



## September 2013 Newsletter

In this edition we focus on the growing theme of the Inter Spirituality movement through a review of **The Coming InterSpiritual Age and** an account of the recent workshop by Brother Martin.

We go on to some themes from the Holy Rood summer school on spiritual direction/ accompaniment, and to reflections by Revd. Mary Robins on her own spiritual journey and on books by Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan that have provided the best food for the quest.

The very substantial book **The Coming Interspiritual Age** by Kurt Johnson and David R. Ord makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the roots of InterSpirituality, and its likely evolution in the future.

The authors take a broad historical sweep, discussing the evolution of human consciousness and culture since the earliest times. Similarly to Spiral Dynamics and the Integral Spirituality movement initiated by Ken Wilber and others, believe that an “integral paradigm” began around the 1970’s. They see a widespread grassroots desire for a “world-centric holism”, in response to the large scale threats posed by environmental destruction and weapons of mass destruction (to which we would want to add the scale of social injustice and inequality). They do also acknowledge there is a desire to retrench in other parts of society, faced with the uncertainty of our global future. They see it as vital as part of the InterSpiritual process that we engage in dynamic

steering towards the future rather than passively waiting for things to unfold. This involves the hard work of clarifying together the approaches to spirituality that are needed for the future global culture.

The pioneers of InterSpirituality within our own tradition are named as Wayne Teasdale (**The Mystic Heart. Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World’s Religions**), who conducted in depth dialogue with Buddhist meditators; Bede Griffiths (**A New Vision of Reality; The Marriage of East and West**) Raimon Panikkar (**The Unknown Christ of Hinduism; The Inter-Religious Dialogue; Christophany: The Fullness of Man**), Teilhard de Chardin (**The Phenomenon of Man**) and Matthew Fox (**One River, Many Wells; The Coming of the Cosmic Christ**). Writers such as Emerson, Whitman and Thoreau are also understood to have contributed to this universalising stream from outside the religious structures.

The unity consciousness that is common to mystical experience worldwide involves the profound experience of interconnectedness, though Johnson and Ord understand that this may be given different interpretations as a result of different cultural lenses.

InterSpirituality accepts both the diversity and rich differences between people and traditions, and the shared experience of the unity underlying

all things. Johnson and Ord's book suggests that we can both continue within our own tradition, and pursue a fruitful dialogue with people from other traditions (suggesting Mirabai Starr's book, **God of Love. A Guide to the Heart of Judaism, Christianity and Islam** as a source of good ideas on how to continue our traditional practice while cultivating InterSpiritual understanding).

As to what we can do to further the understanding of the oneness underlying our diverse experiences of life and of the action of spirit within it, the book suggests working towards the creation of effective collectives through meeting with others in circles where leadership is assigned for specific tasks in order to move the agenda forward, rather than through permanent leadership roles. The work of educationalists such as Parker Palmer and the various methods of conflict resolution are recommended as sources of inspiration. The Sacred Activism (Andrew Harvey) Integral Spirituality and New Monasticism movements are commended as heading in the right direction. **Videos** of dialogues entitled **The Mystic Heart** between Wayne Teasdale and Ken Wilber are available on You Tube, filmed shortly before Wayne Teasdale died.

One thing that is noticeable here is the apparent absence of women in articulating this vision. In Johnson and Ord's book the essential role of the sacred feminine is emphasised, and seen as bringing the attributes that are needed for the new era: awareness of unity, and movement towards wholeness and completeness.

I am now reading a very down to earth book by Rob Hopkins: **The Power of Just Doing Stuff**. Rob Hopkins is co-founder of the Transition Network, which has transition initiatives across the UK and internationally. The theme of the book is the ways in which we can lift ourselves out of the disempowerment and despair about the state of the world and the large forces at work that are

difficult to influence. This is done by joining with others locally to find practical initiatives that will make a real difference to our own community, while also being connected to a global movement. Many examples are given, often meeting social justice and community-building goals as well as environmental ones. Although this doesn't set out to be a spiritual book, it seems to me an excellent way of grounding some of the visionary themes of books like **The Coming InterSpiritual Age**.

### **The Holy Trinity and the Law of Three**

I have greatly admired the ability of Cynthia Bourgeault (Episcopalian priest, teacher and part time hermit) to combine scholarship and direct experience of spiritual practices such as centering prayer, and to speak to people in a contemporary language that is appealing. I have gained a great deal from her UK talks on The Cloud of Unknowing and the role of Mary Magdalene, as well as her workshop on centering prayer. Her latest book is however a bit of a mystery – on various levels, including the need for much more effective editorial input prior to publication. There are aspects that strike exactly the right note, including the focus on a fully embodied spiritual life, on the relational aspect of reality, on the equality of presence of the divine throughout the created order, and the need for co-creation by us all in bringing about the future : “.... the Christian contemplative needs to stop fighting the body, the world, secularity, messiness .....spiritual praxis will want to be shifted away from subduing the body and renouncing the world and reoriented to the acquisition of an alert and supple attentiveness that can make itself more readily available....”

However, there is much in this book that isn't readily graspable by those who don't have knowledge of Gurdjieff's law of three and his particular exposition of the Enneagram, or of Jacob Boehme's mystical vision. The succession of

diagrams didn't do the trick. If we have any LS members who are familiar with these kind of areas, we would welcome further comments on this book whose subtitle is **Discovering the Radical Truth at the Heart of Christianity**.

At the **Holy Rood** House Summer School on **"Spiritual Direction – Myth and Reality"** there was excellent reflection from many angles on the nature of the accompaniment process. In addition to some of the traditional models of stages of development, amongst the rich fare on offer Lucyann Ashdown explored the links between midwifery and Spiritual Accompaniment. Artist Carla McCowan emphasised the need for us all to create, from the wellspring we tap into during silent periods, as an expression of the divine spirit within us.

Elizabeth Baxter spoke of spiritual accompaniment as a process towards just living, as the injustices done through dualistic theologies of fear are unravelled. Elizabeth saw Spiritual Accompaniments as a way of re-integrating the parts of a fragmented spirituality, re-establishing a relationship of trust (or doing so for the first time), and gathering the person into a community of liberation, which Holy Rood House most certainly is. June Boyce-Tillman brought to life the visions of Bernadette of Lourdes in a one woman presentation in the Parish Church.

### **Christ in different traditions**

In July, **Brother Martin** from Bede Griffiths' Ashram in India gave a workshop at Jenny Sandler's place in West Hampstead, on the theme ..."**Jesus Christ: a marriage of Wisdom and Prophetic Traditions**"

In this session Brother Martin proposed that Jesus' experience of Truth cannot be understood exclusively either from the Wisdom or Prophetic Tradition. It is in the marriage of these two traditions that we have the unique vision of who human beings are and their purpose in this world.

Brother Martin presented the Truth according to the Upanishads (Hinduism) and used that to understand the vision of Christ and its uniqueness.

Tanya Deavall writes about the impact of this workshop:

"Well over two weeks after Brother Martin's visit, I'm still gaining so much from thinking through the approach to Spirituality that he discussed in such an inspiring way. His message, free from the chains of guilt, narrow-mindedness and exclusivity which so often restrict individual religious pathways, has been most refreshing to receive. It was valuable hearing about his personal journey in life as an introduction to the way he has come to know God. I was so glad to meet him in an informal relaxed small group and home-based setting because it meant that there really was an opportunity to ask questions and it made it easier for each one present to share their personal experience of spiritual journeying when he asked us to do so. I am delighted to have discovered him and other like-minded people so I know I am not alone in feeling that religions (in my case Christianity as taught by the Anglican Church) have limitations. He has put into words, the inner truth which I have got in touch with over the years.

Although I have very little knowledge of Hinduism, I gained a lot from the first part of the day in which he concentrated on a Hindu perspective and it was good to hear the ideas repeated from a Christian perspective. I also liked the pictorial images he used to convey the essence of his ideas in an easily memorable form. I shall look out for even more books he may write in future that move beyond the language of particular religions, and that therefore might have an even more of a universal appeal."

**Revd. Mary Robins writes about her own journey and about two books that have helped the movement towards new understandings of Christ's ministry.**

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Twenty five years ago I was well into my journey to discover and claim some of the feminine in women, men and God. I loved and struggled with the Church I was ordained to serve. I wrote –

Out of doors I grow steady as a tree –  
rooted in the earth,  
reaching to the sky –

**FREE**

But I am not a tree.

In the Abbey I hurt from rigid stones –  
feminine denied by straight lines,  
men's voices echo round –

**COLD**

And I cannot be me.

On the steps, by the loos –  
I wait under-ground,  
Surrounded by humble basic things –

**I AM ME**

And in God, I am who I shall be.

**(Desert Flowers, Cairns Publications)**

Through the years I discovered that the map of my journey formed behind me – it was never in front to show the way.

My map shapes behind me  
To identify where I've been.

Now and again I stop,  
gather powers and feelings in my inner space,  
hold them focused in my being,  
to move,  
re-shape,  
come to birth,  
just as they shall be,  
strong or puny.

And I journey on.

**(Desert Flowers, Cairns Publications)**

My journey continues and my understanding of the Bible, and the Church are frequently challenged.

Two books I find feed my quest are –

**The Heart of Christianity** by Marcus J Borg and **The Power of Parable** by John Dominic Crossan.

In **The Heart of Christianity** Borg explores two views of Christianity noting that they almost produce two different religions – he summarizes the differences

	<b>Earlier Paradigm</b>	<b>Emerging Paradigm</b>
<i>The Bible's origin</i>	A divine product with divine authority	A human response to God
<i>Biblical interpretation</i>	Literal – factual	Historical and metaphorical
<i>The Bible's function</i>	Revelation of doctrine and morals	Metaphorical and sacramental
<i>Christian life emphasis</i>	An afterlife and what to believe or do to be saved	Transformation in this life through relationship with God

Borg explores dialogues between different Christian view points and draws them into relationships of considerable respect and finds much common ground. He concludes that 'At the heart of Christianity is the way of the heart – a path that transforms us at the deepest level of our being. At the heart of Christianity is the heart of God – a passion for our transformation and the transformation of the world. At the heart of Christianity is participating in the passion of God.'

In **The Power of Parable** Crossan explores 'How fiction *by* Jesus became fiction *about* Jesus'. He observes that the parabolic stories told by Jesus seem remarkably similar to the resurrection stories about Jesus. He asks 'were the latter intended as parables just as much as the former?' Could it be that we have been reading parables, presuming them to be history, and misunderstanding both? In other words, could Jesus' use of parables have inspired the Gospel writers to create meaningful, metaphorical stories about Jesus to help them explain who he really was?

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I thought I would end this newsletter with some lines from a poem called *Earth* by Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), which I heard on the radio recently, translated from Bengali . I have transcribed these words from what I heard (overleaf), so hope the form isn't too far from the way they were written!

My earth, you are so many years old,  
With me mixed in your clay.  
Unwearied in the limitless firmament,  
You have orbited the sun,  
And for nights and days spanning millennia,  
Within me your grass has grown,  
Flowers in clusters have opened,  
So many trees have shed their leaves,  
Buds, fruits, odoriferous pollen...

It is always a delight to hear from **LivingSpirituality** members, so don't hesitate to comment or make suggestions.

With all good wishes,

*Petra*

Petra Griffiths

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