



Dear LSN Supporters

The Cuban jazz musician Omar Puente said in a recent interview: *Life is full of surprises – you just dance with the things that happen, good things and bad things.* His philosophy is both touching and challenging, for it is forged in pain. Omar is married to Debbie Purdy, the woman suffering from Multiple Sclerosis who has fought through the courts so determinedly for the law on assisted suicide to be clarified.

There's nothing like a crisis to bring you face-to-face with your own philosophy. I don't in any way equate the loss of a job to the diagnosis of a life-limiting disease, but it's still, for most people, one of the major surprises they will face in the course of a life. At the end of May I learned that my contract to produce the long-running Radio 4 programme *Something Understood* would be terminated at the end of June, at the behest of the BBC. My programme themes were deemed too narrow, my guests too obscure, and I was suspected of having (whisper it) *a religious agenda*. *Surprise* doesn't quite express what I felt!

In the years since I joined LSN I've been reflecting, both personally and professionally, on new expressions of spirituality and new ways of being faithful. Now, faced with a real-life crisis, how do the new thoughts and intuitions of those years hold up? Through the busyness of finishing the last eight programmes and the longed-for space of ten days retreat in Whitby, I've been trying to respond to what has happened in the light of the spirituality to which I have felt so drawn in recent years: a spirituality of unknowing rather than knowing, doctrinally agnostic; a spirituality of silence and waiting, wordless, almost; of mindfulness rather than mind, of *watching with the eye of the heart*. Deeply, but scarcely recognisably, Christian.

The instinct to regress is strong! The traditional words – texts even (Jer. 29:11!) – of reassurance spring as rapidly into my own head as they do to the mouths of so many lovely and supportive friends. But really, this won't do. My so-called *new way of being faithful* has to be tested and tried in the light of all the things that happen in a real life, and the bad things even more than the good.

While I know in my head that you shouldn't carry expectations into a retreat, I travelled to Whitby with the hope that by the end of my time there, I would know what to do next. It was a long and not very happy ten days, relieved mainly by walks along the beach and the multi-award-winning coffee in the Wits End Cafe. Two pieces of writing gave me a way at least to be in that place without struggling too much to be gone. The first was from the journals of Mary Ward, the extraordinary 17th Century Yorkshire woman who founded what became the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Congregation of Jesus. Mary Ward's calling was revealed only gradually. Often she had a very strong sense of what not to do, but not of what to do. Her patient waiting on God for moments of incremental clarity was a model as fitting for the new spirituality as for the old. And another nun, this time in the late 20th Century, provided the *cantus firmus*, the enduring melody, of the retreat. In her poem *Trasna*, Raphael Consedine PBVM writes of pilgrims on a mountain pass:

*This is Trasna, the crossing place.
Choose! Go back if you must,
You will find your way easily by yesterday's fires,
there may be life in the embers yet.
If that is not your deep desire,
Stand still. ...
While you search your heart's yearnings:
What am I seeking? What is my quest?
When your star rises deep within,
Trust yourself to its leading.
You will have the light for first steps.*

The light for first steps, is all I seek.

Go well **Eley**

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The Art of Faith

The back streets of Shoreditch have been transformed in recent years from crummy and possibly dangerous, to hip-and-happening alleys where galleries, studios, advertising agencies and new media companies jostle for increasingly expensive floor space. Hidden down one of those alleys, in a converted warehouse, is an extraordinary institution: The Prince's School of Traditional Arts. Founded in 2004 by the Prince of Wales, the School's aim is to *teach, research and promote the practice and theory of the arts and crafts of the world's great faith traditions*. Its Masters and PhD students come from around the world, and from all traditions, backgrounds and cultures. Already highly skilled artists in their own fields – icon and miniature painting, ceramics, calligraphy, manuscript illumination, textiles – they're first grounded in the study of the geometry which, the School teaches, underlies all sacred art.

In 25 years of programme-making, I can't think of any more inspiring or pleasurable to make than our two-part *Something Understood**, called *The Art of Faith* and recorded at the Prince's School and in the British Museum. I have never met a more talented, committed, intelligent and spiritual group of people than the students of the school and their Director, Dr Khaled Azzam. Sadly, I can't give you any sense of the exquisite work the students produced for their final degree show, but I can give you some thoughts from the two main interviews recorded for programmes by my friend and colleague, Mike Wooldridge. The first is with the Director of the Prince's School, and the second with Neil MacGregor, Director of the British Museum.

Dr Khaled Azzam

MW How would you describe the mission and purpose of this School?

KA It has several purposes, but primarily it is to explain the common heritage of mankind. No human being from the creation of time can exist outside the natural order of being, whether we have faith that this is a divine creation or whether it is simply a series of chaotic events that have brought us to where we are today, we can all acknowledge that there is an order ... It is asking how this understanding of the natural order, and how we as human beings relate to and fit into this natural order, and how we respond to it through our art and our architecture, that is the main purpose of the School.

MW How much of what you do is about conservation and how much about renewal and innovation?

KA Our understanding of tradition is one of continual renewal. It's like a river that flows ... everything is always new ... we take the view that real preservation comes through introducing a younger generation to their cultural heritage. They find a place within it, improvise, and move ahead... We create links with the next generation to enable them to say something that is contemporary and relevant and yet timeless.

MW Geometry is at the heart of everything you do and not just in the context of Islamic art?

KA Certainly not just in Islam. We understand geometry as a language through which we understand the divine order. It is our means of deciphering the natural order, the blossoming of every flower, the six-fold structure of every snowflake.

MW To what extent is the sacred universal and to what extent specific to places and faiths?

KA I believe the sacred transcends religion and region and time. It is to do with the spiritual... We all have a common spirit which is what makes us human, and makes humanity become one. We are all born in a certain context ... but we try to teach students to look beyond that to the underlying principle. So we go beyond the religion to the root of spirituality and that is timeless and universal.

MW Is there originality in sacred art?

KA Absolutely! When we teach original art we mean that it has an origin ... an original source. To make it relevant you go back to that source and then take it to where you are going to take it. There is an abundance of creativity... but it is like performing a prayer or rite. There is a moment of inspiration that comes, but if we don't repeat the rite on a daily basis and prepare ourselves, that moment of inspiration does not come. If the moment of grace happens, it happens. It is not up to you. It is where we open ourselves to this world of creativity.

Dr Neil MacGregor

MW Dr Khaled Azzam sees a difference between the sacred and the religious. For him, the sacred transcends religion. Would you agree with him?

NM Yes...I think religion is about one particular faith structure and the sacred is perhaps about a more general notion of the divine. But I think the more interesting distinction is the way in which some cultures have contrived to bring God into daily life – what St Theresa talks about as finding God in the pots and pans ... those cultures which divinise the daily and make objects to bring God close to us as we live in the world – rather than objects for the temple or the Church which are set apart from daily life.

MW So is there then a clear difference then between sacred and religious art and if so what is that?

NM I think sacred art is art which is set apart. It is art that is saying God is other and God is in a separate place. And it is therefore art about the division between ordinary life and worship or sacred life. Religious art I see as rather different -- I see it as how people practise the presence of God either in objects designed to encourage devotion or prayer or designed in the daily circumstances of life, to call them back in remembrance of God.

MW How do you understand the relationship between the universal and the culturally specific dimensions of sacred art?

NM When the British Museum was being made in the 18th century one of the things that fascinated the collectors was that all around the world every society had a religion. And every society needed to articulate its relationship to God. And I think that's one of the purposes that the museum can still fulfil with historic objects and contemporary objects. If you want to know how people now see their relationship to God and compare it you can do that here. And what is remarkable is that every society, I think, still needs to find new languages to articulate their changing relationship with God as the world changes around them - and you can see that in the objects.

MW Khaled Azzam believes that art is a safe language in which to explore and promote multi-faith understanding. Do you agree with him on that?

NM I don't think it's ever safe to embark on conversations with the divine! I think art enables very difficult conversations to take place. It also allows I think a much more rapid access to a faith tradition which is not your own. It's very hard for most people to read their way into another way of relating to God. Most of us can get there much, much faster either through music or through visual art – and that I think is the great value of it at the moment in a multi-faith society... that I can much more quickly get to an understanding of what Hinduism is about through Hindu sculpture than through reading Hindu texts.

- **The programmes were broadcast on 8th and 15th August but if you missed them and would like to hear them, we have copies for short-term loan in the office, for the cost of post and packing.*
- *The exhibition of the graduating students' final degree pieces is on until 3rd September. See the School website www.psta.org.uk for details, or call 020 7613 8500.*
- *Full transcripts of both interviews can be found on the LSN website.*

Little Unfinished Poem by Allan Cooper

I love this prose poem by Allan Cooper: it seems to me to reflect a wisdom very close to that of the Maori Koru ...

Today I don't want to finish anything. I'll leave the birch log leaning against the fence, and the bed half-made. Even the spruce outside my window is incomplete, its buds held tightly in their protective sheath.

Inside us there are growth-rings that say to finish is not the task, there is more to come, each new ring will grow on what we feed it. Tonight I will feed it only tea, and the warmth of a small fire, and maybe a line or two from this poem that will go on growing after dark, gathering speed, like a snowslide pummelling down a hill...

From The Pearl Inside the Body: Poems Selected and New (pub Percheron Press) used by kind permission.

The Koru

Indigenous to New Zealand, in Maori culture this curled fern symbolizes new life, strength and peace; its circular shape is a reminder that our cosmos is in perpetual movement, change and growth.



The Future of LSN

Enclosed with this newsletter (and also available on our website) is an important letter from Judith Lampard, the new Chair of LSN's *Project Group*. That's the name which has evolved for the group of people who not only manage the work of LSN, but who reflect on and guide that work, in the light of their own wide-ranging experience, wisdom and insight. We very much hope that you will take time to read this letter – the intention is not at all to be alarmist, but simply to be realistic and open with you, our loyal and valued supporters.

Beverly Lanzetta in Dublin

In early June I was fortunate to be present when one of the leading voices in contemporary spirituality, Beverly Lanzetta (author of *Emerging Heart: Global Spirituality and the Sacred*) gave three, for me, remarkable and inspiring talks at a conference entitled *Trekking the Wilderness: Contemplation of a New Monastic Way*. Beverly is one of the true pioneers of a new spirituality: a spirituality rooted in contemplative practice and discipline, socially committed, creative, innovative and inclusive. We have a set of CDS of her talks in the Library, which can be borrowed, for a limited time, for the cost of post and packing. Please contact Win Kennedy in the LSN office, or Barbara Merrifield in the Willen Library, if you would like to borrow them. We also have available for loan, a set of recordings of the late John Moriarty, the Irish mystic featured in the Spring 2009 edition of *Living Spirituality News*.

You might also be interested in the new website of the organisation that brought Beverly Lanzetta to Dublin: www.newmonasticismsireland.org

Mysticism and Contemporary Spirituality – Saturday 6th November

LSN and the Centre for Radical Christianity joint conference at St Mark's Broomhill, Sheffield

We are delighted to be collaborating with the Centre for Radical Christianity on a day conference on 6th November. The theme of the day is ***Mysticism and Contemporary Spirituality*** and LSN Director Eley McAinsh will be the speaker. Please see the enclosed leaflet and booking form, or download a copy from our website. Completed forms should be returned to the CRC Administrator. This event will take the place of a separate LSN Gathering this year and we look forward to seeing as many of you as possible on the day. It will be a wonderful opportunity to forge new links and friendships. In the meantime you can find further details on our own website, or at www.stmarksrc.co.uk

Bookshelf

Readers may be interested to know that wherever possible all the titles mentioned in the Bookshelf section of *Living Spirituality News* will now be available for borrowing from the Well Library. For further information contact the LSN office, or the Librarian, Barbara Merrifield, on 01908 242693, or library@thewellatwillen.org.uk

Harvey Cox: The Future of Faith (HarperOne £17.99 paperback due out in October)

Described by Karen Armstrong as *timely and prophetic* this new book by Harvey Cox, published on his retirement from Harvard Divinity School, explores what is, arguably, the essential change taking place in what it means to be religious today. Cox believes that fundamentalism is, contrary to appearances, dying and that we live in an *Age of Spirit* in which *religious* people are far more interested in ethical guidelines and spiritual disciplines than in doctrine and dogma.

John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge: God is Back: How the Global Rise of Faith is Changing the World (Penguin £9.99)

This book received remarkably wide press coverage when it came out in hardback last year and is newly available in paperback. From a very different perspective than Harvey Cox, above, Micklethwait

and Wooldridge explore, energetically and very readably, religion's re-emergence as a political force throughout the world. Towards the end of the introduction they write: *However you look at it, faith is more likely to impinge on you that it once did, either because it is part of your life or because it is part of the lives of some of those around you ... This book is an attempt to explain this phenomenon – to understand how and why God has fought his way back into the modern world.*

Marilynne Robinson: Absence of Mind (Yale University Press £16.99)

Impatience for the new Marilynne Robinson title made me disregard my usual note-to-self concerning the purchase of hardback books, ie they're too heavy to carry around and the paperback will be out in six months anyway. *Unprolific but revered, deeply religious but in love with science, Marilynne Robinson is unique*, according to Tim Teeman in *The Times*. The multi-award winning author of *Housekeeping*, *Gilead* and *Home* returns here to non-fiction to challenge, according to the fly-leaf, *postmodern atheists who crusade against religion under the banner of science*. In Robinson's view, *scientific reasoning does not denote a sense of logical infallibility, as thinkers like Richard Dawkins might suggest. Instead, in its purest form, science represents a search for answers. It engages the problem of knowledge, as an aspect of the mystery of consciousness, rather than providing a simple and final model of reality.*

Madeleine Bunting: The Plot: A Biography of My Father's English Acre (Granta £8.99)

Widely reviewed, and short-listed for the 2010 Ondaatje Prize, for books which evoke the spirit of a particular place, Madeleine Bunting's *The Plot* tells the thousand-year history of an acre of land in North Yorkshire and of the chapel her difficult and eccentric sculptor father built there. Madeleine is among our most thoughtful and well-informed columnists, and one of the very few journalists in the British media who writes very well about religion. But here, she gets personal. *If wisdom 'sits in places', as the native American Apache say, what wisdom did this place have to offer?* she asks in the Prologue, and continues: *At certain points in our lives, some questions become insistent ... Where is your home? Where do I belong? Perhaps the Plot could provide some answers, and help me understand how a place can shape a life.* A real treat!

Ann Michaels: The Winter Vault (Bloomsbury £7.99)

A friend recommended *The Winter Vault* to me and I want to pass on that recommendation, despite the fact that in my view it tails off disappointingly in the second half. The first half, set mainly in Egypt in 1964, when the great temple at Abu Simbel was being dismantled and resurrected high above the rising waters of the Aswan Dam, is so hauntingly, poetically written, it reminded me of Marilynne Robinson's novels, especially *Gilead*. Unusually, the main character is an engineer, Avery, and his reflections on the metaphysical aspects of his work are both fascinating and revealing. Later on, for me, the novel becomes self-conscious and contrived and the spell is broken. None of the reviewers seem to agree with me though, so you may enjoy the whole book. Even if you don't, the first 183 pages are magical!

Mary Doria Russell: A Thread of Grace (Black Swan £7.99)

A number of you contacted us about Mary Doria Russell's first novel, *The Sparrow*, featured in the Spring newsletter. I knew there was a sequel to that book, *The Children of God* (available as a print-on-demand order from booksellers) but I'm grateful to Jenny McIntosh, of Spirited Exchanges, for telling me about *A Thread of Grace*, Russell's third novel. Moving from the science fiction world of Rakhat and the year 2060, here the author returns to Second World War Europe in order to tell the little-known story of some of the thousands of Jews who sought refuge in Italy during the final phase of the war, and of those who risked all to help them. It's described by one reviewer, Karen Joy Fowler, as *Ambitious, beautiful, tense and transforming*, and after *The Sparrow*, I wouldn't be at all surprised if she's right.

Margery Williams: The Original Velveteen Rabbit (Egmont Press £5.99)

Tales of how the summer blockbuster *Toy Story III* makes not just grown men, but normally cynical male journalists, weep, have made me wary of going to see it – I'm reluctant to sob in public! But I've been reflecting recently on the idea of *the really real*, prompted by the provocative question posed at the launch of the new British Association for the Study of Spirituality: *Does spirituality have to be real to be*

of value? On retreat in July I was given two sentences to ponder. The first was from Richard Rohr's book *Simplicity: The Freedom of Letting Go*, in which he said *Contemplation is a long, loving look at what really is*. The second was from Margery Williams' classic children's book *The Velveteen Rabbit*, which according to my local bookshop is enjoying a resurgence of interest as a new generation discovers it. Nearly 90 years before *Toy Story* this unassuming and decidedly low-tech little book was posing the same question: 'What is Real'? asked the Rabbit one day ... 'Real isn't how you're made', said the Skin Horse, 'it's a thing that happens to you ... when a child REALLY loves you, then you become real.'



Pinboard

Hidden Houses of Prayer

A new initiative from the founder of Contemplative Fire, Philip Roderick, who writes: *For some time now I have been nurturing and working with a simple vision for an invisible network of people drawn to the practice of contemplative, creative and intercessory prayer in their own homes*. There will be a meeting for anyone interested and able to travel, at Whirlow Grange Spirituality Centre, Ecclesall, near Sheffield, between 2.00 and 5.00pm on Thursday 9th September. For further information contact Philip at contemplativefire@btinternet.com

Sarum College

Sarum College in Salisbury has slightly changed the pattern of its short courses, with fewer one-off day events and more series. This makes it harder for us to feature here but we wouldn't want you to miss the many excellent opportunities for learning that the college provides. Do check their website www.sarum.ac.uk or request a copy of their Programme from 01722 424800 or Sarum College, 19 The Close, Salisbury, SP1 2EE

Attention Stirlingshire!

Jon Cape and Lois Cameron have recently become supporters of LSN and would like to make contact with other supporters who live in and around the Stirling area. If you'd like to make contact, email jon@cameroncape.net or drop us a line in the office and we'll pass on your message.

September

10-12: Sutton Courtenay, Stillpoint (Oxford) Residential Retreat, a highly experiential weekend with a focus on spiritual practice, through contemplative prayer/meditation and working with our bodies and yoga. See www.thestillpoint.org.uk Contact ian@thestillpoint.org.uk or matt@thestillpoint.org.uk or write to Stillpoint PO Box 788, Oxford, OX1 9HF

13-17: The Ammerdown Centre, nr Bath: A More to Life Retreat, with Adrian Smith. A chance to stand back from everyday life to reflect on some of the big questions. See www.ammerdown.org. Contact centre@ammerdown.org or 01761 433709

25 (Dublin) 27(Belfast): Annual Open Christianity Network Lecture with David Boulton, author of Who on Earth was Jesus? (see Bookshelf Spring 2009) See www.ocnireland.com or contact hilary.wakeman@gmail.com

21-24: Bradwell-on-Sea, Essex: Christian Communities in the 21st Century, joint consultation organised by the Othona Community at Bradwell-on-Sea and the Ashram Community, led by John Vincent. See www.bos.othona.org Contact bradwell@othona.org or 01621 776564, or ashramcommunity@hotmail.com or 0114 243 6688

24-26: Othona Community, Dorset: The Healing Breath – the Aramaic Beatitudes and the Spirituality of Jesus with Neil Douglas-Klotz. See www.othona-bb.org.uk Contact mail@othona-bb.org.uk or 01308 897130

24-27: Hilfield Friary, Dorchester: Understanding Islam with Chris Hewer. A four-day course from St Ethelberga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace. See www.hilfieldproject.co.uk Contact hilfieldproject@franciscans.org.uk or 01300 342313

October

16: Sisters of St Andrew, Edenbridge, Kent: Sharpen the Eye, Awaken the Ear. Tuning in to our untouched creativity – a workshop experience with Maureen Roberts and Diane Reynolds. See www.sisters-of-st-andrew.com Contact thecentre@sisters-of-st-andrew.com or 01342 850 388

16: Tabor Carmelite Retreat House, nr Preston: Sacred Longings with Mary Grey. Reconnecting with the earth and the wisdom of the planet. See www.tabor-preston.org Contact tabor@carmelite.net or 01772 717122

16-17: The Coach House, nr Inverness: Being Human and Divine with Janet Lake. Using story and poetry to explore how engaging fully with our humanity makes possible living into the Mystery of the Divine. See www.coachhousekilmuir.org Contact coachhouse@kilmuir.fsbusiness.co.uk or 01463 731 386

16: Turvey Abbey, Beds: Creative Collage and Prayer. Explore a new dimension of the spiritual life – no need to be artistic! See www.turveyabbey.org.uk Contact day-events@turveyabbey.org.uk or 01234 881432 (Sr Johanna)

19: Ty Croeso Centre, South Wales: Prayer Day: Will the Real Me Please Stand up (and 9 November Prayer Day: I Call You Friends) See www.tycoesocentre.co.uk Contact tycroeso@talktalk.net or 01633 867317

22-24: Turvey Abbey, Beds: Listen With the Ear of Your Heart. Discover the word God speaks to your heart through the practice of the ancient art of Lectio Divina. See www.turveyabbey.org.uk Contact day-events@turveyabbey.org.uk or 01234 881432 (Sr Judith)

23: Sion Centre, London: What is God? Christians Awakening to a New Awareness (CANA) Study Day with Adrian Smith and David Usher. Contact Celia Storey on 01730 265591 or celiastorey@aol.com

28-31: Othona Community, Dorset: An Alternative Hallowe'en Retreat with Tess Ward, author of The Celtic Wheel of the Year and an Anglican hospital chaplain. A retreat in which contemplative darkness, recognised in all mystical traditions, is welcomed. See www.othona-bb.org.uk Contact mail@othona-bb.org.uk or 01308 897130

30: Tabor Carmelite Retreat House, nr Preston: The Paradox of Meister Eckhart. An exploration of Eckhart's relevance for 21st Century thought and faith. See www.tabor-preston.org Contact tabor@carmelite.net or 01772 717122

November

5-7: Hilfield Friary, Dorchester: Ubuntu and the Essence of Being Human: Cultural, Political and Economic Dimensions of Building Peace in Africa with Mark Barwick and Brother John. See www.hilfieldproject.co.uk Contact hilfieldproject@franciscans.org.uk or 01300 342313

14: Oxford: The Challenge of the Future, a Mayflower Conference with George Burnett-Stuart, David Lorimer, and William Meader, led by Clare Goodrick-Clarke. Day event reflecting the organisers' interest in the Divine Feminine. Contact janeandmay@btinternet.com Jane May 01865 407680 or Marigold Hutton 01865 407490

20: St Bede's, York: Dancing with Your Shadow with Kim Nataraja. Exploring practical ways to integrate all aspects of ourselves, including the lost and suppressed, so that grace may enter and make us whole. See www.stbedes.org.uk Contact admin@stbedes.org.uk or 01904 464900

20 and 22: Dublin: Prayer in the Cave of the Heart and Compassionate and Wise, two separate day events with Cyprian Consiglio, a Camaldolese monk and teacher. See www.newmonasticismsireland.org Contact sophiasociety@gmail.com or 087 203 3006

The Living Spirituality Network

The Living Spirituality Network exists for people who are exploring the meaning of spirituality, both within and beyond the traditional churches. The Network provides supporters with information, encouragement and contacts as they seek to understand and deepen their spiritual lives. We work with a wide range of individuals, groups and communities, many of whom find themselves on the edges of mainstream church structures. For further information on the Network, and the groups and communities with which we are in contact, please contact the office for a copy of our leaflet.

Support:

The Living Spirituality Network relies on grants and donations from small communities, projects, networks, individuals and churches. Major support is gratefully received from the Society of the Sacred Mission.

Living Spirituality News is issued three times a year, and is available by post, by email or via the website. If you know of anyone who would welcome a copy, please contact the Administrator. **It is issued free of charge but donations of £10.00-£15.00 pa would help considerably in off-setting our costs and would be gratefully received.** Please make cheques payable to: **'CTBI – Living Spirituality Network'**, and send them to the Administrator at the address given. If you are a taxpayer and are willing to **Gift Aid** your donation, please ask for a form to sign.

A large type version is available on request.

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