

Editorial

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After the publication of three issues in 2021 (two special issues—one on ‘Ecology and Religious Experience’ and the other a ‘Festschrift for Peggy Morgan’—in addition to our normal issue), the *Journal for the Study of Religious Experience* took a little break. The pandemic kept us all very busy, and it took a while to recover, but finally the 2022 issue is ready, and it demonstrates that research on religious experience continues to flourish and diversify, despite the interruptions.

This issue comes out shortly after the return of our annual conference to the campus, which represented another step back toward normality. 2022 was a very special year in Lampeter as we celebrated the 200th anniversary of Higher Education in Wales. In August 1822 the foundation stone of the first university in Wales was laid in Lampeter, now the home of the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre. Our conference was therefore part of the bicentenary celebrations of the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. In a significant development, due to the success of the online conference in 2021



Right to Left: Prof. Lisa Isherwood, Vice-Chair of the Alister Hardy Trust, Prof. John Harper, Vice Chancellor of the University, Prof. Medwin Hughes, Prof. Rowan Williams, Prof. Bettina Schmidt and Prof. Marta de Freitas.

—which enabled greater access and inclusion for many interested in our field of research —the 2022 conference was held in a hybrid format. We had a large number of people tuning in online in addition to the in-person crowd on campus, reflecting the attraction of our keynote speaker—Rowan Williams, the former archbishop of Wales and Canterbury—who spoke about the medieval mystic Julian of Norwich. The conference theme was ‘Mystical Experiences: Past and Present.’ In addition to a reflection on medieval mystics, such as Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, our second speaker, Prof. Lisa Isherwood, considered the ways that people who report mystical experience are treated in a clinical context today. We also discussed the complexities surrounding mystical experience during the COVID-19 pandemic, which indicated the relevance of the theme of the conference for our contemporary world.

While none of the speakers from the conference are featured in this particular issue (though hopefully they will appear in future editions), the topic of mysticism is nevertheless a central theme here, with contributions from Aaron Murly and Stefan Sencerz each offering different (though complimentary) reflections on the experience of nothingness and oneness, with an emphasis on the insights afforded by the Zen tradition. Anne Morgan’s contribution—the third paper in this issue—then shifts focus to consider evidence for gender differences in the experience of Christian conversion, drawing on first-hand qualitative research interviews with Evangelical Christians and accounts from the Archives of the Religious Experience Research Centre. The final paper by Andrew Dean examines new dimensions of the eschatological imagination in the context of the ‘Rainbow Bridge’—a new conceptualisation of the afterlife for pets and other non-human family members. Dean explores how the imagination is used by bereaved pet owners as a spiritual tool to gain access to non-physical realms, providing a revealing insight into the ways that changing beliefs and expectations impact extraordinary experiences.

The 2022 issue of our journal contains articles that represent the vast field of our area of research, from Jungian philosophy to anthropology, from conversion experiences to bereavement, from Buddhism to Christianity, and from experiencing ideas of nothingness and oneness to ideas about pets in the afterlife. As previous issues of the Journal have already shown, religious experience is no longer studied only within Christian contexts. The study of religious experience is now a much wider field of study, encompassing perspectives on other-than-human entities. The issue also shows the vitality of the research field, as several of the authors have recently completed their postgraduate studies within philosophy, religious studies and anthropology. The study of religious experience is indeed diverse and multi-disciplinary, a rich field that produces fascinating research projects and insights into human experiences.

We sincerely hope that you enjoy the issue!