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Researching Contemporary Cosmologies

HPCA7016 – Assignment 2

What are the attitudes and beliefs of church members, local residents, and visitors, to manifestations of the miraculous at the well of St Issui in Partrishow, South Wales?

By Richard Stunt

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Introduction

The well of St Issui at Patricio just outside Abergavenny has a long association with miraculous healings. After his murder in the 6th century, St Issui was buried by locals who raised a shrine over his grave. The site became known for healings, with a stone church eventually built and paid for by a grateful pilgrim who had been healed of leprosy there. It's reputation as a spiritual place has endured with visitors continuing to seek peace, healing, and spiritual encounters there.

But what is a healing? What causes them and how do they come about? Healing events can be described as sacred events, but quite what they are and what causes them remains debated.

Emile Durheim¹ concluded that sacred events originate in collective human experience and result from collective human agency. By contrast Mircea Eliade² identified something he calls 'hierophany', that originates outside of human experience, that is not rooted in human agency, and which breaks into our normal, every-day lives.

At Patricio the focus of the reported healing events has been around what is known as St Issui's Well. The most well documented of these events was the healing that Kathy Priddis experienced in 2008³, however others were visiting the site long before 2008, and have continued to do so since.

This study seeks to explore both Durkheim's, Eliade's and others' theories and the lived experiences of Kathy Priddis and others who have visited St Issui's, to explore how these apparently mutually exclusive theories might be brought more closely together.

¹ Durkheim, E. (1915). *The elementary forms of the religious life, a study in religious sociology* (5th ed.). (J. W. Swain, Trans.) London: G. Allen & Unwin.

² Eliade, M. (1959 (1957)). *The Sacred and the Profane*. (W. R. Trask, Trans.) New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc.

³ Winnan, J., Thomas, C. M. (Producers), & Thomas, C. M. (Director). (2009). *Secret Wales* [Motion Picture]. BBC TWO Wales.

Literature Review

Healing events can be described as sacred events, but what causes them and why they happen remains resolutely mysterious. Contributions to the academy do little to resolve the mystery, rather they paint a stark contrast between Emile Durkheim's work which insists that sacred events result from some sort of human agency⁴, whilst Mircea Eliade's work insists that the sacred derives from our encounters with something outside of ourselves, something that is 'wholly different'⁵.

Between these two extremes various others have also examined the nature of the sacred. Lucien Levy-Bruhl is one such who, when writing in 1910, suggested that human experience can be split into 'prelogical' and 'logical' mindsets⁶, and that those who inhabit the 'prelogical' ('primitive' or 'unscientific'⁷) mindset experience it as

a mystical participation between a man and the land on which he dwells, between a tribe and it's chief, between a man and his totem, between a man and his kin, and so on.⁸

In discussing these attitudinal differences Levy-Bruhl concludes that 'mystery' is not just the preserve of 'primitive' societies, but that modern societies still contain mystery and ritual too⁹. Each member of a society, as they participate in the rituals of their culture, participate in the mysteries that bind the society and culture together.

For each of these three writers it is participation that is important. For Eliade it is heirophanies, mysterious human encounters with the nonhuman-numinous, that are the origins of corporate acts of human participation¹⁰. Durkheim, on the other hand, says that it is the act of human gathering and participation that elicits the 'sacred'. The sacred is 'experienced as external to each individual [and] is created by the fact of assembling and temporarily living a collective life that transports individuals beyond themselves.'¹¹ Levy-Bruhl, however, stays silent on the roots of the sacred, but is clear that 'mystery' happens when people assemble for ritual.¹² What is clear is that somehow, for all three authors, it is this collective, effervescent practice of religion that causes transformation.

Clearly, human participation in the sacred is important to each author and their explanations when examined individually can appear compelling, however they do not combine easily together to explain the experiences that humans define as sacred. Eliade's mystical heirophany seems to defy the rational human agency that Durkheim seeks, whilst Durkheim's determined rationalism is dismissive of the inexplicable or ineffable, and Levy-Bruhl simply recognises the importance of human gathering.

Interestingly, Tim Ingold, may have stumbled on a means to tie together these ideas. In '*Lines: A brief history*'¹³ Ingold explores the role that lines play in human life. Whilst the book explores how

⁴ Fields, K. E. (1995). Translator's Introduction. In E. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (K. E. Fields, Trans., pp. xvii-lxxiii). New York: The Free Press. p. xli

⁵ Eliade, M. (1959 (1957)). *The Sacred and the Profane*. (W. R. Trask, Trans.) New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc. p. 10

⁶ Levy-Bruhl, L. (1926). *How Natives Think*. (L. A. CLARE, Trans.) New York: Alfred A Knopf.

⁷ Evans-Pritchard, E. (1934, May). Levy-Bruhl's Theory of Primitive Mentality. *Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts - Egyptian University*, 2(1) p. 26

⁸ Evans-Pritchard, E. (1934). p. 18

⁹ Levy-Bruhl, L. (1952, June). A Letter to E. E. Evans-Pritchard. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 3(2), p. 122

¹⁰ Eliade, M. (1959 (1957)) p. 11

¹¹ Fields, K. E. (1995). p. xli

¹² Levy-Bruhl, L. (1926)

¹³ Ingold, T. (2007). *Lines: A Brief History*. London: Routledge.

he sees lines functioning in various human spheres, it is Ingold's exploration of lines as traces that are pertinent. He defines the trace as 'any enduring mark left in or on a solid surface by a continuous movement', describing them as either 'additive or reductive'¹⁴. Additive lines are those that, like a snail's trail of slime, add something to the line's substance. Reductive lines are those that, like feet wearing down a footpath, remove something from the line's substance.

In wayfaring the line 'advances in an ongoing process of growth and development, or self-renewal'¹⁵ that requires the traveller to actively engage with his surroundings as he moves through them. In contrast, transport breaks the bond between the wayfarer and the way that he is travelling¹⁶ and makes travel about the destination, rather than the process of growth and development experienced when wayfaring.

Having established the contrast between wayfaring and transport, Ingold expands his view from the single trace to the multiple traces sustained by human wayfaring and transportation across landscapes through time. Wayfarers make interwoven trails that, over time, entangle together forming a mesh, with Ingold suggesting that where they intersect, overlap and entangle, where wayfarers pause and rest, 'places' and 'ways' become more defined as people pass, meet and remain, if sometimes only for a short time.

Whilst at first glance Ingold's ideas seem to deal with a very physical understanding of the world, it is possible to view them through Durkheimian, Eliadian and Bruhlian lenses, whose views of the sacred all depend on people. For Durkheim, humans together initiate the sacred, for Eliade, heirophany or experiencing a numinous external force initiates the sacred, whilst Levy-Bruhl finds mystery in the act of human gathering. In each case the experiences could be viewed in the same way as Ingold's additive or reductive lines.

A Durkheimian view of Ingold's lines would suggest that human spiritual agency is additive to the lines of our wayfaring and accumulate in the places where we gather. As we wander, we leave a thin layer of 'spirituality' on our trace in the landscape. An Eliadian view of the same lines might see human spirituality as negative, neutral, or positive depending on when a heirophany was last encountered, meaning that wayfaring might be either additive or reductive adding spiritual matter to, or removing it from, the trace of everyday human wayfaring through the profane. Encounters with heirophany would somehow 'top up' human spirituality, switching the wayfarer's trace from a reductive spiritual state to an additive one as the person moves along their trace away from a site of heirophany. Finally, a Bruhlian view of the trace might see it as falling somewhere between both Durkheim's and Eliade's depending on whether the mystery encountered by the gathered people was externally or internally derived.

It is hoped that exploring the attitudes and beliefs of various individuals who have encountered the 'sacred' in some way at St Issui's church and/or well it will be possible to more fully explore the academy's understanding of the sacred. To find a way in which the Durkheimian and Eliadian theories of the sacred might be reconciled together in a more complete and unified theory.

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 44

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 78

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 81

Methods

Hennink, Hutter and Bailey point out that ‘mixed methods’¹⁷ research techniques use both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to interrogate research questions. It can be seen as a research paradigm in its own right (Teddlie and Taskhakkori¹⁸, 2009), however Hennink et. al believe that ‘mixing research methods’ is a better, broader term that encompasses the idea of combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies in one study, and/or of including different methods in either a qualitative or quantitative study. Mixing research methods, this study will pursue a qualitative methodology using several different methods of data collection.

As defined by Bell and Waters¹⁹ this study used questionnaires to obtain qualitative information about the beliefs and attitudes to reports of miraculous healings at St Issui’s Well, Patricio, of people attending, visiting or living near to St Issui’s Church. Questionnaires were a mixture of oral questionnaires and self-administered paper or online questionnaires²⁰, with questions designed to identify suitable individuals willing to explore in more detail reports of miraculous healings at St Issui’s well.

The participants in this research were a mixture of local residents, church members, and visitors to the church (tourists, walkers passing through, or pilgrims deliberately visiting the well) and were accessed via contact with church clergy, local (online Facebook) resident’s groups, by visiting the church and well to talk to visitors, and by directly contacting one individual with a widely reported experience of a healing at St Issui’s Church. All questionnaires were preceded by an explanation of the research, a confirmation of participant anonymity, and informed consent obtained from all participants indicated either through the signing and dating of a paper questionnaire, or the act of reading and completing a questionnaire online. Informed consent also included consent for any observation and follow-up interviews. Fifteen questionnaires were completed orally at the well or church and respondents consisting of tourists, walkers, and local members of the community and church congregation. Eleven questionnaires were completed online by previous visitors to St Issui’s, completing the questionnaire either following a personal invitation to do so, or following messaging to local online (Facebook) interest groups.

The questionnaire was designed to identify respondents who have experienced the miraculous at either St Issui’s Church and Well or in another setting, or who have not experienced the miraculous, but are open to the possibility of the miraculous occurring. Of the twenty-six respondents, three had experienced some sort of miraculous occurrence –two at St Issui’s and one elsewhere, with the fourth open to the possibility of the miraculous having previously been a curate at St Issui’s church.

Having identified 4 respondents willing to discuss their attitudes to reports of miraculous healings at St Issui’s well, a guide²¹ was prepared to give direction to semi-structured interviews and make sure that the topics of discussion did not drift from the project’s key aims. The key areas of discussion were 1) Beliefs about St Issui’s Well (and church) which included questions about whether participants believed healing had happened there, and what was causing those healings; 2)

¹⁷ Hennink, M., Hutter, I., & Bailey, A. (2020). *Qualitative research methods* (Second Edition ed.). Los Angeles: SAGE.

¹⁸ Teddlie, C., & Tashakkori, A. (2009). *Foundations of Mixed Methods Research: Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches in the Social and Behavioral Sciences*. London: Sage.

¹⁹ Bell, J., & Waters, S. (2018). *Doing your research project : a guide for first-time researchers*. (7th Edition ed.). London: Open University Press, McGraw-Hill Education. P. 188

²⁰ Appendix I

²¹ Appendix II

Experiences of St Issui's well (and church) which included questions about their purpose in going to St Issui's and any miraculous occurrences they attributed to the well; and 3) Attitudes about St Issui's well (and church), which included questions about how the physical surroundings might contribute to the miraculous occurring.

The interviews were carried out in-person and face-to-face having been initially planned as online Zoom interviews in order to mitigate participant and student risks. However, the participants were reluctant to participate via Zoom and preferred to meet for an in-person interview. Whilst this meant that personal risk was slightly higher, it also meant that the data collected from participants was richer than interviews carried out via video-conferencing software.

Reflexivity

As a white male, middle-class, practising Christian from a charismatic-type church background I hoped to ensure that my subjects reflected a broader faith and world view than my own. The four respondents chosen were all white British (2 female, 2 male) practicing Christians, albeit from different church denominations and doctrinal backgrounds. I had hoped to interview a fifth respondent whose faith and world view was different, however as a fellow student of UWTSD I was not allowed to interview them. I believe that their different world view would have significantly enriched the findings and conclusions of this essay.

Findings

Questionnaires

Twenty-six questionnaires were completed, fifteen in person at St Issui's either by tourists or walkers or church attendees, and eleven electronically by people who had visited St Issui's in the past. Of the twenty-six respondents, four were chosen to approach for interview based on their experiences of, or attitudes towards, the miraculous taking place at St Issui's Church and Well.

Respondent 8 was chosen because of her direct experience of a miraculous healing at St Issui's well, as well as healings experienced by friends there too. Her view that such healings can be attributed to 'God's healing power' as well as 'healing power associated with the place', and 'with water' makes her an interesting subject to interview further.

The remaining three respondents' mix of views and experiences were not as comprehensive as respondent 8's, however all three attributed miraculous or unexplained healings to 'God's healing power'. Respondent 13 attributed his 'healing' from a severe stammer to attendance at St Issui's. He also believed the miraculous could be attributed to an 'undefined spiritual power'. Respondent 12 indicated she had experienced 'God's healing power' as a physical healing from severe tonsillitis, although this was unrelated to St Issui's church or well. Respondent 2 indicated that he had experienced 'a miraculous or unexplained healing' which he described as 'various; many answered prayers, both me and others' without identifying a specific event. Additionally, he had served as a curate at St Issui's church, I felt this made his views of both the place and the miraculous interesting.

Together these experiences and views seemed to make each of these subjects suitable for a semi-structured interview exploring their attitudes and beliefs about the well in more detail.

Semi-structured Interviews

Each interview started with questions about the participants' religious identity, and whether miraculous events (usually healings) were something they expected as a part of their faith. Each participant identified as Christian, three as Anglican and one as 'evangelical/charismatic/mystic'. All four participants clearly expressed the belief that miraculous healings are possible.

During all four interviews several themes were recurring. The first was that quite simply St Issui's church and well is a '*special place*'. Two of the participants directly described it as such, and a third reported that many of those who visit describe it as that too. It clearly exerts a hold over the many people who visit, and for some it is a place where they experience something far more mysterious and difficult to explain than just a sense of wellbeing and peace. Quite what lies behind this idea of the '*special place*' is unclear, but several themes stand out within the interviews.

The next theme to stand out was the idea of people and their faith. Participant 2 in particular was quite clear that where Christian believers expect 'miracles' to happen they happen more. Participant 12 also echoed this idea saying, '*The more you pray, the more those things happen, so how much to put it down to coincidence and how much to put it down to prayer?*'

This sense of expectation was repeated as Participant 8 reported the healing experience of a friend of hers at the well. Usually, Participant 8 asks the people she is taking to St Issui's to be contemplative on the journey there, making it a kind of pilgrimage, however for the friend the journey was irrelevant, the healing would happen there, and so he chatted continuously without any sense of contemplation. He received the healing he expected!

For Participants 2, 8 and 12 their faith was quite clearly in the Christian God, and as such healings however they come about, were attributable to 'Him'. Participant 13 in contrast was much more focussed on the place, stating that people '*want to come to an exact spot, not a vague area*' where over many years a structure has grown up and people have returned. Regardless of the contrast, it seemed that for each participant the activation of the miraculous at St Issui's is, at least to some extent, through people and their faith.

Each interview also picked out the idea that the place or the water in the well could mediate God's presence or a healing encounter there. Participant 2's highlighting of this was in order to expressly reject the idea that God might choose one place over another, asking that, '*Since God is everywhere at all times, why would he choose special or "thin" places?*' He returned to the idea of greater human expectancy or faith in certain places saying that '*there's nothing particularly special about St Issui's well compared to other places.*'

Interestingly, Participant 8 clearly identified St Issui's church and well as a 'thin place' where something deeper than normal life could be encountered. Her conclusion is that this experience is mediated by both '*a determination to persevere and the fact of the thin place combining to give access to the deeper place*' where healing happens. It's both '*something within us, in our mind, our spirit, if you call it that, and it's also something about being physically in that place.*' Participant 8's own unlooked for experience of healing combined both this sense of determination to visit St Issui's and a sense of deep encounter.

The final theme to emerge in each interview was that of journeying and repetition. St Issui's is a remote mountain church and so journeying applied in both a physical, 'passing over landscape to get there' way, and in the sense of a contemplative journey. Repetition applied in the sense of many people returning to this one spot over many centuries to all encounter something beyond themselves. It applied also in the sense of votive offerings repeating the prayers of those who have offered them after they had gone. Participant 12 also suggested that as people interact with these 'spiritual places' it leaves '*behind a residue in the spiritual realm*', '*a spiritual imprint from the life of St Issui and then the prayer that's gone on there since then*'.

Discussion

As described in the findings four themes stood out from the interviews, the first was that St Issui's church and well are considered by the majority of visitors to be a 'special place'. Quite what people mean by 'special' could be the subject of more research and is not the focus of this paper. The second theme could be described as 'people and their faith as a mediator of the miraculous', and the third theme as 'place/water as a mediator of the miraculous' although both themes will be treated as one here. Finally, the fourth theme might be called 'journeying as a mediator of the miraculous.' Interestingly each of these themes ties closely to the theories of Durkheim, Levy-Bruhl, Eliade and Ingold, and what is particularly fascinating is that no one interview participant expressed views that only reflected the ideas of one author.

People and places as mediators of the miraculous

Of the four participants, Participant 2 was by far the most Durkheimian in his views of the sacred or miraculous. He quite clearly believed that miracles could happen, saying that, *'part of the reason for these things happening among believers particularly is due to expectation, and around here expectation is very low, so therefore there's not a lot that's gonna happen, but it could and occasionally does.'* Essentially Participant 2 is saying that the miraculous occurs when expectation amongst believers is high, noting specifically in his experience that expectation is low, so few miracles are seen. As such this reflects Durkheim's view that the divine starts in the collective mind but perpetuates in the individual, and that religious force is thus both transcendent of human individuals, yet also internal²².

Contrastingly, Participant 8's views reflect a much more Eliadian view of the sacred, as she explicitly identifies St Issui's as *'a thin place'*, going on to describe how simply visiting was strengthening, and that her healing was both an encounter with the place and with the substance of the water, during which she *'put [her] feet in the water and was suffused with a sense of joy and peace'* and received physical healing too. The encounter was a

mysterious act – the manifestation of something of a wholly different order, a reality that that does not belong to our world, in objects that are an integral part of our natural 'profane' world'.²³

For Participant 8 with her multiple experiences of healing there, St Issui's was clearly a place of Eliadian heirophany, and yet without the experience of heirophany, Participant 2 remained unsure *'that a place ever gets thin.'* It would seem that it is possible to experience St Issui's (and by extension other similar places) through both an Eliadian and a Durkheimian understanding of the world.

Journeying as a mediator of the miraculous.

Clearly not everyone who visits St Issui's comes away with a healing experience, although the reported use of the descriptor 'special place' suggests that many who visit are experiencing some sort of numinous encounter. Either way the idea that both human agency and the 'mysterious other' can both be credited here suggests that it might be possible to bring the apparently binary, mutually exclusive Eliadian and Durkheimian explanations of the sacred together.

Participant 8's experiences of both healing-by-proxy and of healing away from the well as a result of unknowingly drinking the water clearly show that there is a sense of mystery and what might be

²² Fields, K. E. (1995).p. xliii

²³ Eliade, M (1961) p. 11

called power about the place and the water. And yet, Participant 12's experience of healing did not happen at an obvious 'thin place' like St Issui's, but in a healing meeting held in a rented public hall. So what might connect these different healing encounters?

In his work Durkheim identifies the sacred as deriving from the 'collective thought'²⁴ of society, whilst Eliade says 'that men are not free to choose the sacred site, that they only seek for it and find it by the help of mysterious signs.'²⁵ In both cases the sacred is decided by the agreement of people coming together in Levy-Bruhl's 'mystical participation between a man and the land...'²⁶.

This idea of a participation between a man and the land begins to make sense when viewing Eliade's and Durkheim's ideas through Tim Ingold's ideas of the line. All of the interview participants talked about the remote location of St Issui's church. Three noted that it was located on one of the ancient roadways between southern Wales and central England. The fourth noted that in times past the landscape around St Issui's, whilst remote, was also busy and alive with people living on and working the land. St Issui's was not remote in the depopulated sense that it now is but was part of a meshwork of ways and paths that not only took fattened geese to market but brought Gerald of Wales to St Issui's to preach the Third Crusade in the late 12th Century, and has continued to draw visitors seeking healing in the centuries since.

Participant 8's comments about how one needs to persevere through and experience the landscape, to go '*up there and round and up and over the wet areas and hills*' in order to arrive at St Issui's entirely captures the spirit of Ingold's chapter 3, entitled 'Up, across, along'²⁷. She identifies perseverance as a key component to an individual being open to a potential spiritual encounter there, whether that is an overt physical healing, or a more covert emotional one.

It is in this seeking of healing and encounter at St Issui's that there is an echo of Ingold's reductive lines. As Participant 8 and her like come seeking peace, quiet, healing and encounter, the journeys there and back become as important as the time spent there. The wayfaring line of the pilgrim advances in a process of self-renewal and spiritual growth. Whether the wayfarers are adding to the line or reducing its substance is difficult to know, and perhaps the use of Ingold's snail metaphor continues to be apposite. As the snail moves it leaves behind its additive slime trail, but it is also constantly browsing its environment, consuming various leaves, stems, plant crops, bark, fruits, fungi, mushrooms, and occasionally algae or other animals. At one and the same time the snail's progression is both additive AND reductive.

Intriguingly however it is Participants 12 and 13 who move the conversation in the direction of Ingold's additive lines. Participant 12 suggested that a praying hermit at the well would leave a spiritual heritage or imprint behind, and that this would only be added to by those following after him in prayer or pilgrimage. Participant 13 proposed that those leaving votive offerings were leaving something like their spoor to mark the place where they had been, maybe in order to prolong their prayers or spiritual imprint there. Both of these comments echo Ingold's additive lines that as people have visited and prayed over the years, they have added something to the substance of the place, either through physically leaving votive offerings, or through the practice of prayer and stillness.

²⁴ Fields, K. E. (1995).p. xliii

²⁵ Eliade, M (1961) p. 28

²⁶ Evans-Pritchard, E. (1934). p. 26.

²⁷ Ingold, T. (2007) p. 74

What is interesting here is that both Durkheim's and Eliade's theories seem to be reasonable in the face of evidence emerging from the interviews with the four participants. There are clearly moments of Eliadian heirophany with encounters resulting in a sense of increased physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing, reductive passes along the trace they are travelling, but one which they can use to encourage others in their wellbeing too, a more additive trace coming from an Eliadian explanation.

There are then more Durkheimian encounters in the place, the community coming together, as described by Participants 12 and 13 for regular services and high days and holidays. Participant 13 describes how St Issui's '*has a powerful draw, not just to the small congregation*' [ranging from six to ten people, and at Easter, 60 people], but also to '*walkers. It draws people who may not be part of the consistent rural community but are drawn to that rural community because of the church.*' Similarly Participant 12, speaking of the Christmas service she had attended said that she '*was really surprised at how many people were there,*' and that a woman there that she'd met previously told her that, '*she felt the need to be there at Christmas.*' The lady in question clearly felt the need to assemble with others to be part of something with others that she couldn't explain.

These more Durkheimian/Bruhlian experiences that have come about as a result of the mystery of human gathering might be viewed through Ingold's work too. Both Participants 12 and 13 use language suggesting 'want', St Issui's '*has a powerful draw*' or '*she felt the need to be there*' suggesting that those involved were receiving from the experience and therefore the trace of their journeying was largely reductive. On the other hand, Durkheim's view of gathering is that the sacred 'is created by the fact of assembling and temporarily living a collective life that transports individuals beyond themselves.'²⁸ Viewed through Ingold's work then, assembling at St Issui's for services would be additive to the trace of each individual's journey.

²⁸ Fields, K. E. (1995). p. xli

Conclusions

It is obviously difficult to disentangle Ingold's additive and reductive lines from Durkheim's, Levy-Bruhl's and Eliade's work in such a short piece of work. The four interviews produced such rich information that it was difficult to choose what to use and what to leave out, and as such these conclusions can barely scratch the surface of a question that has occupied the minds of thinkers for centuries.

What is clear however is that both Eliadian and Durkheimian explanations of the sacred are valid. Eliade's heirophany can be attested to evidentially to suggest that there does exist a numinous other, outside of our experience, that breaks through at St Issui's (and other places). And yet, Durkheim's explanations of the sacred also seem valid too. There is evidence that as folks draw together in ritual there emerges an effervescent community that is compelling, and often attractive, and which will draw others in too.

If both these things are true, then there are several implications for our understanding of spirituality. If Durkheim's ideas are true then it means that humans are spiritual creatures with the agency to affect or change the spiritual landscape in which we exist, adding to it and taking from it as we gather and as we journey through life. If Eliade's ideas are also true then it means that there is a numinous, spiritual reality beyond our every-day profane view of the world that as spiritual beings we can encounter, enabling us to affect or change our spiritual landscape, and by implication, add and subtract from the trace of our journeyings too.

If, in fact, both Durkheim's and Eliade's (as well as Levy-Bruhl's) views of the world are true, then it means that humans are, whether we like it or not, spiritual beings with agency, who exist in a far more complex world than we first see, where we can unexpectedly encounter the numinous 'other' in ways that defy easy explanations, and where, as we gather, we have the agency to call into being the same or similar numinous, effervescent encounters. It turns out that there may well be a deep truth to Participant 8's conclusion that it's both *'something within us, in our mind, our spirit, if you call it that, and it's also something about being physically in that place.'*

As stated above, this work barely scratches the surface of this ancient conundrum, and in many ways, it leads to more questions than answers. Ingold's 'Lines' goes on to explore the trace in time, something that would be fascinating to explore more with St Issui's. How does the trace left by 'journeyers' at St Issui's change and grow over time? How might these traces mesh together in space and time across both the physical and spiritual landscape? What role does the use of votive offerings and repetition play in how the sacred manifests? Can Eliade's hierophanies be mediated by humans – specifically, might St Issui's martyrdom, an event mediated by gathered (albeit one assumes only two) humans, be a heirophany? What are the implications for spiritual agency and the numinous within our western, secular framework?

Total word count: 4988 words (excluding footnotes)

5302 words (inclusive of footnotes)

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Appendix I – St Issui's, Partrishow Religious Attitudes Survey

Dear Visitor to St Issui's Church and Well,

This questionnaire is designed to explore the attitudes and beliefs of parishioners, locals and visitors to manifestations of the miraculous at the well of St Issue in Partrishow, South Wales. This research is part of a project I am undertaking for my MA in Ecology and Spirituality at the University of Wales, Trinity Saint David. The purpose of the questionnaire is to gain insight into the religious world view of the people who visit the well and the church, and in particular their attitudes and beliefs as they relate to reports of miraculous healings after visits to the well.

I hope that in answering these questions you will find your experience of St Issui's Church and Well is enhanced. **All the information will be treated in absolute confidence, so please express your responses as honestly as possible.** Please feel free to ignore any question you do not wish to answer. Your name and contact details are requested solely so that if a follow-up interview seems relevant in the context of the research project, I can contact you. All such personal information will remain confidential and will be destroyed at the end of the project.

WHAT TO DO: Please answer each question by placing an X in the selected box or by writing your comments in the space provided. In some cases, you can mark more than one box, as indicated.

Part 1 – Religious attitudes

Q1 How would you describe your religious upbringing?

- | | | | | | |
|----------------|--------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| (a) Protestant | ☐ | (b) Roman Catholic | ☐ | (c) non-denominational Christian | ☐ |
| (d) Jew | ☐ | (e) Muslim | ☐ | (d) Buddhist | ☐ |
| (e) Hindu | ☐ | (f) Pagan | ☐ | (g) Agnostic | ☐ |
| (h) Atheist | ☐ | (i) Other _____ | | | |

Q2 How would you describe your religious identity now?

- | | | | | | |
|----------------|--------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| (a) Protestant | ☐ | (b) Roman Catholic | ☐ | (c) non-denominational Christian | ☐ |
| (d) Jew | ☐ | (e) Muslim | ☐ | (d) Buddhist | ☐ |
| (e) Hindu | ☐ | (f) Pagan | ☐ | (g) Agnostic | ☐ |
| (h) Atheist | ☐ | (i) Other _____ | | | |

Q3 Do you attend a church or religious service regularly?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, which denomination? _____

Q4 Would you describe yourself as believing in:

- (a) God ☐ (b) The Goddess ☐ (c) A supreme consciousness/being ☐
- (d) Other _____

Q5 If you answered that you do believe in a higher being or power in Q4, do you believe you have a personal relationship with this being in which they answer prayers?

(a) Yes ☐ (b) No ☐ (c) Don't know ☐

Q6 Do you believe that miraculous or unexplained healings occur?

(a) Yes ☐ (b) No ☐ (c) Don't know ☐

Q7 How would you explain such healings?

- (a) God's healing power. ☐
- (b) A saint's or spirit's healing power. ☐
- (c) Undefined spiritual power. ☐
- (d) Healing power associated with a place. ☐
- (e) Healing power associated with water. ☐
- (f) Healing through power of suggestion. ☐
- (g) Healing through other not yet explained natural process. ☐
- (h) Other ☐

(please specify) _____

Q8 Have you experienced a miraculous or unexplained healing?

- (a) Yes – personally ☐
- (b) Yes – a friend ☐
- (c) Yes – a trustworthy source ☐
- (d) No ☐
- (e) Don't know ☐

If yes, please give more details.

Q9 What age bracket are you in?

(a) 18-24 ☐ (b) 25-34 ☐ (c) 35-54 ☐ (d) 55-75 ☐ (e) 75 + ☐

Q10 Do you feel that your spirituality/belief/faith has changed over time?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, please give more details.

Part 3 – St Issui's Well

Q11 Had you heard of St Issui's Well before today?

(a) Yes ☐ (b) No ☐

If yes, what were your expectations of St Issui's well?

- (a) I thought it would be bigger. ☐
- (b) A beautiful place. ☐
- (c) A peaceful place. ☐
- (d) A spiritual place. ☐
- (e) A healing place. ☐
- (f) Other ☐

(please specify) _____

Q12 What are your reasons for visiting St Issui's Church and Well?

- (a) To attend a religious service ☐
- (b) Tourism ☐
 - (i) Hiking / Rambling ☐
 - (ii) To visit church building. ☐

- (c) To visit St Issui's Well ☐
- (d) For prayer and retreat time ☐
- (e) As a place of pilgrimage ☐
- (f) For healing ☐
- (g) Other ☐

(please specify) _____

Q13 How would you describe your experience of St Issui's well?

- (a) A beautiful place. ☐
- (b) A peaceful place. ☐
- (c) A spiritual place. ☐
- (d) A healing place. ☐
- (e) Other ☐

(please specify) _____

Q14 Are you aware that some people claim to have experienced physical healings during and after visiting St Issui's Well?

- (a) Yes ☐ (b) No ☐

If yes, what accounts have you heard.

Part 3 – Follow up interviews

Q15 Would you be willing to discuss these issues in more depth in a recorded Zoom interview?

- (a) Yes ☐ (b) No ☐

If Yes, please give name and contact details.

Name: _____

Email: _____

Mobile: _____

Appendix II- In Depth Semi-Structured Interview Guide.

Researching Contemporary Cosmologies HPCA7016 – Assignment 2 –

What are the attitudes and beliefs of church members, local residents, and visitors, to manifestations of the miraculous at the well of St Issui in Partrishow, South Wales?

In Depth Semi-Structured Interview Guide.

Introduction

Hi, thanks for agreeing to meet with me. My name's Richard and amongst other things, I am a part time post-graduate student studying for an MA in Ecology and Spirituality at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David.

This interview is part of research for a module called Researching Contemporary Cosmologies and is part of the Ecology and Spirituality course. The module explores various research techniques and this second assignment in the module is an opportunity to use them in a short research project.

The purpose then of this interview is to answer the question, 'What are the attitudes and beliefs of church members, local residents, and visitors, to manifestations of the miraculous at the well of St Issui in Partrishow, South Wales?'

The answers that you give and the data that I extract from them will be used to write a short 5,000-word paper outlining the different attitudes and beliefs of those that I interview, exploring and contrasting how these world views fit in with and are understood by the academy.

The project outcome will be a short report as already mentioned, submitted to my course tutors as assignment 2 of the Researching Contemporary Cosmologies Module (HPCA7016) at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David.

Ethical issues are of foremost importance, therefore, please be aware that I will treat all that you say as confidential, and any use of your comments will be anonymised unless specific permission is given to cite your words publicly.

Please also note that I plan to record this interview so that I have a reliable record of our conversation. This will be transcribed for use in my report and analysis. Audio recordings will be kept on an encrypted hard drive and deleted once the assignment is completed and assessed by my course tutors.

Please indicate below that you give permission for your answers to be recorded and transcribed as described.

Name: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

General Questions (participant background)

Could you tell me your name?

How would you describe your religious identity and background?

Do you attend a religious service regularly? If yes, how would you describe it?

Is the idea and expectation of the miraculous a normal part of that identity?

Key Questions

Beliefs about St Issui's Well (and church).

Do you believe that healings have taken place at St Issui's well/church?

Why do you think that healings have happened there?

-What is it there that allows/enables miracles to occur?

(Something in our mind? Something about the place? Something in the water? It's a 'thin place'. St Issui? God? Holy Spirit?)

-Why do you think miracles have been reported/experienced at St Issui's well and not at other places?

Experiences of St Issui's well (and church).

Please describe your visit(s) to St Issui's Well and or church.

-What was your purpose in going to St Issui's?

-What happened to you because of your visit?

-Do you consider this to be a 'miraculous' event?

-Is there anything else that stands out in your memory of your visit?

Attitudes about St Issui's well (and church).

How do you view the practice by some visitors to St Issui's Well of leaving votive offerings?

-Why do you think people leave such items?

How do the physical surroundings of St Issui's Well make you feel when considering the possibility of miracles?

-Was there water in the well when you visited?

-Is water in the well actually important? Why/Why not?

Is the relative isolation of St Issu's Well a positive or negative thing for those seeking healing? Why?

Closing Questions

Have you ever discussed miracles at St Issui's with anyone else?

How did they respond?

Have you ever seen miracles elsewhere?

Many thanks for your time.