



## Dear LSN Supporters

When the American writer Hunter S Thompson died from a self-directed bullet to the brain in February this year, there was widespread media coverage of the event and much earnest analysis of his cult status. *The Times* printed a series of short extracts from his various works, including this from *Kingdom of Fear* written in 2003:

*I am not a religious man in any formal sense, but in truth I am far more **theologically conscious** than anyone else I know – except perhaps my monkish brute of a neighbour Ed Bastian, who conducts big-time spirituality seminars on Aspen mountain and rides a big black BMW motorcycle that was once blessed by the Dalai Lama ...*

Thompson's disclaimer concerning formal religion is one that is heard more and more frequently. Another recent article in *The Times* reported on research carried out not on the farthest reaches of America's West Coast but in Kendal, on the very English edge of the Lake District. It was headlined **Spirited Away: why the end is nigh for religion** and suggested that Christianity, as traditionally understood and practised, could be eclipsed by mystical spirituality in 30 years.

The separation, in many people's minds and experience, of spirituality from religion is increasingly common and well-documented, but what catches my interest in the quote from *Kingdom of Fear* is Thompson's use of the term *theologically conscious*. The work I've been doing since I joined LSN three years ago – the conversations, the networking, the reading – suggests to me that it's a profound shift in *theological consciousness* which is giving rise to the separation of spirituality from religion, both in the population at large and amongst many of those deeply committed to the spiritual path. It's this theological shift which has led to the spiralling failure of much traditionally expressed Christian theology to keep up with people's lived experience of God.

The classic definition of theology is St Anselm's *faith seeking*

*understanding*. A more modern commentator, Andrew Walker, Director of the London Centre for Spirituality, defines spirituality, when he's speaking in shorthand, as *lived theology*. There seems to me to be an elusive but essential intersection between those two definitions. While most of those who identify with spirituality as opposed to religion may not be making a consciously *theological* statement, this is undoubtedly what they – we – are doing. So many of the old understandings, as expressed in the doctrines, rituals and liturgies of traditional religion, simply no longer make sense of our personal spiritual experience and intuitions.

Thank God, then, with me, for a whole generation of theologians\* who are producing important, ground-breaking works of Christian theology and re-envisioning the heart of Christianity in a way that resonates with the lived experience and theological consciousness of so many people today.

As the popular writer John O'Donohue said in an article for *The Irish Times* called *Forgotten Springs: In contrast with cults or fundamentalism, theology attempts to keep the frontiers between memory and possibility open ... within a great theological tradition, the awkward and critical questions are welcomed; they help mine the sources of revelation and illumination with stringent rigour, espousing only loyalty to the truth. When an institution outlaws questioning as disloyalty, then it has substituted its sense of service for self-protection.*

I hope you enjoy our modest attempt at some theological re-envisioning in this edition of *Living Spirituality News!*

Go well

Eley

\*A number of them are mentioned in *Bookshelf*, and in the bibliographies on the inside pages.

## 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 (registered 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.

### BECOME A FRIEND OF LSN:

#### Sponsorship scheme:

The Living Spirituality Network needs an assured annual income to help us plan for the future and to enable our work to continue to grow. We are grateful for the generous support we receive from individuals, groups and communities, but in the present climate funding is often short-term and for specific projects. In order to put the core activities of the Network on a more secure, and sustainable, financial footing, we have launched a Friends scheme. If you believe that our work in helping people to explore the meaning of spirituality is important, please consider becoming a Friend of the Living Spirituality Network. There are three levels of commitment: Friend (£30 pa), Sponsor (£75 pa), and Patron (£150 pa). Please contact the office for details.

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*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.

### Contact us at:

The Living Spirituality Network, The Well at Willen, Newport Road, Willen, Milton Keynes MK15 9AA  
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### In this issue:

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## Authentic Spirituality

Joycelin Dawes is co-author and editor of *The Quest... Exploring A Sense Of Soul: a practical home-study course for personal and spiritual discovery*. *The Quest* supports a growing interest in spirituality and the current search for a deeper connection with the sacredness of life. It will be reviewed in the next edition of *Living Spirituality News*. In the meantime, you can find out more at [www.thequest.org.uk](http://www.thequest.org.uk)

I read Eley McAinsh's article in the last Newsletter and wondered about authentic spirituality today and how I wrestle with it.

Quaker *Advices and Queries* begin 'Take heed, dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts. Trust them as the leadings of God... Love I might express as the will-to-good for all life. Truth is apparently relative to person and circumstance and puzzling. But truth in ancient Greek, *aleitheia*, reveals the essence or true nature of something. In Philip Pullman's *Northern Lights*, Lyra is given an *alethiometer* and told: 'it tells you the truth ... as for how to read it, you'll have to learn by yourself' and it is 'a symbol reader'.

Might it be this way with authenticity? What is my alethiometer for authenticity in my spiritual life and what is yours? How do I wrestle with spiritual authenticity as *aleitheia* and what practices support my enquiry?

On my alethiometer the symbols include *values*, clarifying those higher-order values, identified by Paul in Galatians, that speak to me; Martin Israel defines these as 'judgements related not only to our immediate satisfaction but also to that of other people.' *Self-reflection, questioning and discernment* are further symbols; inner noticing where there is discord, or indeed a sense of alignment, and questioning that critiques myself. My practices include reflective reading, listening and seeking connection with God. Patricia Loring reminds me that listening includes prayerful attentiveness to how I may cultivate 'over a lifetime the fallible gift of discerning what is and what is not of God' and learning to read auditory, visual, kinaesthetic, intuitive and visceral symbols.

'As we reflect on our experience, intimations may emerge about the nature of God. In this we are helped by the experiences of others which enlighten our path.' (*Advices and Queries*). I am helped by a

small group of spiritual friends and reading the discoveries of other explorers.

I find in William Bloom's *Soul-ution: the Holistic Manifesto* a deepening authenticity embracing: *morality* (monitoring behaviour and attitudes so they are of benefit to the community of life), *development* (to grow and fulfil ourselves), *connection* (to check we are staying connected to the beauty of nature, the universe and God), a *practice of listening* (allowing new levels of insight and compassion to surface), and *being awake* (incorporating body, feelings, mind and spirit).

Can we reach towards authenticity? John Heron described it as: 'in equal measure the cultivation of discriminatory competence in evaluating spiritual and subtle events, grounding this through openness to the spiritual life deep within, bringing it into relation with the felt field of *inter-being* and reviewing the whole process in dialogue with one's peers.'

We too have to learn the symbols, combine the readings with reflection and enquiry, discerning the truth of spiritual authenticity. The co-authors of *The Quest... Exploring A Sense Of Soul* sought such a rigorous yet compassionate and grounded search for authenticity, true to Spirit, emerging from our real and engaged life, and offering symbols and signposts for others in their search.

### References:

- William Bloom *Soul-ution: the Holistic Manifesto*, Hay House, 2004
- Advices and Queries in Quaker Faith and Practice*, British Yearly Meeting 1995
- Joycelin Dawes, Janice Dolley, Ike Isaksen, *The Quest... Exploring A Sense Of Soul*, O Books, 2005
- Martin Israel *The Power of the Spirit in Everyday Living*, lectures delivered at Guildford Cathedral under the auspices of The Churches Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies
- John Heron *Sacred Science*, PCCS, 1998
- Patricia Loring *Listening Spirituality: Corporate Spiritual Practice Among Friends*, Quaker Books of Friends General Conference, 1999
- Philip Pullman *Northern Lights*, Scholastic Ltd, 1995

## The Spirit in Spirituality

Eley McAinsh is Director of the Living Spirituality Network and Producer of Something Understood, Radio 4's weekly spiritual anthology

As a new and very peripheral member of the university Christian Union I was once taken to task by a campus zealot for referring to the Holy Spirit as a *force*. *You do mean PERSON, don't you*, he corrected, no doubt ticking the big box in his head marked *Dodgy!* Actually I didn't, but neither did I have the confidence to stand my theological ground.

The Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo<sup>1</sup> has written that *the spirit of the times is not the Holy Spirit*, but a number of contemporary theologians and commentators are questioning that assertion. They see in the current explosion of interest in spirituality, the powerful and transforming breath of the Spirit and are challenging traditional doctrinal statements about the Holy Spirit. David Tacey, whose book *The Spirituality Revolution: the emergence of contemporary spirituality* features again in our Bookshelf column, writes:

*I am not sure [Vattimo] is right. I agree that spirit in our time is not experienced in terms of the conventional image of the Holy Spirit, as conveyed to us in doctrine or traditional sentiment. Our experience of spirit today appears to break doctrinal rules in its holistic rather than perfectionist strivings: in its quest for human authenticity, body-*

*mind integration, psychological health, ecological integrity and sexual wholeness. Might it be that the doctrinal conventions are inadequate, and our traditional images of the Holy Spirit are radically out of touch with the reality of this spirit?*

This is also the key theme of Mark I Wallace's *Fragments of the Spirit: Nature, Violence and the Renewal of Creation*<sup>2</sup>, a much more difficult book of academic theology which none-the-less opens with an accessible introduction:

*Many people now sense that we live in the age of the Spirit, a time in which a fragile connection with the earth and one another is being felt in friendship with a power anterior to ourselves...*

Karl Barth remarked at the end of his life that the Holy Spirit is the proper focus for a theology that is right for the present situation:

*...My orienting thesis is that the Spirit is the life-giving breath within the cosmos who continually works to transform and renew all forms of life – both human and non-human. ...This life-centred model of the Spirit expands the understanding of the Spirit beyond its intratrinitarian role to include the Spirit's cosmic role as the power of healing and renewal within all creation... My position is that the Spirit is best understood not as a metaphysical entity but as a healing life-force that engenders human flourishing as well as the welfare of the planet.*

Tom Stella, an American Catholic priest, writes of his personal journey of spiritual and theological transformation in *A Faith Worth Believing: Finding New Life Beyond the Rules of Religion*<sup>3</sup>. In *The Holy Ghost*

chapter he describes how his understanding of the Holy Spirit gradually changed from what he had learned in childhood catechetics, to concepts much more in tune with his actual experience of that Spirit in his life:

*I came to sense that my thoughts and feelings about the Holy Ghost were not only real to me, but that they related to an unseen reality both within and beyond me ... I cannot identify any particular incident that occasioned this new consciousness, for it is the nature of the Spirit to be elusive. But I gradually began to sense within myself a Presence that was more than myself. And in relation to the world and other people, I felt a bond that I intuitively knew was of God ... As I have changed spiritually, so has my understanding of Pentecost, which I now view as the celebration of an inspiration that has moved humanity from the beginning.*

Stella goes on to quote another writer, the religious educator Michael Morwood, who, he feels, confirms his insight:

*In the Pentecost experience ... the followers of Jesus came to a clear belief and awareness that the same Spirit they had seen in Jesus was present and active in their lives ... Was the presence of the Spirit of God in their lives a new phenomenon conferred only by Jesus returning to heaven and sending the Spirit? We can continue to understand the experience of Pentecost as the granting of the Spirit in a*

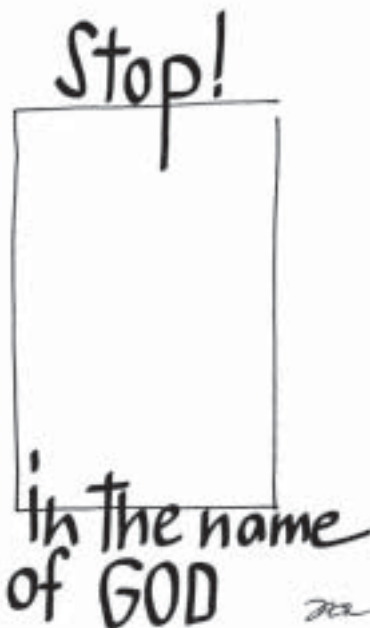
*special way or we can understand it in the belief that God's spirit has never been absent from any aspect of creation.*

I can only touch here on ideas and developments which a few dedicated commentators are pursuing with passionate intellectual and spiritual energy. I am certain that their pursuit will bear rich fruit for all those who want to celebrate the so-called spirituality revolution and who want, at the same time, to make theological sense of it.

These days I'm occasionally taken to task, not for my dubious understanding of the nature of the Holy Spirit, but for my resistance to the use of the word *mission*. I felt rather more comfortable with the word after someone explained to me that most contemporary missiologists are concerned with *the mission of God* as opposed to *the mission of the Church*. The popular Jesuit writer Gerard Hughes has described God as a *beckoning word*. Perhaps God beckons most powerfully today in that experience of the Spirit which some believe is at the very heart of the spirituality revolution.

1. Quoted on page 128 of *The Spirituality Revolution: the emergence of contemporary spirituality* by David Tacey (Brunner-Routledge)
2. Mark I Wallace: *Fragments of the Spirit: Nature, Violence and the Renewal of Creation* (Trinity Press International)
3. Tom Stella: *A Faith Worth Believing: Finding New Life Beyond the Rules of Religion* (Harper San Francisco)

## Stop! in the Name of God: June 17-19th



Stop! in the Name of God is the annual weekend organised by the Retreat Association to encourage people to Stop! and experience a different way of being in the midst of their busy lives. This year there is a special focus on stopping in the workplace.

For further information please contact the Retreat Association: The Central Hall, 256 Bermondsey Street, London, SE1 3UJ, tel 0845 456 1429 (local call rate) or email: [info@retreats.org.uk](mailto:info@retreats.org.uk)

book's original and insightful analysis is rapidly generating interest and excitement wherever it is finding readers.

**Paul Heelas & Linda Woodhead: The Spiritual Revolution – why religion is giving way to spirituality (Blackwell £15.99)**

This book, not to be confused with the one above, presents research carried out in Kendal on the edge of the Lake District which was designed to chart the state of religion and spirituality in Britain today. Featured in *The Times*, it prompted the headline *Spirited Away: why the end is nigh for religion* and an article suggesting that Christianity will be eclipsed by mystical spirituality in 30 years' time.

**James Conlon: At the Edge of Our Longing: Unspoken Hunger for Sacredness and Depth**, with a forward by Diarmuid O'Murchu (Novalis, a North American publication, available through internet suppliers). James Conlon is Director of Sophia Centre: A Wisdom School Celebrating Earth, Art and Spirit, a division of Holy Names University in Oakland California. Among those who have commended this book are such luminaries as Richard Rohr, Thomas Berry, Brian Swimme, Leonardo Boff and Rosemary Radford Ruether. Richard Rohr writes: *Jim Conlon has 'big-picture spirituality'. Here your politics and your prayer, your loves and your longings can all move from one grounded centre where God is good, where we are together, and where everything belongs.*

**Alan Jones: Reimagining Christianity: Reconnect your spirit without disconnecting your mind** (John Wiley & Sons Inc, another North American publication, available through internet suppliers). The former Bishop of Edinburgh, Richard Holloway writes of this book: *Alan Jones's book is a brave and brilliant attempt to rescue Christianity from the clutches of the cruel reactionaries into which much of it has fallen. Generous-hearted Christians of all persuasions will cheer him on. And Walter Brueggemann, of Columbia Theological Seminary, adds: Alan Jones combines the power of the mystical, the honesty of the sceptical, and the eagerness of the romantic. His vision of faith and ministry for the time to come will be a gift for many readers.*

**Diann L. Neu: Return Blessings: Ecofeminist liturgies renewing the Earth (Wild Goose Publications £10.99)**

Diann L Neu is the co-founder of WATER – Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual – in Silver Spring, Maryland. The 16 liturgies in this attractively produced collection are based on the framework of the four seasons and explore the inter-relatedness of ecology and feminism. They prompt reflection on issues of eco-justice

## Bookshelf

Some new titles which might be of interest to LSN supporters:

**David Tacey: The Spirituality Revolution – the emergence of contemporary spirituality (Brunner-Routledge) £14.99**

We make no apologies for highlighting once again this important book by the Melbourne-based academic David Tacey. It was described in *The Tablet* by David Hay (author, with Kate Hunt, of the report: *The Spirituality of People who don't go to Church*) as one of the first creative responses to the seismic social change of the past 10 years, a decade in which there has been such a shrinkage in the meaning of 'religion' and an expansion of the term 'spirituality'. The Director of the Spirituality Programme at Sarum College, Peter Tyler, is making *The Spirituality Revolution* required reading for his students and the

and invite participants to pray and work for the healing of the earth.

**Kate McIlhagga: The Green Heart of the Snowdrop (Wild Goose Publications £12.99)**

Kate McIlhagga was a URC minister and a member of the Iona Community until her death in 2002. Her work appears in many anthologies and prayer collections but this book presents the best of her work in one volume. It includes poems and prayers of gathering and beginning; creation, mothering and self; Advent and Epiphany; Lent, Easter and Pentecost; pilgrimage, endings and blessings. The green heart on the underside of the tiny snowdrop captured her imagination and symbolised for her an aspect of God's purpose for our lives.

**Ann Bird: Colour me Spiritual (Foundery Press £11.99)**

**Michaela Youngson: Making the Colours Sing (Inspire £12.99)**

Reviewed by Alan Horner

These intriguing titles are linked not only by the word colour, but by the role of their authors in the pastoral and spirituality concerns of the Methodist Church. The books themselves are special in format and in the high quality of the paper and printing, and a joy to handle. The extra cost is worth it, and the publishers are to be congratulated.

In *Colour me Spiritual* there is naturally much colour in the photographs used by way of illustration. Verbal illustrations too are very varied – poetry, quotation, story. Each chapter has its own key colour and concludes with a page of appropriate words in a range of fonts which lead us to pause and contemplate. The visual and the verbal interact throughout the book and generate imaginative reflection, though sometimes also calling for a practical response.

Ann Bird's book invites unhurried reading in its easy prose style. Michaela Youngson's has leisure built into its presentation with various prayers, poems, hymns and liturgies from her own pen, which make it more of a resource book than the other, but in a first reading we are inevitably drawn on from item to item and section to section, though with pages showing beautiful stained glass encouraging us to linger. Some material is inevitably more usable and some less, but this is not to detract from a fine book which is imaginative, human, sensitive and gentle, and sometimes humorous. The language is contemporary and paced to the themes, and the themes themselves are earthed in the reality of experience.

Both books are a pleasure to use and will be a joy to give and receive. Not least they are capable of stimulating the reader's own imagination and creativity.

## Pinboard

### Fellowship of Prayer for Unity/Farncombe Community

The Revd Paul Renyard has completed a brief history of the Fellowship/Community from 1973 up to 2000, when the Fellowship merged with the Ecumenical Spirituality Project to form LSN. This follows on from Sister Carol Graham's earlier publication, filling a gap and making a valuable contribution to the history of the ecumenical movement in those years. Copies will be available from the LSN office at £2.50 (p & p incl.).

**What is Prayer?** A booklet containing summaries of a series of Living Spirituality Network 'Conversations on Prayer', organised by Paul Renyard and held in four locations in England and Wales November 2001-October 2002, is now available from the Administrator. They are free to participants in the events and available to others for £1.50, including p&p.

**20 Years of Spiritual Journeying: ordinary women – extraordinary lives:** a collection of personal reflections by members of the Catholic Women's Network, to celebrate the network's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Available from Máirín Valdez, 17 Hillbrow, Reading, Berks, RG2 8JD or [mairinv@aol.com](mailto:mairinv@aol.com)

### Bonhoeffer Centenary Newsletter:

David Moore intends to publish between now and the end of 2006 a three times a year electronic (email) newsletter for those wishing to explore the continuing significance of Bonhoeffer's work. Anyone interested in subscribing or contributing should contact David Moore at 12 Pastern Place, Downs Barn, Milton Keynes, MK14 7RD or [david@david-moore.net](mailto:david@david-moore.net)

**Thanks - Jean Farmer** would like to thank all LSN supporters who completed the questionnaire on personal spirituality which she circulated as part of her research for her Master's degree. She is very grateful for all the help she received and is happy to report the successful completion of her Dissertation.

**9<sup>th</sup> April:** Kendal, Cumbria **The Christianity of the Future** with Hilary Wakeman, founder of the Julian Meetings and author of *Saving Christianity: new thinking for old beliefs*.

Contact John Hetherington on 01539 726181 or [john.hetherington@pcnbritain.org.net](mailto:john.hetherington@pcnbritain.org.net)

**5<sup>th</sup> May:** Central London **The Da Vinci Code: Prophetic or merely Profitable.** A lecture by Diarmuid O'Murchu organised by The Othona Community. Booking essential. Contact 01308 897130

**5<sup>th</sup> May:** Dunblane **Dunblane Conversations on Spirituality and the Arts: Don't play the notes, make music!** Professional musician and minister Ian Mackenzie on the choice he had to make between words and music. Contact 01786 823588 or [reservations@scottishchurcheshouse.org](mailto:reservations@scottishchurcheshouse.org)

**6-11<sup>th</sup> May:** Turvey Abbey **Creation Here and Now: a faithful response.** Interfaith weekend with Buddhist, Baha'i, Christian and Jewish contributions. Contact Br John Mayhead OSB, 01234 881211 or [turveynews@aol.com](mailto:turveynews@aol.com)

**14<sup>th</sup> May:** Edenbridge, Kent **She Sits Like a Bird: Pentecost reflections on the blessings of the Spirit** with Paul Heppleston and 'The Team' of Sisters of St Andrew.

Contact 01342 850388 or [team@standrews2.freemove.co.uk](mailto:team@standrews2.freemove.co.uk)

**21<sup>st</sup> May:** Central London **Jesus in His Own Language** a day led by Neil Douglas-Klotz, specialist in Aramaic Christian, Jewish Mystical and Sufi traditions. Organised by CANA (Christians Awakening to a New Awareness): contact CANA, 9 Priors Road, Hemingford Grey, Huntingdon, PE28 9BT not later than 30<sup>th</sup> April.

**21<sup>st</sup> May:** The Abbey, Sutton Courtney **Writing the Spirit** with Judy Clinton. A day of writing for spiritual and personal awareness. Contact 01235 847401 or [admin@theabbeysc.demon.co.uk](mailto:admin@theabbeysc.demon.co.uk)

**11<sup>th</sup> June:** The Glasgow Ignatian Centre **Spirituality and Sexuality** with Ali Newell, Angus MacDonald and Ruth Holgate. A day reflecting on how we bring our whole selves into our relationships – with God and other people.

Contact 0141 354 0077 or [iscentre@btopenworld.com](mailto:iscentre@btopenworld.com)

**14<sup>th</sup> June:** Central London **Lover/Beloved: Dancing the Divine Encounter** an evening with Claire Henderson Davis, dancer, artist, writer and organisational development consultant. Contact 020 7935 6179 or [office@wlm.org.uk](mailto:office@wlm.org.uk)

**17-19<sup>th</sup> June:** Scargill, N Yorkshire **Transcending Images** with Craig Russell, Community Artist. A weekend exploring art and spirituality. Contact 01756 760234 or [bookings@scargillhouse.co.uk](mailto:bookings@scargillhouse.co.uk)

### Advance Notices

**12-14<sup>th</sup> Aug:** Laetare Centre, Linlithgow **WISE (Wales, Ireland, Scotland & England) Women's Synod** on the theme *Journeying*, with speakers including Kathy Galloway and Alison Elliott.

Contact Zam Walker 0141 876 1402 or [zam@fish.co.uk](mailto:zam@fish.co.uk)

**5-8<sup>th</sup> Sept:** Sarum College, Salisbury **Richard Rohr** leads an ecumenical study retreat entitled *Prophets Then... Prophets Now ... likely to be very popular so early booking advised.* Contact Paul Pearce, Sarum College, 19 The Close, Salisbury, Wilts SP1 2EE or [ppearce@sarum.ac.uk](mailto:ppearce@sarum.ac.uk)