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No 'God Spot' in the Brain of Christian Believers

Contrary to common beliefs, there is no particular brain area designed for mystical experiences; instead, a mystical communion with God involves about 12 regions of the brain which mediate other processes, too

A new study carried out by researchers at the University of Montreal, France, found that religious people have no such thing as a 'God spot' in their brains to mediate the prayers and mystical experiences as previously thought. Instead, mystical experiences are mediated by several brain regions and systems which are also involved in a variety of other activities like self-consciousness, body representation or emotions. The study was conducted on 15 cloistered Carmelite nuns with ages ranging from 23 to 64. The nuns were taken MRI brain scans while asked to recount a mystical union with God known in religious terms as Unio Mystica. Results showed that there is no such thing as a mystical brain spot or particular region to be activated while reliving a mystical experience. On the whole, researchers found that no more than 12 areas of the brain were involved in the experiment. "The main goal of the study was to identify the neural correlates of a mystical experience. Rather than there being one spot that relates to mystical experiences, we've found a number of brain regions are involved. This does not diminish the meaning and value of such an experience and neither does it confirm or disconfirm the existence of God," explained lead researcher of the study Dr Mario Beauregard. The findings of the study performed by French scientists are due to appear in the Neuroscience Letters publication and bust all the myths related to mystical experiences which involve and stimulate certain areas of the brain. Since the 90's, there have been many debates on how the brain of religious adepts works when experiencing a mystical union with God. Some people went as far as to strongly support that there must be a particular spot or region on the brain which 'hosts' the communion with God. "These brain studies can give us fascinating insights into how the human body and mind and spirit inter-connect, but they should not make us think that prayer and religious experience are just an activity in the brain. True Christian mysticism is an encounter with the living God. We meet him in the depths of our souls. It is an experience that goes far beyond the normal boundaries of human psychology and consciousness," stated Father Stephen Wang for BBC News. Father Stephen Wang is a Catholic priest teaching at Allen Hall Seminary in London.