



June

6-8: Glasgow: Celtic Weekend organised by the Glasgow Ignatian Centre, including a pilgrimage to the ancient Celtic monastic site of St Blane's on the island of Bute. See www.iscglasgow.co.uk Contact admin@iscglasgow.co.uk or 0141 354 0077

6-8: Sarum College, Salisbury: Renaissance Spirituality. Explore the artworks, beliefs and writings of this glorious period in humanity's history, when a synthesis was achieved between spirituality, the arts, history and classical learning. See www.sarum.ac.uk Contact hospitality@sarum.ac.uk or 01722 424800

7: Tabor Carmelite Retreat House, Preston: Windows of Wonder – a spirituality of self-esteem, with Daniel O'Leary, author of *Journey into Wholeness*. See www.tabor-preston.org Contact tabor@carmelite.net or 01772 787674

7: Oxford: Boundaries of the Secular, the Religious and the Spiritual. A joint Alister Hardy Society and World Congress of Faiths study day, with Edward Bailey, Marcus Braybrooke and Mary Braybrooke. Contact marianne@johnrankin.demon.co.uk or 01684 772417

27-29: Durham: Radical Amazement – Responding Contemplatively to the New Universe Story with Judy Cannato. A conference at Ushaw College for those involved in faith accompaniment. Contact St Antony's Priory at durhamstant@aol.com or 0191 384 3747

July

Advance notice

21-24: Winchester: Women, Religion and Violence. The Britain and Ireland School of Feminist Theology Summer School, with Rosemary Radford Ruether, Mary Grey, Beverley Clack, Anna King and Mary Condren. Contact lisa.isherwood@winchester.ac.uk or (with sae) Lisa Isherwood, Dept of Theology & Religious Studies, University of Winchester, SO22 4NR

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. 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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Supported by the Society of the Sacred Mission

Dear LSN Supporters

Aruna Roy is a small, slight woman in a plain, green cotton sari and round Gandhi glasses. She wears no jewellery and carries a simple canvas bag. Born into a high-caste Brahmin family and highly educated, she has committed her life to raising the living standards of India's rural poor. For the past 15 years she and her husband have voluntarily lived on the wages of a rural labourer – about £35 a month. She has faced concerted opposition, some of it violent, from powerful local interest groups intent on preserving a feudal status quo. She is a profoundly inspiring woman and she is, I was distinctly confused to discover, profoundly hostile to religion in all its forms. It would be an insult to attribute her sacrificial compassion for suffering humanity to a spiritual impulse she would not recognise, though my desire to do so is strong.

My first encounter with Delhi in 1982 was the most disorientating experience of my life. The noise, the light, the crowds, the sights, the smells, left me reeling. I was so unsettled that once I arrived at the little hospital where I was to work for the next three months, I didn't leave the compound for a week.

I didn't know then that I would return again and again to that city, and see before my eyes the extraordinary pace of development in the past ten years. The rhetoric of the city fathers is that *Delhi will be the new Paris by 2010!*, the date of the Commonwealth Games. The new and ever-expanding Metro, the eight-lane highways and the floodlit flyovers; the glass-and-chrome business parks, gated condominiums and air-conditioned malls; the coffee bars, designer home-ware shops and high-fashion boutiques; the BMWs and 4x4s; the pets as life-style accessories and the Swarovski crystal shop in the local bazaar: all highly visible indicators of the change in India's economy.

But the comforting familiarity of a skinny latte curdles on the tongue when you see that nothing has changed for the poor and struggling: the beggars, the street children, the cycle-rickshaw wallahs, the bent and skeletal women breaking stones and digging ditches and raising their children beneath the eight-lane flyovers.

I am more disturbed by Delhi than ever I was 26 years ago, and the reason is that Delhi holds an extraordinary mirror to the world. It is a microcosm of all the drives and aspirations and injustices that make the world go round. What is different in Delhi is that there's no way of *not seeing*. You cannot avert your eyes. You cannot pretend you don't know how people are being forced to live, and how the have-nots are being abused and exploited by the haves.

In his book *Faith Styles: Ways People Believe** John R Mabry describes six types of people: Traditional Believers, Spiritual Eclectics, Ethical Humanists, Liberal Believers, Religious Agnostics and 'Jack' Believers. Aruna Roy is the exemplar of the Ethical Humanist, and her beliefs motivate and direct her compassionate action on behalf of the poor. Others of us find our motivation and direction in different beliefs and experiences, religious and spiritual. What matters though, is not where the motivation originates, but where it leads. What fruit does it bear?

As John D Caputo says in his book *On Religion**: *The whole idea is to respond, to do the truth, to make truth happen, facere veritatem, as Augustine said, to do justice, to do the impossible, to make the mountain move.* However I respond, from whatever motivation, I fear I'll always trail a very long way behind Aruna Roy!

Go well

Eley

*see Bookshelf

You can hear Aruna Roy talking to Mark Tully in *Something Understood* on BBC Radio 4, at 6.05 and 23.30 on Sunday 11th May.

*A branch, a star
through this small window
the mind's eye opens*

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Spirituality and Interfaith

Extracts from a talk by Eley McAinsh for the Milton Keynes Interfaith Group in February 2008

Religion is moving rapidly up the global political agenda because of its link, at least in the popular and media mind, with conflict and violence. For the sake of world peace and security, and for the future survival of the planet, more and more people are recognising that closer, warmer relationship and collaboration between the faiths is an urgent need in our time, and a number of commentators are beginning to suggest that a focus on spirituality, rather than on religion, might prove a new and creative approach to interfaith dialogue. A focus on spirituality, they suggest, could circumvent some of the tensions, anxieties, and stultifying courtesy that can lead to deadlock and disappointment in conventional interfaith dialogue.

The Hindu monk and Delhi-based social activist, Swami Agnivesh, presented a paper on this theme at a major conference in South Africa in 2006. His paper was called *A Spiritual Vision for the Dialogue of Religions*.¹ What he said was provocative, iconoclastic even, but it resonated deeply with much of my own work at the interface between traditional Christian faith and practice and the newly emerging spirituality.

For Swami Agnivesh, as for increasing numbers of people generally, there's a clear difference between spirituality and religion as it's now understood. However strongly one might want to argue for the 'true' meaning of religion as rich, deep and profoundly spiritual, in common usage religion now means institutional religion: that thing, according to a well-known religious publisher in the States, *with doors and windows, clergy and tax exempt status, moral expectations and social implications*.

Religions, in Swami Agnivesh's argument, are based on territory (real or symbolic), conformity, and self-interest, or at least the interests of one community over against other communities. Religions quell the prophetic and critical spirit to preserve their clerical elites. Religions are threatened by individual mystical experience and have lost their ability to communicate a sense of the numinous. The religiosity we have developed, he argues *is the religiosity of rejection and exclusion*.

I did say he was provocative!

Spirituality, however, is something, in his mind and experience, quite, quite different: *Spirituality*, he writes *is like an ever-expanding ripple. From the individual it spreads and embraces the world around. Spirituality integrates the salvation of the individual with the transformation of society. That is why values such as love, truth, justice and compassion are basic to spirituality. ... Spirituality puts the spotlight on our shared destiny as a species and not on the metaphysical profit or loss that an individual might incur*.

And he continues: *Spirituality seeks to bring about change. But that change is not the process of fitting everything into a fixed framework. It's a change from is to what might well be ... Spirituality is a sphere of ever-expanding responsibility. That is why it's also a medium of [humanity's] on-going evolution*.

Swami Agnivesh acknowledges that spirituality once lay at the core of all the major faiths – the lived experience of the divine; the profound sense of encounter with God, or with the deepest reality – was the fire that inspired and forged the faiths. But he believes that this fire has been largely lost as the faiths have become increasingly institutionalised religions. Yet it is this fire that so many spiritual seekers today, of all faiths and none, are longing to recover, or to discover for the first time.

Swamiji draws together in a succinct and powerful way what many other writers, commentators, activists and practitioners are also saying, and what many of the people I'm in touch with through LSN and other networks are experiencing.

He highlights, as they do in different ways and different faith traditions, the healing potential of spirituality. Rippling out from the individual's commitment to a personal spiritual path, spirituality has the potential to bring transformation at every level: from the transformation of the individual to the transformation of local, national and international relations. It's this transformation, and perhaps this transformation alone, which will bring justice to global economic systems and restore health to the planet.

A recurring theme in contemporary writers and commentators in this field is that we are facing a moment of global crisis, but some writers add to this doom-laden scenario the belief that humanity is also, potentially, on the threshold of an evolutionary leap, a leap in spiritual development.

Judy Cannato, in her book *Radical Amazement: Contemplative Lessons from Black Holes, Supernovas, and Other Wonders of the Universe*² writes:

Pinboard April

20: Dunblane: The Moment of Truth is now ... it will be poetry. Evening at Scottish Churches House with Tim Duffy, Kathy Galloway and Alastair McIntosh. See www.scottishchurcheshouse.org Contact reservations@scottishchurcheshouse.org or 01786 823588

21: Glasgow: Celtic Spirituality. First of four weekly meetings of a short course at the Glasgow Ignatian Centre (last meeting 12th May). See www.iscglasgow.co.uk Contact admin@iscglasgow.co.uk or 0141 354 0077

25-26: Abingdon: Being in Balance – exploring deeper truth through the layers of meaning in the Vesica Pisces. Christians Awakening to a New Awareness (CANA) reflection days – the Vesica Pisces is CANA's symbol. Contact Sue Howard, 9 Prior's Road, Hemingford Grey, Huntingdon, PE28 9BT

25-27: Turvey Abbey, Beds: Meister Eckhart – Inner Silence and Awakening. A Christian/Buddhist weekend reflecting on Eckhart's texts through the medium of Benedictine Lectio Divina. See www.turveyabbey.org.uk Contact Sister Lucy 01234 881432

29: London Christian Meditation Centre: Aspects of Love with Fr Laurence Freeman. See www.wccm.org Contact uk@wccm.org or 020 7833 9615

May

2-4: Douai Abbey, Reading: A Spirituality at Work workshop offered by the Monos centre for the study of monastic culture and spirituality. Contact Anthony Grimley 01455 845390 or info@monos.org.uk

2-5: The Othona Community, Dorset: Labyrinth of Life. During this long (Bank Holiday) weekend led by Linda King, a large canvas labyrinth will help participants engage with their inner journeys in a down-to-earth, healing way. See www.othona-bb.org.uk Contact mail@othona-bb.org.uk or 01308 897130

6-11: St Beunos, N Wales: Music Meditation. A short retreat led by composer Mark Argent, using classical music to help participants enter into meditation. See www.beunos.com Contact secretary@beunos.com or 01745 583444

13: London: The Blissful Brain. Dr Shanida Nataraja presents findings from her new book on the effects of meditation on the brain and our health. See www.wccm.org Contact uk@wccm.org or 020 7833 9615

12-16: St Beunos, N Wales: Nurturing Creation – Building the Kingdom of God. A retreat exploring the link between environmental responsibility and building God's Kingdom, led by David Birchall SJ. See www.beunos.com Contact secretary@beunos.com or 01745 583444

16-18: Mount St Bernard's Abbey, Leics: Coracle & Pilgrimage. Make your own full-size coracle as part of this St Brendan Celebration. Contact Anthony Grimley 01455 845390 or info@monos.org.uk

17: London: The Desert Tradition – the relevance and importance for our times, led by Kim Nataraja of the World Community for Christian Meditation and part of a series of monthly sessions exploring the Christian contemplative tradition, hosted by the Contemplative Spirituality Network. See www.contemplativespirituality.org Contact info@contemplativespirituality.org or 020 8451 5255

24: Tabor Carmelite Retreat House, Preston: Meister Eckhart, the man who rediscovered the obvious and was amazed, with Hymie Wyse of the Eckhart Society. See www.tabor-preston.org Contact tabor@carmelite.net or 01772 787674

26-31: The Open Gate, Holy Island: Celebrating Saints and Sea Birds. A relaxed time learning from the history, and natural history, of Holy Island and its surrounding area. See www.aidanandhilda.org Contact opengate@aidanandhilda.demon.co.uk or 01289 389222

Simon Small: From the Bottom of the Pond – The forgotten art of experiencing God in the depths of the present moment (O Books £7.99)

This is a wonderful little book, the fruit of an authentic contemplative life lived, somehow, both on the farthest edge and at the truest centre. It is little only in size, not in stature, deeply yet unconventionally Christian, as wise as it is simple, as profound as it is accessible. I met Simon Small quite soon after I joined LSN – we had a fascinating conversation in which he traced his spiritual journey to that point. Simon is now an Anglican priest in the Diocese of Worcester but spends much of his time accompanying spiritual seekers from beyond church boundaries. After leaving the Church as a teenager he found nurture in a range of New Age and Eastern spiritualities and while he has in some ways returned to his roots, he remains deeply grateful for his wide-ranging spiritual influences and sources. For me it is different, and therefore appealing, in the way that BBC World Service news bulletins are different from BBC domestic news – it comes out of a different perspective, and different pre-suppositions.

John R Mabry: Faith Styles – Ways People Believe (Morehouse Publishing £12.99)

John R Mabry teaches spiritual direction, world religions, and interfaith theology at the Chaplaincy Institute for Arts and Interfaith Ministry. He is the former editor of *Presence: An International Journal of Spiritual Direction and Creation Spirituality* magazine. In this immensely helpful book he explores the many styles of faith and spirituality that characterize believers from all religions and none. From the traditionally faithful to the spiritually eclectic, he examines various modes of believing. Crucially different from previous faith development systems, most notably James Fowler's *Stages of Faith*, Mabry's *Faith Styles* approach is comprehensive and insightful without being developmental or hierarchical. Instead of subtly encouraging value judgements, it offers a route to compassionate understanding and relationship across all the myriad faith style permutations.

Pauline Webb & Nadir Dinshaw (compilers): Living by Grace – Moments of Grace for Every Day of the Year (SCM-Canterbury Press £9.99)

One of the first people to contact me when I joined LSN was my former, very senior, colleague, Pauline Webb, who within a multi-faceted, international ecumenical career was for a time Head of Religious Programmes for the BBC's World Service. I saw Pauline again recently at the 80th Anniversary of the Daily Service – she cut the celebratory cake, announcing that she was the same age as the Daily Service. This book is a new edition of a collection first published in 2001. Sadly, since then Nadir Dinshaw has died but this collection of readings from the authors' *commonplace books* is as fresh and relevant as ever, offering daily wisdom from literature, poetry and the world's great spiritual writers. The theme is grace, and the way it comes flooding into our lives, often when we least expect it, from surprising people and strange places. Richard Holloway provides the Foreword.

Sheila Ward: Towards Wisdom – Discovering wisdom through circles: a personal journey exploring the potential of love (Distributed by GreenSpirit Books £7.50)

This book reflects Sheila Ward's experience over many years – part personal story, part practical guide to the formation and richly creative work of *wisdom circles*, and part exploration of aspects of love. She highlights the moments that have shaped her own spiritual journey and offers her thoughts to women with at least half a life-time's experience and who care about future generations. Her aim is to address the dearth of wisdom in the world today, recognising that wisdom is derived from life experience and can be distilled through 'circles'

If you don't have a specialist bookshop near to home, the excellent Centre Bookshop at the London Centre for Spirituality, offers a wide selection of spirituality and theology titles, plus a range of music. With coffee available, the shop is in the Church of St Edmund the King, Lombard Street, London EC3V 9EA (020 7626 5031 or bookshop@spiritualitycentre.org)

There now exists an urgency to engage our consciousness that we have never experienced before. Our existence as a species depends on how we respond to the many issues that threaten the survival of the Earth. Materialism, political egocentrism, religious fanaticism, and human ignorance have spawned a political and environmental crisis of epic proportion. The crisis involves every relationship on the planet: person to person, person to creature, person to organic and inorganic life. Nothing is exempt from the dangers which confront us.

But she continues: As urgent as the current crisis is, we must nevertheless respond deliberately, with care rather than anger, with wisdom rather than fear. The consciousness with which we respond is as significant as the response itself, for in our responding we are becoming – we are taking the next evolutionary step towards homo universalis. Universal humans, described by Barbara Marx Hubbard as those who 'are connected through the heart to the whole of life, attuned to the deeper intelligence of nature, and called forth irresistibly by the spirit to creatively express their gifts in the evolution of self and the world'.

Thomas Berry, who has been called the leading spokesperson for the Earth, in an unpublished paper³, makes explicit the link from spirituality, to interfaith dialogue, to the survival of the planet. He observes that *human beings desire to communicate intimately and on the level of deep interiority* – from the feeling human heart – where they experience the numinous. The future adequacy of individual religions, he continues, as well as the emergence of global harmony, will depend on achieving this. ... achieving intimate communication at the level of deep interiority.

And another American writer, Beverly Lanzetta, who founded the Interfaith Theological Seminary, expands on Berry's observation in her book *Emerging Heart: Global Spirituality and the Sacred*⁴:

Members of diverse religious traditions, she writes, as well as people who claim no religious affiliation or belief, are aware of and committed to inter-religious dialogue as an essential dimension of world peace. They recognise in the external works of greater understanding and co-operation among religions an interior work of spiritual unity taking place in the depth of their souls. Today's religious seekers find in the call to discover the spiritual foundations of our common humanity a need to find in oneself the inner peace that helps heal the fractures and violence within our world.

In practicing this interior integration, spiritually attuned people realise that it is truly not possible to conceive of the individual spiritual life in isolation from the fortunes and fates of creation as a whole. This reciprocal relationship between the dialogue of world religions, the inner life of the person, the fate of the earth, and the transcendent aspects of the human spirit is leading people today to a new revelatory vision based on the awareness of the common spirituality that binds us into one earth community.

But this may be beginning to sound somewhat overblown and over-optimistic – what about the practicalities: the down-to-earth realities of what we're suggesting? And the questions are valid, of course, for there is cost and challenge in committing to living this vision. Courage, self-knowledge and generosity of spirit are demanded, as Frederica Halligan, in her book *Listening Deeply to God: Exploring Spirituality in an Inter-religious Age*⁵ makes clear:

To find a universal spirituality we must, first of all, be willing to surrender our preconceptions and beliefs that 'our way' is the 'right way'. There is truth to be found in each of the traditions ... We must be willing to let go of our sense of superiority and our emphasis on differences in order to find the value of cross-cultural similarities... we have to surrender our rational theologies in order to move beyond conceptual thought into the realm of mystical experience. The mystics have all told us that we cannot think our way into unity.

But even as Halligan looks to the discovery of a universal spirituality she is also very clear that: we must treasure the differences. She quotes Mike Bastia, the Native American spiritual leader, who said: *If we look into the natural world we see that the Creator loved to have diversity, which brings us to a point that many commentators are at pains to emphasise. We're not talking about losing diversity but about discovering a new unity and a new relationship with difference.* In *The Experience of God: Icons of the Mystery*⁶, Raimon Panikkar says something similar to Mike Bastia: *Pluralism he writes is inherent to the human condition and prevents us from speaking of God by starting from a single perspective or a unique principle of intelligibility.*

And Professor Keith Ward, the respected Christian academic in Oxford, in his *God, Faith and the New Millennium*⁷ says: *In the third millennium many possibilities exist for bringing the various religions into a positive and mutually enriching relationship. For that to happen, the traditions must not be destroyed, but must remain as witnesses to the diversity of human understanding of God, a diversity which will remain within any wider convergence of traditions.*

Grey clouds rolling
rain in gusts
silvers the window

Warm morning sunshine
wood anemones
the spiders web

Pale Easter morning
sudden sun light on the hill
newborn lamb

So if, as Swami Agnivesh acknowledges, the great religions began with spirituality – living, vibrant, spiritual passion – how can that spiritual core be recovered in order to nourish, sustain and direct the contemporary longing for spirituality, and the transformations that could result from it?

All the major faiths have traditional resources which are vital to this contemporary quest: prayer, meditation, contemplation, silence, retreat, study, self-examination, spiritual direction and discernment, rules of life, ritual, sacrament, insights from the mystical and apophatic traditions, insights into spiritual development, insights into the nature of community, insights into the crucial relationship between action and contemplation.

These are all extraordinary treasures, but most important of all in our context is, I suggest, the teaching in each tradition on the practice of meditation and contemplation.

Martin Laird, in *Into the Silent Land*⁸ writes *Contemplation is the way out of the great self-centred psychodrama. When interior silence is discovered, compassion flows. If we deepen our inner silence, our compassion for others is deepened.*

Echoing that, Judy Cannato writes *Fidelity to a silence that penetrates the heart and soul enables us to connect to the whole of life with hearts filled with peace, wisdom and compassion for all that is.*

Swami Agnivesh says *Spirituality liberates us from our religious ghettos. It dismantles barriers and enables inter-religious partnerships. This is basic to the liberation that spirituality affords.* And basic to such spirituality are silence, stillness and contemplation.

References:

1. Swami Agnivesh: *A Spiritual Vision for the Dialogue of Religions in Secular Spirituality as a Contextual Critique of Religion*, ed Cornel W du Toit and Cedric P Mayson. Papers presented at the Forum for Religious Dialogue Symposium of the Research Institute for Theology and Religion held at the University of South Africa, Pretoria 11-12 May 2006.
2. Judy Cannato: *Radical Amazement: Contemplative Lessons from Black Holes, Supernovas, and Other Wonders of the Universe*, pub Sorin Books
3. Thomas Berry, unpublished paper *Religious Studies and the Global Human Community* quoted by Kusumita Pedersen in her paper *On What Ground Do We Meet* in the journal *Interreligious Insight* January 2003
4. Beverly Lanzetta: *Emerging Heart: Global Spirituality and the Sacred*, pub Fortress Press
5. Frederica R Halligan: *Listening Deeply to God: Exploring Spirituality in an Inter-religious Age*, pub Twenty-Third Publications
6. Raimon Panikkar: *The Experience of God: Icons of the Mystery*, pub Fortress Press
7. Keith Ward: *God, Faith and the New Millennium: Christian Belief in an Age of Science*, pub Oneworld
8. Martin Laird: *Into the Silent Land: The Practice of Contemplation*, Darton, Longman & Todd

Capture the Moment

LSN supporter Gail Gowers has produced a slim volume of Haiku – short poems which seek to capture the essence of a moment of heightened awareness. Originally from Japan, with formal rules, the modern style is less constrained. Gail’s collection, called *Capture the Moment*, includes both traditional and modern, free-form poems. We print a selection in this edition of the newsletter. Copies of the book can be ordered from Gail at 17, Woodsyre, Sydenham Hill, London SE26 6SS or www.calinfo.co.uk/haiku.htm, priced £6.99.

*Turning the corner unexpectedly
they meet themselves
lovers again*

*Beached moonbeams
gulls glowing
shingled shore*

Farewell

Many supporters will of course know of the deaths of John O’Donohue and Chiara Lubich in the early months of 2008 but it seems appropriate, nevertheless, to mark the passing of two people who have done so much to shape contemporary spirituality.

John O’Donohue died suddenly in January at the age of 53. Poet, philosopher, priest and prophet, he was best known for his book *Anam Cara*. If you would like to read some of what has been written about him we have copies of pieces from *The Tablet* (by Patrick O’Brien) and *Spirituality* (by Brendan O’Cathaoir) in the LSN office, and there is a moving memoir by the poet David Whyte at www.jodonohue.com

Chiara Lubich was the founder of Focolare, the grassroots religious movement which grew, in her lifetime, to encompass 2 million adherents in 182 countries. Peter Stanford, writing in *The Guardian*, said that *only Mother Teresa of Calcutta could match Lubich’s influence as a woman in the all-male world of the Vatican under John Paul II.*

Sr Eileen Smith has also died, at the age of 85, after a short stay in hospital. Former members of the Fellowship of Prayer for Unity will remember her as a member of the Farncombe Community. Another former Sister from Farncombe, Olive Tallack, remembers Eileen fondly as a very helpful member of the community, and one she was sad to see leave after several years’ service.

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 library@thewellatwillen.org.uk

Tina Beattie: The New Atheists – the Twilight of Reason and the War on Religion (DLT £8.95)

High profile atheists have recently enjoyed many column inches and minutes on air but the challenges are now coming thick and fast. Tina Beattie is always worth reading and this book is no exception. Her challenge to the atheists goes much further than theological apologetics in its call to all sides in the argument to engage in a wide-ranging and creative dialogue across religious and cultural boundaries.

John D Caputo: On Religion (Routledge £7.99)

Pete Rollins, author of *How (not) to Speak of God* and guest speaker at our LSN Gathering in London last summer, recommended this book to me. It’s not new (2001) but it’s a very engaging and stimulating read. Taking Augustine’s question *What do I love when I love my God?* as his key theme, Caputo asks if we can *have religion without religion*, and writes towards the end of the book: *God is the passion of life, the passion of my life, the passion of my unknowing, my passion for the impossible. God is served in spirit and in truth, not in propositions.*

Bernadette Flanagan & David Kelly (eds): Lamplighters – Exploring Spirituality in New Contexts (Veritas £16.99)

Bernadette Flanagan PBVM set up the Masters in Applied Spirituality course at the Milltown Institute in Dublin and has taken a close interest in the work of LSN. The appeal of this important collection of essays will be somewhat limited by its highly academic nature but it provides the committed reader with an excellent introduction to the theological background to contemporary issues in spirituality on the margins. Because the various contributors are not only academics but reflective and compassionate practitioners, they offer acute and challenging insights arising from their work with a whole range of marginalised individuals and communities: immigrants and refugees, poor and abused women, the mentally ill and those suffering from various addictions. The authors propose ways to *hear the still small voice of what has been silenced or marginalised, what disrupts comfortable mainstream visions.*

Laurence Freeman (ed): The Heart of Creation – Meditation: a way of setting God free in the world (Canterbury Press £8.99)

Laurence Freeman has edited this newly reprinted collection, based on talks given by John Main, the Benedictine monk who founded the World Community for Christian Meditation. As this edition of *Living Spirituality News* goes to press, meditation is getting a lot of coverage thanks to a new television series presented by Professor Kathy Sykes (*Alternative Therapies: the Evidence*). This programme, along with other books, articles and research, highlights the benefits of meditation and its capacity actually to alter activity in the brain. But for John Main the purpose of meditation was not simply to induce calm and well-being. In the spirituality of the desert fathers and mothers he discovered a tradition of contemplative prayer that he believed could re-energise the Church in prayer and restore its capacity to communicate a sense of wonder at the heart of creation.

Claire Henderson Davis: After the Church – Divine Encounter in a Sexual Age

(Canterbury Press £8.99)

The American theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether gives this book this powerful endorsement: *Claire Henderson Davis deconstructs key Christian dogmas, but also translates them into deep patterns of meaning that illuminate our everyday dynamic of life. It is a translation that is deeply autobiographical. She brings in her own story and her relations with her family in powerful and poignant ways. But it is a kind of autobiography that can touch other autobiographies, allowing each reader to realise the similar patterns that illuminate her or his own life. I like the author’s assertion that she writes to claim the future undetermined, finding my way to the limits of the known world in order, there, to greet the unknown.*