



**Living Spirituality Connections**  
Resources for spiritual journeys

**Newsletter Autumn-Winter 2021**

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## Introduction

Our first three articles throw light on different aspects of peace and healing. Lucy Winkett speaks about the everyday nature of peace-building; Matthew Fox takes forward Bede Griffiths' inspiration about seeking a deep level of commonality between faiths; then I report on Deep Abiding Prayer, which is new to the UK, and provides a channel for self healing and extending healing peace and compassion to others and to the world.

Inspirations from Celtic Christianity are a thread that runs through a number of the articles. Peter Millar's resources following the Climate Summit draw strongly on the Iona Community. Elaine Breckenridge's piece describes how Creation Spirituality (starting with Celtic sources) has enriched her church-based faith, rather than being in opposition to it. Ann Palmer's article on the Christian cross contrasts the qualities of the Celtic Christian cross with those of the long armed traditional cross. Ian Mowl's book review of John Philip Newell's *Sacred Earth, Sacred Soul* shows the strong influence of Celtic Christianity in our present understanding of God's presence within the whole creation.

The Creative Spirit is very much present in Linda Courage's piece on decorating ceramics and her poem for the start of the Artist's Rule course she is running. The commitment to the flourishing of the earth and all life, another key theme for Living Spirituality Connections, is exhibited in Peter Millar's piece, and shown in the photographs of our participation in events to draw attention to the goals of the UN Climate Summit. The link we give to Tricia Hersey's article on the powerful impact of rest: *Resting on and for the earth* develops original insights into how our paradigms can change.

The link to Deshna Shine's talk shows how in practice Christianity can become truly inclusive and embody the beloved community.

Philip Roderick's review of Elizabeth Mills' book *In the Stillness* takes us to the contemplative dimension, in a "profound celebration of silence and soulfulness". *Heart's Ease. Spirituality in the work of John Tavener*, the latest volume launched by The International Network for Music Spirituality and Wellbeing, considers the spiritual encounters that gave rise to the "heart's ease" he spoke of.

## Peace-making is a task for us all

By Lucy Winkett



*Cape Town Youth Choir singing a South African peace hymn: Ukuthula*

The end of a war is most often messy and leaves whole populations begging ‘give us our daily bread’ – words that are deafening today from the population of Afghanistan on the brink of famine – words that we ourselves will say later in this service.

What is our direct connection to the prosecution of war and the making of peace? One of the key reflections that we learned as a church after our pilgrimage to Berlin, Auschwitz-Birkenau and Nuremberg was that the way we speak about each other in society is something within our control and something that is hugely influential in whether, as Isaiah says, we can ever hope not to ‘learn war any more.’

The work of ending war, of making peace, of recognising the power-broking and the harmful language that can provide the environment for war in the first place is a daily task for every person in this room. It’s a lot more ordinary than we think.

In the service held at St Paul’s at the end of the Iraq war bereaved families, injured service personnel, politicians, journalists, military senior leaders were all under the same roof. At that service, the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, was impressively independent in his challenge to everyone there, including the ranks of politicians in front of him. He spoke about the period of time leading up to British intervention in Iraq in these terms:

“There were those among both policy makers and commentators who were able to talk about [the conflict] without really measuring the price.... Perhaps we have learned something – if only that there is 'a time to keep silence', a time to let go of the satisfyingly overblown language that is so tempting for human beings when war is in the air.”

Today we honour the willingness of the mostly young men and women who will go where they are sent and risk injury or death in the service of their country. And we especially honour the ones who went and did not return.

War is only possible when we have started to believe that the “other” is fundamentally not like us. And this “othering” language starts innocuously enough, with comments about different cultures or customs. And making lasting and just peace requires the wilful and deliberate dismantling of this tendency to “other” people who are more like us than we think. The witness of, often young people, is incredibly powerful even in the midst of war. The diary of Amal Salman who was aged 13 living in Baghdad during that war in Iraq in 2003 and suffering multiple violent attacks, included “I wish from God only peace.”

The wider context for war and peace is not ‘over there’ or ‘decided by someone else’. The environment in which war breaks out is a lot more ordinary than we think. And the peacemaking that is needed to prevent it is more personal and more ordinary too, and something that every citizen is able to make a contribution to:

I end with the words of **Etty Hillesum**, who died aged 29 in Auschwitz 1943

*All disasters stem from us. Why is there a war? Perhaps because now and then I might be inclined to snap at my neighbour. Because I and my neighbour and everyone else do not have enough love. Yet we could fight war and all its excrescences by releasing each day, the love which is shackled inside us, and giving it a chance to live.*

Rev. **Lucy Winkett** is Rector of St James’s Church Piccadilly.

The above consists of extracts from the Remembrance Sunday sermon on 14 November 2021. For the full sermon click here:

[https://www.livingspirit.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/peace\\_making\\_by\\_lucy\\_winkett.pdf](https://www.livingspirit.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/peace_making_by_lucy_winkett.pdf)

## The Urgent Need for Deep Ecumenism

### Matthew Fox reflects on Bede Griffiths’ insights



Banner Image: Interfaith Banner, Nichols College Chaplaincy. Photo by Sean on Flickr.

Bede Griffiths was a serious student of religions and of Hinduism and Christianity in particular. By living in a Hindu culture he immersed himself in many ways (including the clothes he wore) into that culture. A list of the titles of just some of his books gives an outline of his interest in Deep Ecumenism:

***River of Compassion: A Christian Commentary on the Bhagavad Gita***

***Christ in India: Essays towards a Hindu-Christian Dialogue***

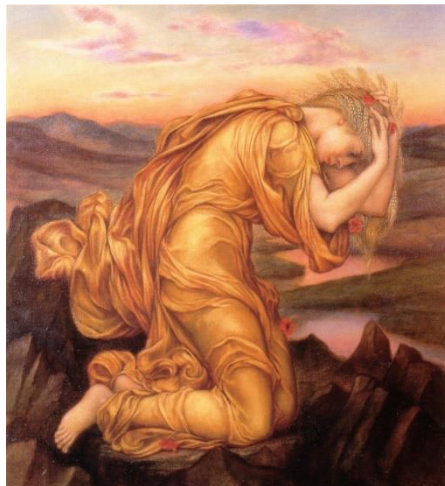
***Return to the Center***

***The Golden String (an autobiography)***

***The Cosmic Revelation: The Hindu Way to God***

***The Marriage of East and West*** (Foreword by the Dalai Lama)

One of his important teachings about religion is the following statement about the central role that mysticism plays in all religions:



*Demeter Mourning Persephone: the goddess of grain, bereft, removes the grace of fruition from the Earth, bringing the cold and death of winter. Painting by Evelyn de Morgan, 1906, on Wikimedia Commons.*

“All religion derives from a mystical experience, transcending thought, and seeks to express this experience, to give it form, in language, ritual, and social organization. Myth is not something negative or inferior to rational thought and fact-finding. Rather, myth is the language of primitive religion: it is the poetic expression of a mystical experience. Myths can only be understood as poetry. They spring from the depths where man encounters the ultimate mystery of existence and interprets it in poetic form.”

If this is true, then does it not follow that to renew religion is to return to mystical experience and to alter forms of language, ritual and social organization accordingly? To invite the poetry out of people’s hearts and the poet into the heart of religious education?



So often religion, instead of renewing itself this way, defensively re-entrenches its social organization, makes walls of orthodoxy ever thicker, and deepens slight differences into moats. Meanwhile, poetry withers, becomes ever distant.

Bede instructs us in the need for Deep Ecumenism when he says, “Today we have to open ourselves to the truth in all religions.” For Bede, deep ecumenism is not about being nice to other religions. It is about recovering a balance in a society that is unbalanced and it is about evolving “an authentic form of religion” that will address today’s needs. Eastern and indigenous religions, he feels, can assist the West to bring back a lost balance. We can’t neglect the intuitive wisdom of people like the Australian Aborigines, the Polynesian Islanders, the African Bushmen and the Eskimos. The Christian mystery is the mystery of God’s presence in humanity, and we cannot neglect any sign of that presence.

The above article is adapted from Matthew Fox’s book *Christian Mystics*.

**Matthew Fox’s Daily Meditations** by email are available free of charge from <https://www.matthewfox.org/> **Creation Spirituality: Reawakening Mysticism, Protecting Mother Earth.**

## **Deep Abiding Prayer –** *Praying, Living and Loving from the Inside Out*



*St Clare of Assisi – a source for this prayer, along with St Teresa of Avila*

Deep Abiding Prayer (DAP) was developed by **Catherine Quehl-Engel**, Episcopalian Chaplain at Cornell Liberal Arts College in the USA. This is an approach which sees contemplative prayer of the heart both as a spiritual practice occurring in silence, and as a way of being while in the midst of everyday life activities and encounters. The heart is seen as the seat of

compassion and the prayer is at the intersection between contemplation and action. Catherine Quehl-Engel's PhD dissertation reported on the details of an action-research project she carried out which studied the benefits of this form of prayer.

The DAP programme was created not only for participants' healing, inner peace, and empowerment amid their overstretched lives. It also aimed to embody an engaged citizenship, moral courage, civic and social responsibility. The programme also aimed to reclaim the original purpose of many contemplative spiritual traditions: to help awaken awareness of life's inter-connective oneness; and to live, love, lead, and serve as instruments of healing peace, but without seeking to be perfect.

DAP can be used as a way of asking that a community or individual people be held within the presence of the Holy Spirit, with a healing intent. Importantly, we do this without assuming that we know what outcome will take place or is desirable, so that we trust in the action of the Holy Spirit and the mysterious life force of the divine. Where there is no cure for conditions, there can still be healing. We let go – implicitly saying “Your will be done.” An inner gesture of surrender and awareness —like a radio dial inside us – tunes us to the deep abiding presence and healing action of the indwelling Spirit if we are open to it. It is the same eternal life force of the universe dwelling in, yet also beyond, all beings that connects all life as one.

With Catherine's encouragement we have adapted this form of prayer for our own setting in the UK. I have been praying this prayer for a number of years twice a week. This form of prayer works particularly well when a group of people agree to meet regularly to practise the prayer together, and to pray for particular people and communities.

In September 2020 Living Spirituality Connections, in partnership with St James's Church Piccadilly, developed a 5 session introductory course in Deep Abiding Prayer, conducted over Zoom. The course is very experiential in nature, with each session including readings on the key topics, some embodied practices based on qi gong, a practice session of the prayer, and listening to some contemplative music. Participants also appreciated the chance to converse with other course members in breakout groups. We are now running monthly practice sessions for course members and we will offer the course again in 2022. At some point in the future, there will be a Zoom session with Catherine-Quehl Engel about offering the Prayer in multifaith settings.

Here are some of the **comments from course participants about the Deep Abiding Prayer course run in September 2021:**

“The course has been excellent in every way.” “All the sources are brilliant”

“I found it very helpful, especially the resources for further study.”

“Truly life changing and affirming!”

“You have led this with such sensitivity and the content has been excellent. I have appreciated it very much. It has been lovely to be part of something so deeply Christian, but with such breadth (and focus) too. These may sound like contradictions and yet I felt they were both very much present.”

“One thing I am benefitting from is a new awareness of the heart connection.”

“DAP has been like a beacon in the darkness of late. It was beautiful.”

"I hope that the warmth and connection with others, with God, and with myself will continue. Being together in a group was such an important part of it - to share the experience and the journey, and I cannot thank you enough for holding it all together with such care and gentleness.”

**Petra Griffiths** is the Living Spirituality Connections Coordinator, and is Pastoral Care Coordinator at St James’s Piccadilly. She designed the UK Deep Abiding Prayer course.

For a fuller version of this article, and for sources of this form of prayer, go to:  
[https://www.livingspirit.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/DAP\\_nl\\_aut\\_21.pdf](https://www.livingspirit.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/DAP_nl_aut_21.pdf)

## Resources for prayer and reflection in relation to the Cop 26 Climate Summit held recently in Glasgow

By **Peter Millar**



*Iona*

The prayers and reflections below convey our shared hopes for the world’s nations to reflect much more profoundly and creatively on our planet’s future. We are all together on this journey, yet we also know that within great challenge may be born great hope.



*“When people ask me what I pray for, I say sometimes that I don’t pray for anything in particular - **I pray because God is.** I sit before the living Spirit open like an empty bowl, like a flower and also like a wound. I give to the Creator my joy and uncertainties, the planet’s future, my concerns for others, for deeper awareness and understanding of what now faces our beautiful planet Earth. I just lay it all there. In silence, and in the knowledge that many others are doing the same. Deep within my heart I know that this moving Spirit, working every moment through all creation, will accept my fragile offerings and yours.”*

Based on a prayer by Sheila Cassidy.

*“To become aware of the sacramental nature of the cosmos, to be open to the sacramental possibilities of each moment, to see the face of Christ in every person, these things are not novel, but their rediscovery is the beginning of our health.”*

Ron Ferguson, writer and former leader of the Iona Community.

*“Not all are guilty, but all are responsible”.*

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-72)

*“Biblical faith is prophetically relevant to everything that is happening in our world today”.*

From The Kairos Document (a theological statement issued in relation to the growing crisis in South Africa in 1985).



**An Affirmation from the Wild Goose Resource Group of the Iona Community:**

- *We believe that this is God’s world and all that lives on it. We believe that living gratefully and giving generously are marks of faith.*
- *We believe that all of humanity should have equal access to the earth’s resources, and that every individual must now act to preserve this world so that the children of tomorrow will not be burdened by the mistakes of today.*

- *And so we commit ourselves to think globally, to trade fairly, to live responsibly, and to love this world as it is loved by God who in Christ became one with creation. Amen*

This affirmation, written in consultation with the Iona Community's Common Concern Network on the Environment, is to be found in the wonderful new book on the environment and a Christian response to the present crisis facing the Earth, which has just been published by Wild Goose Publications of the Iona Community called ***Living Faithfully in the Time of Creation*** edited by Kathy Galloway and Katherine M Preston. This provides resources for celebrating Creationtide mindfully in an age of environmental emergency. More details can be found at <https://www.ionabooks.com>

### **An evening prayer by John L. Bell of the Iona Community:**

*Tonight let us be grateful for changing things: for cloud patterns and seasonal landscapes, for the restless sea and multi-coloured earth, for branch and leaf and fruit and flower, for rocks, weather-carved like an old face which could tell stories, for wind and water and all that was never meant to stand still, for the lilies waving in the field. That is your economy, Lord. Teach us its value.*

*Set up your cross in the marketplaces of our world, to remind us of your love for the unproductive, the imperfect and the lost, and of the malice of human greed. Redeem our souls, redeem our peoples, redeem our times.*

*We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, through whose passion and death the treasure house of the kingdom was opened to all. Amen*

There is much material about the vision, worship, the Rule and multiple world-wide concerns of the Iona Community on the web. The Community is one of most significant ecumenical Christian Communities in our world. The present Iona Community dates from 1938, and its spiritual home is at Iona Abbey on the sacred island of Iona off the west coast of Scotland - a place visited each year by thousands from every corner of the globe.

<https://iona.org.uk/>

**Peter Millar** is a member of the Iona Community, and is based in Edinburgh. Peter has extensive international experience. This piece is based on one of the regular email reflections Peter sends out. Contact him at: [ionacottage@hotmail.com](mailto:ionacottage@hotmail.com)

## Vigil for COP 26 and Climate Justice March in photographs



*Members of Living Spirituality Connections and St James's Piccadilly taking our Climate Stripes to the Climate Justice March in London 6 November 2021*



*Overnight Vigil for COP26 Sunday 31 October 2021*

## How Creation Spirituality Enriched My Church Based Faith

By Elaine Breckenridge



Celtic Altar, St. David's, Spokane

My journey of becoming an ecological disciple began with my learning about Celtic Christian spirituality. I was taught first and foremost about the importance of creation. For years I had compartmentalized church and nature. I had passed by and through beautiful landscapes to enter into a church building which is where I believed one should pray and encounter God. Creation was simply window dressing on the other side of beautiful stained glass windows.

From Genesis I had learned that creation was good. But that was not the same as being holy or sacred. I learned, however, from the ninth century Celtic philosopher John Scotus Eriugena, who wrote that not only is creation good; it is sacred because creation is a theophany, that is, a manifestation of God. God's ongoing presence can be discerned in creation. Because that is so, I began to see that holiness existed not just in church but in creation. I realized that we should reverence creation just as we do the scriptures, Jesus, the cross, and the sacraments.

As I grew in my reverence for nature, I began bringing the elements of earth, air, fire and water into my home to be a visible reminder of the sacredness of creation. I brought those same elements into Celtic worship services at the churches where I served as an Episcopal priest.



And then, thanks to the pandemic of 2020, I found myself not bringing the elements indoors but instead I began going outdoors to them. Because of church closures, I found myself worshipping in creation. I had learned that early Celtic people had gathered around standing stones to worship. After the introduction of Christianity, the familiar Celtic High Cross replaced the standing stones.

I began praying and meditating not around standing stones but among standing trees. I found a special place on a trail in a state park overlooking the Saratoga Passage in Washington State which I named, "Madrone Chapel."



*Madrone Tree Cross*

There I had a pew beneath a Madrone tree cross overlooking the sea. The light shimmering through the trees was as beautiful as any stained glass window. Angels masquerading as birds were my choir. A baptismal font disguised as a stream made me feel born anew. In the summer of 2020, I found Madrone Chapel to be a refuge inviting me to hope amidst the pandemic's masking and closure of so much I knew and loved.

One day, I had my eyes closed in meditation when I heard a sound of rushing air and water. I opened my eyes. There was a grey whale spouting right below me! It was a sight and joy to behold. I spoke to the whale, "You are beautiful. Will you show me your fluke?" And a few seconds later it did! Then the whale began swimming south. The upper trail I was on also ran south, exactly parallel to the swimming whale. For twenty minutes, I went whale walking! A portion of Psalm 104, "Yonder is the great and wide sea with its living things too many to number, creatures both small and great. There move the ships. And there is that Leviathan, which you have made for the sport of it." (Vs. 26, 27)

It was a moment of profound awe. I experienced it as God and creation calling me to sink beneath the lockdown of the ravaging storyline which in my mind detailed everything that was wrong with the world. Instead, I paused and rejoiced that I breathe the same air as that



magnificent whale. I heard the hymn of creation sing the words of the mystic Julian of Norwich, "All is well. And all shall be well. And all manner of things shall be well."

To read a longer version of this article, which also talks about turning to nature for spiritual healing, go to:

[https://www.livingspirit.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/creation\\_spirituality\\_and\\_the\\_church.pdf](https://www.livingspirit.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/creation_spirituality_and_the_church.pdf)

The Rev. **Elaine H. Breckenridge** is a retired Episcopal priest residing on Camano Island, Washington. She enjoys serving as a substitute priest on Sundays, caring for two grandsons, exploring nature, and writing.

## Transition - an expressive art journey

By **Linda Courage**

I find that going through transition is rarely easy or comfortable - whether it be the transitions of age, or roles, or loss.



I bought this bull years ago from a friend (<https://www.eoghanbridge.com>) who said it was a transition piece in his own work. I was drawn to its seeming discomfort and awkwardness - a struggle of sorts, and emergence perhaps. I'd collected other bull forms made by Eoghan during a time when they were appearing in my dreams...

I was inspired to decorate the piece after seeing cow forms that have been decorated with landscapes by another artist friend (<http://johngeekie.blogspot.com/>). John's cows will be auctioned for charity in the near future and can be seen around the shops of Beverley in Yorkshire, UK.

All the marks on my own bull were made with things to hand - a pin head, a cocktail stick, a spring, the top of a plastic bottle, the nozzle of a syringe, a make-up brush, dried hydrangea petals, and finally, one of my cats whiskers!

I began transforming the piece by making bold solid dots on her flank (he has become a she during the re-making). I soon realised that this didn't sit comfortably with her textured surface and so started to explore her creases by rolling paint in them, quite awkwardly, using a cocktail stick.

Different parts asked for different colours that I enjoyed mixing to match my imaginings. Then the gold and various colours were stippled hither and thither using a range of tools, while my mind wandered into thoughts of seeds and plants and stars and potential and blossoming. In expressive art, the process is more important than the product.

I've come to realise that knowing when to stop is an important part of the creative process - whether it be in crafting a scientific paper, creating a poem, decorating a ceramic, making a felt, flavouring a meal... Adding and altering just that little too much can topple the whole process to a crumbling heap. Knowing how to step back and wait is another discipline - "let things cook" was a favourite saying of mine when supervising students in an earlier life.

Towards the end of decorating my now cow, I had a real sense of her having a new cloak like coat that had become beautiful in the making. I just needed to add those last stroke marks, with something very fine. Thanks be to my cat for shedding a whisker or two at just the right time!



**Linda Courage** is part of Living Spirituality Connections, a life-long friend of St Bede's Pastoral Centre in York UK, and a member of the Holy Disorder of Dancing Monks within The Abbey of the Arts. She gives to, and receives from, these nourishing and transformative places in different ways, and is grateful for the opportunities to do so.

## A message from our inner monk and artist

By **Linda Courage**

Cultivate space for us to flourish  
and we'll gift your creative and contemplative paths  
revealing your inner life  
pointing to your essential nature  
that reflects the boundless creativity of the universe

Show up  
be gentle and compassionate with yourself  
with a beginners mind, begin again  
find silence and solitude  
and a rhythm to sustain  
your appetite  
for transformation

The path has a playful intuitive heart  
and an explorers mind

Come...

The above was compiled by **Linda Courage** using words from the Introduction of ***The Artist's Rule*** by Christine Valters Paintner

## Re-seeing and re-valuing the Christian Cross

by Ann Palmer



I have two Celtic crosses in my bedroom.

One is on the cover of my bedspread. It's a valued possession with scroll-work surely inspired by the Book of Kells. I purchased it on the island of Iona. The other is a stained glass cross fixed to my window. It has midnight blue arms, a green circle and a gold centre that catches the morning sun. Apart from their shape, these two Celtic crosses have nothing in common.

You can read what you want into symbols and icons. To me, the Christian cross is a symbol of imbalance. In the Celtic cross the four arms meet in the middle, the round green heartland. It speaks of wholeness, as in the mandala. The lower arm of the traditional Christian cross is the problem. It's longer than the other three arms. I take, happily, the *oppositional* – North, South, West and East – brought together at the point of integration in an ordinary cross, at the centre. With the Christian cross, I have to transform the lower arm from its present tendency to champion the Anthropocene in the matter of the Earth as greed, consumerism. Instead I need to re-root it to the evolutionary necessity to focus on care for the planet.

It is interesting how this transformation makes sense to me within my beliefs and values. The Christian cross morphs into a dynamic imperative to work on our human relationship with the Earth if we want our species to survive. One day we need to reach the point where the oppositional are all of equal length, in balance, like the rays of the star-symbol. I thought I knew why the Celtic cross appealed to me so much. Now I have discovered, this morning, another way to interpret it.

My reference points are many. Native American 4 directions (in the working out it is 7 directions of course, far more powerful as a 3D rather than 2D model), Tai Chi in the Earth-Sky energy flow, Yogic in the borrowing from the chakras – root to crown of head. I feel, when multi-reference points are operating in interpretation, it is much easier to achieve

inner coherence through integration. The over-long arm of the Christian cross points, today, to our need to *get more real* when it comes to the Earth and nature. There is urgency to do this.

For this perception to take hold, it is necessary, for a moment, to set aside the traditional interpretation of the Christian cross. To do this makes the Christian cross *more relevant as a symbol in many belief systems*, and gives it greater relevance for us today.

If we are willing to work at the level of the great underlying symbols – imagery – rather than the dense texts of intellectualisation, we can reach a different place of understanding quite quickly.

Imagery carries the power it always has for the human being. That's why Protestants were so keen to eradicate all traces of it from the Catholic religion in the sixteenth century. The human brain processes imagery in the right hemisphere, language in the left hemisphere. This crucial difference is a brain-sourced phenomenon, whose profound effect can be brought to bear on our global ecological crisis.

The Christian cross, taken as a modern working symbol, can also find a new role, a *complementary one* to its original deep association with the crucifixion. One that speaks a common language in cross-religious or interfaith contexts. It demonstrates the inherent power of imagery to widen the fields of reference with the single intention of highlighting commonalities that will bring us to a wholeness of seeing.

This is done through using *associative* thinking rather than boxed or linear thinking.

Art, generally, plays too small a part in our culture, and is seen as a peripheral to serious issues. Perhaps art's role in culture is due a makeover?

**Ann Palmer** is a Living Spirituality Connections subscriber living on a Scottish island, who has been very active in creating hymns and carols with an ecological focus. Here is a link to one of Ann's previous volumes:

[https://livingspirit.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/ecocarols\\_ann\\_palmer.pdf](https://livingspirit.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/ecocarols_ann_palmer.pdf)



If you could make use of the material, or would be interested in her offer concerning singers to record the songs, do be in touch with Ann at [gaiadance@btinternet.com](mailto:gaiadance@btinternet.com). Ann



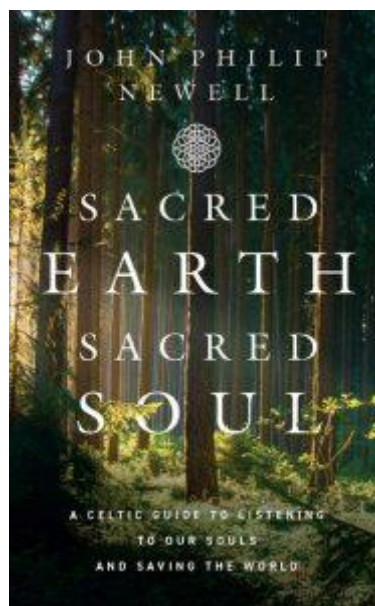
pays £50 to a singer/choir who records an EcoSong and sends it to her in MP3 format. All the EcoCarols in the document are already recorded and a CD of them is available at <https://www.ecosanta.co.uk> See also <https://www.ecologisers.com>

## BOOK REVIEWS

### Sacred Earth, Sacred Soul: A Celtic Guide to Listening to Our Souls and Saving the World

by John Philip Newell

reviewed by Ian Mowl



This book starts with a beautiful piece saying that we have, within us, a deep knowing of how to be in the world which is sometimes at odds with what is taught in mainstream religion. One of these ‘knowings’ is that the Earth is sacred. This ‘coming home to our true selves’ is one of the main reasons that I have been drawn to green spirituality and this book has helped to reawaken that feeling of home coming within me.

This book is about Celtic spirituality, largely expressed through Celtic Christianity. I have often felt drawn to Celtic Christianity and this book has given me a comprehensive overview of this spiritual tradition with its history and ideas.

Celtic spirituality brings together the transcendent (that which is beyond) and the imminent (the physical world) – whereas mainstream Christianity emphasises the transcendent. Celtic Christianity also emphasises creativity and includes the divine feminine. And, as it has pagan roots, it grounds itself in the Earth – seeing the divine in all things.

The book goes through the history of Celtic Christianity starting with Pelagius (AD 390 – 418) and the split with Rome with its emphasis on the transcendent and its neglect of the imminent. Further chapters trace this spiritual tradition through history with such people as St Brigid of Kildare, John Muir, and I am delighted that Teilhard de Chardin has a whole chapter. Through all of this, I see a spirituality that is not stuck but is evolving, alive and growing.

There is a radical thread that runs through the book; a non-acceptance of the mainstream, and a desire to emphasise the physical, practical and immediate. An example is the chapter on George MacLeod who often said, “Are you a Presbyterian or a Christian?”

Inevitably the Scottish Isle of Iona is mentioned as a home for Celtic Christianity and I now feel a stronger urge to make a pilgrimage to that isle and its community that sees the sacred in all things.

**Ian Mowll** writes for **GreenSpirit Magazine** <https://www.greenspirit.org.uk/magazine/> and is the Greenspirit Coordinator. **Greenspirit** is one of our linked organisations.



<https://www.greenspirit.org.uk>

### *In the Stillness: poems, prayers, reflections*

by **Elizabeth Mills**

**Reviewed by Philip Roderick**



*In the Stillness* offers the reader a simple yet profound celebration of silence and soulfulness. These meditations provide nudges and invitations, hints and catalysts. They are

accompaniers on the interior journey. Each page has a theme and a hidden dynamic, pointing to a daily engagement with the mystery of life in Christ:

In the stillness  
Is the Pearl of Great Price  
Where the Light shines...  
It is within us all  
But we must dig deep.

There are different sections in the book, which help to give shape and focus to the reflections. A number of poems begin with a question: "What if.....?" Some of these may well get the grey cells working and bring to the surface thought-provoking musings. More recent prayer/poems feature in one section of the book, together with a simple two line refrain. And so:

Dip into the River of Silence  
Be cleansed, refreshed, renewed  
This day and every day  
Amen

**Elizabeth Mills** is a Quaker and an educator, with whom I (Philip Roderick) have been in contact over a number of years as a prayer friend. She specialises in early childhood education and works with children having special educational needs. She is married with two children and has been a carer for many years.

*In the Stillness* can be purchased from The Quaker Bookshop  
[https://bookshop.quaker.org.uk/In-the-Stillness\\_9781732823914](https://bookshop.quaker.org.uk/In-the-Stillness_9781732823914) £10.

Rev **Philip Roderick** is the founder of the Quiet Garden Movement  
<https://quietgarden.org/>, and of Contemplative Fire <https://contemplativefire.org/>

**From *In the Stillness*:**

**Pilot Light**

There's a tiny light inside  
Only a flicker  
Easily it can fade  
And be extinguished

Yet we may fan it  
Keep it alive  
If we choose  
To take time  
And attend

Nurture it  
And it will bring warmth  
And a glow  
Not only to our hearts  
But also to the lives of others

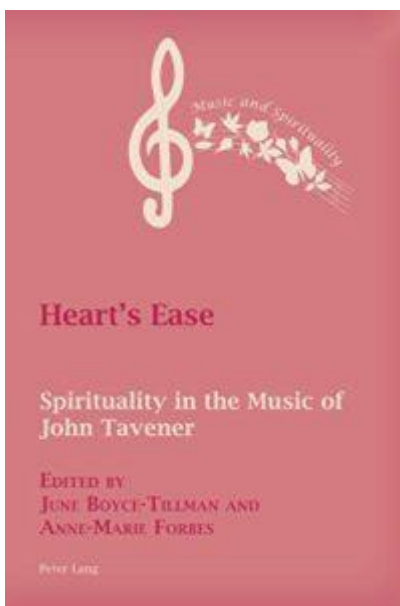
***Let your light shine***

Matthew 5:16 (NIV)

## **Heart's Ease. Spirituality in the Music of John Tavener**

Launched by the **The International Network for Music Spirituality and Wellbeing**

Our age owes Sir John Tavener deep gratitude. His works cross both cultural and disciplinary boundaries. He illustrated how to deal with intense suffering and felt deeply for the suffering of the world. He stands as an icon representing a view of artistic expression as a way of generating hope and transcendence.



In Tavener's thinking, spirituality was closely tied to wellbeing and healing and this book considers the spiritual encounters that brought him 'heart's ease' and the communication of that experience to performers and listeners through his composition. The contributors to this book include scholars, musicians, theologians, medical practitioners, informed listeners and practitioners in religious traditions. It includes case study material, empirical studies, philosophical, theological and theoretical contributions along with accounts from lived experience of the spirituality generated by Tavener's music. This is set in the context of a world that sees spirituality sometimes coupled and sometimes uncoupled from religion.

The pattern of the book is an alternation between interludes and chapters illuminating different facets of the crystal of Tavener's creative work and the spirituality and 'heart's ease' it can offer.

**The International Network for Music Spirituality and Wellbeing** embraces the social,



personal, spiritual and political aspects of wellbeing. Our mission is to promote wellbeing in individuals, communities, organisations and the environment, through the use of music. <http://mswinternational.org/>

## LINKS TO INTERESTING ARTICLES AND TALKS

### Rest is resistance

<https://thenapministry.wordpress.com/2020/07/14/slowly-emerging-after-a-3-week-sabbath/>

“Rest and slowing down will be the foundation for the liberated future that many are screaming about online via memes, in the streets during the uprisings for Black Lives and in our hearts. I want to mourn and lament and realize this culture is not set up with systems of care to allow others to stop long enough to rest. This is why this Ministry exists. The Nap Ministry is an organization that examines the liberating power of rest. We name sleep deprivation as a racial and social-justice issue.”

*Rest is a form of resistance because it disrupts and pushes back against capitalism and white supremacy.*

<https://atmos.earth/rest-resistance-colonization-black-liberation/>

Bishop **Tricia Hersey** <https://thenapministry.wordpress.com/> is trained in public health medicine and black liberation theology. She is a performance artist and activist, who founded the Nap Ministry.

### Progressive Christianity: Hope for the Future?

For an inspiring talk by **Deshna Shine** about truly inclusive churches in the States, go to:

<https://www.pcnbritain.org.uk/resources/videos/hope-for-the-future>

Deshna Shine quotes Jack Spong as saying “Divinity is seen when we are whole and become a vessel through which divinity can flow.” In the United Church of Christ she and her wife



found somewhere where they could be both broken and growing, radically welcomed with their doubts and questions, and part of the beloved community. You could be your authentic self, while the community offered to walk alongside you.

As white people now, we need to listen to our grief at the loss of comfort and privileges that is essential in order to make reparations for past injustice. Loving wastefully overflows into action, not because love is deserved. Where to start with the action? Look at what breaks your heart and start working on what can bring healing in that area, and do it well. See each living being with the eyes of Christ.



**Deshna Shine** is the visionary and Executive Producer of Embrace Festival, a 3 day in-city festival in Portland, Oregon that focuses on Sacred Community, Social Transformation and the Arts. She is former Executive Director of ProgressiveChristianity.org & Progressing Spirit, She is an ordained Interfaith Minister and Chaplain and many other things.