

# Progressive Voices



'Tis the Season of  
metaphor, mystery  
and hindsight

11

December 2014

# **John 1 through Quantum Science**

**In the moment when this particular reality came into being there was a story and the story was part of the creative energy.**

**The story had always been part of the creative energy as all things are part of the creative energy and cannot exist otherwise.**

**This story gave light and hope to life in this reality.**

**There was one who saw the light of this story and he told others. Those who see the light show this light to others, that all may see the light and know the creative energy that is the source of all being.**

**Not everyone wants to see the light, some cannot yet see the light, but those who do know a different way of being and become their true potential as children of the source of all being.**

**The way we are comes from the separateness of the law but in this new story comes the oneness of grace and truth.**

**In this story we can see the reality that is creation.**

**We too can see beyond our senses and discern the greater reality that is the source of all being.**

**We too can know within our souls and hear the music that is creation singing.**

**Heather Whyte is a minister of the URC in the South West. She combines writing with artistic reflections to offer meditations for everyday use.**

# Welcome

I am pleased to welcome you to the 11th edition of Progressive Voices, the magazine of the Progressive Christianity Network Britain.

Firstly let me introduce myself. I am David Coaker and I am stepping into the shoes of Hugh Dawes, and latterly John Churcher, as the editor of Progressive Voices. (A fuller introduction can be found on page 5.)

You will find a few tweaks and changes - and some of them are intentional! Let me know what you think as we take our magazine into a new era.

My thanks to all of those that have submitted material and promised items for March. I hope the process of being edited has not been too onerous.

For this edition I have gone with the obvious - Christmas. A time of the year in which shops and churches can be full, joy is exaggerated and loneliness can be even harder to bear. These ambiguities, for Christians walking the progressive path, can be amplified as shepherds and kings wander around nativity scenes watched over by angels and a star. In an attempt to support us all we have contributions seeking to shed light on the Bible, traditions, science, carols and more. We are also publishing the final draft of the "8 points" following the membership consultation.

As this is sure to inspire responses it will provide a focus for the March issue. Which will also include a report on the "Godly Mayhem" conference and an article about fossil fuel disinvestment. Your thoughts about Lent and Easter are also encouraged.

So here it is, the 11th edition of Progressive Voices. Enjoy!



There is an open invitation for submissions. Your reflections, questions, events, poems, images, reviews, letters, comments, news, prayers and other contributions are all welcome.

Publication is at the discretion of the editor:  
dave.coaker@pcnbritain.org.uk

## Copy Deadlines:

**March: (8 points, Lent & Easter)**

**Friday 13<sup>th</sup> February 2015**

June: Friday 15<sup>th</sup> May 2015

September: Friday 14<sup>th</sup> August 2015

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Further information, including details of publications and conferences, is available at [www.pcnbritain.org.uk](http://www.pcnbritain.org.uk)

# Letter from the Chair

Back in September, those of us who were able to attend the Gretta Vosper conference left Oxford feeling that we had been part of a rather special event. One in which our different faith understandings and human inconsistencies were brought into sharp focus. Whatever our current understanding of Christianity we were challenged to rethink what our faith means to us, and to consider how best we might share and articulate our own interpretations.

Similarly, those at the Godly Mayhem conference in November (with Peter Rollins, George Elerick and Katharine Sarah Moody) were invited to question where Christendom has gone wrong and to explore new ways of rethinking the role of the church by adopting a new approach to faith that transcends the usual preoccupations of Christians.

'...Be born in us today' is the familiar line from the last verse of a well-known Christmas carol, sung by most of us since our childhood days. One of the biggest stumbling blocks for anyone embarking on a progressive Christian journey is how to rethink and understand afresh the Advent and Christmas narratives. How do we negotiate the traditional doctrines, literal readings, liturgies and prayers together with the clichéd ubiquitous carols? We may well find ourselves asking, what, if anything, can still speak to us today? What is of value in the underlying themes and myths of the Christmas stories we know so well? For me, among the most important principles to be re-claimed are the concepts of light (light shining through darkness), hope, joy, and new beginnings. These are all eternal values that endure, which makes them infinitely worth holding onto; indeed they are a part of the very stuff of life. And despite all the razzamatazz of the secular Christmas, these same values remain true. Regardless of the excesses and conspicuous consumption we often witness at this time of year, most people yearn for and seek to make real the same ideals. The paradigms might differ, but the hoped-for outcomes are the same.

The key Christian doctrine associated with the Christmas season is, of course, that of Incarnation. Wikipedia tells me that 'Incarnation' literally means embodied in flesh or taking on flesh, referring more specifically to the conception and birth of a sentient being that is the material manifestation of an entity, god or force whose original nature is immaterial. I would like to suggest that a valid progressive Christian interpretation of this doctrine might be one that illuminates the reality that today, it is you and I who must incarnate, bring to birth, these all important values of light, hope, joy, and new beginnings. As



progressive Christians in the UK we live in an ever-changing society, which means that we must seek to embrace the social and cultural challenges of talking about God in ways that can make sense and a real difference to people today. Maybe then, this Christmastide offers us a timely opportunity to spread an accessible and credible progressive message. One that renews and re-energizes the significance of Christmas!

Turning to more general matters, during the past twelve months we have completed the review of the Eight Points and the trustees join me in thanking all those members who have so helpfully offered comment and suggestions as we worked through the task. 2014 was also the year of the three-year strategic review and more information on this will be available presently.

The Spring Conference and AGM are now booked for Saturday May 9th at Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, London with Canon Mark Oakley of St Paul's Cathedral as the speaker. We also look forward to welcoming Val Webb, the Australian author and theologian who visited the UK in 2013, for a return tour in 2015. Val will be speaking at eleven venues, beginning on April 8th in Stirling and ending in Welwyn Garden City on April 19th.

A committee meeting has been scheduled for February 2015, so if you have any comments or suggestions you would like the trustees to consider, please let me or Andy Vivian have them by early January.

With every good wish to you all for a joyful, and peaceful, Christmas and New Year!



**Angela Smith** serves as the  
Chair of PCN Britain  
[angela.smith@pcnbritain.org.uk](mailto:angela.smith@pcnbritain.org.uk)

# Introducing

David Coaker

## Progressive Voices Editor

Following on from Hugh Dawes, and latterly John Churcher, let me introduce myself as the new editor of Progressive Voices:

I am married, with a 2 year old son;

42 years of age.

I was ordained in July 2004 as a minister within the United Reformed Church.

I grew up in Lincolnshire and am now living in Leyland, Lancashire, serving within a four-church group.

The first church I attended was Little Hale Methodist chapel until I started at the United Reformed in Sleaford through joining the Boys' Brigade based there.

Schools: I attended Great Hale Primary and then Carre's Grammar School in Sleaford.

Employment: after leaving school at 16 I undertook an apprenticeship with EEV Ltd in Lincoln, worked in Quality Control and then Printed Circuit Board design. Continued with PCB design at TTI, in Huntingdon.

Call: I have always been involved in church life, especially through FURY (URC youth association) and after moving jobs still felt more fulfilled through evening and weekend activities than my working day. So I placed myself before the URC and was accepted for training and was called to my first pastorate serving two churches in Warrington.

PCN: Having grown up within a middle-of-the-road congregation and then discovering liberalism at the Free Church, St. Ives, preparation for ministry opened up the breadth of Christianity to me, and I pinned my flag to the progressive path 6-7 years ago.

Experience: I edited FURY National (youth magazine of URC) for about 5 years, put together an item on environmental issues for Reform (URC magazine) for two years, and helped out Andy with the website.

Past-times: I enjoy reading / collecting books, clay pigeon shooting and spending time with family.

Favourite book: "Shadow of the Galilean" by Gerd Theissen. Hymn: "We are not our own. Earth forms us" by Brian Wren. Author: Marcus Borg

What I'm reading now:

"A new spiritual home" by Hal Tausig and "The Girl who Kicked the Hornet's Nest" by Stieg Larsson.



A reminder in this Christmassy edition of Progressive Voices that we have a study book in our Together in Hope series entitled 'Christmas: Ancient Meanings, Modern Faith' written by Adrian Alker. A number of groups have found this useful preparation for Christmas.

### Christmas: Ancient Meanings, Modern Faith



Together in Hope -  
Resources for Christian Faith Today

Why not consider using this and other books in the series in your group or for individual study? You can buy the books in the PCN shop on our website.

## St Mark's CRC Conferences

### Making Jesus Visible: Radical Discipleship Today Saturday 18 April 2015

The conference will begin with a lecture giving an overview of developments in Jesus studies as a means of making him visible in his 1st century context. This will lead into workshops exploring the implications for contemporary discipleship.

### Radical Christianity: Book Launch – Lecture – Seminars Saturday 4 July 2015

There will be the book launch of 'Radical Christianity', a keynote address by Chris Rowland, Dean Ireland's Professor of Exegesis of Holy Scripture at Oxford University, followed by seminars covering the issues and perspectives raised.

### Re-imagining Church: No Longer Male and Female, but One in Christ Saturday 24th October 2015

Kathy Galloway, Emma Percy and Jenny Morgans invite us to engage in conversation. Together we will dream dreams and explore strategies for the radical transformation of the church at every level and across denominations so that it more adequately reflects and embodies a 'genderful' God.

4 St. Mark's Crescent, Sheffield, S10 2SG  
0114 266 3613 admin@stmarkscrc.co.uk  
Timings: 9.30am-4.00pm  
Costs: £12, £10 CRC/PCN, £5 students/unwaged.

# The 8 points review

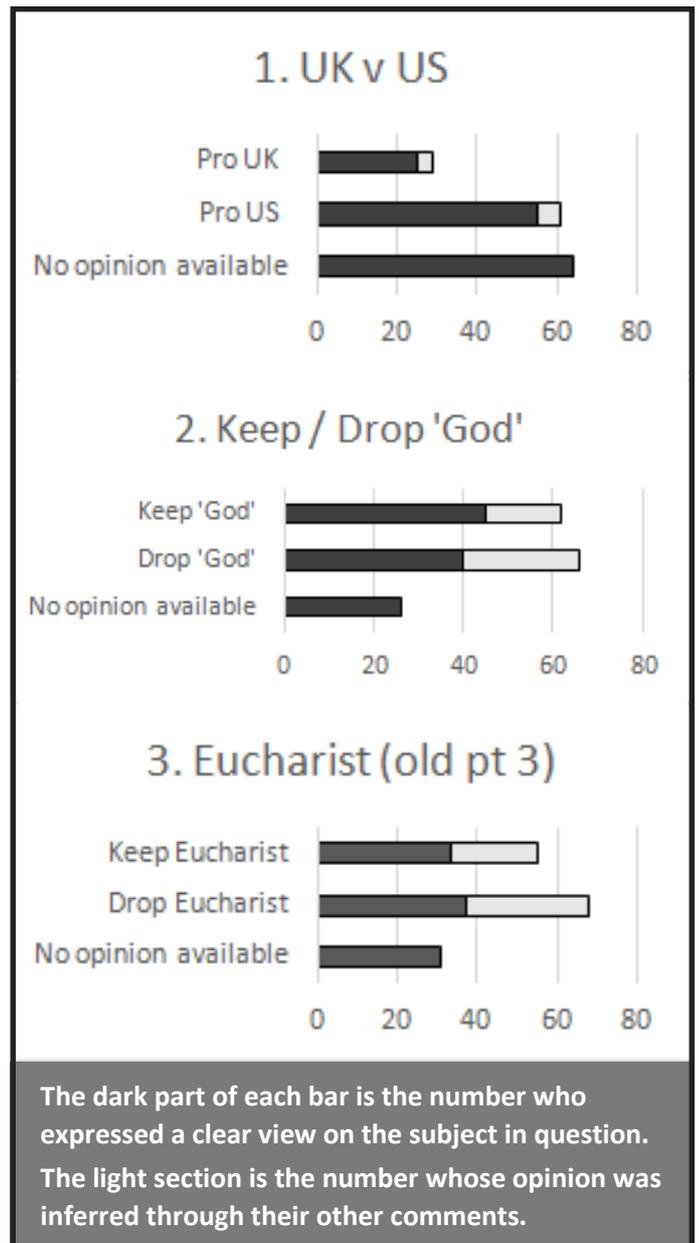
Looking back on this whole exercise - from the initial members' consultation through to the final passionate arguments in committee – I've learned a lot about who we are and what PCN stands for.

We had a record response, more than any previous consultation – about 154 members took part producing 128 submissions. So clearly the Eight Points matter to us, and we overwhelmingly wanted to see them revised.

Our chair invited us to compare our old version with the latest US version in which the word God has been replaced by the composite phrase, 'the Sacred and the Oneness and Unity of all life'. Our members were fairly evenly split about use of the word God. Some opponents said it carries a traditional baggage which could send out a misleading message. In committee the mood was more positive about the word God. The prevailing view was that PCN's aim of promoting a progressive debate within the Church would be harmed if the word 'God' were removed. But that left open the question of what we mean by 'God', and trustees chose to qualify its context so as to indicate that this question remains open. Hence, 'God, however understood'.

One clear view from the consultation was that the new wording should be inclusive and jargon free in order to engage with those who are not from a church background. With this in mind, when it came to the second point where the word 'God' recurs in our original version, the committee chose instead, 'the Sacred', a term which had a number of supporters in the consultation. This was a much debated decision both within the committee and in the second round of online consultation. Other alternatives were pleaded for - the Divine, the Transcendent, Mystery. The trustees were asked: 'Does not 'the Sacred' mean that which we chose to make sacred and does this not miss out the sense of something greater, that we are given?' After a passionate debate, a sizable majority of the committee voted to keep 'the Sacred' as they felt it could be used in both a worldly and a transcendent sense. This gave the phrase an inclusivity that they felt the other words could not provide.

The old point three (now four) referred to Holy Communion – 'the sharing of bread and wine in Jesus' name'. The Americans dropped this point altogether. In the initial consultation a narrow majority of members also thought it should go - the margin was about 9-8. The committee approached this issue in terms of the Eucharist's centrality to the Christian life. Opponents of point three said Communion was not vital to Christianity; that our's was exclusive and steeped in jargon. While accepting that the language does pose a



problem, supporters felt that Communion was indeed central for most Christians and they wanted to make plain in our Eight Points a belief that Communion does not have to be seen in terms of atonement. In the end, it was decided to keep a reference to Communion, though as you can see, the wording is considerably less theological than our original.

Regarding the old point four, with its emphasis on inclusivity, controversy arose over the list of people mentioned as needing to be included – believers and agnostics, women and men, those of all sexual orientations and gender identities, those of all races and cultures etc. Some members expressed the view that such lists were invidious – because some minorities would inevitably be left out and also because just stating that a group needs to be included is a form of exclusion. Others liked the notion of pointing out

# The Eight Points

PCN Britain offers these eight points as an expression of how many of our members wish to live as Christians.

We are people who ...

1. Seek God, however understood, guided by the life and teachings of Jesus.
2. Affirm that there are many ways to experience the Sacred and that we can draw on diverse sources of wisdom on our spiritual journeys.
3. Recognise that following Jesus leads us to act with compassion and to confront evil.
4. Place hospitality at the centre of our communal and worshipping life and see the sharing of bread and wine as an expression of our common humanity.
5. Seek to build communities that accept all who wish to share companionship without insisting on conformity.
6. Know that the way we behave towards others is the fullest expression of our faith.
7. Gain more insights in the search for understanding than we do in certainty.
8. Work together within and beyond the Church to achieve a just, peaceful and sustainable world.

commonly held prejudices but wanted the list to be modified. The committee dispatched the drafting committee to come up with a new list. But the more they fiddled, the more they came to believe the list was unnecessary. They went back to the committee proposing that the list be dropped and it was.

The old point six, an expression of the golden rule, has changed little in this revision, in common with the American revision.

A number of members asked us to drop the word 'grace' from the next point because they felt it was religious jargon not used in the way the word is commonly understood. The drafters sweated over alternatives and the one chosen, while it has a narrower meaning, was felt to be more readily understood.

Many members wanted more stress on our responsibility for the environment and so in the next point (old seven, new eight) this has been included. Unlike the Americans, the trustees retained the notion that working for peace, justice and sustainability is not an individual pursuit, but one where we work in communities. Many members were keen to keep this community aspect.

The old point eight was moved to number three so as to link it with other points which relate to following Jesus. A number of members regretted what might be seen as the watering down of discipleship in the American version. They felt it was wrong to drop resistance to evil, costly discipleship and the renunciation of privilege. The committee liked the US reference to compassion but agreed that resistance to evil, in whatever form, is a key part of the Christian agenda.

The new 8 points are considerably shorter than first version – 142 words down from 251. This was a specific aim of the revision because many members asked for them to be sharper.

So what have I learned about who we are and what PCN stands for? It is that PCN has within its membership a wide variety of opinions about God. We range from theists to non-theists, realists to non-realists and on the fringes I'm sure there are evangelicals and atheists. But what these Eight Points say about us is that we are not hung up about where we stand on these dividing lines. Indeed many of us are probably sliding along the lines in one direction or another on a regular basis. In the end, as far as I can see, the God debate is not the most important issue. It is living a life guided by the teaching and example of Jesus and all that our hearts and the Bible tells us that involves.



**Andy Vivian** serves as the Administrator for PCN Britain.  
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# Coping with Christmas!

Christmas, or the earlier winter festival, has undergone many changes since early people implored the Gods to let the sun rise again from the low point on the horizon. Christianity took over and overlaid the nativity story to cash in on a very popular event. It was a shrewd move to inject a dramatic birth story into the dark and very difficult days of winter. It gave a new boost to lift the spirits of the poor, struggling people, whose lives were hard and often short – not helped by the cold and damp along with a shortage of food.

It is tempting to think that Christmas was always similar to our way of celebrating the event, but it wasn't until the 19<sup>th</sup>C that cards and gifts appeared. Through the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup>C the religious aspect was overtaken by commercial interests and now we have a situation where many people do not know, or care little for, the story of the Nativity.

It seems to me that the polarized positions – literal, fundamentalist beliefs versus a time to indulge our selfish gluttony – leave no space for a different interpretation of the ancient stories. To me they represent turning normal accepted behaviour up-side-down: e.g. a king born in a stable and not in a castle, shepherds, the lowest and poorest people, invited along with the rich and intellectuals, and the young family driven away from home to a foreign country.

Many of our carols were written at a time when a literal interpretation was accepted and reasonable. Most people were poorly educated and were not able, or encouraged, to question the established order.

In the same way that children are weaned off the literal understanding of Father Christmas, I think they should be introduced to thinking about the meanings behind the stories of the Nativity. For me it is a time of loving, not only my family and friends, but others we know of who are in need of so much that we take for granted. This is done in a number of ways including the 'shoebox' appeal, helping to look after the homeless in some of our cities, street collections, or special services in church to raise money for charities. These selfless acts of practical love happen all over the country. They are truly altruistic and, I believe, the sort of thing Jesus was talking about and living out in his life.

We only have to see the faces of children as they take part in the school Nativity play or as they anticipate Santa, to understand the special power of Christmas. It would be dreadful to ban the drama and 'magic' of the story just because it is 'literally' untrue. Meanwhile, I am happy to sing along with others 'O come all ye faithful' but with another understanding of the meaning of the words.

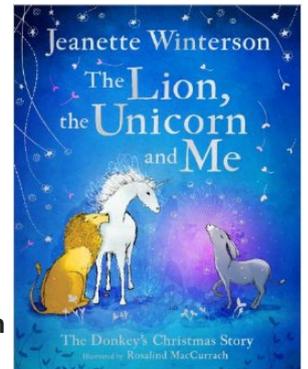
**David Kemp**

I have been intrigued by the idea put forward in 'The Christian Agnostic' (ISBN 0853053006) by Leslie Weatherhead of 'sacred marriage' where Zacharias could have played the role, as a priest, of divine messenger (i.e. father).

**Ian Gregory**

For a Christmas service, I have read, in sections interspersed with carols, Jeannette Winterson's 'The Lion, the Unicorn and Me'. It is a lovely story, needs no commentary and is greatly enjoyed.

**Dorothy Haughton**



Why do we celebrate Christmas? Most of us don't believe in the virgin birth as a literal truth. Most of us don't believe in Jesus as the eternal son of God. I doubt a single one of us thinks that the things we sing about in Christmas Carols happened in that way, and I'm very sure none of us think that whatever did happen, happened on the 25th of December.

And yet each year, we show up for carol services, for Christmas morning worship, for social events, all marking the holy and sacred season of Christmas.

We show up because it is a holy season. A baby was born – what could be more holy than that everyday event? It happened to every single one of us, it happened to everyone who is, or ever was, on this planet. That makes it no less of a miracle. That makes it no less worthy of celebration.

And the light returns. Whether we mark Christmas, or Hannukah, or Kwanzaa or the Solstice, or none of those or all of them, we know that round about Christmas, the light will start to come back. For some of us it may mean the light of redemption shown by a new-born saviour. For some of us it may mean the tilt of the earth, a new phase of the sun, the beginning of hope again. That makes it no less of a miracle. That makes it no less worthy of celebration.

At Christmas we are more aware than we normally are, perhaps, of the values of peace, and goodwill, and love. We are more aware of our links with family, and friends, and neighbours. And we celebrate that love by being together, by eating together, by exchanging gifts, and perhaps by praying and singing together. And that togetherness, that love, that sharing are themselves a miracle. And they are worthy of celebration, and long may we, in our rational and questioning and dogma-free fashion, continue to do so.

**Kate McKenna**

To me the Christmas stories are made up of myth, metaphor and midrash.

Matthew's story of wise men visiting Jesus in a house in Bethlehem, bringing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, is obviously myth and midrash, but with a strong metaphorical message embedded in it, that Jesus was born to be king of the Jews.

Luke's story also is made up of myth and midrash; with the metaphorical message that Jesus came into the world to be with the marginalised and down-trodden; shepherds in those days were regarded as some of the lowest in the community.

Our Nativity plays, almost without exception, meld the two different accounts of Jesus birth together; I don't think this matters, as Jesus came into the world for the good of all mankind, whether princes or paupers.

Mahatma Gandhi said, "And because the life of Jesus has significance and transcendency to which I have alluded I believe that He belongs not solely to Christianity, but to the entire world; to all races of people, it matters little under what flag, name or doctrine they may work, profess a faith, or worship a God inherited from their ancestors."

Taking this a step further in Mark Townsend's book, "Jesus through Pagan Eyes" it shows that many followers of Pagan religions revere Jesus, as do people from all religions.

I often find myself at odds with the way Christianity is sometimes portrayed; but never at odds with Jesus.

**George Drake**

Is Christmas still meaningful?

It is surprising that following Borg and Crossan's collaborative book, *The First Christmas*, there hasn't been more protest. They explained to us that the angels, the wise men with their star, and the shepherds (for example) were part of a myth constructed for the purposes of explaining the supremely important role of Jesus. Nevertheless, these stories have fired the imagination of poets and musicians for centuries and given us a rich cultural heritage.

Most progressive Christians accept that the birth narratives in Matthew and Luke are myth, and that their message is far more important than their historical accuracy. However, have we ever stopped to think about the implications of demythologising this narrative? With no historically reliable birth narrative the Christmas tradition is left rather flat; "the magic has quite gone out of it". Surely the teachings of Jesus are far more worthwhile than the celebration of his birth? We have reached a point when the reality is that Christmas is now a commercial and social occasion and not a religious one, nevertheless traditional views hold



sway in most of the Church. In the midst of this commercial festival there is a balance: the great cultural legacy created by poets and composers which continues to the present day. This is evident in the Nine Lessons and Carols and community carol concerts held in churches and halls across the country.

Still, this suggests a somewhat bleak assessment that Christmas is no longer meaningful in a religious sense. And yes, I would agree. Do Progressive Christians either acquiesce in the orthodox version or perform theological gymnastics to make sense of it? I propose an alternative.

Whereas originally the Church "Christianised" an existing pagan festival which allowed new converts and potential waverers their winter celebration to keep them within the fold, the current disconnect with the religious aspect to Christmas has a positive side and gives us an opportunity to re-invent Christmas. For nearly two thousand years the Church has been telling us that the reason for celebrating Christmas is that Christ is Born! The Good News is that He will save us from our sins. But now it's time for us to face the challenge of working out our own unique reasons for celebrating. It is time for us to discover, or should I say re-discover, what the Good News is for us.

Dark December is an ideal moment to take stock of "where we are today and how we got here", to contemplate the future and re-discover what that Good News is. The depths of winter is a good time to dream and plan for the year ahead, to face up to the challenge of new ideas, to reflect on what nourishes our souls, to look for new activities that would serve our communities better, and how we might make better use of our time. For this to work there will be many obstacles to overcome, however, seeking Good News in this way each year might just be Good News.

**John McKechnie**

# Reflection: Jesus' birth

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As our understanding and our desire to ask and live with questions grows, it is easy to find ourselves standing far from the familiar nativity scene. Star brightness and movement explained; oxen dismissed; blue robes impossible; a late pregnancy donkey-back ride unthinkable; Persian astronomers improbable; gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh unlikely.

All these details from Matthew and Luke, and added to over the centuries by art and tradition, came in the first place from the fact, unacceptable to some hearers, that the Gospel writers had agendas. They enfolded this child in greatness. Their aim was not to deceive but to convince as many people as possible that Jesus, even as a baby, had an effect on Kings and Creation. They loved and lauded a person through whom they had experienced God – not a God of the Law, but of compassion and action and deliverance. There had, after all, been terrible episodes of extreme brutality, total subjection, and persecution, against followers of this particular troublemaker.

So what do we think we can be sure of – given that new discoveries are being made all the time? Life then was precarious and potentially short. Girls were betrothed by 12 or 13 and married 2 or 3 years later. If a child was born before the wedding, a blind eye was turned, but marriage was always insisted upon, and the custom remains that a wife moves in with her husband's family.

The majority of families were peasants, poor and under the brutal thumb of the Romans. Each village home was a simple one room, tiny by our standards, flat-roofed building. Only the better-off would have had a small guest room attached or built under the flat roof – quite literally an upper room. Animals – sheep and goats, were quite literally life – milk, meat, skin, wool, hair, bone, sinew, dried dung for fuel – nothing would have been wasted. Being essential for life they were more than precious. When they went out they were under the care of a boy from the village and, unless pasture was hard to find, they came home each night and in the cold nights would have been in the house – safety and security for them, and warmth and convenience for the family. Resting, eating, and sleeping would have been on a slightly raised floor for the family but it would not have been unusual for a young woman to lie on the straw surrounded by the women of the family to give birth. We have to suspend our niceties concerning hygiene and privacy. Mangers were low wooden troughs or even a hollowed out piece of wood at the raised floor level. Perfect for a newly swaddled baby.

So what do we have? Most importantly, we have love. A baby born into poverty but out of love. A mother who

like all mothers wondered what would become of her child. Friends who would have noisily visited – since every occasion in that land, even now, is greeted at the top of people's voices. Every joy, every fear is discussed at full volume. And a new baby in that land is still considered to be the greatest of blessings.

So come now to the household where the animals stamp in the straw. You can feel the warmth of their breath and bodies, the scent of them hangs heavy in the air, it is dark. A young couple are warm and safe, surrounded by family and they are full of love and wonder at the birth of their son. The relief and joy are palpable. Neighbours will come tomorrow bringing gifts, both inconsequential and sacramental – for as often is the case, those with nothing never come empty-handed. The night is often cold and clear and myriad stars shine brightly. The baby draws his first breaths and sleeps on as yet oblivious to the world. His grandmother softly sings one of the old Hebrew songs of joy - in thanksgiving.

So we can draw near and we can celebrate and we can share in that love - but there was also courage and hope in that lowly home because we know that love has consequences. It is the same love we are asked to carry with us when people despair at empty cupboards, where women are raped going to the toilet at night, or the homeless feel the cold of a winter-blown doorway. We can celebrate because this child became the man who railed against hypocrisy and stood up for the dispossessed, the overlooked and the unlovable.

We can glory in the love that fired people to want the world to know that injustice, brutality and prejudice will never have the last word unless we let it. And that standing up for the truth can be as painful as giving birth but, nevertheless, puts us in the company of the man who touched lepers and embraced the raving. Bending low is required to look into the manger and to wash feet – they cannot be done otherwise.

So far from standing back we should come forward, even closer, and enjoy the story knowing it is a beginning – after all, he became one of the greatest story tellers of all time. Come and marvel that the birth of this baby, whatever the circumstances, became a celebration that, in so many different ways, still causes the world, and us, to catch our breath.



**Julia Morris** is a retired school secretary and Reader, a grandmother and Convenor of "Shoreline" the Norfolk Broads PCN Group.

# The divine fantasy

Christmas is woven around a fantastic fairy-story.

There are the Old Testament predictions, and there is the mystery of Mary's impregnation by the Holy Spirit leading to the Immaculate Conception and the virgin birth. After the delivery, the Bible talks about unusual formations in the sky and apparitions of angels. Later, there are visits from foreign magi, who claim to have some fore-knowledge of Jesus' birth at that specific time and at the specific location in Bethlehem. Even if you strip away all the esoteric details, you are left with the impression that this event attracted a lot of attention and numerous mythical observations.

Jesus was not your average social reformer. The Wilberforces and Nightingales of this world came from comfortable backgrounds and approached social change with the potent combination of liberal education and a measure of personal guilt about their privileged status. By contrast, the story of Jesus is the triumph of the ordinary man over the established order, whether that order was the Jewish hierarchy or the occupying colonial power. That's not the way change normally happens. Look at the background of the activists of recent generations. Mandela was born into Xhosa royalty, Gandhi had a high-caste middle-class background, Karl Marx's ancestors were predominantly lawyers, and Che Guevara's family were financially comfortable and had aristocratic roots. All these children were raised in privileged upbringings and all graduated from university and became game-changers.

By contrast, Jesus grew up in a very ordinary background: Joseph was a carpenter and, presumably, Jesus was expected to follow in the family business. We don't know whether he did so at any stage, because there is no record of most of his early life. There are myths about years spent travelling and studying with Buddhists and Hindus in India, but there are no specific details, and nothing to suggest that Jesus talked about this with his followers. Jesus was intellectually gifted, but relatively un-schooled. He did, however, have a clear purpose and mission in coming here.

We all interpret Christmas in our own way, and in my reading of it, this is the story of an interventionist deity. That's not a very fashionable view in the 21st century, when non-theists are claiming centre-stage, but it works for me. Personally I view Jesus as being one of them, as well as one of us. I believe that there was some unearthly, extra-terrestrial input behind him, but you don't have to buy into my theories to accept the central premise that Jesus was decidedly different, and undoubtedly special.

My Christmas becomes a time to express gratitude to



the Almighty for constantly stepping in, and nudging human civilisation back on track. Humankind has wandered off-course time and again over the millennia, but through the teachings of Jesus we have been left with a workable model to get it right once and for all. The magic formula is the combination of humility and unconditional love. This love extends to everyone around us, and also to the Almighty source of the divine intervention.

This is what I celebrate at Christmas. It is a time when I am reminded that the Jesus formula is the solution to the world's problems. It is a time when society reminds us of the joys of family and community. It is also a time to remember those who have fallen through the net and lost the security that such fellowship offers. It is, above all, a time to remember that I am part of the Almighty's plan, with a personal and individual role in the propagation of those Christian values of humility and unconditional love. I can express my gratitude in the way I live my life, and at the same time accept my responsibility to help make the world a better place.



**R J Harvey** has led a varied career from shoe sales in Africa to restaurants in Lincoln. Now he trains executives to deliver persuasive presentations.

# Make Christmas Real

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'What you do think of it so far?' One of the catch phrases of the very funny Eric Morecambe. The answer was usually 'rubbish!' What if we ask this question of our experience of Christmas?

What do we think of it so far? Let's be honest, we Christians have been worried about Christmas for many years now—ever since the end of world war austerity and rationing and all that. In those days, which few of us now can remember, Christmas was an opportunity to cheer us up in bad times. If we managed to have a chicken for Christmas dinner we were lucky. Stockings for most were still stockings rather than pillowslips, if you had them at all. The presents were few, often hand-made, or useful such as handkerchiefs, socks or a bar of soap. We entertained ourselves with party games or party pieces.

*are we offering a real alternative to the superficial and sentimental glitz and spend*

Now Christmas has gone mad. It is a crazy shopping spree, which the shops cannot do without and which many shoppers cannot afford. Our country's economy would, apparently, take a nose dive if there were no Christmas booster. The flip side of this is that many families are getting more and more seriously in debt as a consequence. They cannot pay their mortgages and the Christmas over-spend does not help, nor do the divorces and family breakdowns that reach a peak at Christmas. Many people lose their homes due to repossession. More and more booze is required to provide the merriment that people do not really feel inside. Is this the real picture? It is for far too many.

As Christians, we are not opposed, so we say, to people having a good time. Jesus came to bring 'life in all its fullness'. But we have to be concerned, and sorrowful, that year on year, Jesus is even more squeezed out than the year before. The life he came to bring is seemingly further away than ever. Look at the pretty lights that some households take so much trouble over. They do cheer up the dark days before Christmas, though they use a lot of energy and are yet another expense. Father Christmas is nearly always very prominently displayed. How often do we see a picture of Mary and Joseph and the baby?

I enjoyed the Father Christmas experience when I was a child. It didn't worry me that my parents had told me a fib. I enjoyed it with my own children. But who is this

overweight person, with his improbable attire and beard? The origin was Santa Clans-Saint Nicholas-still remembered and revered on the Continent. Saint Nicholas is usually depicted as a rather slender man. He left little presents on window sills for children too poor to have any. Our modern Santa, it seems has become a symbol of greed and over-indulgence, the very reverse of what Nicholas was about. The fat man in red was promoted by Coca-Cola in the 1930's to promote sales. And we have fallen for the bait, Rudolf and all.

Early in the new century we were given a little statistic which may mean something. More people were attending church at Christmas than in previous years. Was this a sign of weariness with it all and a hunger for something more satisfying? And are the numbers still keeping up? Maybe it's too early to tell.

What we must ask ourselves as Christians is whether we are offering a real alternative to the superficial and sentimental glitz and spend, or are we just offering something on the same lines, but with a religious flavour? An alternative or rather an additional time out to the pantomime? The story of Santa Claus has been debased, indeed so turned around that it means very nearly the opposite of what was intended. Perhaps we have done the same with the Christmas story?

Perhaps it's just as well we don't see the crib scene in pretty lights on the walls of houses. Because there were no pretty lights at the first Christmas and it is not the reality of Christmas today. My own church had quite a debate at a church meeting over the size of the Christmas tree which appeared every year covered in lights and baubles and was getting bigger and bigger. It was voted to reduce the size.

We need to do a lot of work and a lot of hard thinking in our churches about the Christmas story. It's not just the semi-pagan things that we give prominence to, not just the pretty lights and Christmas trees and Father Christmas. We have twisted—and yes, we have vulgarized the Christmas story to such an extent that it comes over as no more real or meaningful than Father Christmas or Jack and the Beanstalk. It is one of many Christmas fairy stories and not the most popular.

It is not even true to what the Bible says, and very few Christians seem to care about that. They don't read their Bibles anyway, or do not read them very carefully. I had to read the Christmas stories very carefully when I worked on my new translation, 'Good As New'. It was time to translate the Greek correctly. Magi means 'magicians' not wise men, and very definitely not kings. The Magi were a weird, outlaw type of person, telling fortunes, selling lucky charms and so on. They should

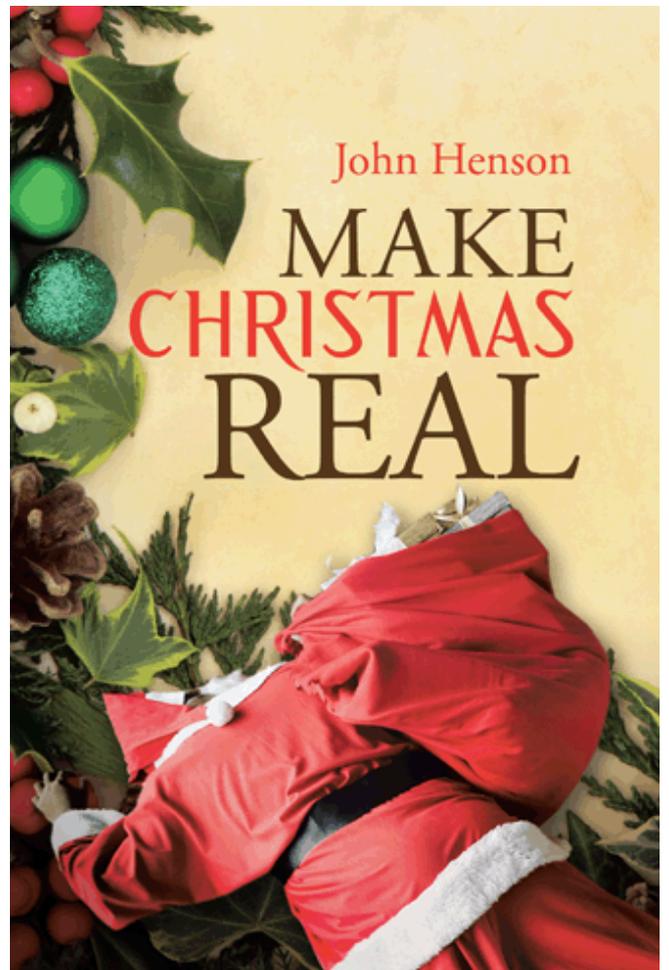
make us aware of a growing number of people today who are experimenting with a wide variety of spiritualities. They are people who have rejected the churches because they don't seem to them to be genuine. But this does not mean they have accepted the greedy and materialistic standards of our world today. They are green, concerned about the environment, healthy food and relaxation of mind and body. They seek an honest understanding of what it means to be a person and to have loving relationships. All the churches seem to do is to cling on to old ways, old ideas, and old traditions, without thinking deeply about the true meaning and its relationship to life today.

Then there is the problem with Christmas cards and their traditional presentation of Christmas. Was Jesus born in a stable as on our Christmas cards, or in a cave, as you will find if you visit Bethlehem? You will be shown the exact cave, and probably you will have to pay to go in. I went back to the text and to my Greek. I already knew what I would find, but I needed to check. We must keep doing that with scripture. When we think we know it, we don't.

There is no mention of the birth of Jesus being 'in the bleak mid-winter'. Susan Sparks at Madison Avenue Baptist Church New York, in 2011, led her people in celebrating Christmas in August in order to make the point. Most Christians today live in the southern hemisphere where 25<sup>th</sup> December is in the middle of summer. They also understand the picture of poverty and destitution that the Bible text indicates, which few of us in the north and west have experienced firsthand.

There is a long tradition of putting in touches from our own imagination, and this is alright as long as we do not contradict the essence of the story.

People like Francis of Assisi, and others in the Middle Ages introduced the animals. It is important to recognize their part in God's creation. Working animals were much closer to people in Francis' day. They often occupied the same living quarters. Francis also introduced carol singing, imagining there would have been boys and girls in Bethlehem who would have sung their songs to the baby Jesus. We still sing the same sort of carols. We have added to them, even some with modern words. But, by and large, we have depended on the imaginations of people of time past, instead of using our own imaginations. 'Little Lord Jesus no crying he makes'—that was somebody's rather pious imagination



a couple of hundred years ago, and somebody who didn't know very much about babies. Must have been a man, old-style. Today we can allow ourselves to think of a baby crying, and dirty nappies.

If we only present the Christmas story to our visitors who only come to church at Christmas, in the old language and with old pictures, they may get a nice woolly feeling, as they might get by going to see Sleeping Beauty on ice, but they will not understand how the birth of Jesus connects with the life of the world today.

Folk frequently say, 'Christmas is for the children'. That shows how much our presentation has got it wrong. The Christmas story is for adults. There are some parts of it we can't talk about in front of the children, because it's X-certificate. It's about an unmarried mother giving birth in an inconvenient place; it's about asylum seekers and the homeless; it's about the fellowship of outcasts—queer folk and New Age travellers; it's about a cruel dictator and soldiers making an attack on a small community and slaughtering its children.

Don't let's blame the world for marginalizing Jesus. We've helped with the process, and we are still helping. Unless we go over the story again, making it true for ourselves, and making it true for the world in which we live today, it will remain just a fairytale story from the past, getting dimmer and dimmer as the years pass.

Today—today, not yesterday, is born the Saviour.

**The introduction of John Henson's  
latest book, with Ray Vincent,  
exploring Christmas. ISBN: 1496978951  
(Reproduced with permission.)**

# In, or Out, of Season

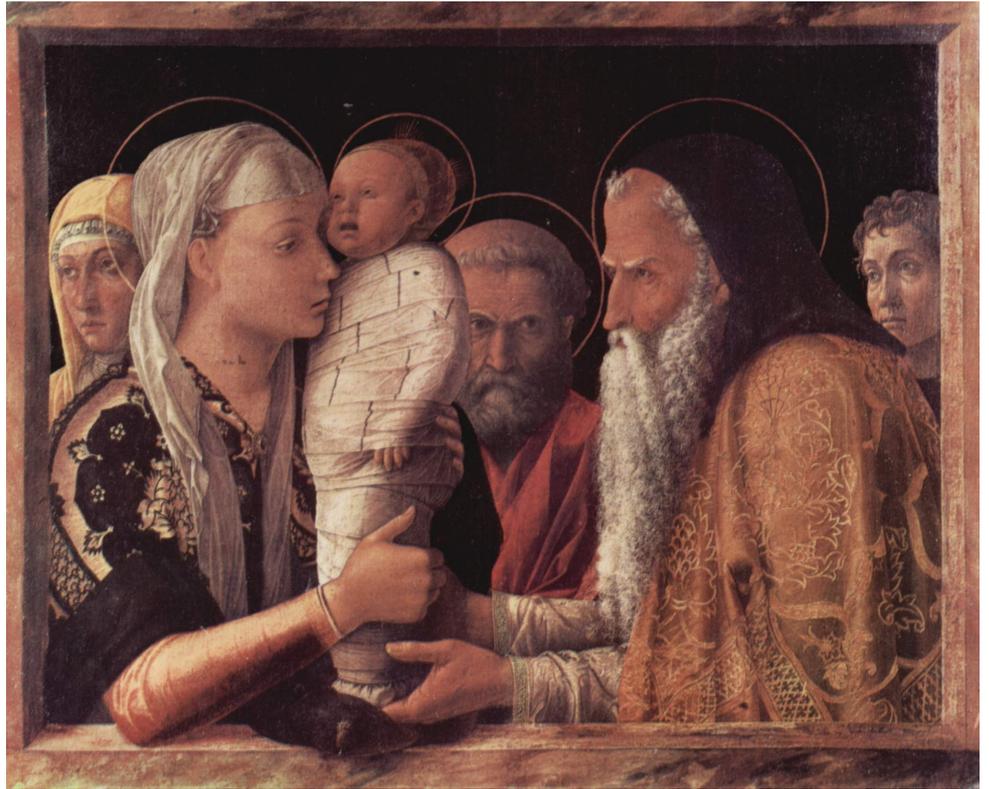
In 2 Timothy 4.2 (RSV) we read that Timothy was urged to be urgent in season and out of season. But what do we understand by the term “season” and does it really matter if it is in season or out of season if we should be urgent whatever the season?

We are all familiar with the four seasons, even if modern life has nullified some of the traditional boundaries they hitherto set; for example it is now possible to eat fresh asparagus all the year round thanks to air freight.

Without the Second World War, it could be argued, that Winston Churchill would hardly be known by the general public. Being in season and out of season is a sobriquet which describes Churchill well. The Second World War would almost certainly be seen as his “high season”, (as the modern travel and tourism industry may put it), yet as we know this was to be transformed to one of his “low season” periods when the Labour Government led by Clement Attlee was elected in 1945. This was to be followed by being in season, or perhaps a “mid season” period, relative to him, when he became a peace time prime minister in the years 1951 – 55.

Our own lives may seem to be far from the likes of Winston Churchill and Clement Attlee while having far more variables than the predictable seasons. But life can often be seen to have what might be thought of as rhythms; for example the “honeymoon period” in a new job, the period which follows, often the bulk of the period that you are in post, where perhaps you are at your most able, then the dawning of the period where you realise you are no longer being that fresh inspiration to your employing organisation that you once were. The day dawns that it is time to move on. In other words, what was the high season has gradually metamorphosed into mid-season.

Sometimes it is quite difficult to discern the correct time to act. Often there might be contradictory influences. You may wish to seek another job and that might entail a move of home, however other members of the family may wish to stay where they are, whilst it was never on the cards to move too far away due to the proximity of elderly parents.



In truth it is often difficult to make decisions in life. In my teenage years I was interested in pursuing two industries. At the time I pursued the one out of the two which seemed slightly stronger, e.g. seemed more “in season” to the times. This held good for some years however I am now in a process of transition, changing from one to the other. What was in season in the last century for me has now changed, thus it will be for many, in varying degrees.

In the Christmas story Simeon and Anna are very good examples of people who were “being urgent” in the “out of season time”, i.e. before the Lord was born, by way of prayer and devotion to God, so that when “the season” arrived, being in their case the manifestation of the Saviour, they recognised what was happening and were, by dint of their own preparations, in a position to play their part.

Most of us are not going to experience such a sudden “seasonal” transition in our lives as that recorded in the Christmas story, it will be a process of prayerfully weighing up the events which unfold before us, praying as if all depends on God yet also working and acting as if all depends on us.



**Chris Young** has earned his living for most of his working life from horticulture, he resides in Hampshire.

# A Christmas break?

During the First World War, there was a Christmas truce in which soldiers on opposing sides greeted each other across no-man's land. Unfortunately it seemed to make no difference to the war. So can we really believe that Christ, the baby, could unite the human race?

Each year during Advent, I hear someone leading worship say we are looking to the coming of baby Jesus. I want to shout out "He's already been and gone." Then some say we are looking to his second coming. When? And so what?

Rather than focus purely on an event in history, I prefer to take the Bible stories as insights into life as it is, with all its goodness and wrongs, beauty and darkness, material things and spiritual dimension. That is not to say that no such events took place, but the significance of the gospel writers' acts of putting pen to paper (or scroll) goes beyond the events themselves. It demands that we look out today and every day, for the presence of that same life that was in Christ Jesus.

Christmas speaks particularly of birth and the power of a vulnerable baby to invoke love, even amidst poverty and evil. A ministerial friend sent me one Christmas a lovely drawing of a mother hugging her newborn baby; it symbolises one of the key messages of Christmas, and for once the drawing did not have the halo or clothing of any kind.

Several Christmases ago, National Children's Homes (as it was then called) sent round a story of a young mother, she had given birth at the age of 16 and loved her child. Her past had included mental ill-health, homelessness and drug addiction. She wrote a poem, which begins:

*Such an innocent face  
Could she ever do harm?  
All she wants is her  
mummy to take her in  
her comforting arms.*

And ends:

*A fatherless guilt two-  
generations long  
for a mummy I am  
with such an innocent face  
all I want is my mummy  
please hug me I say.*

Another key message is found in the story of the wise men. I have seen a suggestion that it could have been three wise women instead. In that case they would have arrived on time, helped deliver the baby, cleaned the stable, cooked a meal and given practical gifts! The key message however, is found in Herod. Those who are

so narrow-minded and self-centred and full of their own might and power, that they only see this new birth as a threat. Could that also be those who are so tribal and self-righteous in their beliefs that they fail to see the goodness in the growth of

those who are not of their beliefs? Many years ago, I was told of some Muslims in Sheffield who celebrate Christmas; they objected when a local authority suggested Christmas should be renamed, because it was divisive, discriminating against people of non-Christian faith.

When viewed through what Jesus did in his life, teaching, death, and resurrection; Christmas speaks of the enormous potential of human life, all human life. Indeed, St. Paul wrote of Christ coming to reconcile all things. It also speaks of the God within, which should be the starting point for dialogue between people of different faiths.

In the year 2000, the Reverend Christopher Hill was Bishop of Stafford. His Christmas message in the local newspaper had two parts. One was that it is the time for rebirth and forgiveness for all past wrongs (including the wrongs of the Church). The other point was: "that the world and the Church still has a long way to go in really understanding the message of Jesus, the message of Christmas, which is God's love and life in humanity, and in the Victim on the cross. God in every child, God in every victim. God in us."

So let's invite everyone to take a break this Christmas, not as an escape from our problems, but as a means to meditate on the potential of all human life.



**Nigel Jones** is a retired Mathematics teacher, a Methodist Local Preacher, and a Liberal Democrat Councillor in Newcastle-under-Lyme.



# News from local groups

Please contact group convenors or see the relevant PCN Britain web page for further details. Newcomers are always welcome.

**Abingdon** Cliff Marshall  
01235 53048 cliff.marshall@pcnbritain.org.uk

Several members of the group attended the thought provoking Oxford 'With or Without God' conference. It was good to meet members from other groups around the country and to make new acquaintance with members of Sea of Faith groups. The topics raised by Gretta and Scott stimulated some lively discussions at our October meeting based on the diverse views expressed. November's discussion was initiated by an excerpt from Richard Holloway's Radio 4 series, 'Honest Doubt' - a lively evening with a good range of views explored! In December we shall be starting a series of meetings based on 'The Thoughtful Guide to Faith' by Tony Windross. Future meetings will be on 6th January [Trinity URC/ Methodist Church]; 3rd February [St Michael's Church]; 3rd March [All Saints Methodist Church].

**Birmingham** Richard Tetlow  
0121 449 4892 richardtetlow@btinternet.com

Our November topic was Advent's Poetic Language. We noted the strong threads of judgement, heaven and hell in the traditional liturgies, and we discussed appropriate patterns in modern communities. Chris Wolfe offered us a valedictory in urging PCN to be more visible and engaged in established organisations, not expecting all to change but being recognised as valid new Christian expression. Our December meeting discussed the meaning of Christmas. Monday 5th January will be a social meeting hopefully shared with other groups.

**Bolton** Jim Hollyman  
01204 456050 jim.hollyman@pcnbritain.org.uk

Our next meetings will be at 1.30 p.m. on 14 January and the 4 March 2015. We will continue reading Karen Armstrong's 'Twelve Steps To A Compassionate Life' and will be looking at chapter 9 ['Concern for Everybody'] at our January meeting. Meetings are usually held at 1462, Junction Road West, Lostock, Bolton, BL6 4EG.

**Chelmsford** Jane Anderson  
01245 466160 jane.anderson@pcnbritain.org.uk

We continue to meet on the 2nd Sunday of the month at St Augustine's Church hall in North Springfield [6.15 p.m. - 8 p.m.] We have just finished 'Painting the Stars' which the group found interesting and enlightening. We next meet in January 2015. Numbers vary from 3 - 12 but there is always lively discussion and a feeling that this is a 'safe place' where we are able to be open with one another.

**Driffield** Raymond Eveleigh  
01262 420062 Raymond.eveleigh@pcnbritain.org.uk

After several meetings during which we studied the development of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, we invited the Rev'd John Beynon to speak to us at our September meeting. John is the Pastor at King's Pentecostal Church in Beverley and also the Director of a charity called 'Jacob's Well' which is dedicated to the provision of medical supplies and related aids for many countries in Africa and Asia. The experience of the Holy Spirit is central to John's ministry and is treated with great depth and obvious passion. Our November session was concerned with Climate Change, led by Ray Eveleigh. We studied newsprint from the Observer and the Church Times following the climate change

summit conference which was recently held in New York. Some group members concluded that they would put pressure on their various church councils to consider the installation of Solar Panels. In December we follow our usual custom of celebrating an informal Eucharist followed by a party.

**East Shropshire** Miriam Walton  
01743 243 167 miriam.walton@pcnbritain.org.uk

The group is continuing with its eclectic programme of discussions, films and reports, interspersed with lively (some might say raucous) meals at a local pub. In August, members who attended the PCN 'Being Honest to God' Conference reported back. It came across as very thought-provoking and moving and it was also useful to have the booklets available so we could read the full presentations afterwards. In September and October, we had a presentation and discussion on Jack Spong's book on St John's Gospel, 'The 4th Gospel: Tales of a Jewish Mystic'. Many members of the group are currently reading the book for themselves. Future meetings are planned for: 26 January, 2015: guest speaker, David Roberts (Interfaith Officer for Hereford Diocese) on Sikhism and Islam [7.30pm]; 23 February: Presentation on the Geza Vermes' book, 'Jesus the Jew' [7.30pm]; 13 April: Talk by Dr Val Webb, 'In Defence of Doubt' at the Red House, High Street, Albrighton, Wolverhampton WV7 3LU. Albrighton is easily accessible by road and rail and there is parking at the venue.

Thank you to all who have contributed group news. Please note that contributions should not exceed 300 words and may be subject to heavy editing. Group report editor: **John Churcher**

**Edinburgh** Mary McMahon  
0131 4413337 mary.mcmahon@pcnbritain.org.uk

Our November meeting welcomed back Michael Paterson speaking about 'Significant Chaos' (the title was taken from some graffiti he saw scribbled on a convent wall in London: "Your order is meaningless, my chaos is significant"). Our December meeting explored the topic 'What is the Good News?', a progressive look at Christmas before breaking for wine and mince pies! We meet again on 26 January with a DVD extract from one of Gretta Vosper's lectures. On 23 February Kathy Galloway will lead our discussion on 'People in the Wilderness'. Everyone is always welcome at our meetings - no membership requirement, other than a willingness to listen!

**Exeter** Liz Vizard  
01392 668859 liz.vizard@pcnbritain.org.uk

The Exeter group had a talk and discussion led by Anastasia Somerville-Wong, author of 'For Every Season: Reflective Liturgies for Worship'. We learnt about the history and breadth of the Progressive Christian movement across the world and considered its characteristics in some depth. Anastasia has done much research into this and her findings would be well worth exploring further. Our discussion time looking at where we saw ourselves in relation to this was worthwhile, though sadly not long enough to do the questions justice. Also, we have been carrying out a survey of our members in order to plan a way forward for our group after ten years in existence, as the small group organising meetings is no longer able to manage without more help. We will report back in the next edition of PV. Our group has a very large mailing list and is widely spread geographically, which creates organisational and commitment difficulties. Our next meeting is on January 25th at 2.30 in Southernhay URC Hall Exeter, with Francis Rothery, author of

'Missional Impossible: The Death of Institutional Christianity and the Rebirth of G-d'.

**Gloucestershire** Eric Massey  
01453 766389 eric.massey@pcnbritain.org.uk

The group is lively, friendly and enjoys helpful conversations to add stimulation to a faith journey that has so many big words that grapple with the reality of God. We have started to work through 'Living the Heart of Christianity' by Marcus Borg and Tim Scorer. In our first session we explored the idea of unending conversation, looking at our faith journey as individuals, coping with paradigm shift and the feeling of being on the edge of things. We looked at what was received from our traditions, sharing personal examples and allowing that which is 'given' to have its own voice in a changed cultural context. In November we explored when or where, and even how had we heard God speaking in our lives. Talking about God and the character of God produced some very helpful and at times challenging moments: stories and life experiences all contributed to a creative time together. We have also looked at several versions of the Lord's Prayer wondering whether they speak more clearly to our culture today. The programme for 2015 will begin by looking look at love and evil.

**Hampshire Hub** Martin Godfrey  
023 8076 6312 martin.godfrey@pcnbritain.org.uk

The Hampshire Hub News is now published on the PCNBritain web site. It will no longer be sent by e-mail to those on the circulation list. The convenors of the individual local groups will continue to send out reminders of meetings about a week in advance.

**Harrogate (Day)** Philip Goodwin  
01423 563990 philip.goodwin@pcnbritain.org.uk

We continue to meet in Wesley Chapel, which is now renamed as 'The Wesley Centre'. While the building has moved forward the

theology remains 'traditional'. I am thankful that our 'heretics group' is put up with and when I tease the traditionalists by asking occasionally if they fancy joining us there is nervous laughter some passing derisory comment - though all in good humour!

**Hertfordshire** Diana Reddaway  
diana.reddaway@pcnbritain.org.uk

The past quarter has involved discussing a couple of books at our monthly meetings [3rd Sun of each month, 4 p.m. at the Backhouse Room, Handside Lane, Welwyn Garden City]. The January 2015 meeting will discuss Gretta Vosper's book 'With or Without God.' The titles of the February and March meetings are to be confirmed but we are hoping to have a speaker at one of these talking about Coptic Christianity. The April meeting will be the much-anticipated visit of Val and Maurice Webb.

**Hickling Shoreline** Julia Morris  
01692 598538 julia.morris@pcnbritain.org.uk

We on the Norfolk Broads meet every Thursday at 2 pm in a member's house. Most recently we have been reading material by Michael Morwood. We not only discuss but also take action on peace and justice issues. We join in with Fishpond Meetings in Norwich on the last Friday of the month.

**Leeds** Sandra Griffiths  
0113 258 2652 sandra.griffiths@pcnbritain.org.uk

We meet at Chapel Allerton Methodist Centre, Town Street, Leeds LS7 4NB, normally on the



second Saturday of the month between 10.30 and 12 noon, with coffee/tea available from 10.00. In September we looked back to the group's very first meeting in 2004: we introduced or re-introduced ourselves to each other, sharing something of our journey of life and faith - always a rich source of affirmation and encouragement! In October we focused on Gretta Vosper and 'Language', including husband Scott Kearns' hymns/songs. The recent Vosper weekend conference in Oxford included an inspirational Sunday gathering led by the two of them. In November we discussed 'What do we make of evangelism and mission? To what extent is it appropriate to participate?' We discovered that the mention of 'evangelism' made most of us cringe because of negative associations. Mission, on the other hand, was viewed more positively. In 2015 we meet on 10 January for a presentation of compassion in action by one of our members who spends a lot of time in Madagascar training medical staff. On 21 March we have another chance to hear John Churcher. The programme for other months is not yet confirmed but will be varied.

**Manchester** John Ramsbottom  
0161 456 5119 John.ramsbottom@pcnbritain.org.uk

In September we heard a report about the Greenbelt festival and in particular some talks given there by Brian McClaren. In October we considered the topical issue of 'assisted dying'. We looked at some recent high profile cases and the comparable situation in other countries: the majority feeling was that the law should reflect a more compassionate approach, provided safeguards were in place to prevent abuse. Several from the group were able to attend the conference in Sheffield addressed by Rowan Williams and were impressed by his presentations. The meeting at the end of November considered the environment and a Christian approach to issues of global

warming and climate change. Plans for 2015 include a worship and social event in January, and a talk by Gill Dascombe on the Wesleyan quadrilateral in February. For March we have invited Jan Berry (from Luther King House) to speak to the group about liturgy, and there is also a further meeting planned for a subsequent month hearing about the work of the Samaritans charity. In April, in conjunction with Grove Lane Baptist church, we hope to jointly host another visit by Val Webb. We continue to attract upwards of a dozen people for each meeting – and we have room and a warm welcome for more!

**Market Harborough** Jill Cooper  
01858 433865 jandpcooper@yahoo.co.uk

We continue to meet every 4 to 6 weeks, most recently looking at various forms of creed and affirmation of faith, and considering whether any kind of creed at all is helpful, necessary, or inherently exclusive by defining the included members of any group. The traditional creeds were composed to answer the particular issues arising at the time – should we do the same? Would it even be possible? Our discussion was diffuse and ended with a period of silent reflection. In December we explored Peter Rollins' book 'The Idolatry of God'. New members, or droppers-in, are always welcome.

**Newbury** Maria Grace  
01635 47196 maria.grace@pcnbritain.org.uk

We meet monthly on a Friday morning in members' homes. During 2014 we studied Borg's book 'Reading the Bible again for the first time', interspersed with sessions on subjects like 'Engaging with the present world: Personal Encounters – Ukraine, Israel/Palestine' etc. Next month we will consider 'the afterlife' based on Eben Alexander's book 'Proof of Heaven'. On April 17 we look forward to hosting Val and Maurice Webb on their UK tour: 'In defence of doubt'. Tickets £3 and open to all.

**Newcastle upon Tyne** Pat Fuller  
pat.fuller1@btinternet.com

Our sessions usually consist of one of our members offering an introduction on a subject and then discussion follows. We are a dynamic group and love to share food and drink while we talk around a table, raising meaty issues in the world as we struggle to be the People of the Beatitudes. We continue to meet on the second Tuesday of each month. Our numbers have grown recently and that has meant the discussions are more wide-ranging. In November Joyce Firth introduced the theme of remembering and began with a meditation she had written and we read two powerful poems, 'When need I the waving flags' by Bill Hinton and 'There will be peace' by David Roberts. In December Jeff introduced some writing by Marcus Borg on Christmas. In January and February, 2015, we will use the DVDs recorded at Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church in September when Scott Kearns and Gretta Vosper spoke to PCN members. Two of the members of our group attended the weekend conference in Oxford where Gretta spoke with such passion on how she sees a new way of being church. In March Richard Firth will consider Easter, based on some work he has been doing with Mark's Gospel.

**North Worcestershire** Tessa Carrick  
01527 873135 tessa.carrick@pcnbritain.org.uk

We always welcome new members but ask people to let Tessa know you intend to come to a particular meeting to make sure there is a chair waiting for you. We meet about every other month in each other's homes for a drink and discussion [2.30 p.m. until 4 p.m. or 4.30 p.m.]. Our 28 January meeting will be in Hagley when we will watch the next section of the *Living the Questions* DVD: 'The myth of redemptive violence'. We have found plenty to discuss following each piece of film. For details of the venue and some preparatory notes

to read before the meeting, please telephone Tessa.

### Richmond

Alan Powell

0208 878 7355 alanepowell@blueyonder.co.uk

At the November meeting the group discussed the chapters of Marcus Borg's 'Heart of Christianity' entitled "God – The Heart of Reality" and "Jesus – The Heart of God". Further chapters are to be discussed in the first three meetings in 2015.

### St Albans

Leonora Jagessar

leonora.jagessar@pcnbritain.org.uk

The group continues to read and discuss various chapters in 'Speaking Christian' by Marcus Borg. In November we looked at the chapters on "Salvation" and "Heaven" to rediscover their original meaning, liberated from the 'heaven and hell' framework that has distorted it. Also, members who had attended the Gretta Vosper events shared feedback and we familiarised ourselves with non-theistic language and liturgy. Between 10-20 attend our meetings and we welcome anyone in the St Albans area to join us on the fourth Thursday of the month at 7.30pm at Trinity URC, St Albans!

### Sedbergh

Martin Dodds

01539 620308 martin.dodds@pcnbritain.org.uk

We, in South East Cumbria, continue to meet fortnightly through the winter months on Friday evenings. We have recently started meeting in each other's homes. We are currently looking at individual topics suggested by members of the group. Since September these have included Assisted Dying, Halloween, Islamic Extremism, and What is Methodism for? We will shortly be having an evening considering our various 'Visions' for the future. This approach works best when there is at least one of us who has some good general knowledge of the issue under consideration, otherwise it can sometimes get rather waffly!

### South Northants and North Bucks

Jane Lynds

jane.lynds@hotmail.co.uk

We continue to meet on every second Wednesday in members' homes. We have been meeting for five or six years and always find something to talk about. We always start with a shared meal followed by discussion and we complete the evening with a short act of worship. Our discussions have covered a very wide range of topics including books read and lectures/talks attended. Each month a different member of the group volunteers to prepare a discussion paper etc. and someone finds appropriate 'PCN' worship. Topics that we have discussed recently include: the concept of a just war; reflections on the PCN conference in Birmingham; prayer and mediation. The group also supports the regular fifth Sunday alternative services at St Nicholas Church Potterspur, Northants held at 4 p.m .

### Stoke on Trent

Ian Gregory

01782 614407 ian.gregory@pcnbritain.org.uk

Sadly, a study day on the Gospel of Mark that had been planned for November had to be cancelled when only four said they would attend. Speakers had to be told, rooms de-booked, and printed programmes ditched. It was publicised widely but even the local paper declined to accept an advertisement. One church leader responded that they could not support "your little subversive group." There is

a thinly veiled hostility, even in the local media, to what we offer by way of a fresh understanding of our faith and the need to embrace those of other faith systems. Currently the group is hibernating until new leadership emerges. Having been involved as leader for ten years in PCN and similar activities, Ian Gregory (81) is stepping down to encourage new ideas from among the 20 plus individuals who have been attending 'very lively' monthly meetings.

### Vale of Glamorgan Janet Davies

01446 410033 janet.davies@pcnbritain.org.uk

There is always lots to say within our group of 15 talking and challenging each other, and tending at times to agree to disagree! We keep most of us within the church although a few members are now non church goers. From time to time we also join with the Cardiff group, including a recent meeting addressed by John Henson (John's books are well worth reading!) At the moment we have returned to studying Val Webb ['Stepping out with the Sacred'] We meet alternate Wednesdays at a member's home in Barry.

# Charter for Compassion

YO-MAD – Young, Ordinary and Making a Difference!

The Compassionate Cornwall Initiative is part of an international movement to change the culture of communities through compassionate action and is putting Cornwall on the map as the first county in the UK to sign the international Charter for Compassion. (Belfast is the only other, as a Compassionate City.)

This historic launch took place at the Eden Project on November 14th. The YO-MAD project is the first phase in the creation of a vibrant youth network, which will light the way for Young, Ordinary people to Make A Difference in Cornwall, the UK, and around the world, creating links with many other countries, inspiring and benefiting local people, especially youth, and supporting communities in Africa with whom they will collaborate with throughout the project.



They are crowdfunding to pay for Fenna Martin and Sophie Coxon to travel to Africa, where they will gain qualifications, experience and resources that they can bring back to inspire and educate other young people in Cornwall and the UK. Funds will go towards flights and transport, the cost of their training, basic food, accommodation, malaria medication and vaccinations, and some expenses for workshops and film-making with African young people.

They, along with independently-funded workshop facilitator Tam Martin Fowles, will travel to Cape Town where they will spend two weeks training to be facilitators of the Virtues Project (a UN-endorsed Character Education Programme that is used in over 100 countries worldwide, but again has not taken off in the UK – yet! [www.virtuesproject.com](http://www.virtuesproject.com)). They will then spend a further four weeks in neighbouring Botswana, where the virtues are being widely used.

In both places they will work with fellow partners of Charter for Compassion International, learning how compassionate action is addressing the serious problems that exist in their communities and how these lessons can be translated to offer solutions to problems in our own communities, and sharing good practice developed through Compassionate Cornwall.

<http://www.charterforcompassion.org/>

# Together in Hope

This series of books has grown and developed, very much in response to groups asking for new and varied material for discussion. There are now six books in print and a seventh, on worship, in preparation.



Those who have used the material have been very positive about it and we are sure that there are many more individuals and groups who would buy the books if they knew about them. We are publicising the series in two particular ways:

- A new flier about the series: for more copies, email: [togetherinhope.editor@gmail.com](mailto:togetherinhope.editor@gmail.com) or ring on 0845 345 1909.
- If you can recommend your local Christian or independent bookshop, please send some information about it to Anthony Freeman at: [anthony.jcs@gmail.com](mailto:anthony.jcs@gmail.com)

# Seeking the Sacred

Christianity in dialogue  
with other religions and the world



Annual Conference of Modern Church (in association with the World Congress of Faiths)

**13 – 16th July 2015**

High Leigh Conference Centre  
[www.modernchurch.org.uk](http://www.modernchurch.org.uk)

This conference is designed on the basis that our encounters with people of other religions lead us to acknowledge the positive presence of the sacred in other traditions and movements.



**WORLD CONGRESS OF FAITHS**

WCF works to develop better understanding, co-operation & respect between people of different faiths....



# Human Being - Being Human

## Malvern Science and Faith Weekend 6th - 8th March 2015

For progressive people of faith - as for open minded scientists - there need be no intrinsic conflict between religious faith and the scientific disciplines. Rather both these sets of approaches to life on this planet and beyond are regarded as explorations of existence and a search for reliable answers. Many of us, of course, live with and thrive on both types of enquiry.

One of the most fundamental questions raised in both religious and scientific discourse concerns ourselves: what does it mean to be human? Answers can be offered from a number of scientific standpoints. Our physics and our chemistry can, in principle at least, offer some definitions, and the medically-related disciplines of physiology, anatomy, neurology and psychology have much to contribute.

Every religious or spiritual discipline has its 'anthropology' – an explicit or else inferable understanding of our species and its place in the order of things. From this understanding flow many of our religious and spiritual practices, ranging from family life to politics.

Malvern Science and Faith Weekend is a time for people of all religions or none that engages people, through talks, discussion and other activities, in open dialogue on matters of key importance to us all as human beings. The speakers at the 2015 Malvern Science and Faith Weekend will address the topic of Human Being – Being Human from their own standpoints, and the accompanying discussions and activities will allow participants to follow up their own interests within this overall theme.

Further details may be found on the website, [www.scienceandfaith.org.uk](http://www.scienceandfaith.org.uk) and brochures can be obtained by telephoning **01684 565708** or email [info@scienceandfaith.org.uk](mailto:info@scienceandfaith.org.uk).

Events take place at different venues in Malvern and are free (there is a charge for some of the art and science activities), but booking is recommended.

The opening session 'Human Being: The Evolving Animal', addresses the weekend's theme with contributions by philosopher Professor Eric Olson of the University of Sheffield, and Dr Fern Elsdon-Baker, social science researcher, from Coventry University.

'Human Being: Beginnings and Endings' on Saturday morning is a workshop with Dr June Jones of the University of Birmingham and Professor Dawn Brooker of the University of Worcester, and explores the theme



of being human with particular reference to the beginnings and endings of life. On Saturday afternoon, Professor Raymond Tallis, described as one of the greatest living polymaths, and philosopher Shabbir Akhtar of the Centre for Muslim-Christian Studies at Oxford discuss the nature of 'Being Human: Evolving Consciousness' with science communicator and author Dr Peter Moore. This theme is continued in the evening session at St Matthias with writer and broadcaster Professor Susan Blackmore. The evening concludes with a panel discussion by all three speakers, chaired by Dr Moore.

'Human Being: Justice and Social Engagement' is explored by Revd Dr Roger Ray in two sessions on Sunday. Roger Ray is the founding pastor of Springfield Community Church, south-west Missouri and these sessions form the conclusion of a series of talks in the UK organised by PCN Britain. His lunchtime session, 'Thou Shalt Not Stand Idly By', is based on his recent book: *Progressive Faith and Practice*.

On Sunday afternoon, Professor Keith Ward leads a session 'Human Being: More Than Matter' in which he reflects on one of his recent books: *More than Matter? What Humans Really Are*.

An important part of the weekend is the art and science activity day for young people, which includes demonstrations, workshops and themed shows. 'Human Being – Brains and Bots' includes workshops by science communicator, Jon Wood, and robotics sessions by the QinetiQ (local science and technology company) STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) ambassadors.



**Andrew Webb** is an Elder at Holly Mount URC, Malvern, and a research scientist with specialism in statistical pattern recognition.

# “With or Without God”

Gretta Vosper, who is pastor of West Hill United Church in Toronto, spoke with great clarity and verve to the two conferences in September. She described how, during her first period of theological training, she greatly enjoyed the exploration of progressive (left-hemisphere) Christian scholarship. But not yet ready to be a minister she spent ten varied and sometimes very difficult years experiencing life’s vicissitudes.



On re-starting her training she was still thrilled by the academic perspective. However her church, The United Church of Canada, became involved in working towards a vision of unity with the Anglican Church of Canada. So it began exploring and enjoying aspects of the more sensuous (right-hemisphere) beauty of the Anglican liturgy and worship. With academic theology using the left side of the brain, and, worship-acts the right there seemed no sensible way for ministerial trainees to hold the two approaches together.

Back then she was not aware how much modern systematic theological training was split off or disconnected, in all students, from the potential for creating meaningful opportunities for growth and worship in a congregation. Thus, after the beginning of her third appointment (still standing after eighteen years), she was to discover that she had made no headway in communicating her theologically trained insights to her congregation, and was wrapping her message with hymns and liturgy that conveyed sentiments she had hoped to leave behind. This was a wake-up call, and a leadership crisis.

Her struggle was to surface publicly in 2001 in what proved a momentous sermon in which she impulsively interjected that she no longer believed in an interventionist God and in fact not in a God of any kind. This led to a conversation with the board of her church about her beliefs regarding a theistic God, a salvific Jesus, and, the centrality of scripture. The board encouraged her as she changed the old emphasis on doctrines and beliefs so as to prioritise life-enhancing values instead. These are “beneath” all the great religious traditions. Nevertheless her services and celebrations are devised so as not to deny or imply criticism of specific spiritual beliefs that individuals may tend to hold. But she had not expected that in eight years more than half of the congregation would have left. They have been replaced by others many of whom would not ordinarily have come to church.

This was illustrated by the non-theistic liturgy she led in Somerville College Chapel on the Sunday morning. Hymns and songs were led from the piano by her husband, Scott Kearns. For these he used some old church tunes and others of his own composition. The words, from which reference to specifically Christian beliefs including the word “God” had been dropped, had been brilliantly revised. However human themes such as of awe, relationship, sacrifice and fear were to be allowed their place.

After the first hymn the congregation moved around exchanging greetings and creating a positive communal atmosphere. In a celebration of commitments those present were invited to speak briefly about work being done and supported. Then a congregational song about seeking the truth was sung. A short talk by her on the primary themes of interconnectedness and love was followed with time to reflect. A sharing of things that burden us, bless us, and, that inspire replaced intercessions. A somehow prayer-like affirmation of commitment was followed by a song sung while seated about the bond of love that we extend. There followed a reading that celebrated “the crazy-ones” who pushed forward new ways to change the world followed by a hymn celebrating nature. Of particular interest she delivered a “focus moment”, as written partly from an inspired state each week. After another song and a talk we were reminded that we have the choice of being a source of goodness and a reminder that “We are the light of the world”. During a reflection time we were invited to consider what we might change in ourselves and in relationship. A final hymn emphasised love.

I thought the service at Somerville a major contribution towards ruthlessly clearing away all unnecessary and distracting baggage of unsupportable out-dated mythology, assumptions and attitudes. The mutual encouragement of individuals’ responsibility for doing something in the present I thought extremely important in light of the dire needs of our planet. However at times it struck me as rather flatly humanist. Although most found it moving and meaningful I noticed the question, “Was something missing?” being asked.

I believe that a consideration of psychoanalysis, the analysis of the unconscious through dreams, could be of assistance. I would argue that it can throw light on Jesus’ work of healing, and use of the beatitudes as a guide to behaviour in this part of the Kingdom of God. If this were part of the scientific world eulogized by Gretta, and introduced to ordinary congregations, it would help put Christianity and the Church on a firmer footing.

**Norman Pope**

PCN Spring Conference

## "Is Christianity a Work of Art?"

Canon Mark Oakley, Chancellor of St Paul's Cathedral

**Saturday 9th May 2015**

Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, London.

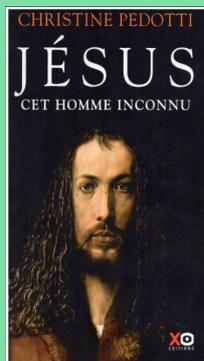
Full details to follow. It will include the PCN AGM over lunch. If you have any thoughts on the topic please contact Tony Rutherford before January 15th: [tonyrutherford@f2s.com](mailto:tonyrutherford@f2s.com)



This 2-disc set (90 mins) contains the talk and resulting Q&A at Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church in London on 24 Sept 2014 and is available for £10 inc postage (cheques payable to C. Avis) from Chris Avis, 37 Clifton Road, Exeter EX1 2BN. Or via Paypal, paying to [chris.avis1@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:chris.avis1@tiscali.co.uk)  
£1 will be donated to PCN Britain for every set sold.

Recently, in France, I bought a copy of Christine Pedotti's study of the life of Jesus: *Jésus : cet homme inconnu*: (XO Editions, Paris, October 2013). To say I was amazed is putting it mildly. I think this book is essential reading for anyone interested in "Christian Mission" today. The key themes are: the new interpretation of the fundamentals of Christianity, the significance of the role of women in the New Testament, which are difficulties that many people have with orthodox Christian "Truths".

If you can't obtain the book, or don't read French, I am happy to email you my summary in English (c10,000 words) of the contents: [houldken@gmail.com](mailto:houldken@gmail.com)



**Harry Houldsworth**

# Dr Val Webb: tour



Val, author and theologian, along with her husband Maurice, visited us from Australia in June 2013, and are returning next April for a tour organised by PCN.

<http://www.valwebb.com.au/>

**Wednesday, 8 April 2015 at 7.30pm**

PCN Forth Valley - "Like Catching Water In A Net"  
Stirling Methodist Church, Queen Street, Stirling FK8 1HL

**Thursday, 9 April at 7.30pm for 8.00pm**

"Liberating Theology"  
Cairns Church of Scotland, 11 Buchanan Street, Milngavie, Glasgow G628AW

**Saturday, 11 April at 7.30pm**

PCN Manchester and Grove Lane Baptist Church  
"Stepping out with the Sacred"  
Grove Lane Baptist Church, Pingate Lane South, Cheadle Hulme, Stockport SK8 7NP

**Sunday, 12 April at 10.00am**

Parish Eucharist, Preacher: Dr Val Webb  
St Mark's, Broomhill, Sheffield

**Sunday, 12 April at 6.00pm**

Centre for Radical Christianity - "Liberating Theology"  
St Mark's, Broomhill, Broomfield Road Sheffield S10 2SG

**Monday, 13 April**

East Shropshire PCN Group - [Details to follow]

**Tuesday, 14 April at 7.30pm**

Tavistock PCN Group  
"Being Communities of Theological Hospitality"  
Tavistock URC, Russell Street, Tavistock, PL19 8BD

**Wednesday, 15 April at 7.30-9.00pm**

Truro Theological Society - "In Defence of Doubt"  
Assemble for a glass of wine from 6.30 p.m.  
Admission £4 (Under-18s free; f/t students £2).  
The Chapter House, Truro Cathedral, TR1 2AF

**Friday, 17 April at 7.45pm**

Newbury PCN Group - "In Defence of Doubt"  
Friends Meeting House, 1 Highfield Avenue, Newbury RG14 5DS  
Tickets: £3 from Maria Grace: [maria.grace@pcnbritain.org.uk](mailto:maria.grace@pcnbritain.org.uk)  
15 Lewis Walk, Newbury, RG14 6TB. Cheques made out to Maria Grace. Enclose SAE or tickets will be at the door.

**Saturday, 18 April at 2.30pm**

Oadby and Market Harborough PCN Groups  
"Being Communities of Theological Hospitality"  
Oadby Trinity Methodist church LE2 4LA  
Cost £5.00 including refreshments.

**Sunday, 19 April 2015 at 4.00pm**

Hertfordshire PCN - "Liberating Theology"  
The Backhouse Room, Handside Lane, Welwyn Garden City AL8 6TA

**As soon as they are available, additional details of each event will be posted on the PCN website.**

## The Story of a Man

Tune: Mountain Christians

Come, listen to the story  
of how it all began.

A child born in a stable,  
the story of a man.  
A man like any other,  
no childhood of remark,  
a father and a mother;  
a life of light and dark.

Then one day with a message,  
aged thirty, he set off;  
with new friends he did travel  
but many learned to scoff.  
His stories of a new way,  
a way of love and peace,  
of life lived for the other,  
were met with disbelief.

'That's not our way of being,  
be gone get out of sight!'  
It's only looking backwards  
that we perceive the light.  
A light that guides us onwards  
towards a better way.  
A way of living fully,  
God's kingdom come this day.

*Heather Whyte, 2013*

## Joy to the World

Tune: Antioch

Joy to the world!  
Come celebrate,  
where love is shared today!  
Let every heart  
prepare its room,  
and raise its voice to sing,  
and raise its voice to sing,  
and raise, and raise its voice to sing.

Joy to the world!  
and may love reign;  
let all its songs employ,  
while fields and floods,  
rocks, hills and plains  
repeat the sounding joy,  
repeat the sounding joy,  
repeat, repeat, the sounding joy.

Love, rule the earth  
with truth and grace,  
your joyful message sound:  
join love with justice,  
and truth with compassion,  
far as all life is found,  
far as all life is found,  
far as, far as all life is found.

*Alt. Gretta Vosper, 2013*

## The Eight Points of Christmas (apologies to PCN)

Tune: The Twelve Days of Christmas

For the first Point of Christmas, my church decreed to me a tale taken literally.  
For the second Point of Christmas, my church described to me two on the road and a tale taken literally.  
For the third Point of Christmas, my church unwrapped for me three way-out gifts, two on the road and a tale taken literally.  
For the fourth Point of Christmas, my church revealed to me: forewarned by dreams, three way-out gifts, two on the road and a tale taken literally.  
For the fifth Point of Christmas, my church produced for me - three old kings!  
Forewarned by dreams, three presents, two on the road and a tale taken literally.  
For the sixth Point of Christmas, my church portrayed to me child genocide - three old kings!  
Forewarned by dreams, three presents, two on the road and a tale taken literally.  
For the seventh Point, my church said with pious purity: no sex required, child genocide - three old kings!  
Forewarned by dreams, three presents, two on the road and a tale taken literally.  
For the eighth Point of Christmas, my church declared to me: inn fully booked, no sex required, child genocide - three old kings!  
Forewarned by dreams, three presents, two on the road and a tale taken literally.

*[Tune now as from start]*

Now the whole point of Christmas (or so it seems to me) is love wrapped in allegory.  
So these points I have listed were never history:  
Inn fully booked, no sex required, child genocide - three old kings! Jesus he was born routinely to humanity; What a branch of our Family Tree!

*Chris Avis, October 2014*

## This Festive Time, Rejoice!

Tune: In Dulci Jubilo

This festive time, rejoice,  
with heart and soul and voice!  
Give you heed to what we say:  
News! News!  
Hopes and dreams arise and say:  
Love within can lead the way  
and can with us forever stay,  
Dreams are born today!  
Dreams are born today!

This festive time, rejoice,  
With heart and soul and voice!  
Hopes arise of peace and bliss:  
News! News!  
Every child was born for this.  
Love can open every door  
so all are blest forevermore.  
Joy is born today!  
Joy is born today!

This festive time, rejoice,  
With heart and soul and voice!  
Wondrous news we have to tell:  
Peace! Peace!  
Love in all is born to dwell.  
Born within, it outward grows  
and then to all the world, it flows.  
Love is born today!  
Love is born today!

*Alt. Gretta Vosper, 2007*

## Come Celebrate

Tune: Adeste Fideles

O come, raise your voices!  
Sing with joy and gladness!  
Sing of the marvel and the wonder we  
know!  
Born in the heart and shared the wide  
world over!  
Come, celebrate the story! (repeat x2)  
the story of love!

Through countless trials,  
In the bleakest hours,  
over the barriers that lay in their way,  
Millions have carried light into the  
darkness.  
We celebrate their stories! (repeat x2)  
the stories of love!

Wonder of wonders!  
Strength beyond all knowing:  
human compassion meeting needs in  
the world!  
Ours is the task to carry on this story -  
to celebrate the glory— (repeat x2)  
the glory of love!

*Scott Kearns, 2010*

More recasting of traditional hymns from  
Scott Kearns and Gretta Vosper can be  
found in 'Sing it Forward'

[www.grettavosper.ca/books/](http://www.grettavosper.ca/books/)