



10-12: Loyola Hall, Merseyside: **Faith & Justice:** an opportunity to hear what God has to say to those who are committed to justice, peace and environmental concerns. Contact www.loyolahall.co.uk or mail@loyolahall.co.uk or 0151 426 4137

21: Sarum College, Salisbury: **Still Moves:** an experiential workshop that explores the role of posture, gesture and movement in the gathering up of the whole person in prayer, with Viv Stacey. Contact www.sarum.ac.uk or hospitality@sarum.ac.uk or 01722 424800

24: Glasgow: **The Enneagram:** helping personal growth by highlighting patterns of giftedness and limitation. Contact www.iscglasgow.co.uk or admin@iscglasgow.co.uk or 0141 354 0077

30-3rd Dec: The Othona Community, Dorset: **Human Dignity, Divine Vulnerability:** what is a human being worth? How is the Christian idea of Incarnation relevant? Reflection for the start of Advent. Contact www.othona-bb.org.uk or mail@othona-bb.org.uk or 01308 897130

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.

We have changed the format of Living Spirituality News in response to new postal charges. Going from A4 to A5 will save the Network several hundred pounds each year and we hope the smaller print will not cause inconvenience. **A large type version is available on request.**

Contact us at:

The Living Spirituality Network, The Well at Willen,
Newport Road, Willen, Milton Keynes MK15 9AA
Telephone: +44(0)1908 200675 email: spirituality@ctbi.org.uk

Staff: Director: Eley McAinsh Administrator: Win Kennedy
Design: Madeleine Frances **Printing:** Murrays the Printers 01908 326560

The Well at Willen, Newport Road, Milton Keynes, MK15 9AA Tel: 01908 200675 e-mail: spirituality@ctbi.org.uk
www.living-spirituality.org.uk

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Dear LSN Supporters

Let me describe three scenes from an English seaside holiday in the summer of 2007:

Scene I: Mum and Dad stretched out on the beach, heads to the cliffs behind them, feet towards the waves, while children play in rock pools close by. Rain blows horizontally off the sea and Mum and Dad are swathed completely, not in beach towels and sun-screen, but in clear plastic sheeting.

Scene II: Two pretty young women, dressed and made-up more for a Riviera promenade than summer in Whitby, huddle under floral umbrellas, grimacing cheerfully at the same horizontal rain.

Scene III: Small igloo tent, totally zipped up, with child's pushchair parked in the sand alongside. Family sheltering inside, Dad in shorts and waterproofs stands alone outside, guarding an elaborate turreted sandcastle with its Union Jack flag whipping in the wind, and scanning the horizon for a break in the slate-grey cloud.

These are the only people left on the beach, apart from me on retreat, striding with almost superstitious determination between the Whitby harbour wall and the next village, Sandsend. I've made a retreat in Whitby for the last six or seven years and it's fascinating how often the weather reflects the inner movements of the retreat. We were once enveloped in thick white mist for five days! This year's synergy between inner and outer was only marginally more encouraging, at least at the time. As my Director said at the end, it was *rather a desert experience*. But as often seems to happen in Whitby, insights and encouragements came unexpectedly, when I stopped looking for them. As I passed first one, then the next, and the next of these little groups determined to face down the weather, they came to represent all the determination, endurance, creativity, inventiveness and underlying hopefulness required for anyone seriously embarked on the spiritual path.

Eventually it became clearer what the retreat had been about. There were important insights about the hiddenness of God, the unknowability and withholding of God, the *concealment* of God, to use Pete Rollins' term. The most helpful thing I read while on retreat was *Meditations on the Sand* by Alessandro Pronzato, a series of short reflections written after an extended pilgrimage to the tomb of Charles de Foucauld in the Sahara. I'd read it before, but this time it seemed to speak to me more personally. His expression *the desert of perplexity* is borrowed from an Islamic mystic and struck a chord, as did the advice: *Never be in a hurry. Do not expect to hear God's word immediately on your arrival in the desert. You must wait in silence. Your whole being should be in an attitude of listening ... And God may speak through his word or through his silence.* And this, my favourite: *The desert showed me that the true object of meditation is to eliminate all thought. Meditation is meant to render me unprepared for the unexpected - God.*

But hope is different from expectation, as those stoic groups on the wet beach in Whitby showed. They knew they couldn't conjure the sun by wishful thinking, just as we know we cannot conjure God by the strength of our longing or by the 'right' rituals or beliefs. Yet whatever disappointment, perplexity, darkness and disorientation we experience, either on holiday or on the spiritual path, the fact is the rain clouds only hide the sun.

One of our most enduring McAinsh family memories is of years of childhood holidays on Hayling Island, punctuated by Dad's constant and ever optimistic refrain: *There's a brightening in the sky!*

Go well
Eley



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Spirituality and Religion: Learning a New Dance

LSN Gathering 2007, held at the London Centre for Spirituality in the City of London on 30th June

Despite the unpromising weather some 65 people, many of them new to LSN, shared a lively and enjoyable day. LSN is very grateful to our friends at the London Centre for Spirituality for their warm and efficient hospitality. We are also extremely grateful to Peter Rollins and Jonny McEwen from the Ikon collective in Belfast for their wonderfully original and engaging contribution to the day.

The day will be repeated at St Antony's Priory in Durham on Saturday 13th October. For details and bookings please contact The Administrator at durhamstant@aol.com or 0191 384 3741.

CDs of Eley and Peter's presentations can be purchased at £3.00 each or £5.00 for two, including p & p, from the LSN office.

Extract from Eley's talk

I was recently privileged to speak to a group of monastic superiors about why they should take the new spiritualities seriously, and what the potential implications might be for the ancient monastic communities. I suggested that they take the new spiritualities seriously, first, because God is most evidently at work in and through them, drawing people to Godself regardless of what's going on behind church doors, and, secondly, because they are a powerful catalyst for personal and social transformation.

But potential has to be realised and while there is, undoubtedly, within the spirituality movement, the greatest possible potential for personal, social and spiritual transformation, there are no guarantees that this transformation will ever be achieved. David Tacey is one of the greatest advocates of spirituality, but nevertheless emphasises that **we need lights and illuminations to guide our way** when we cut loose from institutional religion.

So, where are we to find the lights and illuminations we need? How are we to maintain our spiritual stamina to impact the world around us? How are we to go on taking seriously into account mystery, transcendence, and unfathomable depth? How are we going to sanctify life by our spiritually motivated actions? And how are we going to go on bringing news of another world? How, in a word, is the potential of spirituality to be realised? Especially when so many of us are pursuing a rather lonely path, are quite isolated, physically and/or philosophically, and enjoy little regular contact with fellow travellers and kindred spirits ...?

I suggest that there are three dimensions to our calling: three areas of commitment, discipline and practice, which will help yield those lights and illuminations; which will enhance our spiritual stamina, increase our effectiveness in whatever sphere is ours, and take us ever deeper into God.

We are, I believe: Called to depth, Called to learning and Called to agency.

The three callings of the contemporary spiritual/religious life: to depth, to learning, to agency. In seeking to respond to the challenges they present, we are free to draw on, and integrate, the insights of art and poetry, psychology and science, the practices and disciplines of the widest ever range of spiritual/religious traditions, and the most illuminating contemporary scholarship in every field.

But I am also sure, for all my ambivalence about institutional religion, that some of the tools which will be most helpful as we seek to respond to these challenges are tools developed within the Christian

28-30: Scargill House, Yorks: **Making a Difference: Greenspirit Annual Gathering.** Contact www.greenspirit.org.uk/ag2007 or ag2007@greenspirit.org.uk or 02392 599 299

28-30: The Othona Community, Dorset: **Writing the Spirit** with Judy Clinton (see entry for 7-9 September). Contact www.othona-bb.org.uk or mail@othona-bb.org.uk or 01308 897130

29: London: **Moving & Creating from the Inner Light**, led by Angela Schutz and John Harley, organised by Art and Spirituality Network. Contact artandspirituality@gmail.com or 020 8699 3494

October

5-7: The Othona Community, Dorset: **Singing the Sacred:** Sarah Pennington and Gilo with beautiful songs and chants from different traditions and cultures, invoking the divine spirit present in us all. Contact www.othona-bb.org.uk or mail@othona-bb.org.uk or 01308 897130

6: Sisters of St Andrews, Edenbridge, Kent: **Touching the Senses: Becoming Fully Alive:** a Quiet Day with Sr Diane Reynolds and team. Contact thecentre@sisters-of-st-andrew.com or 01342 850 388

8-11: Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, Birmingham: **Spiritual Friendship:** how to bring spiritual depth and openness to friendships, with Joycelin Dawes. Contact www.woodbrooke.org.uk or enquiries@woodbrooke.org.uk or 0121 472 5171

13: St Deiniol's Library, nr Chester: **Why I am a Christian:** public lecture by John Shelby Spong. Contact www.st-deiniols.org or deiniol.visitors@btconnect.com or 01244 532350

13: St Antony's Priory, Durham: **Spirituality and Religion: Learning a New Dance**, with Eley McAinsh and Peter Rollins. Contact durhamstant@aol.com or 0191 384 3741

15-18: Scargill House, Yorks: **Wildscape:** consider your relationship with the earth through prose, poetry and music, with Kenneth Steven and CAIM. Contact bookings@scargillhouse.org.uk or 01756 760234

19: Sarum College, Salisbury: **Praying with Beads:** explore the worldwide traditions and experience of praying with beads, with time for reflection and prayer. Contact www.sarum.ac.uk or hospitality@sarum.ac.uk or 01722 424800

20-27: Open Gate Retreat House, Holy Island: **Savouring Autumn's Wildness:** led by Graham Booth, a week in which to lose yourself in the glory of the island. Contact www.aidan.org.uk or admin@ca-and-h.demon.co.uk or 01289 389249

28: Tabor Carmelite Retreat House, nr Preston: **What is Spirituality?:** finding meaning in our lives today with Diarmuid O'Murchu. Contact tabor@carmelite.net or 01772 787674

November

2-4: St Beuno's, N Wales: **Seasoned with Love:** considering the spirituality of preparing and sharing meals with Mark Argent. Contact www.beunos.com/love/htm or secretary@beunos.com or 01745 584151

3: Sisters of St Andrew, Edenbridge, Kent: **Gateway to the Heart – exploring and praying the labyrinth** with Sr Jean Kirkpatrick and team. Contact thecentre@sisters-of-st-andrew.com or 01342 850 388

10: Kingston-upon-Thames: **The Art of Mindfulness** with Kathryn Wills and Maria Lancaster. Contact artandspirituality@gmail.com or 020 8936 8365

I'm sure this subject does need a radical look at. It has resonances of a divine continuum within it, which is well worth exploring.

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). It's a great place to browse, a calm oasis in the midst of the City, and a good place to meet for a quiet conversation. A mail order service is available, with free post & packing within the UK, and searches are undertaken for out-of-print and American titles.

Pinboard

Advance notice!

Sheffield, 12 April 2008: Marcus Borg on Jesus – Uncovering the Life, Teachings and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary. The hugely influential American theologian Marcus Borg will be speaking at the 2008 conference of the St Marks Centre for Radical Christianity in Sheffield. Contact Adrian Alker, 4 St Mark's Crescent, Sheffield, S10 2SG, email adrian@stmarkssheffield.co.uk or call 0114 267 0362

Spiritual Penfriend? Julian Towler is interested in the possibility of having a spiritual pen friend. In the process of building up a spiritual direction practice alongside other part-time work, he writes: *As I continue with this richly rewarding ministry, I find myself increasingly at odds with the established church. I am, however a little wary of taking on more meetings as I am rather short of stamina after a heart attack over five years ago, and I have to pace myself rather carefully. What I am particularly interested in is the question of having a spiritual pen friend.* If you would like to pursue the idea with Julian please contact the office in the first instance and we will forward your contact details.

Christian (non-denominational) Transcendental Meditation Group in Greater Manchester area: Anna Brook is seeking to re-start such a group and is hoping to hear from anyone who might be interested. Please contact her direct on anniemarcata@yahoo.co.uk.

September

7-9: Sarum College, Salisbury: **Writing the Spirit:** time for reflection and an opportunity to learn a particular method of spontaneous writing with Judy Clinton. Contact hospitality@sarum.ac.uk or 01722 424800

15: London: **Earth is Community:** a celebration of the vision and path of Thomas Berry with Matthew Fox, Satish Kumar and others. Contact www.earth-is-community.org.uk or 0845 2235280

17-19: Scargill House, Yorks: **The Holy Fool:** in simplicity and playfulness, relearn the art of slowing down and rediscover joy at the heart of living, with Angela Knowles. Contact bookings@scargillhouse.co.uk or 01756 760234

18: London: **The Soul and the Person:** talk by Sir John Polkinghorne followed by 'shared supper', organised by the Alister Hardy Society. Contact johnfranklin35@hotmail.com or 020 8858 4750

tradition: 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. As one of the participants in our Living the Questions Conversations last year said: *Just because the church gets up my nose, I don't feel inclined to turn my back on that immense inheritance of understanding of God giving Godself to the world.*

So, can we imagine a new dance between spirituality and religion? Is Celia Kourie right when she suggested in her paper for a major conference on secular spirituality held in South Africa last year, that: *Perhaps one of the fruits of post-modern spirituality will be a re-engagement with religion; the fruits of the former may well enrich the latter and the great wisdom traditions of the latter may well illuminate the former*.*

I think she is right, but there is a huge difference between what we mean by the *great wisdom traditions*, specifically here the Christian tradition, and the representation of that tradition in the majority – though not all – of today's churches. Here's John O'Donohue in an article called *Forgotten Springs* for the Irish Times:

A tradition is a huge archive of wisdom, shadow and memory. It holds the lived experience of a people latently present as a possibility. It offers a mirror to current identity and provides stepping stones to the future. A great religious tradition holds wisdom; it is the archive of the religious imagination that has concentrated on the central questions of the origin, meaning and ultimate homeland of human identity. It is a huge loss for a culture when access to this harvest is closed because of the limitations of the representatives of this tradition.

*Celia Kourie: 'Post modern spirituality in a secular society', in *Secular Spirituality as a Contextual Critique of Religion*, edited by Cornel W du Toit and Cedric P Mayson, published by University of South Africa, 2006.

Peter Rollins

Pete spoke from notes in a brilliantly lively, entertaining and spontaneous way – but this means that his presentation doesn't lend itself to a straight transcript. So instead, here is an extract from his book **How (not) to speak of God** (SPCK £10.99), on a theme he developed at the Gathering:

From a section called **Revelation as concealment (p16f)**

... revelation, far from being the opposite of concealment, has concealment built into its very heart. For instance, let us imagine entering a museum and contemplating one of the exhibits. The painting could be said to offer us a type of revelation, for it stands before us and communicates a message. However, the message of a piece of art is not that simple, singular or able to be mastered. This is evidenced in the fact that different people will take away different meanings from the same artefact, demonstrating that the message is concealed, elusive and fluid. When we ask ourselves about the meaning of the artwork, we are immediately involved in an act of interpretation which is influenced by what we bring to the painting. In a similar way, the revelation of God should be compared to a parable that speaks out of an excess of meaning. This means that revelation offers a wealth of meaning that will be able to speak in different ways to those with ears to hear. The parable is given to us, but at the same time its full wealth of meaning will never be fully mined. It is not reducible to some clear, singular, scientific formula but rather gives rise to a multitude of commentaries ...

Hence revelation ought not to be thought of either as that which makes God known or as that which leaves God unknown, but rather as the overpowering light that renders God known as unknown. This is not dissimilar to a baby being held by her mother – the baby does not understand the mother but rather experiences being known by the mother. In contrast, revelation is often treated as if it can be deciphered into a dogmatic system rather than embraced as the site where the impenetrable secret of God transforms us. In the former revelation is rendered into an eloquent doctrine, while in the latter, revelation is that which transforms. We are like an infant in the arms of God, unable to grasp but

being transformed by the grasp. Revelation can thus be described as bringing to light the secret of God in such a way that it remains secret. God is thus the secret who remains concealed in the sharing. We can thus not speak of a hidden side of God and a manifest side, for we must acknowledge that the manifest side of God is also hidden.

What is important about revelation is not that we seek to interpret it in the same way but rather that we all love it and are transformed by it...

... the emerging conversation is in a unique place to acknowledge the long-forgotten insight that God hides in God's visibility, realizing that revelation embraces concealment at one and the same time as it embraces manifestation and that our various interpretations of revelation will always be provisional, fragile and fragmentary.

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Library Celebration

At The Well, home to the LSN office, work on integrating the LSN Library with the books belonging to the Society of the Sacred Mission is making good progress. A computer database system will soon be installed, and the work of putting the collection onto the database will begin. On 6th October, The Well will be holding celebrations marking ten years since the formation of the Well at Willen community. The proceedings will start at 2pm, when the library will be blessed by the new Bishop of Oxford, the Right Reverend John Pritchard. This will be followed by an open afternoon between 2 pm and 4 pm, and then by a meal and concert at 7 pm (tickets for the meal and concert cost £7). All friends are welcome to come along and join in the festivities. Tel. 01908 242190 for details.

Bookshelf

Into Great Silence – A film by Philip Gröning. We have bought the DVD of this extraordinary film for the LSN library and will happily lend it out to supporters for the cost of post and packing (£5, including return postage). We cannot charge for the hire of the film, and anyone who borrows it may not charge for viewings. We ask that it is returned within one week. Please contact the office if you would like to borrow it. The film follows a year in the life of the Grande Chartreuse Monastery, near Grenoble, and is described as *a very strict, next to silent documentary on monastic life with no music except the chants in the monastery, no interviews and no commentaries. It is the first feature to document life inside the mother house of the legendary Carthusian Order in the French Alps. The viewer is invited to watch the films as part of a meditative experience where the film becomes the monastery rather than depicting one. A film for those who want to embrace awareness, absolute presence and to contemplate the life of men who have devoted themselves to God in the purest form.*

Jeremy Young: The Violence of God and the War on Terror (Darton Longman & Todd £12.95) This, the new title from the author of *The Cost of Certainty: how religious conviction betrays the human psyche*, is a hard-hitting and provocative exploration of the connection between violence and religion. Using the analogy of an abusive relationship, with God as a violent partner, Jeremy Young traces the influence of the psychology of such behaviour on Jewish, Christian and Islamic depictions of God. In conclusion he suggests how his insights may be applied constructively to a reform of Christian belief, and within the contemporary political situation.

Sandra Maitri: The Spiritual Dimensions of the Enneagram – nine faces of the soul (Tarcher Penguin £10.99)

Recommended by LSN supporter Steph Hobson, who writes: *Sandra Maitri states in the Introduction to this*

brilliant book that the recent focus has been primarily on the psychology of the nine types identified in the Enneagram. Her intention is to pursue the Enneagram's deeper function which points the way to who we are beyond the level of personality, a dimension of ourselves which is infinitely more profound, more interesting and more real! Like one of the reviewers, AH Almaas, I found that the book 'possesses a depth and completeness I find missing in the existing Enneagram literature'.

Innocenzo Gargano OSB (trans Walter Vitale): Holy Reading – An introduction to Lectio Divina (Canterbury Press £8.99)

The practice of Holy Reading, *Lectio Divina*, has been an essential element of monastic spirituality, especially the Benedictine tradition, for centuries, and is becoming increasingly popular today. This wise and practical introduction to the practice is from an experienced guide who has trained many Benedictine monks and nuns in this spiritual discipline. It is ideal for the complete beginner and the more experienced practitioner alike.

The following three books are not new but may well be of interest to anyone exploring spirituality and interfaith dialogue.

Fredrica R Halligan: Listening Deeply to God – Exploring Spirituality in an Inter-religious Age (Twenty-Third Publications £7.99)

Listening Deeply to God provides an opportunity to discover important pathways to the deepest source of spiritual wisdom. Written from a Catholic and psychological perspective, this book integrates studies and experiences in inter-religious dialogue, as well as stories of people on the spiritual quest, mystics and contemplatives both ancient and modern. The author shows that learning how to love leads to greater understanding among the world's religions, a communal path to the mystical unity of all humanity.

Harold Kasimow et al (eds): Beside Still Waters – Jews, Christians, and the Way of the Buddha

(Wisdom Publications £10.95)

Beside Still Waters gathers the voices of 14 Jews and Christians who describe their profound encounters with Buddhist teachings and practice. Ken Arnold, author of *Night Fishing in Galilee* writes: *The remarkable stories ... each share a common theme: the transformative value Buddhist practice can have in the lives of Christians and Jews; and a common conviction that one can be a member of one religion and be enriched by encountering Buddhist spirituality. This is, I think, the way forward for interfaith dialogue and the enlightening of the planet – the walls of religions become more permeable to the waters of the spirit.*

Hermann Hesse: Narcissus & Goldmund (Peter Owen Modern Classics £10.95)

Again, obviously not a new book, but ever since we used an extract from it in *Something Understood* some years ago, I've been promising myself I would read it. When I collected my pristine copy, the bookseller was quite envious that I would be enjoying it for the first time – it had had a major impact on him when he first read it many years ago. Hesse's exploration of spirituality, sensuality, detachment and creativity has remarkably contemporary resonances. A further extract will be heard in *Something Understood* on Remembrance Day in November, a programme called *Lest We Forget*.

Patricia Higgins and Richard Allen: Lighting the Way – Spiritual and Religious Care for those with dementia (The Leveson Centre. £5 payable to The Foundation of Lady Katherine Leveson, contact leveson.centre@virgin.net). Affirmation that a vibrant expression of spirituality and religious practice can have overall benefit for people with dementia.

RE Slater: Paradise Reconsidered – 9/11 & 7/7, Reincarnation, and the Lost Gospel of Jesus (Crest £9.99. Contact the author at BCM Box 1398, Monomark House, London WC1N 3XX)

A pioneering, self-published consideration by a supporter of LSN, of how the concept of reincarnation came to be excluded from the Christian tradition. The former Bishop of Truro, Michael Ball writes: *Reincarnation hasn't been properly analysed from a Christian theological perspective so far as I know.*