

Interview with John Philip Newell, Edinburgh 10th March 2011 on the launch of *Chanting for Peace* and in advance of publication of *Praying with the Earth*

EMcA: What was your vision for the new book?

JPN: The inception of the vision came very much out of the teaching that my wife Ali and I do each year in the high desert of New Mexico at the Casa del Sol – a retreat centre which is part of the Ghost Ranch complex. Ali and I have been teaching there every year with Rabbi Nahum Ward-Lev, from Santa Fe, and Rahmah Lutz, a Sufi Muslim teacher from nearby, a little village called Abiquiu. To begin with my intention, and my hope, in inviting them to teach was that I would learn from them wisdom from their own traditions, and I've certainly received much wisdom from their traditions. But the great surprise in the relationships is how much light they would throw on my own tradition, and on my understanding of the wisdom of Jesus. This made me realise that a very important thing to be doing is to be much more intentional about coming into relationship with one another to receive wisdom from other traditions but also to allow other wisdom traditions to throw light on our devotion to the way of Jesus. So it was in that context that I realised that as I listened to wisdom from the Koran, or as I listened to Rabbi Nahum teach Torah, that I was not only receiving wisdom from outside my tradition but these words were throwing new light on, and inviting me into greater depth of commitment to the wisdom of Jesus.

Then I began, over several summers at the Ghost Ranch, as we prayed every day at the rising of the sun over the mesa in the desert, and again at sunset, to include words from the Koran and words from the Hebrew scriptures, together with words of Jesus, usually from St Matthew's Gospel. I noticed how significant that was for my own heart, and began to hear from other people just how important it was, in the context of prayer especially, to hear words from the Koran. We often hear words from the Hebrew scriptures, of course, but to hear these collections of words – not just studying them but allowing them to be part of our prayer – represented quite a shift of heart for many of us. So then, observing how important this was for me, and for many others, I felt that I should work on a book that would make that offering more broadly, and it's quite interesting to observe the effect of it at Ghost Ranch because although we're a mixture of people in attendance there, it's predominantly people from the Christian part of the household at prayer and while I'll always be delighted to hear that this book might be appreciated by Jews or Muslims, my real awareness is that it'll be of use primarily within the Christian household, as a way of opening our ears to something that we haven't heard, and the vast majority of Christians today haven't heard – words from the Koran. And to do this discipline of not only hearing but incorporating them into our prayer is, I believe, part of the transforming of the sense of relationship between our traditions that can be a part of contributing to peace among us as nations. If there's not peace within the household of Abraham, there cannot possibly be peace among us as nations.

EMcA: How familiar were you with the Koran?

JPN: I was very unfamiliar with the Koran until about five years ago when I began, around the time of teaching with Rahmah, to systematically read the Koran from cover to cover. The Koran has within it some very challenging, disturbing notes of violence of heart that compared to the sort of violence of heart that we have in our Hebrew/Christian scriptures at times, so it's not easy reading, and I don't attempt in this book to use insights or words from

the full cross-section of perspectives in the Koran, just as I don't do that with the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. My focus has been to pick up on words that can contribute to the theme of peace, and that call us back to a oneness or a unity that is deeper than our differences.

EMcA: I'm interested in what you gleaned from listening to your colleagues speak – were they consciously sharing insights into the Christian tradition or were you picking up something at a deeper level than was simply there in what they were saying?

JPN: Yes! Very much the latter. They are both beautifully wise but profoundly humble people so they wouldn't have assumed that they had anything to teach me about Jesus. A part of our arrogance within the Christian tradition has sometimes been to assume that Jesus is ours, and I think that through Nahum and Rahmah I've come to see more clearly that Jesus is the world's and that we've been untrue to our great treasure to claim that he is limitedly ours. And my experience has been that there are certain insights into the wisdom of Jesus that the Muslim world, for instance, has never forgotten. The way they speak in ultimate terms of respect – whenever Rahmah refers to Jesus she says *Jesus, peace be upon him*, using the ultimate term of respect that's used when the name of the Prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him, is spoken. So it's insights like that, and one of the shadow sides of our Christian inheritance is that we're so wrapped up in Jesus that we've taken our eye off some of the profoundly simple but challenging truths of the wisdom of Jesus, and especially about his Way of compassion.

EMcA: In terms of the process that led to the book, how did you work?

JPN: I very much began by reading, the Koran, and in the Hebrew tradition, the Psalms. Then I chose to concentrate on one voice, one glimpse into the Jesus tradition, so I drew from Matthew's gospel, to try to get a consistency. So that's where the project began. I read these texts with an eye to what are the words we can bring into prayer, and bring into relationship between these three parts of the household. And then, at the same time, I was looking for an overall structure for the book and I chose to structure it in terms of the Beatitudes of Jesus, so I allowed one of the major themes to characterise each day of the week, and then, in relation to that, I began to write the prayers and sometimes, as you'll notice, the prayers pick up very explicitly on the words from scripture, but at other times they don't, but those words are in my heart as I'm writing the prayers so that there's a connection there, though not always an explicit one, or one easily discerned from outside. One of the things I was aware of when I was writing these prayers was that I'd love them to be heard by people like Nahum and Rahmah, but they're not really primarily for them – I don't think they *need* these prayers in the same way that I believe we need them in the Christian household. It's an offering, and I was very intentional about this – I was seeing this book as an offering from within, and primarily to, the Christian household as a way of saying we need these other insights and these other wisdoms and we need these wider relationships in order to be complete; that our traditions aren't given to compete with one another and once we begin to see that, it's so obvious, but we've been trained to see in other ways.

EMcA: Did you write sequentially through the days and through the times of the day?

JPN: Absolutely! I'm a real plodder when it comes to writing so I began with the opening prayer of Sunday morning and ... that's how I write. It's not as if I get inspiration half way through a walk and rush home thinking 'That's the prayer! It's perfect for Wednesday!'

EMcA: Is there any aspect of that?

JPN: No, not for me. I love my writing time, and my time of greatest clarity is early in the morning. I really love the stillness and clarity of the morning and for me it's a matter of being faithful to that time and to that discipline and showing up at the desk, repeating the words from scripture within myself, meditating, and then just being aware of what words begin to emerge.

EMcA: So is there no line between your devotional practice and your creative habits? Is your writing your prayer and vice versa?

JPN: Yes, I find that especially when I'm writing prayer books. When I'm writing theology or prose spirituality there is a bit more of a gap. I still absolutely honour the early morning practices of stillness and meditation and if I neglect those in a day then I know that my creativity and wisdom and sense of presence suffers for it. But this is one of the things that I love about writing prayer books, that it is absolutely woven together with my own practice of prayer and meditation and for me prayer is the poetry of the soul and one of the things I experience in looking at prayers that I've written is that after the creative process, when I read and use these prayers, I often truly don't recognise them as mine. Of course there are things I remember about the writing, but my experience again and again in relation to prayers is that they are *ours* – they come from a place within us and I happen to have been the scribe, not in the sense of them being dictated for I know I wrestle, form and reshape words, but that is my experience of prayer in a way it is not with prose. When I read prose that I have written I know it's my work.

EMcA: I want to ask about your feelings as you cast your 'baby' out into the world? Is the finished word as you'd hoped it would be?

JPN: Yes, it's been wonderful to work with Canterbury Press again, and the graphic artist Vera Brice. We've worked together before on a number of illuminated prayer books and I have great confidence in them, based on what we've done before. I've seen the colour proofs and I'm very, very pleased and I think there's something important in allowing a prayer book to be beautiful to hold in one's hand, and to be beautiful to look at, and I think we've often lost that combination of beauty of texture and beauty of colour in a prayers book, so it feels much enriched by how Canterbury has produced it.

EMcA: Say a bit more about the colour plates that are such an integral part of the book.

JPN: One of the basic themes in terms of the art that we've chosen from the Christian world and the Hebrew world and the Muslim world is a recognition that a form that appears in each of these three traditions is carpet. Carpet designs – so one of the art forms that Vera, the graphic artist, has accessed, is Muslim carpet designs. Then we've looked at the carpet pages – that is, some of the title pages – in the Lindisfarne Gospels. In the case of this work there seems to have been one person doing all the illuminations, whereas in the Book of Kells there were plenty of different illuminators. This creative genius used patterns that were suggestive of carpet designs and this is one of the interesting things about the 8th century Celtic world; we sometimes look at the past and think the Celtic world must have

existed in significant isolation from the Middle East, and from the Himalayas and so on, but some of the dyes and pigments used by the 8th century illuminator of the Lindisfarne Gospels came from the Himalayas. So the artistic world of that time was much more aware of designs in other parts of the world and much more open to influences from other parts of the world than we would sometimes imagine. So the Lindisfarne Gospels illuminator was clearly using some designs that were similar to Middle Eastern carpet designs and that's one of the reasons they're called carpet pages, and, similarly, Hebrew illuminators were involved in a sort of cross-fertilisation with Muslim carpet designs.

And then we also used some graphics, some designs from the Alhambra Palace in Spain, because one of the aspects of the Alhambra that we know of is that Jewish artists, Christian artists and Muslim artists were all employed to work together on the great designs in the palace and that's a visual and artistic expression of what I'm trying to do in the book.

EMcA: So, add the musical dimension to all this – with the accompanying cd *Chanting for Peace*.

JPN: Again, it's an attempt to allow the genius of the traditions from different parts of the world to influence us. I believe that different types of music actually open up different parts of us and one of the clear intentions in this project was to allow Middle Eastern sound in particular to influence both the composition of the chants and the interpretation of the chants. The composer is Linda Larkin from Santa Fe, with whom I've worked before, so that was another aspect of the New Mexico creativity. Just as the relationships with Nahum and Rahmah formed part of the inception of the project, so Linda Larkin nearby was very eager to bring her creativity and I was able to tell her what I was looking for, that is, more of a Middle Eastern sound. But we're not simply trying to reproduce Middle Eastern sound; we're wanting to be very clear that we are westerners – the composer, me as the lyricist, the group of musicians that I work with here in Edinburgh, we're all westerners – so we're not trying to reproduce something so much as allow ourselves to be influenced by it, and I think it comes through in the music that, for the most part, these are very western and at times very classical western instruments, but we're using them to create a new sound that reflects the desire to be more intentional about relationship within the household of Abraham. So the sound, in that sense, parallels what is happening visually in the artwork and what is happening theologically and spiritually in the inter-weaving of sacred texts and words.

EMcA: One of the things I enjoyed about the prayers is that there's an honesty about the difficulties in these relationships, and there's a very strong strand of forgiveness running through the collection. When peace does seem so elusive, and no matter how optimistic we are one day, the next day in the news there's some great new atrocity. How do you keep the vision for peace alive?

JPN: I think there are a couple of things. One is that I firmly believe the pathway to peace, and to a new harmony – a new sense of inter-being and inter-relationship – the pathway forward, the pathway to transformation, is one that includes in it as integral and essential a naming of our brokenness and a never-forgetting just how deeply divided we are, never forgetting the depths of violence that are within the history of our nationhood, within our traditions and within our own hearts. Naming that, confronting that in our prayers, bringing it into our consciousness is, for me, an essential part of the way forward. There is no

leaping ahead to transformation by trying to downplay or deny just how broken we are. So that's one very essential aspect of the journey, and I think that prayer can do that; without beating ourselves up, without going into the sort of paralysis that some confessional practices do.

The other thing that I would say is this ... I was with some university students the other day in Florida and we were talking about some of these themes and there was a young Jewish woman present. She said *Is this not just a pipe dream to talk about peace and to envisage peace?* It was an important question, but what I tried to say to her in response is that the peace towards which we are working and being invited to give ourselves to as part of the transformation, *that* peace, I do not see as a static reality, but unfortunately some of our imagery and words around peace – peace on earth, or the coming of the Kingdom of God, for example – have sometimes given us a very static approach to peace. But this is not our experience in life. In the most important relationships of our lives, or in the journey of any day, what is it that enables us to experience and to know peace within ourselves and between ourselves? Every relationship, whether individual and intimate, whether collective, vast and national, is forever unfolding and in the heart of every moment, the invitation is to peace, so that the doorway to peace is right here, is right now, is always in the midst of any moment, in any relationship, and we're always being asked to be faithful to what will enable peace and what will enable the deep oneness we bear within us, and from which we've all come, to be born anew in our lives.

But when we do have these expressions and experiences of peace, it's not fixed, it's not static, so the next moment we can topple back into lack of forgiveness or resentment or violence, so peace is something that we have to forever choose. So in that sense I'm hopeful, and I love something I saw in an interview with the Dalai Lama not so long ago, in which the interviewer said to him: *Are you hopeful about the future?* And the Dalai Lama, typically, laughed and laughed, and he said *Of course I'm hopeful – the future has not been decided!* So it's ours to decide the future in every relationship, in every moment.

EMcA: I was struck in the first part of your answer about the need to be very honest about the reality of the brokenness – that's a million miles away from most interfaith conversations, which one of my friends once described as *being killed by courtesy*.

JPN: Yes, that's right, and we experienced something of that early in my relationship with Nahum and Rahmah – we were so keen to get everything right – but by the second or third summer of teaching together, as our love for one another, and confidence in one another, grew, we allowed ourselves increasingly to get into the difficult sides of our journey and so like any true and great relationship, there have been some testing times.

EMcA: One of the things that strikes me in the new collection is that it has all the earthiness and all the sensuousness of *Celtic Benediction*, and then it's also got hints of a wider cosmological awareness – the stars, the cells, the whole quantum universe – are you aware yourself that that's becoming a theme, and might that be at the heart of the next collection?

JPN: Yes, I have been aware of that. I was writing the prayer book at the same time as I was pondering and preparing for my next major prose spirituality/theology piece, which comes

out in July and is called *A New Harmony –the spirit, the earth and the human soul*. Much of what I do in that book is allow a kind of convergence between the new science and a new consciousness about an essential inter-wovenness ... and the ancient wisdom from the spiritual traditions – [a convergence that] allows us to speak ancient wisdom in radically new ways. So some of that was happening in me, and I think that I brought some of that into the prayer book – and it's a real fit, of course, a very good fit, and a very good progression from some of what we know about Celtic prayer and Celtic insight. So it's a progression and it's also for me being quite emphatic that what we should be doing in the Celtic resurgence is to be very wary of romanticising this tradition – it's not about going back to something that was, it's about allowing some of the lost wisdom of that tradition to be spoken in radically new ways and to weave it together with aspects of the new science and new consciousness of earth's oneness.

EMcA: But isn't the nature of that 'ancient wisdom' quite disputed? There's been so much deconstruction of Celtic spirituality and Celtic Christianity, and people saying that the version we have of it bears very little relation to the reality. How do you, as someone who's been so steeped in that tradition and so associated with it – how do you respond to that kind of critique?

JPN: Part of what I want to do when I hear that critique is to ask what is behind the critique, because I don't think that critiques are always as straightforward as they seem. So some of what I'm alert to when I hear that sort of critique, often from more academic theological quarters, is to say what are they afraid of, or what is it that is challenging them or disturbing them, in terms of the themes that are being articulated and reformed. That is a practice that I try to employ in any criticism in life – I try to look at what's behind it. And I think that what we're hearing from within many aspects of Western Christianity is a frightened perspective, a realising that we're in the midst of a major collapse of Christianity as we have known it, and in the midst of collapse is often fear, and the sense that what we need to do is throw up the walls and define the boundaries more exactly. So I think there's some of that happening. But I do think that the recovery of Celtic wisdom has not been served well by those who want to romanticise it or absolutise it, or to pretend that it was as defined a tradition as some people speak of. The term Celtic spirituality is a modern term and I think that this is part of the confusion and part of what leads to criticism because it's something used, forgetting this *is* a modern term. So some of the great teachers in the Celtic world, like Erigena and Pelagius and others – they would never have described themselves as Celtic spirituality people, they were just Irish and Welsh Christians. They were trying to follow the wisdom of Jesus, and they were doing it in the Celtic world of that time.

So I think a clearer term, and I term that I increasingly use, because of the reaction and misunderstanding about using Celtic spirituality, is to refer to the *Celtic world*. You know there's no disputing that they were Celts, and my argument has always been that they evidence some themes, some characteristics, that we do not find prevalent in the Mediterranean Christian world at the same time, or within the imperial Christian tradition once Christianity got into bed with the Empire. The Celtic world was in many ways an inconvenience to Empire, and to the imperial church and that expressed itself theologically as well as in many other ways – a tradition which honours wisdom as being deep within the people is not a convenient perspective to empire.

The other thing I try to clarify is that when we use a term like Celtic spirituality, I believe we're using it to refer to insights, wisdoms, that have unfolded and grown into new expression today, just as when someone studies American history, the history will often be about a people, a collection of peoples, who were in that part of the world before the United States of America was formed, so I think something similar is happening with the term Celtic spirituality, and it refers to a progression and an unfolding, and I think the unfolding process is quite important because most educated, theologically-trained Christians would say that the wisdom of the words of Jesus is forever unfolding, that is, we speak from the words of Jesus in ways that were not done 2000 years ago, or 500 years ago; we try to speak them into this moment in time. Their truth is living, it's organic, it's never fixed or set in one form. So we do that with really important texts in our Christian household – texts such as the Gospels – and I believe we can do the same thing with the writings of great teachers from the Celtic world. The attempt to think the tradition is somehow sewn up and locked and defined at one point in time runs contrary to everything we know about the evolutionary and unfolding nature of the universe as well as of humanity, and as well as of the Christian household.

EMcA: It's years since I've been in the States, but my impression is that the so-called Spirituality Revolution, and within that, the emergence of the 'spiritual progressive', or the 'new believer', is far further ahead there than here. The people I'm reading are almost all from North America. What are your observations of the differences between here and there?

JPN: Yes, for me the US is one of the exciting places to be at this point in time. In terms of new articulations, new awareness, but I think one of the significant things about spirituality in the United States is that we're seeing manifestations of both ends of the spectrum in very pronounced ways. So I believe that the new consciousness, the new awareness of earth's essential oneness – the inter-being, the inter-wovenness of all things – is nothing short of being like a new Pentecost. It's an extraordinary movement of the Spirit that's manifesting itself through all sorts of disciplines and is re-emerging from deep within many spiritualities. So if this is like a new Pentecost, a new movement of the Spirit, well beyond the bounds of our attempts to domesticate the sacred and the holy, then how are we to be open to that? How are we to serve it? And I sense a deep desire, and a deep willingness, to reform, to bring our treasure to this point in time in order to serve this new Pentecost, actually to be part of leading it, and supporting it, instead of being irrelevant to it, or opposed to it to the extent that we've thought wellness and wholeness and wisdom are to be had somehow in separation from one another, from other traditions. So if that's the deep spirit of this moment in time – what Thomas Berry called, this moment of grace – if we're living in a moment of grace, will we meet this moment, and be part of it, and serve it, or are we going to miss it, for Berry also makes the point that such moments are transient.

So I think there's great energy around all that in the States. But in any moment of grace, any moment of real transformation and transition, there's also enormous reaction, because at some level the fundamentalists – and I'm not just talking about the fundamentalists out there, but also the fundamentalism within our own heart when we don't want to change ... the fundamentalism within us, within our household, within our nations, at some level knows very clearly the *cost* of the new awareness, because if we're one, then we're going to have to change how we live as a species, as nations, as wisdom traditions. We're going to

have to wake up to the fact that we can't pretend to be well by just looking after our own household, our own family, if the family down the road is suffering. So this is a moment of grace, our way of seeing is being radically challenged. What you see in America is both manifestations: I think it's a great manifestation of the Spirit at the heart of this moment in time, and it's also a manifestation of fear, and that for me makes it a very exciting place to work. I experience, and I see, both these manifestations also in Britain, but not to same extent at either end.

EMcA: Do you think that's cultural, or that we're just lagging behind?

JPN: It's an enormously complex issue and I don't think there are any simple explanations. In the Scottish context, one of the things I'm very aware of, given our history, is that we have these two strands that are quite significant, both to our religious psyche and to our cultural psyche. The one strand is the fierce Calvinism of our inheritance. The Calvinist reformers of the 16th century were like our Taliban. They were a violent lot; they tried to bring change through violence and force, and it's almost as if there's been a kind of transmutation of that religious Calvinism into our secular psyche, so that just as Calvinism doubts what is deepest in the mystery of humanity, and doubts what is deepest in the energies of the human body and in the earth – seeing these energies as essentially opposed to the sacred rather than being *of* the sacred – so something of that has translated into the psyche of the nation, even though it's now a very secular nation. So it's a hard place. In my experience it's been a hard to be; ironically, it's the hardest place in the world to recover aspects of Celtic wisdom.

And I think Scotland has also been characterised by the strong philosophical tradition – the rationalist tradition and the great Scottish contributions of people like David Hume and others – and that's a wonderful strength of Scotland, its delight in the mind and in reason, but it has a shadow side that is the suspicion of the mystical and the suspicion of the body as a major faculty of knowing. So we've ended up cutting ourselves off from other ways of knowing and we're suspicious and frightened of other ways of knowing.

So I think those two strands – Calvinism and rationalism – are quite a potent mixture, and that doesn't say it all, but I think that's part of the difficulty of our journey.

EMcA: And you envisage continuing to work transatlantically?

JPN: Yes, and something quite significant has happened in my work – I mean it's small in some ways, but it's felt big for me – and that's the creation of a foundation to come alongside my work and enable my work to unfold. The great inspiration that led to the creation of the foundation – The Friends of John Philip Newell – came from Ken McBride, who is now the Chairman of the foundation and a very good friend of mine. He spoke to me after having had a very sleepless night while on pilgrimage on Iona. He's a good, straightforward Oklahoma businessman and he's not accustomed to being disturbed by the Spirit in the middle of the night, with a vision. But he spoke to me at breakfast on Iona almost two years ago, and said *this is what I've realised. I feel compelled to start a foundation*. His great insight, and as soon as he said it, I knew he was speaking a deep truth for me; he said *I realise that your schedule is an essentially passive one, meaning it is driven by invitation, so groups invite you* – and increasingly groups are inviting me a few years down the road, so before I know it, my annual schedule is filled with invitations, and of

course, it's wonderful to be invited and I love engaging with groups who have invited me, but Ken's realisation was: *Where are you initiating? Where are you setting in motion things that you believe, on the basis of your experience and wisdom, should happen, but aren't happening?*

And as soon as he said it, it was one of those real, deep, realisations, and I hadn't been allowing that realisation to unfold in me, partly because I didn't know how it could happen. I didn't feel I had any resources to enable that to happen. So this has been a big shift. A lot of what I do will always continue to be by invitation, but the creation of the foundation has enabled me to say *what are some of the things I think are really important, that I can do to be part of serving transformation at this time?* So the two big new strands in my work are being much more intentional about being in relationship with young adults, young leaders in their 20s and 30s, and to come into a more intentional mentoring relationship with them. That's not to say that I am what they need, it's to say that we need one another. That generation is looking for ways to be in relationship with our generation and so our event on Iona in April is the first expression of that, and we have young adults coming from different parts of the world for *Pilgrimage for Change* – that's pilgrimage for inner change, but also for the transformation of our world, and this could only happen through a foundation, deciding to raise money to offer scholarships for young adults to come.

EMcA: How have you selected them?

JPN: We didn't have to do much more than let it be known through our network. The Friends has an email list of about 5,000 people so we let people know that this event was happening, and that we were raising money, and people let young adults, young leaders, in their communities know about it. It's a very good cross-section – some young theologians, some young people working in refugee camps, some working in inner city contexts, and some artists – the full range.

This is just the first and we're going to watch what we have to learn from this first experience. Iona was an expensive first choice, because it's not an easy place to get to, it does call for considerable resources and next time it may not be in such a wonderful place as Iona. We may feel that the next event needs to be in a city; so it's early days and we're trying to learn.

The other major area is related much more to the new prayer book and the new cd, *Chanting for Peace: Praying with the Earth*, in terms of allowing words from the different wisdom traditions to sit in relationship much more, and so over the next couple of years I'll be initiating times on Iona and elsewhere where I am in residence with small groups of teachers from other traditions. So this September, we're having a gathering of 10 Buddhist teachers and Ali and me on Iona. Again, that's by invitation, having the foundation's money in order to say *let us bring you together for a week*, and I wouldn't have imagined doing that before because I wouldn't have known how it could happen. So, we're not talking about an enormous foundation, but it feels really big for me in just releasing some imagination.

One of the groups I pulled together recently, again, as a gift of the foundation, was a little publicity group in New Mexico, in January. I invited them to get together to think creatively about how we make the offering of the new cd and the new prayer book. How do we make

people aware of them? So I invited people who had to do with communications and publicity, and one of them was my brother-in-law, Keith, from Los Angeles, who had recently retired as the CEO of a big publicity firm in LA. I felt *oh, he'll have lots to say about how to get a book out there*, and he was great, but what he brought was not at all what I'd been expecting because he asked a very important question in our first session. The question was *are we here just to talk about the publicity for a book and cd, and if we are, that's fine, we can do that – or are we here to launch, or serve, a bigger movement, which the book and cd can serve?* And that was a very, very important question for me, because I realised of course that this is about serving a wider vision, a wider practice, a transformative path. So what came out of that few days of meetings was something we're calling the *Praying for Peace Initiative*, and it means that wherever I am in 2011 and beyond, whatever I'm teaching, I want to do in the context of praying for peace. For me, that is to get the focus right, and it's also to say the context of the teaching must be this practice, and part of what we can share with one another is practices around praying for peace that get us in touch with the yearning for transformation which I think is deep within us. So, these are shifts which are small in some ways, but they feel very significant in terms of a redefining of what my work is.

EMcA: So what next?

JPN: One of the things that I love about writing is that usually, when I'm writing the Epilogue of a major piece of work, such as the *New Harmony* book – literally, it's when I'm writing the Epilogue that I get a clear insight into what my next piece of work should be, and it's one of those insights that comes up; it's not me consciously asking the question *what next?* I just suddenly realise, and it's happened so consistently with me that I now look forward to it. And so what I realised as I was writing the Epilogue of *A New Harmony* is that – and this relates very much to the new prayer book and *Chanting for Peace* and the *Praying for Peace Initiative* – I realised that I want to do something about rediscovering Jesus from outside Christianity. It relates very directly to what was part of the inspiration for the prayer book and that is how much I've learned from my Rabbi brother and my Muslim sister, and I think there's a real crisis of identity happening in much of our Western Christian household now. Many of us know that we don't want the triumphalist and often arrogant conquering in the name of truth that has characterised much of our past, but I think there's a real question about how do we reclaim the essence of the Jesus wisdom, the essence of our tradition, so what I'm realising, or sensing, is that if the wisdom of Jesus is to be recovered or reborn within us in ways which will actually enable us to lead peace, rather than contribute to division, much of that rebirth of wisdom, I think, will come from outside. That is, there are things that the other traditions, (the Buddhist tradition, for example – I mean, Thich Nhat Hanh and the Dalai Lama, have on their personal altars, images of Jesus); these other traditions have remembered many things that we have forgotten, or we've taken our eyes off them, so it's something to do with Jesus rediscovered from outside Christianity, and that feels a very natural progression, but I'm glad it came as an 'ahaa' moment.