



January 2014

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The Wall – solidarity with those in Bethlehem

Over Christmas and the New Year an 8 meter replica of the Bethlehem wall has been erected in the courtyard at St James's Piccadilly, between Piccadilly and the Church, blocking the view of the Grade 1 listed building, reflecting what has happened to the holy sites in Bethlehem. In 2009 Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem issued an appeal to Christians to help to alleviate the desperate hardship the wall has caused to Palestinian families. The **Bethlehem Unwrapped** Festival is in association with Amos Trust, Holy Land Trust, Interpal, and the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions. It is part of the "beautiful resistance" movement which celebrates the culture of those living behind the Wall. St James's supports the universal call for a just and sustainable solution for both Palestinians and Israelis; opposes all forms of racism including Antisemitism; and supports the right of the State of Israel to exist with secure borders – important

points to note, given the heat generated by the Wall installation and inaccurate reporting in some places including national media.

The Festival brochure tells us that this wall is symbolic of all walls that divide and confine people, restricting free movement and dominating the imagination of those who live behind them. Bridges not walls are the only lasting foundation for peace. On 5 January the wall became a bridge, accompanied by music and dance.

The graffiti people have written on the Wall are often polarised in their view, referring to the illegality of the wall in international law, or talking about the lives which have been saved by it.

"The most unhelpful thing you can do is be pro one side; it just adds to the conflict. We have to not only understand those people who are oppressing us, but try to walk in their shoes, and ultimately to really engage with what it means to love our enemies."

- Sami Awad, Director, Holy Land Trust

A *Living Spirituality* special interest group on peace and justice issues is proposed by

Heather-Jane Ozanne, founder of **Spirit of Peace**, who work with international partners.

www.spiritofpeace.co.uk More of this in the next newsletter.

The Charter for Compassion: “Peace starts here”.

"We urgently need to make compassion a clear, luminous and dynamic force in our polarized world... indispensable to the creation of a just economy and a peaceful global community."

Initiated by Karen Armstrong in 2008 in her TED talk (available through www.charterforcompassion.org), the Charter has arrived at greater prominence through her interview on Oprah Winfrey's show in December 2013. It grew from contributions of more than 150,000 people from 180 countries, and was crafted into a succinct, 312-word pledge that allows room for all faiths by a panel of leading religious scholars. More than 103,000 people have pledged to uphold it. You can read it here: www.charterforcompassion.org/the-charter.

Karen Armstrong aims to make the journey to a compassionate life accessible in her book "Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life." In the preface, she writes that, "All faiths insist that compassion is the test of true spirituality and that it brings us into relation with the transcendence we call God, Brahman, Nirvana, or Dao. Each has formulated its own version of what is sometimes called the Golden Rule, 'Do not treat others as you would not like them to treat you,' or in its positive form, 'Always treat others as you would wish to be treated yourself.' They all insist that you cannot confine your benevolence to your own group; you must have concern for everybody — even your enemies."

Yet every religion has a history of intolerance. "I want people to hear the compassionate voice of religion," she says in a short video. "I want to

change the conversation and bring compassion to the forefront of people's attention."

It is not easy, she admits. In the same interview, she calls the work "the struggle of a lifetime," for herself as well as those around her. "Like everybody, I feel I've suffered, I feel I've been damaged, I meditate unpleasantly on my enemies and feel this corrosive sense of anger," she said. Karen Armstrong believes that change happens one person at a time. She points to world leaders like Gandhi and Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King. "One sees what one person can do, the tremendous impact (of) a decision to seek reconciliation, not revenge, as Mandela chose," she said in an interview on public radio in the US.

It is time to move beyond toleration to appreciation of the other – Karen urges in her TED talk. We can sign the charter as individuals and as organisations through the website – www.charterforcompassion.org.

Blue Sky God The Evolution of Science and Christianity by Don MacGregor is a book in which compassionate awareness is also a central theme. Don MacGregor is a former science teacher, and now an Anglican priest living in Fishguard and a member of the CANA core group.

The first chapters set out the convergence between scientific fields such as Quantum Reality, Epigenetics, morphic fields, the implicate order, and contemporary understandings of spiritual reality arising from the Wisdom and contemplative traditions. Drawing on authors such as Cynthia Bourgeault, Marcus Borg, and Neil Douglas-Klotz, Don MacGregor sees the Kingdom of God not as a place but as a state of unitive consciousness, of abundance and of compassion, in which we are connected to the ground of our being. He emphasises the social and justice aspect of compassion as much as inner awareness. Salvation is seen as freedom from constriction, and an experience of fullness of being. In agreement with Cynthia Bourgeault,

the unique contribution of Christ is understood to be to enable us to know the way of kenosis: that of releasing and self-emptying. Similarly to mindfulness approaches, there is an emphasis on the central importance of yielding, staying open and receptive, rather than reacting to events and people.

Again connecting with the Charter for Compassion, the Golden Rule is a focus for unity between different religious traditions. The challenge for religion, and especially for Christianity, is to create a non-exclusive path that understands the riches of other traditions, while drawing on its own contemplative tradition, and retaining a “place of centrality” for Christ as a teacher of wisdom and transformational love. Don MacGregor concludes by calling for a new path for humanity of deep compassion, oneness and harmony, and for an appropriate form of wisdom school to be a key part of bringing about the spiritual development that will be essential to the harmonious future that is envisaged. Some wordings are suggested for a service of prayers of healing and for a “consciousness Eucharist”.

Proposed new “equalist” special interest group

David Carter writes about the ideas behind this proposed new LS group.

“Since the mentions in the LS website and October newsletter, I have been talking with people at St James’s Piccadilly and several have expressed interest in starting a group exploring the spirituality and theology of giving equal weight to female and male language for the divine. The overall approach would be “equalist” rather than feminist. Guiding principles would be the absolute equality, in the last analysis, of women and men; and the equal appropriateness

of female and male verbal and visual images of God, and/or the divine.

Compared with feminism, little has been written on equalism. I believe that some ideas of feminist theologians about a post-patriarchal situation are worth exploring further in group prayer, meditation and discussion. For example, in late 19th century USA, Elizabeth Cady Stanton: wrote of a ‘new age as ... a reign of men and women together as equals’ and Frances Willard that ‘we need the stereoscopic view of truth in general which can only be had when woman’s eye and man’s eye together shall discern the perspective of the Bible’s full-orbed revelation’. Even Mary Daly wrote in the 1970s of a post-patriarchal ‘diarchal situation that is radically new’.

Some progress has been made on earth with equal opportunities for women and men but heaven seems to be exempt: language for God as father and lord still predominates, even in most liberal/enlightened liturgies. How long must this injustice continue? We should, as Abraham did long ago and in different circumstances, respectfully argue with God and say “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” (Genesis 18:25). Now, we shall ask for God to reveal Godself equally as mother and father, lady and lord. Many feminist theologians, such as Nicola Slee, have noticed that beneath the surface of the dominant masculine language of scripture and Christian tradition there is evidence of a repressed, underdeveloped female tradition which is being brought to consciousness in our own day.

Traditional Christian dogma can give rise to bizarre results, as Mary Daly’s quip illustrates. To ‘the timid objections voiced by Christian women’ about the all-male Holy Trinity ‘the classic answer has been “You’re included under the Holy Spirit. He’s feminine.”’

Is it not absurd that heaven, supposedly a realm of ultimate value, justice and truth, lags behind the secular ideals of earth in the matter of equal opportunities?"

David Carter lives in London and travels regularly to Birmingham where he is a Research Associate at The Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education. His research is in the area of male and female language for God/dess and Christ/a and how we might understand the coming of Christ/a. His tutor/supervisor is Nicola Slee. David has returned this year to the St James's Piccadilly community after an absence of nine years at three other London churches. Before that he was at St James's from 1996 to 2004.

Please contact the LS Coordinator via this page - www.livingspirit.org.uk/contact-us - if you have an interest in this SIG. She will forward your details to David. Meetings in central London are planned. Those in other parts of the country are welcome to be members at a distance.

Sparks and fire by Maggie Jackson

I can't remember a time when I didn't write. Imagination has somehow been my companion through life and I know that God has called me through creativity. I love the term "wordsmith" as a way of describing what I do – something about the sparks and fire and burnishing as a poem or story are crafted – and these images apply in equal measure to my spiritual formation. Many of my poems tell stories and are often based on true encounters and life experiences where wondrous events or realisations can burst at any moment into "ordinariness" or through pain. Increasingly I find that my poetry is helpful and meaningful, even healing, for other people, and I am using it more and more as part of my Spirituality "Tool-kit" for Spiritual Direction,

parish work and for reaching those who struggle with the whole idea of faith.

Several of Maggie's poems can be read on the LS website: www.livingspirit.org.uk/resources-and-links/poetry-and-spirit

Poet **Maggie Jackson**, is also author of "**The People's Psalms**" in which a broad spectrum of contributors have interpreted and expressed their own psalms.- "vital, authentic, heartfelt, contemporary yet timeless." It is available by sending a cheque for £8.50 (inc p&p) payable to "Arrowriver" to: Arrowriver CIC, Lighthaven, North Marine Road, Flamborough, North Yorks.

Here is one of Maggie's poems:

Calling me Meg.

I could choose a harp-full heaven.
Choirs and flights of angels.
Exultation.
Peace.
Freedom from pain.
Everlasting joy.
Coming home to a compassionate God.
That heaven, I could predict
And would quickly find lacking.

The heaven I hope for,
Would last only for a moment
And be held in a single word,
In hearing your voice
Calling me "Meg".

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July 2008

Hearing God's voice

Jim Pym is an author and a spiritual healer and meditation teacher with over 40 years' experience. He is a Quaker with an interest in Taoism. Davina Misroch has sent in the following thoughts as a result of Jim's last workshop at Jenny Sandler's flat in the autumn of 2013 on the topics of the universal Christ and spiritual gifts.

“I think one of the enduring thoughts I have of our day with Jim Pym is how eclectic his sources of reference were. To my consciousness, the Truth is the Truth is the Truth. It is One Voice, although it may come through many. In my own experience, I note the tendency to cherish the ones who bring us along the Path, and those who provide the spiritual leadership for it. That was certainly true for me, and now I am freer in myself to 'hear' the One Voice when it appears through different ones. It has been a process for me; for a long time I wanted only the core spiritual teaching I had from my spiritual leaders. Essentially, this remains the same. What has changed is my capacity to 'hear' this One Voice, the Truth, when it is being uttered and the collective Voice of God begins once again to find expression on earth, to fulfil His purposes as we yield to the government of His Spirit.”

Personal and Spiritual Development in Nurse Education

Linda Pearson gave a well-received presentation at the Lisbon conference on Spirituality in Health Care in November. Linda is an Associate Member of the Centre for Spirituality Studies at the University of Hull and an LS Steering Group member. The Powerpoint slides from her talk are available here – www.livingspirit.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/lindapearsonslides-2013.pdf.

Linda commented “I really enjoyed the input of the nurses who work in hospice settings – and the keynote speakers. Their maturity of insight into spiritual needs of patients and their loved ones was a joy to hear and their lack of need to speak directly about their faith meant that that did not get in the way.”

Using the Labyrinth for Healing and Transformation

The following two books make a significant contribution to understanding how the Labyrinth can become an important tool in spiritual and personal development.

[The Sacred Path Companion](#). Rev Dr. Lauren Artress.

This further book about walking the Chartres labyrinth (a sequel to [Walking a Sacred Path: Rediscovering the Labyrinth as a Spiritual Practise](#)) includes very useful personal exercises for people to do in order to work with shadow aspects of the self as well as locating a sense of one's true purpose in life.

[Working with the Labyrinth](#) ed. Ruth Sewell, Jan Sellers and Di Williams.

This book focuses on the practical experience people have of offering labyrinth walks in diverse settings in the UK, such as a hospice, at retreat centres, in universities and colleges and with young people. It is wonderful to hear how Lizzie Hoptthrow succeeded in making the case for a permanent labyrinth and got Department of Health funding for Pilgrims Hospice labyrinth garden!

February-April events digest

The February to April events digest with information about events all over the country can be downloaded from www.livingspirit.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/events_feb-apr14.pdf.

We send you our best wishes for a fruitful New Year,

Petra Griffiths

LivingSpirituality Coordinator.

For details of the LS Steering Group: see www.livingspirit.org.uk/who-we-are.