



# Living Spirituality Connections

## Resources for the spiritual journey

### WINTER NEWSLETTER 2018-19

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## Introduction

We have three themes in this newsletter, beginning with articles addressing our **interconnectedness** with the whole of creation, and how we address the threats to our climate and the biodiversity of our planet. This includes how our religions and our spirituality need to change in order to be a source of wisdom in the very challenging period that lies ahead. In an introduction to an important theme for Living Spirituality Connections in the year ahead (in partnership with Spirit of Peace, Eco Church, Earth Church and others), we open up the theme of how, in the future, both human flourishing and earth flourishing could be combined. Paul Hawken's piece drawing on his book, ***Blessed Unrest***, talks about the great size and significance of the very decentralised movement made up of a myriad of local initiatives for the earth and for human justice. Michael Barrett speaks of the need of a new beginning as to how we look at our story of origins.

Lucy Winkett proclaims the need for a revolution in how we look at the planet, a God's eye view in which creation is like a love letter written by God to God's beloved. This includes a de-centering of human experience. We then look at the Eco Church Gold Award won recently by St James's Piccadilly, and what the important elements in that were. The image of the Earth Window at Grace Cathedral, San Francisco, conveys both the brokenness of the present situation and a light of hope.

Articles on Quiet Gardens and Forest Church then talk of ways in which people can worship while participating in nature, and how entry points to the contemplative dimension are provided by Quiet Gardens.

### **Seeking peacebuilders**

We introduce the training programme for reconciliation-in-action being launched this month by five ecumenical partners in different parts of the country, aiming to make an input into the healing of divisions within the Church and more widely in communities. A photograph of the sculpture at Grace Cathedral of two thousand paper doves, symbols of spirit and peace, follows.

### **Liberation**

This theme opens with a radical perspective from Hugh Valentine on the significance of the Magnificat for freedom from oppression.

Independent scholar and best-selling author Diana Butler-Bass then speaks very personally of the difficult journey for her from the recognition of an ongoing situation of abuse in her childhood to coming to the point of feeling forgiveness and gratitude – which has not been quick, easy, or always facilitated by approaches demanding instant forgiveness.

## Books

In our book reviews, Peter Millar reviews Neil MacGregor's *Living with the Gods: On Beliefs and Peoples*, and Linda Courage reviews Jonathan Tulloch's *Glimpses of Eden. Field notes from the edge of eternity*.

Finally, we link to a song sung on the Earth Day Pilgrimage to Burns Bog in Canada - *One world, one voice, one heart*, accompanied by a drumbeat.

## Interconnectedness

### What is the connection between earth flourishing and human flourishing?

Sir David Attenborough told the UN's climate change summit in Katowice at the beginning of December 2018 that the "collapse of civilisation" and "extinction of the natural world" are on the horizon. There have been multiple warning statements by scientific bodies such as the International Panel on Climate. The Church Times's editorial "Sins of emission", part of its special issue on climate change issues, stated in the clearest of terms that otherworldliness needs to be set aside, as being Manichean rather than Christian in origin. "When this is combined with high consumption as among many Trump-supporting Evangelicals in the United States, theological error is compounded by hypocrisy. By contrast, the people who are most religious lead the simplest lives, with the smallest global footprint, because they love the world around them."

Humanity is clearly at a crossroads in terms of grasping the nettle of reversing the impacts of climate change and loss of biodiversity. Rather than allowing the destruction to continue, humans need to seek ways of living that also enable the living systems we depend on to flourish. How we can do that through simplification of life and through pursuing justice for those lacking the wherewithal to live with dignity is the question we will be exploring in the year ahead, with the help of people who have thought deeply about these questions and identified more sustainable ways of being. We will look at what is helpful in our spiritual traditions, particularly Christianity, and what needs to change. These are questions at the root of a number of events that Living Spirituality Connections will be running during 2019 in partnership with Spirit of Peace, starting in June with a workshop on this topic in partnership with Earth Church at Brighthelm, Brighton. For details go to:

<http://www.livingspirit.org.uk/events/>

### **The Biggest Movement in the World that No One Saw Coming by Paul Hawken**

I believe that we are part of a movement that is greater, and deeper,

and broader than we ourselves know, or can know.  
It flies under the radar of the media, by and large.  
It is non-violent. It is grassroots.  
It has no cluster bars, no armies and no helicopters.  
It has no central ideology.  
A male vertebrate is not in charge.

The unnamed movement is the most diverse the world has ever seen.  
The very word movement, I think, is too small to describe it.  
No one started this worldview.  
No one is in charge of it.  
There is no orthodoxy.

It is global, classless, unquenchable and tireless.  
The shared understanding is arising spontaneously from different  
economic sectors, cultures, regions and cohorts.  
It is growing and spreading, worldwide, with no exception.  
It has many roots, but primarily the origins are: indigenous culture,  
the environment, and social justice movements.  
Those three sectors and their sub sectors are intertwining, morphing and enlarging.

This is no longer, or simply, about resources or factions or injustice.  
This is fundamentally a civil rights movement, a human rights movement.  
This is a democracy movement.  
It is the coming world.

We do not know how big this movement is.  
It may be 250,000 groups. It may be 500,000 groups.  
It's marked by kinship, and community, and symbiosis.  
It is Pachamama. It's Mama!  
It's the Earth, talking back, 'Waken up!'

It's so new, we can't recognise it.  
We're familiar with armies, and wars, and governments,  
and churches and religions.  
But there's no precedent for what we're doing.  
What you're creating is completely unknown.  
It's everywhere.  
There's no centre.  
There's no one spokesperson.  
It's in every country and city on Earth.

It is within every tribe, every race, every culture, and every ethnic group in the world.  
This is the first time on Earth that a powerful, non-ideological movement has arisen.

And during the span of the 20th century, big ideologies were worshipped, like religions.

They dominated our beliefs.

They dominated us with socialism, capitalism, and communism.

In the words of Ed Hunt, “Ideologies stalked the Earth, clad in armour.

They fought for the control of our minds, and the lands, and it wasn’t pretty.”

We were told that salvation would be found in the domination of a single system.

*This* is where salvation will be found.

We know that as biologists.

We know that as community organisers.

We know that as ecologists.

It’s found in diversity.

This movement is humanity’s immune response to resist and heal political disease, economic infection, and ecological corruption, caused by ideologies.

So it is up to us to decide.

How will we be? Who will we be?

This is what it is we’re building: the capacity to respond.

It is about possibilities and solutions.

Humankind knows what to do.

**Paul Hawken** is a leading environmentalist, social change activist and author. This blog is based on his book: ***Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Social Movement in History Is Restoring Grace, Justice and Beauty to the World.***

Paul has spent more than a decade researching organisations dedicated to restoring the environment and fostering social justice. From billion-dollar non-profits to single-person causes, these groups collectively comprise the largest movement on Earth, a movement that has no name, leader, or location and that has gone largely ignored by politicians and the media. ***Blessed Unrest*** explores the diversity of the movement, its brilliant ideas, innovative strategies, and centuries of hidden history. A culmination of Hawken’s many years of leadership in the environmental and social justice fields, it has the capacity to inspire all who despair of the world’s fate. Its conclusions will surprise even those within the movement itself.

Thank you to The New Story Hub for permission to reproduce this blogpost:

<http://newstoryhub.com/2018/09/the-biggest-movement-in-the-world-that-no-one-saw-coming-paul-hawken> 27 September 2018

**The New Story Hub** is a resource centre for anyone engaged in the co-creation of a new evolutionary paradigm. We invite you to participate and to help us accelerate our collective understanding of what might be, what is emerging and what must change, both in us and in the Human Story. <http://newstoryhub.com/>

## **A New Beginning to an Old Story** by Michael Barrett

It's time the Western world looked critically at its ancient origins narrative and considered adopting a mythology appropriate to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

What was simply not available to Moses, or Jesus, Muhammad or the Buddha - is any real understanding of the place of our earthly home and its astonishing biodiversity in the context of the evolving universe. Far from undermining the idea of religion, an updated mythic origins narrative could attract and encourage some of our disenchanted generation to engage in a religious discovery of the sacred in the natural world. Here the term religious refers not to any particular creed, philosophy or cultural system, but to the kind of affective experience of awe, wonder, respect, reverence or at-one-ness evoked by the mystery underlying the emergence and evolution of life, and engendering a sense of being deeply 'bound' or 'tied' (cf. Latin *religare*) in commitment to the natural world.

**Michael Barrett** has worked in media and education in Europe and Canada and in development in Africa. This is a short extract from a ***Resurgence & Ecologist*** article considering the dichotomy of human and Nature as interpreted through the book of Genesis, and how, in the age of the anthropocene, we need to step away from the notion of “mastery” of the rest of the living planet and instead emphasise our connectivity.

The article was published in Issue 311, November/December 2018, of ***Resurgence & Ecologist*** magazine. To buy a copy of the magazine and read this and further articles visit: <https://www.resurgence.org/> Thank you to the editors for enabling us to quote from this article.

## **Celebrating a faith in God that's rooted in our sensual experience of the world** by Lucy Winkett

Photo: Flickr - Peter Smith [\*“Spring is coming”\*](#)

“Traherne invites us to notice and be attentive. He invites us to love the gifts with which we're surrounded, and take part in nothing less than a revolution of attitude that we've heard this week [*following the announcement by the International Panel on Climate Change that we have 12 years to cut the risk of extreme heat, drought, floods and poverty,*] is so urgently needed. A distinctive Christian contribution will be to celebrate a faith in God that's rooted in our sensual experience of the world.



Traherne is always reaching for something, yearning, straining for a deeper unity in his life, a more profound union with the divine. Traherne teaches us a habitual stance towards creation that's not fundamentally human-centric. He writes a lot about happiness which he defines as union with the divine bound by the cords of love, so this is more of a self-giving than a self-actualisation. The Cross is a tree set on fire with an invisible flame that illuminates all the world. That flame is love. In the central presence of the cross at the heart of creation, there is a decentering of human experience, and this is what is needed today in our attitude to the ecological crisis.

Theologically and spiritually, we require a revolution in how we look at the planet, which is a God's eye view. ....Creation is like a love letter written by God

to God's beloved. This way of understanding can be very inspiring and, for me, reintroduces joy and delight into an environmental debate that can sometimes get a little bit earnest. To lay aside our human-centric language can make us playful again.

In our liturgy we simply join in the praise being offered by the created order already. ....  
*[It is worth listening to the audio of the full sermon on St James's website in order to hear Lucy illustrating this through her singing of the Exultat at dawn on Easter morning while accompanied by a blackbird in the church garden. Go to:*

<http://www.sjp.org.uk/sermons.html> and scroll down to 14 October 2018, Harvest Sunday]

There is one reality. Heaven and earth are joined. We're in union with all that lives, and all that has died and yet lives."

**Thomas Traherne** (1636/7 – 1674) was a spiritual writer and poet. He is best known for his Centuries of Meditations and his poetry. Here is a famous line of Traherne, memorably set to music by the Incredible String Band:

*"You never enjoy the world aright, till the Sea itself floweth in your veins, till you are clothed with the heavens, and crowned with the stars".*

**Lucy Winkett** is Rector of St James's Church Piccadilly. The above are extracts from her sermon preached on Harvest Sunday 14 October 2018, when St James's also celebrated winning an Eco Church Gold Award. The full sermon can be heard at:

<http://www.sjp.org.uk/sermons.html>

## St James's Piccadilly Eco Church Gold Award

St James's Piccadilly is the first urban church to gain a Gold Award from Eco Church.



Andy Atkins presents Gold Award to the youngest member of the community – for her future



**Right hand photo:** Deborah Colvin, Sustainability Champion at St James's and supporter of LSC, is awarded the Eco Church Award Certificate on 14 October 2018.

Eco Church is a wide-ranging ecumenical partnership project led by Christian conservation charity A Rocha UK (<https://ecochurch.arochoa.org.uk/>). The Eco Church vision is to create a vast network of churches as local centres of environmental care in the community - shining beacons of hope for a brighter environmental future.

Living Spirituality Connections is part of the Eco Church Steering Group at St James's and provides input especially to the events series covering theological and practical issues; to discussion of how our interconnectedness is reflected in the liturgy; and is one of the contributors to the monthly Eco Contemplative Garden liturgies started by Angela Sheard and friends (see: <http://www.livingspirit.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/regularevents.pdf>)

Andy Atkins, the CEO of A Rocha UK presented the awards in recognition of "care for God's earth in their everyday work and witness" across five categories: worship and teaching; buildings; land; community and global; and lifestyle. "As an inner-city church in the heart of London, we hope that this award will encourage other urban churches to realise how much





## Quiet Gardens

Quiet Gardens are accessible, friendly and adaptable to local needs, and aim to be places where people can find welcome, stillness and spiritual refreshment. The outdoor space and garden act as both a context and focus, in which to share the inner search for wholeness, natural beauty and silence, and in which ancient Christian wisdom and the contemplative tradition can be explored. Quiet Gardens provide hospitality and a safe, quiet space for coming home to oneself, for spiritual contemplation and reflection.



### **The Quiet Garden at Gleneagles, near Auchterarder, Perth & Kinross, Scotland**

The Quiet Garden Movement flows from the example of Jesus's withdrawal to natural places to pray and his invitation to, 'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest' (St Mark's Gospel 6.31). If Jesus regularly and consistently needed such space to just 'be', then so do we. Those involved in the Quiet Garden Movement come from a variety of traditions, churches and cultures, and as such express their heritage in many diverse ways and welcome the diversity of fellow travellers on the journey. All are welcome to Quiet Gardens, to rest in the presence of God, whatever spiritual path they follow.

The Quiet Garden Movement nurtures access to outdoor space for prayer and reflection in a variety of settings, such as private homes, churches, retreat centres, schools and hospitals.

## **Our core values:**

### **Hospitality – the offer of a warm-hearted, simple welcome to all**

Quiet Gardens are places of hospitality, which is offered to all who wish to visit from any faith background or none. Such hospitality draws on the deep wells of Christian spirituality and the monastic past as well as the gifts of the host team. In a home setting this may begin with listening to guests, as Jesus listened to those he encountered, before responding to individual needs whether those needs are a cup of coffee, a warm corner or a niche in the garden just to be.

### **Contemplation – the practice of silence, stillness, meditation and prayer**

Quiet Gardens are rooted in the Christian contemplative tradition as expressed in the Scriptures and the wisdom of the desert tradition, as well as the Christian mystical tradition and Celtic spirituality. Quiet Gardens provide a context for learning about these sources and resources, and enjoying silence, attentiveness and contemplative prayer.

### **Nature Connection – the opportunity to deepen our relationship with the natural world**

Time in a Quiet Garden can be helpful for our health and wellbeing, as well as our spiritual journey. Deep restfulness and refreshment within the beauty of creation can often take place, and there will be many opportunities for attentiveness and moments of wonder and transcendence to occur. All these restore body, mind and soul. Our care for the environment creates balance for daily life and inspiration for compassionate activism. Time in a Quiet Garden enhances our relationship with the earth and encourages care for creation.

### **Creativity – the provision of quiet outdoor space to inspire**

Quiet Gardens are often spaces designed with great creativity. They are hosted by creative people and groups. Time spent in them allows moments of inspiration and creativity to come to the surface.

## **Our beliefs**

The core beliefs of the Quiet Gardens Movement include:

Honouring what unites us and being enriched by our differences;

Being guided by our past tradition, we are open to the freshness of the future;

In collective participation, we can be more effective;

Recognising that creating intentional space for inner silence is important for everyone's wellbeing;

Time spent in the natural environment will inspire our reflection and invigorate our action.

## History of the Quiet Garden Movement

The original vision for Quiet Gardens was developed by Philip Roderick in the early 1990s, who at the age of 14, was on holiday with his family in South Wales. He went for an evening walk alone up the cliff path and was suddenly aware of a different reality, a depth to things of which he had previously been unaware. This experience lasted for about half an hour. Afterwards he returned to his family, outwardly the same, but inwardly transformed. Many years later Philip discovered that the place where this happened was the cliff path very near the site of the great teaching monastery of St Illtud in the fourth and fifth centuries. The village is now called Llantwit Major.

Enthusiasm and support for quiet gardens soon came from others who were drawn to the contemplative dimension of the Gospel and who wished to explore the creative tension between action and contemplation, between involvement and withdrawal, between work and prayer. This group opened the first Quiet Garden in September 1992 in the village of Stoke Poges (in Buckinghamshire, England) and thereafter the vision spread, with Quiet Gardens opening across the UK and North America. Today there are over 200 Quiet Gardens in the UK and over 100 spread across Europe, Africa, Australasia and North America.

For further information about the Quiet Garden Movement go to: <https://quietgarden.org/> or watch the "**Beauty behind the Beauty**" interview with Philip Roderick on conscious.tv which expands on the above awakening story and says more about Quiet Gardens: [http://www.conscious.tv/atoz\\_show.php?action=show&author=Philip%20Roderick](http://www.conscious.tv/atoz_show.php?action=show&author=Philip%20Roderick)

## Forest Church



### Oxford Deepening Nature Connection retreat

Many people can describe transcendent moments in nature where they feel deeply connected to something bigger than themselves and Forest Church is a way to explore that

connection within community. Forest Church is a fresh expression of church drawing on much older traditions when sacred places and practices were outside – but it is also drawing on contemporary research that highlights the benefits of spending time with nature in wild places.

Forest Church isn't just normal church happening outside. Instead it attempts to participate with creation. And it isn't just a fellowship group doing an outside activity. We aim to learn, worship, meditate, pray and practice with the trees, at the spring, along the shore....

It is an expression of Communities of the Mystic Christ, people exploring a journey in community with the Mystic Christ towards personal transformation and the renewal of creation. Resources for the contemplative meditation practice of Lectio Divina, or Divine Reading, and Sensio Divina, literally 'Divine sensing' are available via the website [mysticchrist.co.uk/](http://mysticchrist.co.uk/)

### **Forest Church comes to the Brighton area**



Rev Alex Mabbs writes: Brighthelm United Reformed Church started a Forest Church in Brighton in November 2016, in collaboration with One Church (a local Baptist church). We call ourselves 'Open Sky'. We meet every month, on the second Sunday afternoon. We have met on the beach, on a golf course, and in our church garden, but mostly in the same woodland clearing on the Downs at the edge of the city. We have seen the wood change through the seasons, and different aspects of these changes have triggered the different themes of our gatherings.

"I would rather be in the mountains thinking about God, than in church thinking about the mountains," said John Muir, the 19<sup>th</sup> Century conservationist. Well, with Forest Church, you can do both! Forest Church not only takes away the walls, it seeks to make a deeper connection with God through paying closer attention to nature.

### **Finding Forest Church groups**

Different Forest Church groups do things their own way, with different degrees of structure and content. But we all share the basic understanding that through listening to nature we listen to God.

To find out more, go to <https://openskybrighton.com/> or search for Forest Church on Facebook to see what other groups do.

## Seeking peacebuilders

### An immersive pilgrimage exploring Christian Reconciliation in action

**Reconcilers Together** is a growing ecumenical network of Christian peacebuilding and reconciliation centres across the UK. Their shared mission is to inspire and equip Christian leaders to become skilled practitioners of reconciliation in their churches and communities. This is done by collaborating and sharing best practice within the wider field of Christian peacemaking, and through its fully funded six month leadership training programme: **Journey of Hope** (see below).

Reconcilers Together aims to grow a wide network of diverse Christian leaders equipped with training, relationships and opportunities to be active peacemakers in the public square. They aim to enable conflicts within the Church to be responded to well, and to enable Christian practitioners to have greater confidence in offering skills to help with wider community disagreements. They also aim to improve skills and peer supervision, evolving a shared understanding of best practice, improve accountability, and generate more reflective practice. They aim to “create a robust, inclusive and vibrant Christian voice engaging with the conflicts, opportunities and challenges of contemporary life in the UK and Ireland.”

Through the six month **Journey of Hope** programme Reconcilers Together aim to equip twenty church leaders with the skills to transform their churches into Reconciliation Hubs. This will be done by accompanying participants on an experiential and dynamic learning journey across the UK and Ireland. They are aiming to gather a diverse community of practitioners who will support one another in their learning and development. The goal is to have a range of ethnic backgrounds, geographical contexts, and conflict issues. Participants will attend a training residential at each of the five centres: St Michael’s House, Coventry; Rose Castle, Carlisle; The Blackley Centre, Yorkshire; Corrymeela, Belfast; St Ethelburga’s, London. The first Journey of Hope course is about to start in January 2019 at St Michael’s House, which is linked with Coventry Cathedral which has a long term track record in peace and reconciliation work.

For the Journey of Hope, the following are significant:

**Stories** will be central: of place, of people, of conflict, of hope. Participants will be invited to share their own stories, listen to others, and learn to tell new ones.

#### **Theology**

Learning will be rooted in scripture and theological insights from leaders on peacebuilding and reconciliation. Each centre will focus on different biblical passages.

## Tools

From conflict mediation, to facilitating difficult conversations, the training will give people the practical tools to gain confidence in peacebuilding and reconciliation.

## Worship

To honour the ecumenical partnership, a core part of our pilgrimage will be to experience different ways of worshipping together. Each centre has its own unique and inclusive style.

## Retreat

Leadership and facing into conflict can be challenging. The training will have plenty of moments to rest, recharge, and to enjoy the surrounding areas of each centre.

## Dialogue

The learning won't all be front led, but shared within the group. Participants will be encouraged to share their knowledge and experiences, building relationships and connections as they do so.

Those participating will be people with a formal or informal leadership role within their church or faith congregation; support from within their own congregation, church leadership or diocese to develop reconciliation work; some experience of reconciliation work, dialogue facilitation or mediation; and have an ability to lead diverse groups and an aspiration to inspire others. If you know someone who has the potential to effect long-term change in their church, the Journey of Hope team would be grateful if you could encourage them to apply for the following tranche of trainings later this year. Go to:

<https://www.reconcilerstogether.co.uk/leadership-training>

Reconcilers Together welcomes collaboration with people and organisations who share their vision. "Please be in touch, we'd love to hear from you." Make contact via the website: <https://www.reconcilerstogether.co.uk>

## ***Les Colombes: The Doves* by Michael Pendry at Grace Cathedral, San Francisco**

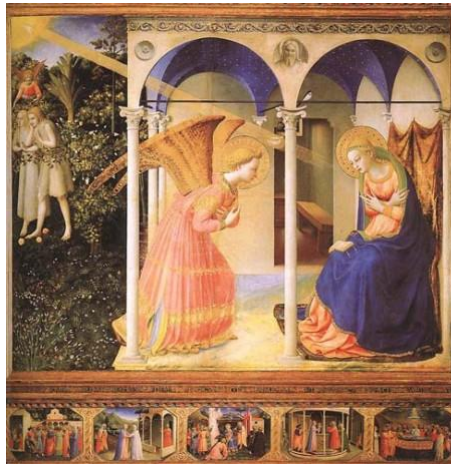


Two thousand paper doves, symbols of spirit and peace, soar in a 45-foot long aerial sculpture. "...art connects people to the depths of their souls and to the divine" says the Grace Cathedral website.

## Liberation

### Christmas and freedom from oppression: the Magnificat By Hugh Valentine

“ nothing short of a total dismantling of the scripts of human oppression. ”



*Fra Angelico - The Annunciation*

The story of Mary is the story of her saying ‘yes’ to God. That is as good a summary of the Christian life as you could want for. It does not require elaboration (though that does not stop us from doing so, as much of the history of Christian conflict and schism shows). But it does lead us into interesting places:

To say a ‘yes’ to God will inescapably mean a ‘no’ to something else; that ‘yes’ comes with consequences. And we get a steer on these from this morning’s Gospel from Luke and this particular passage which is known by the Latin [name] *Magnificat*.

It can at first seem like the present we think we know and could quite do with: something comfortable like slippers maybe, or bathroom smelly stuff. Yet, it turns out to be something far more electric. The compliant young woman submitting to God’s will is not quite the full picture. There are explosives here. Let me draw your attention to some seditious, even revolutionary, sentiments hidden in this cosy text, enough to make all right-minded citizens and many a Religious Person recoil in terror.

Luke attributes these words to Mary when she visits her cousin Elizabeth. In the narrative, after Mary greets Elizabeth, who is pregnant with the future John the Baptist, the child moves within Elizabeth's womb. When Elizabeth praises Mary for her faith, Mary sings what is now known as the Magnificat in response.



“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

Now, how do you want to read this, how do you want to unwrap this particular gift? Or perhaps rather than read it, you find yourself hearing it sung, in your head: musical settings abound, and anyone familiar with choral evensong will know its song-like rhythms even when recited as prose. What can we read into these words if we slip under the heavy mantle of piety and the coiled complexities of Mariology?

Let's imagine we are explaining it to the proverbial visiting alien who observes human religion as organised escapism from a challenging world. But on second thought, we need no alien; let's simply imagine we are explaining it to any half intelligent modern day human who makes the same observation. And in giving such an account, we might want to observe that this isn't a poem about how great it is to be pregnant. And it isn't a submissive discourse in praise of an Alpha Male God. Nor was it exclaimed solely as a fine text for future use in Anglican Choral Evensong.

The message here is seditious, up-setting, one of revolt, for it speaks of overturning an established order and bringing about fundamental change. I don't read it as saying that we shall change places: that the rich will become the poor and the poor become the rich. That would not be very radical, more like a Tom and Jerry cartoon.

### **A song of liberation and promise**

What might be spoken of here, in this song of liberation and promise, is nothing short of a total dismantling of the scripts of human oppression. The child she carries in her womb is not coming to make the oppressed the new oppressors but is coming to rupture the whole pattern of oppression itself. A central clue to how this is achieved is connected to vulnerability – the vulnerability revealed in the incarnation - the birth of Jesus - and in the way he encounters oppressive power both in his life and his dying.

The Magnificat has been called a 'socialist agenda'. That's as may be. Better a Christian Agenda – at least for those who simply must link faith with life (a habit always to be commended as the only possible habit).

This Song of Mary speaks of power relations. It speaks of what God is about and what

Jesus witnesses to, and of how we are to think and behave and act if we seek to know this God and to follow this brother of ours. Let's leave Mariology to the Mariologists, and any excessive piety to pietists, and follow the advice that we should read the Bible alongside reading the newspaper. That is, in dialogue with the concrete facts of our lived lives and our world. Unless we do that, it's hardly worth reading at all. This world of ours is beautiful in so many ways, and yet also full of injustice and horror and grief.

Saying 'yes to God' means working to change that, and looking it in the eye. This is one of the magnificent messages of Advent and Christmas and of the whole Christian narrative.

Responding to it, with our whole hearts, is our greatest calling.

Rev **Hugh Valentine** is a worker priest at St James's Church Piccadilly. He trained in social work, including psychiatric social work, and later served as assistant Director of Social Services and Head of Children's Services. He is director of a foundation concerned with the relief of poverty.

This article is the final part of the sermon preached on 23 December 2018. For the whole text go to: <http://www.sjp.org.uk/sermons.html>

## **#MeToo and the Spiritual Struggle for Gratitude** by **Diana Butler Bass**

About two hours outside of Lexington, Kentucky sits a small church on a country road — a white clapboard building surrounded by fields and woods, mountains in the distance. A cemetery surrounds it, too, holding saints in the earth awaiting resurrection.

I have never been to this particular church. I have seen it online. However, I never want to visit in person, for somewhere in that graveyard, resting among the faithful, lay the remains of the uncle who abused me when I was fourteen years old. When my mother sent me an email in January 2007 saying he was dead, I replied, "Thank God." It was the first time that any mention of my uncle and a word of gratitude ever combined in a sentence. Occasionally, I check the graveyard on the internet — wanting, I think, to assure myself that he is still in the dirt.

I looked again recently, after the news of Bill Cosby's conviction and Harvey Weinstein's indictment. Yes, my uncle is still buried. But the ghosts linger. Even today, news stories of abuse wind my emotional clock back 45 years, and I find myself shaking again like a teenage girl. I am 59 now, and I have struggled with a lifetime of consequences. Over the years, there has been anger and pain, but there has also been release and healing. Forgiveness and gratitude are essential to healing, and they are, indeed, qualities of a mature spiritual life. Miraculous, even. But not all miracles are instantaneous.

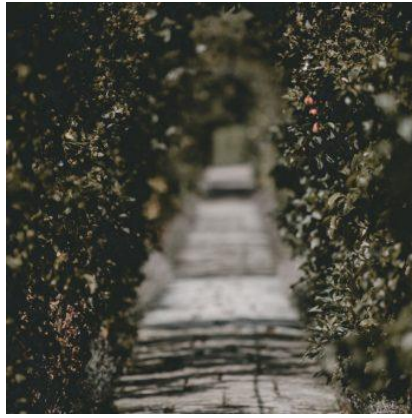


Photo by Annie Spratt

One thing, however, has remained particularly troublesome: the spiritual fallout of sexual abuse. As a teenager, my search for freedom from the pain led me to a fundamentalist church, a community of clear-cut rules and gender roles, with rigid boundaries, a place where I thought no one could hurt me again. Although I did not fully comprehend it at the time, its spiritual safety came with a price — the requirements of forgiveness and a cheerful piety of gratitude.

To read the full article go to:

[http://www.livingspirit.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/diana\\_butler\\_bass\\_on\\_metoo\\_and\\_the\\_spiritual\\_struggle\\_for\\_gratitude.pdf](http://www.livingspirit.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/diana_butler_bass_on_metoo_and_the_spiritual_struggle_for_gratitude.pdf)

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**Diana Butler Bass** is an author, speaker, and independent scholar specialising in American religion and culture. Her latest book is **Grateful: The Transformative Power of Giving Thanks** (2018).

The **On Being Project** is an independent non-profit public life and media initiative. We pursue deep thinking and social courage, moral imagination and joy, to renew inner life, outer life, and life together. We look behind and beyond the news cycle, attending to the human change that makes social transformation possible across generational time.

<https://onbeing.org/>

## Book Reviews

**Living With The Gods: On Beliefs and Peoples** by Neil MacGregor

Reviewed by **Peter Millar**

In my humble opinion one of the great books of 2018 must be Neil MacGregor's **Living With The Gods: On Beliefs and Peoples**. This book is based on his award winning BBC Radio 4

series. One of the central facts of human existence is that every society shares a set of beliefs and assumptions – a faith, an ideology, a religion – that goes far beyond the life of the individual. These beliefs are part of our shared identity. Yet this book is not a history of religion, nor an argument in favour of faith. It is about the stories which give shape to our lives and the different ways in which societies imagine their place in the world. Looking across history and around the globe, it interrogates objects, places and human activity to try to understand what shared beliefs can mean in the public life of a community or a nation, how they shape the relationship between the individual and the state, and how they help give us our sense of who we are. For in deciding how we live with our gods, we also decide how to live with each other.

Revd Dr **Peter Millar** worked for many years in India and is a former Warden of Iona Abbey. A campaigner for global justice he is the author of several books on society and spirituality.

**Glimpses of Eden. Field notes from the edge of eternity.** By **Jonathan Tulloch**. DLT 2018

A round-the-year anthology based on author's *The Tablet* column.

<https://wordery.com/glimpses-of-eden-jonathan-tulloch>

Reviewed by **Linda Courage**

It is a pleasure to review this book, which has been a welcome companion for the weeks leading up to the publication of this newsletter. It is an attractive hard backed book, just under A5 in size, making it eminently portable. The back cover tells us that Jonathan Tulloch writes a nature column for *The Tablet*, and another for *The Times*. He is an accomplished novelist, with eight novels to his name, including *The Season Ticket* and *Larkinland*.

In the Foreword Jonathan Tulloch tells us how surprising, moving, and uplifting it has been for him to select, arrange, and respond to his *Tablet* writings, 'Glimpses of Eden', for this anthology. Most of the book refers to encounters within an hour's bike ride from his home in the heart of North Yorkshire's Herriot country (a reference to James Herriot, a famous and much loved vet and author of 'All Creatures Great and Small').

'Field notes' of his forays and reflections, one page in length, are arranged into the seasons of the year, starting with Winter. There are eight per month, giving time to savour the readings, and the author's footnotes to his own writings.

In the 12<sup>th</sup> reading of Winter, he describes the different reasons he loves Fieldfares, and includes words that summarise what his anthology can do:

"I love them also because they make us see the familiar with new eyes".

In each page we are taken by the hand into the ordinary, in extraordinary ways. Sights, sounds, and smells of nature that are encountered in moments, are infused with insights and knowledge of her ways. We are instructed, encouraged, nourished, admonished.

On the 17th reading for Spring, in his reflection on his own column, Jonathan explains, “For nearly twenty years now I’ve barely travelled anywhere. This is what I’ve learnt: to see the world, stay in the same place. Like the Yellow Wagtails, it will come to you in its own time”.

This book brings the countryside to us in a gifted and expansive way, and gives us a model of how to see.

**Linda Courage.** After a long and varied career in nursing, Linda works in an Outpatients’ Department, is a member of the Abbey of the Arts and co-ordinator for the Arts and Spirituality Special Interest Area within Living Spirituality Connections (LSC). She is also the North East regional coordinator for LSC.

### One world, one voice, one heart



To close this newsletter, here is a link to the singing of this encouraging song at the annual Earth Day Pilgrimage to Burns Bog (British Columbia):

[www.surreyinterfaith.ca/earth-day-pilgrimage-burns-bog/](http://www.surreyinterfaith.ca/earth-day-pilgrimage-burns-bog/)

The goal of the Pilgrimage is to raise awareness for Burns Bog as an important peatland. This spiritual walk through the Delta Nature Reserve features a variety of entertainment, while enjoying the beauty of the natural setting and to educate people about the spiritually enriching elements of our local natural spaces.



Aline la Flamme of the Daughters of the Drum (above), commented: “The Earth Day Pilgrimage is a beautiful way of honouring our relatives of the Winged Ones, the Four-Legged, those that live in the water, those that crawl in and on the earth, [and] the Rooted Ones among others,”

With our best wishes,

*Petra*

Petra Griffiths,  
Editor, Living Spirituality Connections Newsletter