



March 2007

2-4 March: Chrysalis Centre, Donard, County Wicklow: **The Power of Now**, a weekend exploration and experience of *the Power of Now*, the best-selling book by Eckhart Tolle, led by Sam Young. Contact peace@chrysalis.ie or 045 404713

10 March: Glasgow Ignatian Centre: **Desert Spirituality**. A Lenten exploration of desert themes using images and scripture. Contact iscentre@btopenworld.com or 0141 354 0077

13-15 March: Sarum College, Salisbury: **Awakening to the Divine in Dreams and Symbols**. Explore dreams as spiritual practice, find skills and processes to enable us to relate to our dreams, with Madeleine O'Callaghan. Contact hospitality@sarum.ac.uk or 01722 424800

24 March: Glasgow Ignatian Centre: **Discernment, Desire and Choice**. Offering practical approaches to how we hear God's call in the complexity of our daily lives. Contact iscentre@btopenworld.com or 0141 354 0077

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 is an initiative of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (reg charity number: 259688)

The 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, the Milton Keynes Churches Council, and Churches Together in Britain and Ireland.

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.

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.**

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Dear LSN Supporters

I have a heavy newsprint habit. Weekend hosts testify to extra trips to the recycling bins when I've been to stay and I get jittery if I've not scanned at least two newspapers by 10.00am. Undeterred, even by the wise advice of a colleague early in my radio career that trying to discover what's going on in the world by reading the newspapers is like trying to tell the time by watching the second-hand of a clock, I'm the one slipping out of conferences before breakfast to bag the last Guardian in the local garage.

So among the many challenges of a 30-day retreat last July was the absence of newspapers. Scrupulous in my avoidance, except on the single rest day, my plans for re-entry involved significant quantities of cappuccino and printers' ink. The coffee was great, but the newspapers, oddly, failed to engage.

I'd been concerned about missing a month's worth of important events and developments, about being out of touch with the people and places in the news. But as I flipped through the multiple sections of the Sunday papers for 30th July 2006 what struck and intrigued me most, was the feeling that nothing had changed. Certainly, huge and terrible things had happened, especially in the Middle East. The World Cup had been won in controversial circumstances. Celebrities on lists from A to Z had married and split, kissed-and-told, triumphed and bombed. But it seemed that only the names in the headlines were different from a month ago, and not even all of those. Nothing had really changed.

Yet in a pleasant but unassuming red brick house on top of a Whitby cliff, real transformation had been taking place throughout the month as 17 people withdrew from their day-to-day lives to spend time in silent retreat, simply standing in God's way, making space for prayer to happen within them. While I can offer no proof, I am certain that not one of us went home unchanged.

Transformation is a crucial theme for a number of contemporary theologians. Marcus Borg, who has done so much to articulate the insights and experience of those concerned to find a meaningful expression of Christianity for the new millennium, writes in *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*: 'The Christian life is ultimately not about believing or being good. Rather it is about a relationship with God that involves us in a journey of transformation... grounded in the alternative image of Jesus which flows out of contemporary biblical and historical scholarship.'

Peter Rollins, whose powerful new book *How (Not) to Speak of God* is mentioned in Bookshelf, writes: 'While God is impossible to grasp, this does not mean that God has no impact in our lives, for in religion we are transformed by our desire for God. In religious terms, we may say that the desire for spiritual transformation is not satisfied in religious commitment but rather is itself the means of spiritual transformation.'

And in the recent conference: The Emerging Spirituality Revolution: Embodying the Spiritual Imperative (see over), organised by the Wrekin Trust, one of the keynote speakers, David Tacey, said: 'We are beyond belief: any tradition which demands we believe, is doomed. My one aim in teaching spirituality is to connect with something transformative in a student's life.'

A far greater challenge than the lack of newspapers during my retreat, was how to work with the 16th century Catholic theology in which the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius are rooted. Was it even

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- **Remembering Alan Horner**
- **Bookshelf**
- **Pinboard**

possible to do so for someone so attracted to the Borgs, Rollins and Taceys of the 21st Century? In the end, and not without some deep struggles, it was, and the reason it was is that the Exercises are not at heart about theology, but about spiritual desire and transformation. They are, in fact, astonishingly contemporary.

Another of the keynote speakers at the Wrekin Trust conference, Satish Kumar, editor of *Resurgence*, was asked what can be done about the problem of global warming. In reply he quoted Einstein as saying *You cannot find the solution to a problem with the same mindset that created the problem in the first place*. Perhaps I've learned that the mindset which creates and devours the news will never solve the problems the news reports! That will require a much deeper, and profoundly spiritual, transformation.

With warmest good wishes for Christmas and a transformative 2007!

Eley

The Emerging Spirituality Revolution: Embodying the Spiritual Imperative

Full details of this excellent conference can be found at www.wrekintrust.org. Transcripts and recordings of most of the main events are available. LSN Director Eley McAinsh facilitated a workshop called: *Living the Questions: the Way Ahead for the New Believer* in which participants were invited to reflect on what motivates, inspires and challenges the New Believer and how they understand the vocation of the New Believer. Some of the responses are included as quotes in this newsletter.

LSN: The Next Three Years

We are delighted to be able to inform supporters that at the 24-hour consultation on the future of LSN held at Eden Hall in Kent in June, the decision was taken to authorise the continuation of our work for a further two to three years. Despite the lack of any new funding to replace that which we've lost, it was decided that the work should be allowed to continue for the time being, drawing on the Network's reserves. After careful reflection and discussion, ably facilitated by David Bosworth, it was agreed that LSN has a distinctive and important, albeit modest, contribution to make within the field of contemporary spirituality. Affirming the gradual change in focus of the work in the past two to three years, the vision for LSN's role which emerged from the June meeting was summarised as follows:

- to be an open space for theological reflection and *exploration*
- to ask questions
- to *fly kites*
- to live the tensions that arise in spirituality
- to listen and respond to the people the churches do not meet, both inside and outside the churches

Again, we thank all those who took the trouble to share their thoughts on our future, and who expressed concern and encouragement as we faced difficult decisions.

Stop Press

After the decision outlined above was taken, LSN was invited to approach a religious community for significant financial assistance. The Director made a presentation to the community Chapter in October and we are currently awaiting the outcome, hopeful of a positive response!

Pinboard

Peter Parr, a supporter of LSN living in East Sussex, writes: *Since there was previously no local discussion group for open-minded/progressive/questioning Christians in my area, I decided to try to start one up myself. I've already found a number of others who are interested. Twelve people attended a first meeting in October, and decided we would meet as a group one evening every month. I wonder whether LSN has any supporters who live in the Tunbridge Wells (West Kent/East Sussex) area and who might be interested in joining us. If so, please contact me at 44 Welton Rise, St Leonards on Sea, East Sussex TN37 7RF or on 01424 756 218.*

Work/life at the Othona Community

Othona is a community/retreat centre on the West Dorset coast with a ministry of hospitality and a radical edge: "rooted in the Christian heritage... open to the wider future". As part of a major renewal we are offering new residential posts for Deputy Warden/Office Manager, Caterer/Cook, and Facilities Coordinator, plus opportunities for shorter-term core members. If interested please contact Monica King on bbrecruitment@othona.org or 0117 989 2599 - or visit www.othona-bb.org.uk/recruits. Closing date 18 Jan 2007. Selection Feb/March. Posts begin March/April.

December 2006

Apologies that due to the late publication of this newsletter, December events have been omitted.

January 2007

11 Jan: Glasgow Ignatian Centre: **Art and Spirituality**. First of six evening sessions on deepening our experience of God and reflecting on our lives using image and scripture. Contact 0141 354 0077 or iscentre@btopenworld.com

23-25 Jan: Sarum College Salisbury: **The New Birthing of Christ Today: a Celtic Perspective** with Dr J Philip Newell. Contact hospitality@sarum.ac.uk or 01722 424800

24 Jan: Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, Selly Oak (6pm): **A Very Short Introduction to Quakerism**, first of seven weekly talks by the world-renowned theologian and Quaker scholar Ben Pink Dandelion. Contact heather@woodbrooke.org.uk or 0121 415 6792

26-28 Jan: Chrysalis Centre, Donard, County Wicklow: **The Wisdom of de Mello**. Exploring the writings of Anthony de Mello SJ, which offer extraordinary insights into the reality of human living and its divine origins, with Carmel Wynne. Contact peace@chrysalis.ie or 045 404713

27 Jan: Sarum College Salisbury: **Being Human and of God**, integrating our spirituality and our emotional lives, with Janet Lake. Contact hospitality@sarum.ac.uk or 01722 424800

February 2007

6 Feb: Luther King House, Manchester (evening begins with coffee at 7.00pm): **The Riches of the Oriental Orthodox Tradition** with Bishop Angaelos, a leading figure in the Coptic Orthodox Church in Britain. Contact learning@lkh.co.uk or 0161 249 2504

16-18 Feb: Cold Ash nr Newbury: **Spirituality through Women's Poetry**. A weekend for women with Gillian Limb and Nicola Slee. Contact glimb@freenetname.co.uk or 01962 867374

19-22 Feb: Scargill House, N Yorkshire: **The Quest: exploring a sense of soul**. How to deepen your spirituality and clarify the experiences, values and practices that underpin daily life, with Joycelin Dawes. Contact bookings@scargillhouse.co.uk or 01756 760234

23-25 Feb: Scargill House, N Yorkshire: **Moving Mindfully**. Exploring how the way we feel about our embodiedness conditions the way we feel about the world, with Judy Hammond. Contact bookings@scargillhouse.co.uk or 01756 760234

Ken Wilber: Integral Spirituality – A Startling New Role for Religion in the Modern and Post-modern World (Integral Books £10.95)

This is a complex, ambitious book and possibly too inaccessible to have the almost apocalyptic impact predicted by the commentators quoted on the cover. It is, however, exciting, rewarding and extremely thought-provoking in the *radically new role for the world's religions* that it proposes. For anyone interested in the future relationship between free-flowing spirituality and religious form, Wilber's analysis and proposals are worth the effort his book demands.

Martin Laird: Into the Silent Land – the Practice of Contemplation (DLT £10.95)

Rowan Williams writes of **Into the Silent Land**: *This book is different. There are plenty of books on contemplation that feel rather tired – either wordy and laboured or unhelpfully smooth and idealistic. But this is sharp, deep, with no clichés, no psychobabble and no shortcuts. Its honesty is bracing, its vision utterly clear; it is a rare treasure.*

James Alison: Undergoing God – dispatches from the scene of a break-in (DLT £12.95)

Martin Laird, whose own book is mentioned above, writes of James Alison's latest book: *It is not easy to come away from reading James Alison without a sense of being deeply moved, challenged, and grateful for this glimpse of the truth of things. Undergoing God sets our comfortable worlds on a new axis. This new book by the author of, among others, Knowing Jesus and On Being Liked, challenges readers inside and outside the churches to transform their understanding of Christianity and of human desire.*

Keith Ward: Is Religion Dangerous? (Lion £8.99)

With Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion* heading for the Christmas best-seller lists, impassioned debate about the place of religious symbols in public life and global concern about religion and violence, religion is now at the centre of the political stage, nationally and internationally in a new way. In his latest book Keith Ward, Regius Professor Emeritus of Divinity at the University of Oxford, argues the case for religion. While acknowledging that it can indeed be dangerous in some circumstances, Ward gathers evidence to suggest that religion does much more good than harm overall, and the world would be a worse place without it!

Marcus Borg, Matthew Fox, Sallie McFague, Thomas Berry et al: The Emerging Christian Way (ed Michael Schwartzentruber) (Copperhouse £14.95)

In recent years and in rapidly increasing numbers, people have begun to understand the core message and purpose of Christianity in a different way. They have returned to its ancient roots and found a wisdom that speaks to their experience of faith and God today. According to this emerging vision, Christianity is primarily about transformation: about the transformation of the self through a living and dynamic experience of God, who is not separate from us but who is a part of us; and about the transformation of society. In this important series of essays thirteen key contemporary commentators explore different aspects of this new vision of Christianity.

Laurence Freeman (ed): Monastery without Walls – the Spiritual Letters of John Main (SCM-Canterbury Press £16.99)

Much of today's fascination with and attraction to the Rule of St Benedict can be attributed to John Main, a Benedictine monk, who first saw that this rule of life for monastic communities could be relevant for Christians living in the secular world. He founded a community of lay people who shared his vision and from this small beginning has grown The World Community for Christian Meditation which today is active in numerous countries around the world and has thousands of members and associates. Right up to the end of his life in 1982, John Main wrote a series of remarkable letters of spiritual direction to WCCM's growing family. The complete letters are now published in this single volume of remarkable spiritual wisdom and insight, as fresh and relevant for today as when they were first written.

What moves and inspires the New Believer? Everything!

The vocation of the New Believer is to be a listener, a radical contemplative, a prophetic, mystical activist.

Religion without Fairy Tales, Science with Soul

Frank Parkinson is a supporter of LSN and a member of CANA (Christians Awakening to a New Awareness). His career spans engineering and teaching at all levels as well as three years as a Benedictine Monk. He has lectured in literature and philosophy at universities in the UK, Canada, Austria and Guyana. His published works include *Jehovah and Hyperspace: Exploring the Future of Science, Religion and Society* and he is in the process of finalising his new booklet, *Religion without Fairy Tales, Science with Soul*. Having been given access to an advance copy of this latest work, we are delighted that he has given permission to reproduce extracts here. While the views expressed are Frank's, and not necessarily LSN's, they are stimulating, thought-provoking and highly worthy of discussion. Copies of the booklet will be available from the LSN office, price £3.00, from February 2007.

From **Truth, Conscience and Flat-earth Theologies**

Religion, like all else human, evolves, not only by incremental changes but by periodic revolutions when the grandeur of a new revelation demands a re-laying of foundations. In the rear-view mirror of history our descendants will come to see that the early twenty-first century marked the clear beginning of just such an epochal age.

From **The Crisis of Truth in Christianity**

The split world view of Christian theology creates a credal and constitutional dishonesty which runs throughout the churches and drains them of spiritual power. It cannot be put right by tweaking doctrines here and there. We are now entering into a second Axial Age which, like the first, will be marked by a fundamentally new understanding of what we mean by God and by the changes in religious practices that will follow.

From **Making the Vision a Reality**

The absolute and necessary starting point is quite simple: we must ask the power which created us and infuses every cell in our body to reveal what needs to be done and put ourselves at its disposal. All who come together in the quest must have a permanent listening role, and some will be natural followers, but none must follow passively like sheep, for all will have, in their own degree, a teaching role to play. All must be heard with discernment, for we do not know in advance where wisdom will be revealed.

The challenge is in the difficulty and painfulness of being authentic, but the absolute imperative to follow my truth, even if it makes me feel isolated.

The challenge is to become more comfortable with uncertainty, insecurity and the Unknown.

Remembering Alan Horner by Eley McAinsh

I am sure that Alan Horner would have hated me to begin this farewell with conventional words of loss and regret, so I won't, despite the fact that we miss him very much. He died peacefully in September having lived, and lived as fully as anyone could possibly have done, for over three years with myeloma. Living fully was one of the hallmarks of Alan's life: as a senior minister in the Methodist Church, as a devoted husband, father, grandfather and friend, a lover of nature, especially mountains, a traveller and a poet. He and his wife Margaret retired, nominally, to Milton Keynes in 1999, in order for Alan to work with LSN. He provided invaluable practical help as well as wise, enthusiastic and prayerful support to my predecessor Ruth Harvey and to myself. He ran LSN during the long gap between us, producing the newsletter and ensuring, with Win Kennedy, Paul Renyard and Pam Frier, that the Network remained in good health and spirits. His special interest was the bookstall, to which he brought a keen entrepreneurial instinct and thus contributed financially to LSN as well as in kind.

As I began to get to know Alan and to talk about his plans, he used to speak, quietly and rather vaguely, of his other agenda: his writing. He would mention having poems selected for various journals and reviews, and occasional success in competitions. Always modest, but alert to the encouragement in his editors' and readers' responses, his distant ... one day ... maybe ... idea of a collection of his poetry turned, after his diagnosis, from a thought to a project, culminating in the publication, late in 2005, of *A Picture With The Paint Still Wet*, a selection of over 150 of his poems. The poems cover a wide range of events, experiences and reflections but as he wrote himself on the cover *Behind them all is the sense that the poet too, like the universe itself, is on 'a journey to become'.*

The book is a wonderful memorial to good and much-loved man, and what more appropriate thanks can we give than to print one of his poems here, *Star dust*, which was read as part of the Service of Thanksgiving for his life at the Church of Christ the Cornerstone in Milton Keynes on 29th September:

Star dust

This flesh, this blood,
this body and this bone,
did not begin with me.
They were not grown
in my few years of life.
They had their origin
before beast or humankind,
before rivers, rocks,
before all the forms we find
on planet earth, which itself
is framed and fashioned
out of cosmic dust.
Our galaxy evolves:
Its stars, its suns, its moons
are on a journey to become,
to end and start again,
and then move further on.

Of earth's dust we are,
of star dust we now learn,
and unto star dust
shall we soon return.

And is that all? Is it our destiny
to call the universe our home
in which as specks of dust
we may be gathered up,
recycled, and no more?
Or is our wonder at life's mystery
Not itself a sign what we are for,
and what deep down we know?
That we are on a journey
to become one with the One
with whom all was begun,
who said, Let it be so.

Willen Library Project Update from Win Kennedy

And yet more good news: we are delighted to announce that we have succeeded in obtaining both funding and professional staff for this Project (see *LSN News Spring 2006*). The Society of the Sacred Mission agreed to underwrite the cost of employing a librarian on a part-time basis for the initial 3-year project of amalgamating and computerising the two collections - the original SSM library and the LSN library with its focus on spirituality. Staff at Milton Keynes Council Library were extremely encouraging, and suggested that a former senior colleague of theirs, who was hoping to find less stressful part-time work, might well be interested. They were right - and Barbara Merrifield started work on 2 October! She has of course all the appropriate skills and expertise, and has lost no time in familiarising herself with the stock. In due course we expect the library will become much more user friendly, and be linked electronically with other collections. In the meantime the website www.mkinspire.org.uk will tell you a little about it. But **watch this space!**

*My motivations: the search for authentic expression when most traditional formulations don't work,
and the search for some way to make a difference.*

*A quote from Wordsworth's Tintern Abbey comes close: A sense sublime,
of something far more deeply interfused.*

The vocation of the New Believer: to journey out to discover the direction of the call within.

The way ahead for the New Believer is the both/and mystery of being.

Bookshelf

If you don't have a specialist bookshop near to home, the excellent 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.

Peter Rollins: *How (Not) to Speak of God* (SPCK £10.99)

The well-known American religious books publisher Phyllis Tickle writes of this demanding, profound and ground-breaking book: *Here in pregnant bud is the rose, the emerging new configuration, of a Christianity that is neither Roman nor Protestant, neither Eastern nor monastic; but rather is the re-formation of all of them. Here, in pregnant bud, is third-millennium Christendom.*

David Hay: *Something There – The Biology of the Human Spirit* (DLT £15.95)

David Hay was the keynote speaker at the Annual Gathering of LSN in Edinburgh in April 2001 and we have since helped to distribute his paper *Understanding the Spirituality of People who don't go to Church*. In this new book he develops his earlier research. He explores the evidence that spirituality is hard-wired into our biological make-up and argues that this is what enables people to relate ethically to other human beings and to their environment. By applying scientific method to religious enquiry, David Hay offers a new account of the importance of spirituality for human well-being.