



# Journal for the Study of Religious Experience



## Introduction

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The Religious Experience Research Centre celebrates this year its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In 1969 Sir Alister Hardy invited scholars to Oxford to discuss whether a scientific approach to the study of religious and spiritual experience was possible. Following this symposium, he founded the Religious Experience Research Unit at Manchester College that then later changed its name to Religious Experience Research Centre before it moved to Lampeter. It is now part of the Faculty of Humanities and Performing Arts at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. At the core of the centre is still the collection of personal accounts of spiritual and religious experience that Alister Hardy started five decades ago but we have expanded. The collection includes accounts from India, the USA, Ireland and other countries and has expanded also its research focus. In addition to accounts that address the Alister Hardy question (“Have you ever been aware of or influenced by a presence or power, whether you call it God or not, which is different from your everyday self”), we have accounts about Near Death experience, Afterlife experience, experiences with Angels and others related phenomena. We are also very proud that it is now possible to research the collection online which has opened the data to many more researchers worldwide. At the core of the centre is still the engagement with the academic study of spiritual and religious experience, launched 50 years ago by Alister Hardy.

This fifth issue of our Journal for the Study of Religious Experience reflects the history of the study of religious experience as well as new directions. The first article is based on the Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture 2018 by Rev Dr Marcus Braybrooke. In his paper “Meeting in the Cave of the Heart, The importance of religious experience to theology and interspirituality” Braybrooke reflects on his a memory of Alister Hardy and how he inspired him in his own work. It is a very personal approach to the study of religious experience, which also celebrates the work of Alister Hardy.

The second article by Martin Lockley presents a perfect example how scholars worldwide have used the database. Lockley’s article “Kundalini Awakening, Kundalini Awareness” examines very carefully a specific type of religious and spiritual experience that is associated with spontaneous, enlightening shifts in consciousness. Lockley examined 27 accounts in the RERC archive and discusses them in the wider context of Western and Asian experiences.

The third article moves the study of religious and spiritual experience into very different field, medical anthropology. Simon Dein's article on "God cured my cancer: Assessing the Efficacy of Religious Healing" looks at the links between religion and health which is also the current research focus of the Religious Experience Research Centre. His paper questions biomedical effectiveness and discusses the problems arising from the application of scientific and biomedical categories – a topic close to the heart of Alister Hardy and the current director of the RERC.

The last article approaches the study of religious and spiritual experience from a very different approach. Esyllt George's paper "An Exploration of Spiritual Embodied Practice: Art, Death, Land" explores visual, performative and aesthetic responses to death, grief and loss in the wider context of spiritual experience. The author points us to a new direction and reflects on the continuing significance of the study of religious and spiritual experience.