



Dear LSN Supporters

Dr Rajiv Kumar is the Director of the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations. His role is crucial, strategic and internationally respected. In his 'spare' time, he is developing a new ethics for global economics, based on the shared spiritual values of the world's major faiths.

He was once a Maoist revolutionary, committed to the violent overthrow of exploitative feudal landlords using, specifically, traditional weapons: knives, staves, hoes, machetes. His commitment to the Revolution was born, he acknowledges, of youthful idealism, but was no less sacrificial for that. He abandoned his studies at one of India's most prestigious colleges and went to live first in the rickety shanties of Delhi with poor factory workers, and then with landless brick-makers in India's most desolate rural state, Bihar.

We interviewed Dr Kumar for an edition of *Something Understood** called *Called to Account*; as he talked about the development of his own ideas and beliefs I became more and more captivated by his story. What, the presenter asked, made him change his analysis and his tactics? *My real life experience on the ground* he replied. *When I started talking to those brick-makers about their landlord and the exploitation they suffered at his hands, they said they had no landlord! That shocked me profoundly. I came to realise that all I'd been told by my seniors, the ideologues in the Movement, simply did not map with the reality on the ground. That started my questioning, and the realisation that I had to trust my own experience.*

He listened to, and learned from, those he had set out to liberate. Those poor labourers challenged his dearest certainties, presenting him with a choice. He could deny the challenge and continue to operate in a tightly-closed box, forcing every new insight and experience to fit the slogans and formulae of his political masters; or he could decide, as indeed he did

decide, to set out on a journey of discovery on which he would redraw his maps, revise his certainties and raise his eyes to the farthest horizon.

Meanwhile, closer to home, Keith Ward, Regius Professor of Divinity Emeritus at Oxford, has been suggesting that Christians need to expand their horizons and revise some cherished certainties, in the light of new insights about the cosmos. In a fascinating series of lectures at Gresham College in London he has said: *Now we know that the cosmos is an immensely greater arena for divine redemption than the New Testament writers could ever have guessed, the cosmic vision of Christianity needs to be reformulated in the light of what we now believe about evolution and cosmology ... we must rethink much of our imagery of creation ... There could be millions of years of evolution still to come, and perhaps God's plans for intelligent life have hardly begun.*

Rajiv Kumar and Keith Ward underline, for me, something important about contemporary spirituality, that area of exploration so often criticised for being concerned only with subjective, inner experience. Both Kumar and Ward speak of the need to revise inner convictions, whether political, scientific or theological, in the light of new outer experience and data. This, I infer, is the only way for us to move forward with wisdom, integrity and the hope of positive transformation. And this is precisely the process in which many of those involved in spirituality are engaged: not self-seeking navel-gazing, but a conscious and conscientious redrawing of the maps, both inner and outer, in response to new (or newly rediscovered) experience and data.

Go well

Eley

*BBC Radio 4's weekly spiritual anthology, broadcast at 6.05 am (repeated 11.30 pm) every Sunday

LIVING THE QUESTIONS

A journey in conversation with Eley McAinsh, Director of LSN and John Rackley, Minister of Manvers St Baptist Church, Bath, former President of the Baptist Union and Chair of the Retreat Association, supported jointly by LSN and the Retreat Association.

And the questions are:

We are told there is a Spiritual Revolution going on. Eley has begun to assemble her many discoveries about the reality of what some believe is a significant shift in British society. What does this mean for Christian people today? What does it mean for the local church? In the light of the Spiritual Revolution what do we need to learn, do and believe? Can the old ways of church life and outreach make any difference now? In fact is the evidence mounting that the entire assembly of Christian belief and practice has to be dismantled and reconstructed. Is this the calling of God to the Church in this day and age? Are such notions as mission-shaped church, emerging church, new ways of being church actually shoring up tired structures against a tide of spiritual renewal that they are not going to respond to? Has 'God's Bias to the Poor' become lost in this churchy introspection? John Rackley wants to explore these questions because he is deeply committed to the calling of the local church and wants to ask: so what?

Join in the conversation in Manchester, London, Winchester and Dunblane:

Manchester, Wednesday 3rd May: 7pm Luther King House, Brighton Grove, Manchester, M14 5JP (£3, £2 concessions, no need to book) Fran Ives 0161 249 2540 map at www.lkh.co.uk

London, Wednesday 10th May: 6pm London Centre for Spirituality Bookshop, Church of St Edmund the King, Lombard Street, London EC3V 9EA (no need to book) 020 7621 1391

info@spiritualitycentre.org

Winchester, Saturday 3rd June: 10.30am The United Church, Jewry St, Winchester SO23 8RZ (no need to book)

Juli Wills 01962 878 948

Dunblane, Tuesday 6th June: 6pm (supper) Scottish Churches House, Kirk Street, Dunblane FK15 0AJ (please book) reservations@scottishchurcheshouse.org 01786 823 588

For any further information please contact The Retreat Association, The Central Hall, 256 Bermondsey St, London SE1 3UH info@retreats.org.uk 020 7357 7736 www.retreats.org.uk

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The New Spirituality: news of a work in progress

One of the great pleasures of working with LSN is meeting people working in the same area, to share ideas, experiences and discoveries. Back in cold, damp February I met Dr Gordon Lynch, of Birmingham University. For the past 18 months he's been engaged on a research project exploring contemporary forms of progressive spirituality. This work is due to be published by IB Taurus early in 2007, under the title *The New Spirituality: Progressive Faith in the Twenty-First Century*. It's anticipated that this will become an on-going project, with further publications in the future. Gordon was kind enough to send me the draft of one of his chapters, and, even more kindly, has allowed LSN to print some extracts here, as a taster for what, I am sure, will be an extremely important and illuminating book. Here he tackles the question of **Progressive Spirituality as a Religious Ideology**:

When thinking about progressive spirituality, it is less useful to see it as a universally held worldview of a particular group, and to ask instead what kinds of practices, identities, experiences and relationships the ideology of progressive spirituality makes possible. The value of progressive spirituality for its practitioners lies less in its coherence as a worldview or piece of systematic theology, than in its usefulness in shaping meaningful religious identities and rituals, providing a framework for making sense of personal religious experience, and nurturing important relationships and social activism ...

By and large, progressive religious groups and networks are not interested in boundary issues of who does and does not properly belong to these groups or who does or does not fall within acceptable boundaries of 'orthodoxy' in progressive faith... Rather than functioning as a 'statement of faith' to which all religious progressives are supposed to sign up, the emerging religious ideology of progressive spirituality functions more as a basis for mutual identification, communication and collaboration...

[There is] a shared sense that humans are responsible for acting in ways that support the divine imperative for the unfolding cosmos. The ethics of progressive spirituality – particularly its ecological ethic – is thus grounded in an understanding of the relationship between divinity and cosmic evolution...

... Progressive spirituality typically understands the self as an aspect of the divine life ... one important implication of the sacred ground of the self is that embodied experience can be trusted as a revelation of divine truth...

*Progressive spirituality has not emerged simply out of broader movements in Western culture, but out of a more specific Western religious tradition – religious liberalism. As Leigh Schmidt argues, in his excellent book *Restless Souls*, the phenomenon of contemporary Western spirituality owes much to this older liberal religious movement. With its North American roots in the nineteenth-century writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman, religious liberalism typically valued individual spiritual and mystical experience, emphasised the immanence of the divine in nature and the self, recognised the potentially valuable resources offered by religious traditions, supported progressive social causes, and encouraged the individual spiritual quest. The similarity between these emphases and those of contemporary progressive spirituality are obvious. **Indeed, far from being a wholly new phenomenon, progressive spirituality is better understood as the latest phase of expression of this longer progressive religious tradition.***

Whither LSN?

LSN is at a crossroads. Like many small organisations with limited capacity, both human and financial, we are facing important decisions about the future of the Network. Since its formation in 2000, from the merger of the Ecumenical Spirituality Project and the Fellowship of Prayer for Unity

LSN has sought to develop a distinctive role, working closely with other networks and groups on the edges of institutional religion, but with increasing clarity about its own purpose and contribution. This developing vision was outlined in a paper for Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (one of our two main funders), originally submitted in April 2005 and slightly revised in November. This is an extract from that paper:

LSN is a research and networking project designed to resource, encourage and support those who are pursuing their spiritual path on the margins of the traditional churches. Its primary concern is with the estimated 30-50% of Christians currently journeying outside the churches, but the relevance of its work extends outwards to those spiritual searchers with no Christian connection or history. Through its newsletter, its regional and national gatherings, its data base of contacts and supporters, its spirituality library, its links with other networks connecting people on the margins of traditional religion, and above all through speaking and networking opportunities at a wide range of conferences and events, LSN serves as a conduit of information, research and contacts, to aid the exploration of new forms and expressions of spirituality: experientially, theologically and liturgically. LSN's contribution to the contemporary spirituality scene is distinctive, and important, in the following areas:

Pastoral:

- In offering information, contacts, and meetings for sharing, conversation and exploration, LSN addresses an important need, supporting people who often feel isolated and misunderstood in their own communities, people who might echo this comment from one of our supporters: *It seems to me that I both belong and don't belong. There is a sense of being drawn into something, to a sense of belonging ... and then being pushed out again – realising that I have to go my own way, go back to my own wilderness, forge my own path in my own way.*

Theological:

- With its vital connection to the churches, its links with the academic world both in the UK and internationally, and its capacity for individual, local, regional and national encounter with those who may or may not retain any links to the churches, LSN is uniquely placed to act as a bridge between the Church, the Academy and Society. One of its most fruitful activities is making some of the key insights of contemporary theologians accessible to a wider audience than would otherwise be likely.

- It is arguable that a theological crisis of meaning lies at the heart of the current decline in interest in formal religion and explosion of interest in spirituality. In working at the theological interface between what Marcus Borg calls the *earlier Christian paradigm* and the *emerging Christian paradigm*, LSN is exploring new expressions of Christianity which may carry more meaning for the new generation of spiritual searchers. It does so not primarily as an academic exercise, though academic rigour is important, but as a means of engaging with people's lived experience and felt spiritual need.

Ecumenical:

- A number of commentators, including Cardinal Walter Kasper, have highlighted the role that a spirituality-based approach might have in revitalising ecumenical relations. For many today, ecumenism has come to mean interfaith rather than interdenominational relations. Because of its pioneering work, LSN is uniquely placed to support initiatives in this area.



In our last Newsletter I wrote of the moving and enthusiastic responses to our events in Salisbury and Durham: responses which encouraged me to *believe that we are, in however small a way, helping to meet some of the needs we've recognised in those at the very heart of the, so-called, spirituality revolution.*

LSN was not set up with an on-going fund-raising capacity and now, six years on, both our main funders have had to reconsider their level of support. We are extremely grateful to CTBI and to the Society of the Sacred Mission for their generous support over the years: support that has allowed us to develop as we have, with a part-time paid Director and Administrator. Now, however, we are eating into our reserves at a rate which forces us, quite rightly, to consider the best and most responsible options for the future. At the end of June members of our Project Group will meet for 24 hours, with an experienced Facilitator, to try to discern the way forward. Two possible options could be: either a return to a voluntary networking organisation, eking out reserves for as long as possible, or to identify a particular fixed-term research project which could be funded, say over 2-3 years, but recognising that this would exhaust the current reserves.

We would value hearing Supporters' views on the best way forward and invite you to write or email to Win Kennedy by Friday 16th June. Thank you for your concern and support.

A Note from Win Kennedy

If you received this newsletter via an old address, despite having notified us of your change of address, please forgive us. Human error led to loss of some recent amendments to our database and we would therefore be most grateful if you could let us know of your current address so we can restore it.

A Note from Pam Frier responding to Paul Renyard's 'Fond Farewell' in our Winter Living Spirituality News:

Thank you Paul, for your eulogy. It came as a surprise: one that I did not fully deserve, but thanks for what you said. Our connections go back a long way along the road to unity. Although I have had to relinquish being a staff member and cannot come to Willen so frequently, I still hold LSN close to my heart and I still have a particular concern for the library and its use. Thank you to Win, Eley and all the team for your patience and encouragement over the years of working together! Au revoir and Shalom, Pam Frier

A Note about the development of the Library

Some readers will be aware that LSN has a small library focusing on spirituality (developed from the Farncombe Library) and housed within a larger collection at the Well at Willen in Milton Keynes. You are welcome to visit or to enquire after the contents at any time. In order to make this valuable resource better known and more widely used, a Project Brief has been drawn up to amalgamate and modernise these collections by computerising the catalogues and making the library accessible to a wider constituency. Funding is being sought, at this stage chiefly to support professional input for a limited period, to ensure the task is correctly done. If any reader knows of a likely source of funds for this project, or indeed of anyone with professional librarianship experience who might like to be involved, suggestions will be very gratefully received at the LSN office. A copy of the Project Brief is available from the Administrator, Win Kennedy.

Bookshelf:

Timothy Radcliffe OP: What is the Point of Being a Christian? (Burns & Oates £10.99)

A profoundly wise, compassionate and searching exploration of what it means still to be a Christian in the 21st century. Surely, the author writes, *the Church must become a place of scandalous freedom in which we dare to float ideas, test hypotheses, affirm an awkward and unpopular truth and tell the Emperor he has no clothes on, or hear that we have none on ourselves. We can never draw near to the mystery unless we have the playful freedom of the children of God, to experiment and make mistakes, and grope after the truth. Time and again we have seen that Christians should be the ones who go on asking questions when others stop.*

Joyce Rupp: Walk in a Relaxed Manner: Life Lessons from the Camino (Orbis Books £8.99)

At the age of 60 Joyce Rupp didn't know what she was getting into when she began a 37 day pilgrimage along the Camino de Santiago in northern Spain. Joined by her walking friend Tom, a retired Pastor, Joyce learned lessons that can help all of us travel on life's up-and-down journey with more grace and lightness.

David Foster: Reading with God: Lectio Divina (Continuum £9.99)

David Foster is a Benedictine Monk of Downside Abbey and chaplain to Downside School. He has always been concerned to bring the riches of the monastic tradition to lay people as they struggle to live the Christian life in the modern world. Lectio Divina or the art of spiritual reading is an art which is all but lost outside monastic communities. But following St Benedict's opening command in his Rule to listen, attending to the word of God through the printed text is an art which needs to be rediscovered in a world in which we are surrounded by a cacophony of sound and noise. David Foster has written a masterly guide to this art.

Milton Keynes is Different: The Story of the Ecumenical Movement in Milton Keynes 1967-2005 by Robin Baker and Murdoch Mackenzie (£6.75+£2 p&p from admin@MKCC.fsnet.co.uk or contact 01908 311310) This is the story of a unique ecumenical initiative in what has become one of the fastest growing cities in Europe. From the inception of the new town in 1967 the churches have followed the Lund Principle of *doing everything together which need not be done apart*. On a visit to Milton Keynes, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie, commented: *I have seen the future, and it works!*

LSN has a long and close connection with Milton Keynes and its office and library are housed within The Well Community in Willen. Before his retirement Murdoch Mackenzie was not only Ecumenical Moderator of Milton Keynes but Chair of the LSN Management Group. We have enjoyed the generous support of the Milton Keynes Churches Council.

All Year Round is a resource for public worship, group use, and personal reflection, first launched in 1987, and published by CTBI. It draws on the contributions and experiences of individuals and churches, and is valued by subscribers in a wide range of situations.

In the past it has been offered in a loose-leaf format, but it is now available in booklet form four times a year. Each volume relates both to the season of the Christian year and to identified issues of interest or concern.

Copies can be obtained at £20 p.a. or £5.50 for a single issue, from AYR Subscriptions, 4 John Wesley Road, Peterborough PE4 6ZP.

Footnote: Copies of Ruth Harvey's **Seasons with the Spirit**, a selection from earlier years of AYR and published in 2002, are available from the LSN office at £9.95 + pp.

Pinboard:

Advance notice (flyer/booking form to come with Summer Living Spirituality News):

4-5 Nov 2006 Friends' House London, **The Emerging Spirituality Revolution: Embodying the Spiritual Imperative of our Time.** An important international conference organised by the Wrekin Trust and supported by CANA and LSN. Speakers include David Tacey, Diarmuid O'Murchu, Satish Kumar, William Bloom, Ravi Ravindra, and others. For further details contact info@wrekintrust.org

6 May Eynsham, Oxon, **Small Pilgrim Places Spring Gathering.** The Small Pilgrim Places Network is seeking ways to grow. Contact Tim Clapton, 01908 314 209, clapton@clapton.force9.co.uk for the Eynsham day, or Jim Cotter, Dwylan, Stryd Fawr, Harlech, Gwynedd LL46 2YA, 01766 781 368, jim@cottercairns.co.uk and www.smallpilgrimplaces.org.uk for more general information.

12-14 May Noddfa, Penmaenmawr, **Celtic Spirituality**, a celebration of Spring into Summer, using the symbols and verse of the Celtic peoples, with Ann Farr and Mary Warrener. Contact noddfapen@aol.com or 01492 623473

17 May Scottish Churches House, Dunblane, **Third Wednesday Theology**, a series of open conversations chaired by Elizabeth Templeton: *opportunities for truthful, unafraid sharing of faith and doubt, recognising that 'Wrestling with God' is part of our human birthright and not the prerogative of 'experts'...* Future dates: 20 Sept, 18 Oct, 15 Nov. Contact 01786 823 588 or reservations@scottishchurcheshouse.org

19-21 May Turvey Abbey, **Prayer & Activity: an interfaith weekend**, with Buddhist, Bahai, Christian and Jewish contributors. Contact Br John Mayhead OSB, 01234 881211 or turveymonks@yahoo.co.uk

20 May Wandsworth, London, **The Meaning is in the Waiting**, workshop inspired by the poetry of RS Thomas, led by John and Robert Harley. The first in a series of days on **Art & Mystery: creative responses to mystical traditions**, organised by the Art and Spirituality Network. Contact Linda Murgatroyd on 020 8946 8365 or artandspirituality@gmail.com

20 May Sutton in Craven, nr Skipton, **Bridging the gap between traditional expressions of belief and today's world view**, a seminar with Adrian Smith. Contact David Warrington on 01535 637012 or david.warrington@tiscali.co.uk

2-4 June Cold Ash Centre, nr Newbury, **Writing for our lives: a creative writing weekend for women and men**, led by Nicola Slee. Contact Gilliam Limb on 01962 867374 or gml@highcliff.co.uk and Nicola Slee on 0121 452 2662 or nicola_slee@hotmail.com

3 June Edenbridge, Kent, **Dance to the Spirit: Pentecost Quiet Day** with Prisca Cardon and the Sisters of St Andrew team. Contact 01342 850 388 or team@standrews2.freemove.co.uk

9-11 June Turvey Abbey, **Discovering the Sacred**, an opportunity to seek wholeness by uncovering the sacred in everyday life through a variety of approaches to prayer. Contact The Retreat Secretary, The Priory of Our Lady of Peace, Turvey Abbey, Beds, MK43 8DE

22-25 June The Othona Community, Burton Bradstock, Dorset, **Writing the Spirit**, a long weekend retreat for personal and spiritual reflection. Judy Clinton, a Universalist Quaker and writer will show participants how to nurture their inner lives through non-structured expressive writing, creative listening and empathetic sharing. Contact 01308 897130 or mail@othona-bb.org.uk

30 June-2 July Sarum College, Salisbury, **War and Peace: Religion in Conflict and Reconciliation**, Summer Conference. Is religion a prime cause of local and international conflict? Can we find in it tools for reconciliation in a politically and religiously divided world? Contact 01722 424800 or hospitality@sarum.ac.uk or www.sarum.ac.uk

7-15 July Lindisfarne and St Cuthbert's Way, walking holiday/pilgrimage arranged by Pilgrim Adventure. Contact 0117 9655454 or pilgrim.adventure@virgin.net

8 July Holmfirth, Yorks, **A Day with Donald Allchin**, (author of *The Kingdom of Love and Knowledge*, *The World is a Wedding*, *Participation in God*) at The Foster Place Retreat Centre. Contact Jean Smith on 0161 748 8779 or alnjean@davyhulme.fsnet.co

11-14 July High Leigh, Hoddesdon, Herts, **Passion for Justice: global and faithful perspectives on human sexuality.** Annual Conference of the Modern Churchpeople's Union, Centre for the Study of Christianity and Sexuality, and the Student Christian Movement. Contact Mrs E Darlington 0161 633 3132 or conference@modchurchunion.org

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.

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

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. A large type version is available on request.