

Chair's Internet Letter

April 2010

Occupying the 'Chair' for over a year has led me into many interesting situations and conversations. Here are just three of the questions that have been sent to or asked of me. I include my responses so that members of PCN-Britain may be encouraged and supported when you also face such questions. The answers that I give are from my faith perspective, although I hope that they are in line with the 8 Points that guide PCN-Britain. It is also important to remind ourselves that PCN-Britain exists to resource and support local groups and people in their own faith pilgrimage and our place of uniting is around those 8 Points - not in declaring that this or that is the only way of seeing things.

Q: If Christianity is a human construct why should anyone trust the Church in general or PCN-Britain in particular?

A: In my understanding of the sacred, all Scriptures are human constructs attempting to explain the very real experiences of the sacred as the writers struggled with the Spirit to try to understand what the Spirit was doing in their own time and place. The Scriptures remain just words on a page until we, too, struggle with that same Spirit to interpret and to try to understand what the Spirit is saying to us and doing within and about us in our time and place. Sacred words and experiences are to lead us towards a fullness of humanity and an abundance of life for all people, not only to a set of creedal beliefs. 'God' is always more than anything that Church or even PCN-Britain can describe. If you do not want to trust the Church or PCN-Britain, explore and trust your own experiences with the sacred. I am reminded of words attributed to Gautama Siddharta, the founder of Buddhism: "Do not believe in anything simply because you have heard it. Do not believe in anything simply because it is spoken and rumoured by many. Do not believe in anything simply because it is found written in your religious books. Do not believe in anything merely on the authority of your teachers and elders. Do not believe in traditions because they have been handed down for many generations. But after observation and analysis, when you find that anything agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it."

Q: Secretly I am both Pagan and Christian, but I tell no one as I fear being rejected by my Christian friends and Church. We are often reminded at Christmas that 'a dog is not just for Christmas'. I care for all living things and especially for animals. Is it possible for animals to go to heaven with us?

A: As far as I am concerned heaven and hell are here and now. We pass this way once. For me there is no heaven beyond this life. Our calling as those who follow the Jesus Way is to live as fully and as humanly as possible in our time and place. It is to give ourselves away in service to others: to misquote a slogan from the past, to "live abundantly [but not materially] that others may abundantly live." That is the message that I receive from my experiences with

Jesus of Nazareth. If there is a 'place' beyond this life then that is a problem that God will have to solve for me! All life is precious, including animal life. Humans are a particular animal with the evolved self-conscious ability to remember the past and to predict the future [although we often do neither of these particularly well]. Can you be both a Pagan and a Christian? Usually the Church will say "no". However, if the question is, "Can I be a Pagan and a follower of the Jesus Way?" then my answer is "Why not?" PCN-Britain has at least one Pagan follower of the Jesus Way in active membership, so why not another as well! The critical consideration is the validity of our 8 Points within the life of those who are members or those who seek membership.

Q: Why does PCN-Britain want me to change what I believe, especially when it appears to doubt the very Bible that claims to be God's revelation to men and women?

A: Neither my ministry or that of PCN-Britain wants to persuade anyone that "we are right and everyone else is wrong." The Progressive Christianity Network is here to support those who need it. As I understand it, whatever 'God' maybe, God is greater than all the Christian evangelicals, charismatics, liberals, progressives - along with Jews, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, etc, put together. And there is room for many others! Many 'progressive spirits' across the religions remain in their faith communities suffering in silence and in fear of rejection. Others have been driven from the Churches and other faith communities by inflexible creeds and doctrines, and in many cases by unholy condemnation and accusations of back sliding, etc. In my experience of the sacred in Jesus, I wish to affirm all who genuinely serve humanity in the rightness of their sacred experiences for themselves. What I ask in return is the grace to allow me to both follow the leading of the sacred in my own life and to minister to people who also are following an open, loving and progressive spirituality.

There have been many other questions over this year but these three will suffice for now. If you have other answers that you would give to such questions, why not add them to the Forum? Thank you for your continuing support for the work of PCN-Britain.

John Churcher