Centre at Lampeter, develops the theme of relational spirituality.

Bettina E. Schmidt is Professor in study of religions at the UWTSD and director of the Religious Experience Research Centre. She has published extensively on Caribbean and Latin American religions, identity, cultural theories and migration. Her academic interests include the anthropology of religion, diaspora identity, religious experience, urban studies, medical anthropology and gender issues. Her main fieldworks were conducted in Mexico, Puerto Rico, Ecuador, New York City, and, more recently, in São Paulo, Brazil, about spirit possession and trance.

Dr Lymarie Rodriguez, UWTSD

To thine own self be true: Alcoholics Anonymous, Recovery and Care of the Self

Abstract

In this paper, a discussion is built upon findings from a qualitative study that investigated how young men worked through the process of recovery from substance use disorder whilst participating in 12-step fellowships in the UK (e.g. Alcoholics Anonymous). Alcoholics Anonymous' spiritual discourse on recovery gives prominence to the development of a set of spiritual practices that trains participants in their capacities of self-care and self-regulation (i.e. writing, praying). Drawing on Foucault (2005), spiritual exercises were in antiquity a form of pedagogy, designed to teach people of a philosophical life that had both a moral and existential value. Spiritual practices were ways in which to enact self-transformation - an exercise of self upon the self by which one attempts to develop and transform, in order to attain a certain mode of being. The participants' narratives presented authenticity and care of the self as a salient aspect of their recovery. Care and authenticity had become, in Antonovsky's (1987) words, 'a generalized way of seeing the world'.

Biographical statement

Lymarie's academic background is in psychology with a research focus on mental health and wellbeing. She studied social sciences, research methods in psychology and public health at the University of Puerto Rico. She completed her PhD at

Birkbeck University of London with a research project focussing on young men's experience of recovery from substance abuse in 12-step fellowships. Presently most of her research activity addresses the study of emotional experience underpinning wellbeing (i.e. the experience of happiness), the role of spirituality in recovery from mental health distress, and nature-based interventions for wellbeing. She joined the School of Psychology at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David in September 2016.

Patricia R. Souza, PUC SP, Brazil

Speaking to Gods: The Role of Food in Candomblé's Healing Rituals

Abstract

In cases of severe and/or chronic diseases, it is common to Brazilian ethos that people look for their cure, relief of symptoms or at least a reasonable explanation for the causes among religious practices. In such context rises Candomblé, a Brazilian, though African based religion that is frequently sought when traditional medicine can do little or offer no treatment, answers or hope. Many of the Candomblé's seekers do not convert to the religion, but only go after a solution to their suffering. Candomblé, in this sense, can offer many treatments, ranging from a simple pray to a whole process of initiation in extreme cases. What is central to these treatments is that food is largely used, not as nutrition for the seeker, as one would think, but as offerings to the deities responsible for the seeker's cure. Therefore, in this case food's function is not to nurture, but to communicate. Candomblé is not possible without food, for it is its main language to speak to the gods.

Biographical Statement

Patricia R. Souza is currently a Religious Studies PhD student from Brazil at Pontific Catholic University of Sao Paulo. Her topic of research is food and religion, focusing on religion's influence over food choices. She has published the book, *A Religião vai à Mesa: uma degustação de religiões com suas práticas alimentares* (Religion on the table: a tasting of religions and their food practices) which compares several religions, Judaism, Christianity, Islamism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Candomblé, according to their food practices. She has a degree in Gastronomy, post-graduation (*sensu lato*) in Food History and MA in Religious Study.

Dr Thomas Jansen, UWTSD

Embodied Spirituality: Food and Fasting in Chinese Buddhism

Abstract

Religion and food exist in a symbiotic relationship. What we eat and how we prepare food has an immediate effect on the physiology of our bodies and, thus, how we experience the world around us. The consumption of certain foodstuffs, or, conversely, the refusal to consume food, enables us to induce altered states of consciousness—think of the effects of chocolate—as a result of physiological

transformations within the body. Food symbolizes the materiality of our earthly existence but also the potential, in analogy to the cooking process, to transform our bodies and minds into something more spiritual and ethereal. The aim of this chapter is to offer a re-reading of the *Legend of Miaoshan*, a well-known example of vegetarianism and self-inflicted bodily violence in China. I will argue that Miaoshan's act of offering her flesh to save her ailing father does not necessarily signify filial piety and conformity to the values of patriarchal society, as previous interpreters of the legend have claimed, but that it stands as a powerful example of female self-divinization and celebration of the sanctified body of a goddess.

Biographical statement

Thomas Jansen is Associate Professor in Chinese Studies at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Lampeter. He has published *Höfische Öffentlichkeit im frühmittelalterlichen China. Debatten im Salon des Prinzen Xiao Ziliang* (Freiburg: Rombach, 2000) and several articles on early medieval China. He co-edited *Globalization and the Making of Religious Modernity in China Transnational Religions, Local Agents, and the Study of Religion, 1800-Present* (Leiden: Brill, 2014). His current project is entitled *Religious Text Production in Late Imperial China: Social, Religious, and Performative Aspects of Chinese Sectarian Scriptures from the 16th to 19th centuries* and will explore the manifold interactions between religious texts and their users.