



Summer 2015 Newsletter

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1. Val Webb's new book is freeing for laity and clergy and calls for a liberation theology for the survival of the planet by Petra Griffiths

The Progressive Christianity Network (one of the sister organisations with whom we have a reciprocal link) and its local groups organised a book tour by Australian theologian Val Webb in April. Val was launching her book entitled **Testing Tradition and Liberating Theology: Finding your own voice.** I attended the session in Welwyn Garden City, with Revd Mary Robins, and we both found Val's talk encouraging and

empowering for our work developing *LivingSpirituality* and working in a local parish.

Val had a science degree and a career in the arts before coming to religious studies, which she has taught in American and Australian universities. Her opening chapters give a very broad sweep introduction to the multiplicity of beliefs and practices in the early church and throughout the centuries.

Process theology and contextual theology (including feminist and liberation theologies) are explained in accessible ways, building the case for the acceptance

of both human diversity and the need to recognise the powerful role of people's life situations and personal experience in shaping the theological perspective that they adopt. The increasingly knowledgeable laity and the influence of our growing knowledge of the way life has evolved have both changed the role of clergy and churches, and necessitate the recognition of the value of doubt and questioning.

Each individual has to examine the basis of their beliefs and values, and come to their own authentic spirituality. Uncertainty is the one sure thing, and the future is seen as open ended – meaning that the role of each of us in co-creating a better future for humanity and for the earth is vital.

As Val puts it, “The ‘process’ God is not an all-powerful Being orchestrating world events from outside the world, but immanent persuasive Presence involved in every moment.” There is also recognition that God is more than an immanent presence and that there is always a transcendent ‘absolute pole’ of God, which remains a mystery.

Val quotes with approval the comments by Episcopal layperson Anne Rowthorn in her book **The Liberation of the Laity** (1986):
 “The laity of the Church are a voiceless, sightless, powerless, invisible mass... We are believers whose historical roots have been kept from us. We have almost no lay

models for Christian living that the Church recognises and affirms.... We need to return to our roots....in order to uncover beginnings..... Our goal as lay Christians is the reclamation of our place in that historical journey.”

Val concludes that the boundaries are being crossed out of necessity in places where there are insufficient clergy, and lay people are taking on responsible roles for local congregations: “... lay people need to claim their place and power in church and history, knowing that the divisions and duality of the past rest on traditions developed over the centuries in contrast to Christianity's early beginnings.” Rather than candy floss, laity “need solid food so they can ‘love God with all their heart and mind’ (Matthew 22:37).

Final chapters examine emerging movements, the trend towards being spiritual not religious, theological hospitality, relations with other faiths, and living our theology on the planet. She writes that: “Theology – talking about God – has to be returned to its rightful place as part of the natural process of every thinking Christian and the activity of the whole people of God together.” A new balance is needed between the authority of external knowledge and the authority of experience in everyday life. With the crises of climate and ecology that face us,

Val calls for **a liberation theology for the survival of the planet** including justice, equity, sharing of the world's

resources and a move away from the theological idea that this world is disposable since we are headed for heaven.

This vision - of God as Life-breath or Energy of the Universe – “is also about the flourishing or suffering of God.” Quoting Norman Hable’s book **An Inconvenient Text: Is a green reading of the Bible possible?** (2011), “It is time we read [the Bible] as Earth beings in solidarity with Earth not as God-like beings who happen to be sojourners on Earth” – a challenge we need to rise to in order to tackle the crises brought about by our impact on the planet and the need to tackle climate change. This new book **Testing Tradition and Liberating Theology. Finding your own voice** is a timely resource helping us to change and move forward with key issues for our time.

2. Responses to: Climate Change and the Common Good: The Cultural Challenge. St Paul’s Institute 23 April 2015

This event at St Paul's Cathedral, organised in partnership with the Diocese of London, explored the behavioural and organisational changes needed to mitigate climate change, alongside a display of cultural expressions focusing on the issue. Attention was given to the role that culture can play in overcoming this challenge, and how we can best harness a

collective response across multiple levels of society.

Key questions were the role that local communities might play, and how each of us can contribute; how do we build the political will needed to instigate effective change?; will innovation in the business sector emerge quickly enough?; and can our arts and entertainment sectors help overcome a collective apathy towards action?

Speakers:

The Rt Revd Nicholas Holtam, Bishop of Salisbury (keynote)

Stephen Howard, Chief Executive of Business in the Community

Laurence Brahm, Author and Social Entrepreneur

Baroness Bryony Worthington, Founder of Sandbag

Chaired by the Revd Canon Prof. Richard Burrige, Dean of King's College, London.

You can listen to the talks here - www.stpaulsinstitute.org.uk/videos/2015/apr/27/climate-change-and-the-common-good-the-cultural-challenge.

Responses to the talks

Informal responses to the event were compiled by a party of people who attended the event, including members of St James’s Church Piccadilly and of **LivingSpirituality**.

1. The necessity of 'preaching to the un-converted' - those who attend events like this are already committed. How do we get the message to a wider audience?

2. Proposing that the St James's Church Council re-develops its own environmental policy covering things like fuel use, recycling, and purchasing policy. Care for creation was in the last 3 year strategy. This would be making this a more practically-based action area.

3. The need for theological engagement with the issue as a community, to embed practical action in faith/spiritual practice. What metaphors work here? Is the idea of sin and the slaying of dragons useful? Nicholas Holtam referred to St George slaying the dragon as a model for addressing the collective sin that has led to climate change.

We are organising a joint *LivingSpirituality*/St James's event with liberation theologian, **Professor Lisa Isherwood** of Winchester University at the end of September which will explore a different model for our relationship to creation.

4. Linking with the wider church and with ecumenical initiatives and international action.

Deborah Colvin writes:

I was stimulated and encouraged to hear from speakers across a wide spectrum of

public life. Some of the key messages that have stayed with me are:

- the environmental crisis is a spiritual crisis - the idea that we have become unhinged and lost the link between the words we use and what we do

- the 'church local' everywhere - grassroots thinking and action is key

- challenging the widespread acceptance of economic necessity, and the model of GDP - there are other ways of creating and measuring value (creating value by living value)

- who is my neighbour? I always want to include the non-living in this.

- we have a heartening precedent (if not a brilliant track record) in the UK as the first country to establish legally binding carbon reduction targets. (This is where the mandate for Shrinking the Footprint has come from - 42% reduction by 2020, 80% reduction by 2050. These are enormous and challenging targets that need to be tackled at every level)

- the emphasis on the strategic by Bryony Worthington, especially in addressing the twin tragedies of the reduction and mistreatment of the commons, and the shrinking of horizons to a narrow conception of economic growth and political short-termism. The disempowerment of people who are consequently unable to see their way past tactical (but still important!) measures.

- the economy is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the environment, as is the Church!

- what an amazing thing that St Paul's was built on the back of a coal levy!

Deborah Colvin works in education with a focus on sustainability and developing creative curriculum. She is a member of *LivingSpirituality* and St James's Piccadilly.

3. From collaboration to co-creation in Interfaith and inter-cultural work

by Justine Huxley

What's the most exciting experience you've had collaborating across differences in faith, culture, and ideology? Have you ever entered into collaborative relationships and been truly surprised by the result? What enabled those experiences to happen?

In a group I facilitate at St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace, in London, someone recently asked, "What's the difference between collaboration and co-creation?" Here is the answer I liked the most: In collaboration, you and your associates work together. You start off with an idea of what you want to achieve, and the result is not too dissimilar from your original idea. In co-creation, you and your collaborators are inviting in an extra element – the 'field,' the interrelated system around and within us, the web of life, or perhaps God (insert whatever

language you use for That which is beyond yourself) – and the result is something new, something none of you could have predicted.

That description echoes my experience of working with what is called **Emergent Design**. There is a quality of aliveness, of being in new territory, of holding a space for something beyond ourselves to bring itself into existence, of reorganizing us and our relationships, bestowing results according to a deeper wisdom that we cannot access on our own. It is a much more exciting way to work. As my fellow co-creator at St Ethelburga, Debbie Warrener, says, "It invites more humility and less attachment to particular outcomes. **It's a way of listening to a wider deeper dimension in the creative process. Consciously bringing this in can be a powerful way to bridge differences and gently sidestep egos, competition, and more personal triggers that can come up when working closely together with others.**"

Principles of creative emergence in interfaith work

How can we engage creative emergence and how can we co-create rather than simply collaborate as we do our interfaith work? What is the real importance of co-creation and emergence? Surely it must be that it enables us to create from the new now. We are at a time in human history where we cannot afford to keep endlessly

damaging life. We need a new perspective, a new paradigm, rather than recreating the same problems by thinking and acting in the same way.

Emergence takes us into new, co-creative space. **When we connect to the non-hierarchical patterns we find in nature, when we step outside our habitual human hubris and acknowledge what we don't know, and when we listen deeply to the interrelated 'field' we live in, subtle, important change can happen. It can take us beyond our fixed and limited ideas and allow a life-force into the space that can reorganise our reality in new, sustainable ways.**

Fundamentalism and barren secularism sometimes seem to trap us a world where meaning is being eroded and we are fast becoming spiritually bankrupt. The world of faith and practice needs to find ways out of the trap. And as spiritual people, **these new tools ask us to surrender into the deeper trust of 'interbeing,'** that is, supporting people to collaborate across our differences for the good of the whole. My hope for the interfaith world is that we allow ourselves to open up more deeply, be reorganised according to a greater will, and be shepherds of the new.

The principles of creative emergence and clear examples of a process that worked and another, not run along co-creative lines, that didn't work are in the full version of this article at

www.livingspirit.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/collaboration_to_cocreation.pdf.

Justine Huxley is Director of St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation & Peace in London, where workshops are run on co-creation and emergent design. www.stethelburgas.org

4. The Scandal of a Male Bible – a lecture by David Clines

A report by David Carter

The video of David Clines' authoritative and thorough 2015 lecture *The Scandal of a Male Bible* is worth watching. He is an established biblical scholar and currently Emeritus Professor at the University of Sheffield. His lecture opens with "The Bible is a male book, written by men, for men. It enshrines male values, promotes and inculcates them. Everywhere, it esteems men above women. It portrays a deity, moreover, infused with male values. What is the scandal of this male Bible? Twofold: it is first, that the Bible is deeply compromised by its adherence everywhere to specifically male values, and secondly, that its masculinity is hardly ever noticed or mentioned, not even in our much more egalitarian world."

He says that his aim is 'consciousness-raising': this raises the "what next?" question, though he avoids suggesting any 'programme of action'.

Most of the lecture is a detailed consideration of the maleness of the Bible

under eight headings, illustrated with Old and New Testament examples: 1. strength; 2. violence and killing; 3. size; 4. honour; 5. holiness; 6. womanlessness; 7. totality thinking; 8. binary thinking. After this, he gives his personal evaluation of biblical masculinity: it can be and has been misused, but is not *all* bad.

Many feminist theologians have written about the overall maleness of the Bible and its marginalisation of women and David Clines' fresh and systematic account adds to their work.

The lecture is "work in progress" towards his forthcoming book, *Play the Man! Biblical Imperatives to Masculinity* and the lecture text is available at [www.academia.edu/10977758/The Scandal of a Male Bible](http://www.academia.edu/10977758/The_Scandal_of_a_Male_Bible).

Professor David J.A. Clines is regarded as one of the world's most creative and influential biblical scholars.

David Carter is a member of the LS Journeying Together Group and of the Institute for Theological Partnerships (ITP) at the University of Winchester.

5. Music as Spiritual Experience

by June Boyce-Tillman

This article will examine the following questions:

- Is all music a sacred experience?
- Is there a secular music?
- Is the aesthetic a contemporary version of spirituality?
- Can spirituality be freed from a particular religious tradition?

The model proposed is based on five domains that can be identified in accounts of the musicking experience, the way the phenomenon is reviewed in research traditions, how it appears in the literature, treatises and textbooks and how it has been handled in different cultures. It approaches music through the experiencer rather than the music itself. It seeks to re-establish a notion of spirituality as relationality within the musical experience based on Buber's (1970) notion of the I/Thou experience, drawing on theorists such as Dewey (1929, 1934), Maslow (1967), Turner (1969, 1974a & b, 1982), Csikszentmihalyi (1993), Jackson (1998), Hay and Nye (1998) and practitioners such as Custodero (2002, 2005).

Introduction

There is a fine Jewish story that describes the origins of the Nigun the wordless Jewish song tradition:

The rabbi goes to the woods to celebrate his ritual. He finds the place, lights the fire, and sings the service. God says: 'It is enough.'

The rabbi goes to the woods to celebrate the service. He finds the place but has forgotten how to light the fire. God says: 'It is enough.'

The rabbi can no longer find the wood but he sings the service. God says: 'It is enough.'

The rabbi can no longer remember the words of the service. But he sings the tune. God says: 'It is enough.' (Shillor 1999)

The story represents the move from the time when music was inextricably bound up with religious ritual to a freestanding music independent of the ceremony. And yet in this story, this now wordless song is still conceived of as a religious experience.

This paper will engage with the themes set out in the first paragraph through Victor Turner's notion of 'liminality' – an intense, transformative experience resembling that of religious ritual.

Theoretical Framework

Throughout the history of Western music spirituality and music have been associated – from the ancient goddess traditions (Drinker 1948/1995), through Plato (Godwin 1987 pp3-8) and Hildegard (Boyce-Tillman 2000b). In the hands of the philosophers of the Enlightenment the link

between music and the spiritual became weakened and the search for the spiritual became an essentially human search located in the unconscious (Harvey 1999). The realm of the imagination became devalued (Robinson, 2001, pp. 141-142). This is important for the valuing of the Spiritual domain, as the imaginal is an intermediate realm between the purely sensory and the purely spiritual (Corbin, 1998, quoted in Leloup, 2002, pp. 14-15).

The spiritual became associated with notions of self-actualisation (Hooks, 1994) and self-fulfilment in Maslow's hierarchy of human needs (Maslow, 1967) in which he included the aesthetic – the need for beauty, order, and symmetry. As Western culture edged towards an aggressive individualism, a sense of finding some place in a larger whole – the cosmos – became a priority in the human search. This process of objectifying the cosmos associated with the advance of science had not happened in the same way in Eastern cultures; and it was on these cultures that the New Age (Boyce-Tillman, 2000a, pp. 155-166) and some areas of rock and jazz traditions (Hamel, 1978/1976, pp. 134-135) drew, in order to offer the desired sense of relationality. This included a more holistic view of the mind/body/spirit relationship, with transcendence approached through physical practices such as chanting (Gass and Brehony 1999) or dancing.

A Phenomenography* of the Experience

This paper draws on this history to establish the five domains of the music experience (Boyce-Tillman 2004). Other sources are:

- The way the phenomenon is reviewed in research traditions
- How it appears in the literature, treatises and textbooks
- How it has been handled in different cultures
- Discourses and accounts of unreflected experience
- Interviews and accounts where an interviewee is in a state of 'meta-awareness' including those in the Religious Experience Research Centre Archive.

Drawing on these it is clear that the musical experience is one of encounter and in this article I am using the frame of the 'I /Thou' experience described by Martin Buber (1970).....

For the full article go to:
[www.livingspirit.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/music as spiritual experience.pdf](http://www.livingspirit.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/music%20as%20spiritual%20experience.pdf).

All the references are listed at the end of the full article.

* Phenomenography investigates the qualitatively different ways in which people experience something or think about something.

June Boyce Tillman is Professor of Applied Music at the University of Winchester, and is coordinator of the *LivingSpirituality* Music and Spirituality Special Interest Group - www.livingspirit.org.uk/special-interest-groups/music-and-spirituality-group.

6. Remembering Murdoch MacKenzie (23.2.1938 – 3.2.2015)

by Eley McAinsh

If you 'Google' Murdoch MacKenzie you will find a number of tributes and obituaries which detail his life and give some sense of the man and the impact he had wherever he went. From his Glasgow roots and childhood in Birkenhead, to study at Oxford, marriage to Anne, a doctor, membership of the Iona Community, missionary service with the Church of Scotland in India, ordination into the Church of South India, ministry in Glenrothes, Runcorn, Birmingham, and finally, from 1996, to Milton Keynes, where he served as Ecumenical Moderator.

It was in this last post that I knew Murdoch. He was on the interview panel when I was appointed Director of the Living Spirituality Network and he oversaw my work until he retired in 2003, and moved back, with Anne, to 'God's own country', to Connel in Argyll.

He was highly committed to the work of LSN and always supportive,

encouraging, and in the very best of ways, challenging and provocative. Even after he retired he kept in touch, and I know that he and Anne always remembered the Network in general and me in particular in their prayers.

At the services to celebrate his life, held simultaneously in Greyfriars Kirk in Edinburgh and the Church of the Holy Cross in Milton Keynes, family, friends and colleagues queued to pay tribute to an outstanding and inspirational man. I have much for which to thank Murdoch, and will always remember him with fondness and great respect.

Two memories of him, in particular, will stay with me. Our first LSN Gathering after I joined the network in 2002 was held in the Wesley Memorial Chapel in Oxford, with Frances Young as the keynote speaker. Murdoch sent greetings and apologies – he and Anne were unable to attend as they were hosting eight Masai warriors for the weekend.

The second memory is of our final Gathering, on 21st April 2012. He and Anne travelled all the way down from Connel to London for the event and he gave a brief, but moving talk. At the end of his reflection, in an act I never saw coming, he called me up to join him and presented me with a shimmering brocade shawl – a beautiful golden ‘Ponnadai’ from his beloved India. I will treasure the gift, and the memory of the giver, always.

Murdoch MacKenzie’s talk at the final gathering of the Living Spirituality Network in April 2012 is on our website: www.livingspirit.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/lsn_final_gathering.pdf.

Eley McAinsh is the former Director of the Living Spirituality Network, the predecessor of *LivingSpirituality*.

7. The Universe Story Event (14 March 2015) Report by Petra Griffiths

This day organised by our partner organisation Greenspirit (www.greenspirit.org.uk) and held at the Barbican gave us updates on the knowledge we now have from science about how the Universe evolved and introduced some excellent projects seeking to bring about a transformation of the ways we live resulting from our understandings of our place in the Universe. Evolutionary biologist and futurist Elisabeth Sahtouris spoke on the evolution of cooperation and transformation (go to www.sahtouris.com for links to some of her talks around the world). Maddy Harland of Permaculture Magazine. (www.permaculture.co.uk) gave her vision for the future. Helen Moore’s eco-poetry collection, Ecozoa, was a popular input.

Global Generation, an inspiring educational project near Kings Cross (www.globalgeneration.org.uk) brought some young people with them to present

the impact of their work in schools. Global Generation's mission is to "connect people to each other and the natural world by creating hands-on and reflective opportunities".

They write: "We primarily work with local young people, businesses and families in King's Cross as well as at our campsite in Wiltshire. We combine activities such as supporting bees, carpentry, urban food growing, cooking, and eating together with dialogue, story, creative writing, silence and stillness. **These practices help us to create the conditions for people to come together in a fuller and more connected sense of who they are and what they are a part of and from that space, to support them to practically contribute to ecological and social change.** We have developed a methodology based around the three territories of 'I, We and the Planet' which is present in all the work that we do."

To see a 3 minute video about the Universe Story made by a young school girl, go to:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=ivrJR1WGQ2s.

The Universe Story event included a presentation from Professor Lisa Isherwood of Winchester University about the Cosmic Walk they have created in the university grounds. We reported on this in our last newsletter (www.livingspirit.org.uk/cosmic-walk).

8. The Cosmic Walks at Noddfa Retreat Centre, Penmaenmawr

by Barbara Bailey RSHM

(Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary)

The cosmic walk is a symbolic re-enactment that helps us enter personally into the mystery of the unfolding story of the universe, our sacred story.



There are many roads and pathways in and around Noddfa, our RSHM spirituality centre in North Wales, including deserted mountain tracks and labyrinths. A short time ago I was asked, "did I know anyone who might be interested in creating yet a new path in the grounds, a Cosmic Walk?". I invited a friend to join me in this venture into unknown territory.

So we stepped forth, pacing the pathways, exploring the rocks and possible settings. We decided to use stones or boulders, ancient custodians of the cosmic story, as time markers on the path. It was very clear to us that we would not be able to make the length of the walk proportionate to the number of years between the stages.

Gaps of several billion years would be simply longer to walk than millions or thousands. Each boulder (25 in all) would have a date painted on it and we prepared a short written commentary to accompany the walker.

We kept reminding ourselves that the purpose of the cosmic walk is to enter into the universe's story, OUR story not just with our minds, but with our bodies allowing the sheer wonder of its unfolding to touch our souls and imaginations - so drawing us into a deeper commitment to care for our planet.

It was this that inspired us as we explored the way, finding that mini-landscapes and sculpture-like boulders seemed to offer themselves to express each stage. The earliest part of the path is more expansive, the open sea, then we move through the rock faces of the upper path, down again into denser vegetation and 'forest'. With the emergence of human beings, we pass by a loose stone arch, into the more cultivated part of the garden.

We had our favourites! The first stone marking 13.7 billion years ago has the words "in the beginning" and is placed in the magnificent fanning out of branches from a felled tree showing circles of growth that speak of passing years. Walking on we reach a large ancient slab of volcanic rock by the gateway marking the expanse of the cosmos 12 billion years ago.

Further on I imagine the stone beneath the large trees marking the age of the dinosaurs as a giant foot. A strong upright stone among the tree trunks depicting the emergence of hominids 6 million years ago is one of our favourites too. Finally a sphere of blue on the stone positioned deliberately at a distance draws me into that awe inspiring first step and shift in consciousness when human beings first saw earth from the moon in 1969.

I have walked this path many times now. Each time fresh insights remind me of the many untrodden paths of mystery and meaning within the story of this 13.7 billion year journey of our universe yet to be unfolded.

Noddfa is a Welsh word meaning haven or refuge - a place of peace and welcome a place where you can regain energy. It is the name of the centre run by the sisters of the Sacred Heart of Mary in Penmaenmawr, between the mountains and the sea, on the North Wales coast.

www.noddfa.org.uk

Barbara Bailey RSHM developed the Cosmic Walks at Noddfa.

We conclude our summer newsletter with the Cosmic Blessing from Noddfa:

The Cosmic Blessing

May the vastness of the Universe draw you to wonder at the Living God.

May the complexity of the Universe thrill you with joy at life's diversity.

May the journey of the Universe remind you of the life's ever-changing cycles.

May the wisdom of the Universe inspire you with a sense of your true place in the sacred web of life.

Petra Griffiths

Coordinator, *LivingSpirituality*

You can see details of the **LS Steering Group members** at www.livingspirit.org.uk/who-we-are/steering-group.