

# Progressive Voices



Dec 2020, PV35

# Finding God in the modern world

I cried out to God: “Where are you now God, the God I grew up with and now cannot find?”

I searched for you in the clouds and the rain, in the wind, in thunder and lightning, in rainbows, in the mighty oceans and rivers, in the movement of mountains and the roar of volcanoes, in the bewildering array of life on Earth, in beauty, in the night sky, in the very small, the very large, in the origin of things, in other people’s beliefs and faith experiences, but you were not there.

Where can I find you, the God of my youth? Do you still exist?”

Then God answered me thus: “My child, my friend, I am still here but in this age you may not find me where I have been found in the past. Do not search for me: In the clouds and the rain, lest all you find is water droplets of different sizes. In the wind, lest all you find is the result of pressure variations and the Coriolis effect. In thunder and lightning, lest all you find is electrical discharge, rapid plasma expansion and shockwaves. In rainbows, lest all you find is reflection, refraction, and dispersion of light in water droplets. In the mighty oceans and rivers, lest all you find is the natural movements of water, dissolved salts and the life these things support. In the movement of mountains and the roar of volcanoes, lest all you find is plate tectonics, subduction zones, uplift and rising magma. In the bewildering array of life on Earth, lest all you find is mutation and natural selection, a niche-filling struggle for survival, evolution. In beauty, lest all you find is a perception generated by biological chemistry and physics in response to sensory stimulation. In the night sky, lest all you find is dust, meteoroids, asteroids, comets, planets, stars, galaxies, black holes, “dark matter” and “dark energy”. In the very small, lest all you find is fundamental particles, wave-functions and quantum mechanics. In the very large, lest all you find is general relativity, an expanding universe and space-time continuum. In the origin of things, lest all you find is a singularity a “Big Bang” and perhaps the initiation of time itself with no “before”. In other people’s beliefs and faith experiences, lest all you find is untenable precepts, inconsistencies and ideas that you cannot accommodate in the light of your own experience and understanding.

Rather, search for me where lies that deep, unique, inner sense of self, that determines who you are and who you want to become, albeit played out in the physics and chemistry of your own biology.

Search here and you may find me as a loving parent, father or mother, or a loving friend, residing in a heaven created within you. Where my identity can be hallowed. Where my loving kingdom can be visualized. Where my loving will can be fulfilled. Where you can bring your concerns about all your needs and the needs of others, including those needs relating to bodily sustenance. Where forgiveness for your failings can be found, as well as the strength to forgive others. Where guidance may be found to help you avoid, and be delivered from, destructive and un-loving attitudes and actions. Where my rule over your life may be acknowledged. Where the power I can give you can be accepted. Where my presence can be valued and given glory, until time has no further relevance to you.

For you, living in this age, this is where I may be found. You do not need to call me “God” as people in ancient times first perceived me. Father, Mother or Friend will do.

Seek for me thus and you will find me. Then clouds and rain, wind, thunder and lightning, rainbows, mighty oceans and rivers, the movement of mountains and the roar of volcanoes, the bewildering array of life on Earth, beauty, the night sky, the very small, the very large, the origin of things, and other people’s beliefs and faith experiences will take on new meaning, meaning based on shared relationship rather than mere explanation.

Seek and you can still find me, for I am always with you, even in the modern age.”

Chris Vosper

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Your reflections, questions, events, poems, images, reviews, letters, comments, news, prayers and other contributions, are all welcome.

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# Welcome

Nothing is predictable anymore! (Please insert reference to US election, lockdown, or whatever else is out of control today.)

So back to an old chestnut, Christmas. There has been much said about wanting to celebrate this year, but where is the focus? It does seem to be on buying stuff and eating with family. If the gifts bring joy and not financial hardship, I don't disagree, but there's not much in there about celebrating that Jesus was born. Not actually on the 25th or as Matthew and/or Luke tell it, but just that he was born. He lived, taught, changed lives, and had a massive impact on humanity. That is worth celebrating. So is seeking to emulate his example and trying to do the same.

Welcome to the 35<sup>th</sup> edition of PV.  
Enjoy!

## Marcus Borg Memorial Lecture

Sat 9th October, 2021

The Church at Carrs Lane, Birmingham  
We are pleased to confirm that **Deshna Shine**, the former Executive Director of ProgressiveChristianity.org has agreed to give the fifth Marcus Borg Memorial Lecture. We will provide further details as they become available.



[www.equalitytrust.org.uk](http://www.equalitytrust.org.uk)

## Copy Deadlines:

**Mar: Friday 22nd Jan 2021**

June: Friday 30th April 2021

Sept: Friday 9th July 2021

Dec: Friday 5th Nov 2021

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# Chair's Letter

## A bleak mid-winter?

As I write this letter at the beginning of November and in the national lockdown in England, it seems uncertain as to whether churches, schools and many other settings will be allowed to host Christmas carol services in this pandemic year. One of the most popular of carols is that penned by Christina Rossetti, 'In the Bleak Mid-winter', a poem first published in 1872 and set to the music of Gustav Holst in 1906. The title of this carol does indeed seem fitting for a world which enters winter in the northern hemisphere with so many lives lost to Covid-19, where so many have experienced life-changing consequences of contracting the virus and where millions of our fellow citizens face hardship, unemployment and an uncertain future.

The first verse of the carol does indeed portray a bleak and frosty landscape, earth standing 'hard as iron'. But immediately in the second verse Rossetti contrasts the first and second coming of Christ, as the babe dependent on his mother's milk and then as the One who 'comes to reign'. Whilst there are references to angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim bearing witness to this mysterious incarnation of the divine into human life, it is the final verse which calls upon us to respond to the love of God seen in the person of Jesus. What can we give him, whether we be rich or poor? The answer is simple and profound – give our heart.

Whilst many of us find the need to demythologise so much of the birth narratives and suspend some of our intellectual enquiries as we sing Christmas carols, nevertheless I find in this carol by Rossetti a poignant invitation to share with all humanity a 'hatching of the heart', a phrase often used by Marcus Borg.

In this bleakest of years there have been countless examples of how people have opened up their hearts in love and compassion to those in need. Recently my 103 year old mother found herself in hospital with serious illness, which resulted in having a pacemaker fitted. The Northern General Hospital in Sheffield had, at the time, over 300 patients seriously ill with Covid. No relatives were allowed into the hospital but the doctors and nurses could not have been more caring for my dear old mother. There was a sense of calm, a deep concern to do their best for this old lady. And now she has been discharged to our care.

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In this year we have come to appreciate more than ever the love and skills of all NHS and care home staff. And we can all think of so many examples of community action such as food deliveries, which have given us hope and faith in humanity.

And as I write this letter, today, November 9th, news has just come through about a possible successful vaccine which may be rolled out in the New Year. In that new year of 2021, the most powerful nation on earth will also see the inauguration of a new President of the USA. Joe Biden seems to be a man of deep compassion, born out of his own family losses. A man wishing to heal division, to reach out to those who did not elect him to this high office.

This Christmas I do hope that we can sing that last verse of the carol convinced that in the hatching of our hearts we help in our own small ways to heal the broken-hearted and to seek for peace.

If that vaccine proves to be effective it will also mean that we can gather again in our groups, in our conferences and in so many other ways to enjoy each other's company and to affirm that in the life of Jesus of Nazareth we find encouragement to live and to love in ways which indeed transform the bleakest of winters into the loveliest of Spring.

May all our PCN members find encouragement and hope this Christmas.



# Another Side

## Another Side to Christmas

There is another side to Christmas,  
Unwrap the layers  
Of Santa Claus and sparkling trees,  
Sugary treats and sleigh-ride snow scenes,  
And you find a story,  
A couple caught up in miracles  
And the birth of a child.

There is another side to Christmas,  
Unwrap the layers  
Of singing angels and shining stars,  
Shepherds with their sheep and a sweetly sleeping  
baby,  
And you find a story  
Of long, aching journeys,  
Rejection, poverty and escape from violence,  
And a refugee child.

There is another side to Christmas,  
Unwrap the many, multi-coloured layers,  
Of presents and persecutions,  
Conflicts and carol singing,  
Compassion and consumer indulgence,  
The mix that is Christmas,  
In the mix of a world  
Where God steps down  
To become a child.  
bring you to my side.

Ann Bulley

## MEMBERSHIP

PCN Britain has charitable status, and we depend wholly on members for funding. Membership is for all who value an open, progressive and theologically radical voice, and want to maintain and promote that generous understanding of faith.

**£30 (£15 for limited income)**

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**01594 516528**

[www.pcnbritain.org.uk/membership](http://www.pcnbritain.org.uk/membership)

# Advent affirmation

By faith, Mary let go of fear, and engendered a mothering God.

*This faith may lead us through labyrinths of doubt, laughing hysterically, shouting in protest, lurching in denial, finally making it to our foundation, our place in the world, our home.*

By faith, Joseph took comfort from a dream, embracing complex, reconstituted, extended family relationships.

*This faith might reshape our preconceptions, birthing new ways of being inclusive, hospitable, connected family.*

By faith, wise ones followed the path of a new star to a strange land, to an undistinguished stable.

*This faith might sometimes lead us down unpaved tracks, with people we don't recognise, to destinations we didn't plan.*

Faith is the opposite of belief:

*a bright-side-up coin whose shadow-side is hope.*

Faith is relationship and way of life:

*caring for orphans and widows, casting out demons of self-doubt and despair, and occasionally raising the dead.*

This is our faith:

*Living as if we matter.*

Living with uncertainty yet acting with confidence, walking the star-led spiral to the heart of everything:

*God in us, now - and here.*

**Bronwyn Angela White**

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## Galilee Course

Online via Zoom

Free and open to all

**8-9.30pm, Mon 11 Jan - 1 Mar**

The Galilee Course is an introduction to Christianity created by the Rev Tim Yeager, an Anglican priest and PCN member, as a progressive alternative to Alpha.

Each of the 8 weekly sessions features an illustrated talk using Power Point, small group discussion, and a Q&A session. Participants may attend any or all of the sessions.

**07804 614245** [ryeager@gmail.com](mailto:ryeager@gmail.com)

# I too, am C of E

I was in a conversation with a parish group and a white participant remarked: 'Black people can go to black churches. Why do we have to change our church? If they are happy where they are, why can't we be happy with where we are?'

His response was limited and landlocked. It was limited in that there was an assumption that all black people were Pentecostal, felt comfortable at 'black churches' and desired emotion, and to be in motion. The opposite assumption was that all white people only desired stillness and a form of cerebral stimulation. Not only did the comment stereotype, it highlighted the reluctance to take a deeper look at the experience of black people within the Church of England. It was also a severe theological failure of an understanding of what church was actually meant to be. At best, his understanding was that church was a form of streaming ethnicities, and at worst it exposed unacknowledged segregationist tendencies. His view was landlocked in that it failed to understand the global nature of Anglicanism.

In 2015 there was a scheme within the Church of England called 'I too, am C of E' it was an attempt to demonstrate to General Synod that black and brown people should not have to fight to be seen and heard. It was the Anglican version of the 'I, too, am Harvard' and 'I too, am Oxford' campaigns. The question has to be asked, if the thing we are attempting to break into, is breaking us, is it worth it? Then I see the generations of black and brown lives who have acted as human spades breaking up the hard ground of cold hard racism as it blunted and dented them. Is it just my turn? Might there be some treasure to be found? This is something of my story of belonging to the Church of England.

Saint Thomas Lowland was the parish church of my mother and father, founded in 1643 it was the first Anglican church in the West Indies. My maternal grandmother was organist and choir director there, and my paternal grandfather was local primary school master and lay reader.

Let me take you back in time. The church sat perched on the hill, basking in the glory of Nevis' mid-morning Sunday sun. I was fifteen-years-old and was hot in my suit. My mother was by my side as we climbed. I knew my father was inside the church and would be wearing white robes as server and chalice bearer. As we ascended the hill, my mother was acknowledged with smiles, nods and double takes. This was my second trip to Nevis. Mother and father's love had dimmed to friendship after I was born and they were no longer together except through me.

Standing outside Saint Thomas church as a fifteen-year-old I was about to meet my father again. He and I had had a relationship based on letters but we



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had not seen one another in all those years since my first trip. Mother and I took our seats and the service began. At the Eucharist I went forward and knelt. My father held the cup to my lips, said my name, and lingered long enough for me to know that we were no longer strangers. An unacknowledged gulf in me began to heal.

I am now an Anglican priest based in Manchester, I am working with a church in a very diverse area. When I share the story of Saint Thomas Lowland I point out that its history and legacy includes me and validates my vocation and place. Those without history have no future.

My parents have now risen in glory. However, their experience at Saint Thomas Lowland has informed and shaped my identity and legitimacy as a priest. I wrote *Ghost Ship* in part to say that black and brown people belong to God's Church. It should be a place where fathers and sons are reconciled and where black teenage boys find a sense of identity. It should be a place where the separated are brought together around the communion table. God's Church should be a place where mothers can see their children become loved and valued adults, ready to take their place in the world.



# A Theology of Water

Have you ever heard of a theology of water? I guess it is an unfamiliar question. A theology of water is one of a group of ecological theologies which deal with relationships between God, humanity and the earth. It examines the references to water in the Bible and their respective interpretations, and relates these to doctrines such as creation and salvation.

We know that no one can live without water. Water is a fundamental resource for all living beings on earth. It exists everywhere in different forms: solid, liquid, and gas. Thus, a variety of waters circulate and affect one another. These flows of water represent the interconnections between all living beings and the earth. However, unpredictable weather causes various different water crises – for example, extreme drought and flood – which have become one of the most severe global issues facing the whole world.

Drought and flood are not only issues for the 21st century. Extreme weather has affected a number of creatures and places since ancient times. In the Bible, conventionally, drought and flood are portrayed as a test or punishment. Drought is described as a contrast to flourishing. During the exodus out from a life of slavery in Egypt, through the Red Sea and into the Sinai Desert, the Israelites suffered from thirst and drought. In Genesis 7, the Lord wants to destroy all living beings on Earth through flood. If we focus on the relationship between sin and punishment, both the story of the Israelites in the wilderness and Noah's story in the flood are examples of this.

However, these interpretations do not provide a full understanding of these texts. We have to be concerned about what follows each of these events. Drought and flood then become a midway step towards blessings and new life. It is necessary to think about how we handle suffering and unpredictable situations. In addition, faith in Immanuel on earth should be remembered.

Water is physically important to all living beings. In the context of the Bible, water is significant to all; therefore, water is a resource for hospitality to guests (Gn 18:4; 43:24). Water is a fundamental resource, not only for human beings but also for all creatures (Gn 29:7-10). In addition, rain, a different form of water, is regarded as a blessing after drought or thirst (Zec 10:1; Ps 72:6).

In particular, a well which provides water to local people/living beings contains a wide variety of meanings. Wells of spring water show blessings from God. A well is the place where people store



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water from the land and the sky, and then drink it. Sometimes a well is a place of conflict because some people want to have more water than others. A well is particularly a familiar place to women; this is because most women in the Bible draw water from wells for their families. That means a well is an active place which provides spring water for living beings to sustain their lives.



However, the Bible contrasts this physical 'spring' water against 'spiritual' water. Spiritual water is physical water which has a spiritual characteristic, use and/or meaning. For example, in John 4 (Jesus' meeting with the Samaritan woman) Jesus introduces the idea of spiritual water which can be interpreted as salvation. Jesus provides the water of life in a spiritual way. This spiritual water is closely related to baptism. In baptism, water is an important resource. Spiritual water cleans people's sins and allows them to be anointed by the Lord. Spiritual water is also described as a river of the water of life in the book of Revelation (Rev 22:1).

In short, in Christianity water is important in both a physical and a spiritual way. Developing a theology of water will allow us to continue to discern the valuable meaning of the Bible and deepen our understanding and portrayal of the doctrines of creation and salvation. This work will also help us to work towards water justice in the 21st century and thereby facilitate new opportunities for ecumenical collaboration.

# Christianity Expanding

Big pictures need a framework to hold them. The framework that held Christianity for 1500 years was the medieval worldview of God as a supreme being who was in charge of our fate and the occurrences that happened in our daily life. If the crops were good, God was pleased with us. If we won a war, God was on our side. If there was a flood, God was punishing us. It was a simple, graspable, understandable concept when the vast majority of humanity were uneducated and illiterate. This framework retained power in the hands of the few: the leaders, the priests, the religious hierarchy. But along came the Reformation in the 16th Century and then the Enlightenment in the 17th. This influx of creative energy brought the printing press, new scientific understanding, education and a huge challenge to the medieval viewpoint. For the last 500 years, this has been working out in society, with huge upheavals, revolutions and developments. Science has taken over from religious dogma, and has developed its own dogma of scientific materialism. Technology has advanced by leaps and bounds to the stage of world domination. Astronomy has emerged from and eclipsed astrology. Christianity has stuck, largely, to its medieval framework. This still works for some, who remain in the churches, defending the sandcastle on the beach against the incoming tide. And there are many parts of the world where the medieval worldview still exists, along with the feudal system, and Christianity flourishes there.

But for those of us who have woken up to the pulsating energetic universe, with all its size and utter complexity, we need a bigger framework. Christian theology has to have a larger cosmology in which it can

begin to explore new meanings and paths in order to make sense of the future of humanity. Science is now telling us that everything is energetically interconnected in a whole, holographic universe. We are One with a Whole that is so vast, so complex, so far beyond our understanding

Don MacGregor

## Christianity Expanding

— Into Universal Spirituality



The Wisdom Series **Book 1**



**Don MacGregor** is a retired vicar and author of “Christianity Expanding: Into Universal Spirituality” (Christian Alternatives, 2020)

that we find it difficult to believe that this One Life, this One Consciousness could concern itself with us. But we are part of that One Consciousness. Our minds are part of the Great Mind. Our very form, our bodies, our emotions, our thoughts are part of that Whole. We are individually held in being as drops within the ocean of God.

That is the bigger framework that I believe Christianity, and all other religious beliefs and spiritualities, are moving into, slowly and haltingly. The framework has been held down through the centuries by a tradition that goes by a number of names – the Perennial Philosophy, the Ageless Wisdom, Esoteric Philosophy. Strands of it can be traced back to the Greek philosophers, to the early Hindu texts, to the Egyptian mystery religions. It is there in the Jewish Kaballah and the writings of the Christian mystics. It is esoteric in that it has been veiled, hidden within the traditions, like an underground stream of living water flowing until it emerges from the rock. Revd Dr. Cynthia Bourgeault describes it nicely in the introduction to her book “The Wisdom Way of Knowing.”

*“When I use the term Wisdom, I am designating a precise and comprehensive science of spiritual transformation that has existed since the headwaters of the great world religions and is in fact their common ground... The Wisdom cosmology is bold, spacious and remarkably contemporary... It’s remarkable how, no matter what spiritual path you pursue, the nuts and bolts of transformation end up looking pretty much the same; surrender, detachment, compassion, forgiveness. Whether you are a Christian, a Buddhist, a Jew, a Sufi, or a sannyasin, you will still go through the same eye of the needle to get where your true heart lies... “*

In a series of books, I plan to explore the application of this larger cosmology to Christianity. In this first book, I am setting the scene for further writing to enlarge the exploration. It is set out in six short chapters, each one setting out something of the challenge to traditional Christian doctrine and theology that developed in the first thousand years after Jesus the Christ walked the land. At the end of each chapter are questions for reflection, a practice to try out, and recommended books and websites for further study.

# Wealth, Property and Debate

The following are three brief reflections on Jesus' teaching and how the early Church lived it out.

## Jesus and the widow in the Temple

The wealth of churches, coupled with grinding poverty of those living near has offended many. Did Jesus approve of very poor people giving to the Temple all they had to live on?

Of course being able to contribute something, however small, makes people feel part of a project, it means that they can share in the planning and aims and in judging the result. But there are limits. If you read Mark 12 and verses 41-44, which are given a paragraph to themselves in the NRSV, you could get the impression that Jesus approved of the generous action of the widow, while he deplored the self-satisfaction of the wealthy. However, if remembering that paragraphs and chapters were introduced long after the gospel was written, you read from v.38, or even 28, then on to 13.2, the impression changes. First, the law of love is affirmed, then Jesus is appalled by lawyers who overcharge widows. Next he goes to the Temple, God's dwelling place where God's care for widows and orphans is to be expressed. He is moved by the gift of the widow, but that doesn't mean that he approves that she had given 'everything she had, all she had to live on'. The following verses give some indication of his feelings as he leaves the Temple and prophesies that it is about to collapse.

The paragraph break should come here, before Jesus and the disciples move to another site and other topics. But the shorter version is more familiar. Why?

## Fund Raising in Acts 5.1

At this point Peter appears in confident control. The church is led by the apostles; it is ambitious and wants to expand. Converts have come and are sharing their lives in communes. They sell all they possess. Barnabas sells his field and lays all the proceeds at the disciples' feet.

Others follow his example. Ananias and his wife Sapphira have also sold a field but secretly kept some of the money for themselves. After all, who knows how this way of living will turn out? Ananias goes to the group meeting and Peter uses strong, even abusive, language to reveal that he and the group know all about the deceit. Ananias, says Peter, has been 'led by Satan' to lie to the Holy Spirit - moreover he has lied to God. Ananias has a cardiac arrest and dies. With no more ado, the young men are told to wrap him up and bury him. Three hours later Sapphira arrives. In coercive tones, Peter attacks her for the lie. He invokes the



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'Spirit of the Lord', and tells her that husband is dead and buried. Not entirely surprisingly, she drops down dead too. The young men know what to do.

Rather unnecessarily, the account tells us that great fear fell on the whole church. I can't think of any comparable story in the Hebrew Scriptures, or in the gospels. The Holy Spirit is said to lead us into all truth, but not, surely, to terrify the wits out of us.

## John Mark has had enough, it seems

John Mark has appeared in Acts 11, his mother Mary seems to have had a house church in Judea and may well have known Jesus. His next appearance is in 12.25 when Paul and Barnabas, having completed a mission in Syrian Antioch, travel to Jerusalem and bring John Mark with them.

In Acts 13 Paul and Barnabas are directed by the Holy Spirit to go on a journey to preach to new groups and John Mark went with them as a 'helper'. They sailed to Cyprus, they travelled (walked) the length of Cyprus to Paphos. They met Bar-Jesus, a Jew, called in the account 'a magician or false prophet'. He seems to have introduced them to Sergius Paulus, the pro-consul, 'an intelligent man'. As Paul preached Bar-Jesus interrupted him, presumably questioning what Paul was saying. Paul, 'full of the Holy Spirit', looked at him intensely, gave him a string of abuse and struck him (temporarily) blind. Not entirely surprisingly, Sergius Paulus was astonished into belief. (There is then a paragraph break in NRSV, but not in the AV.)

Paul, Barnabas and John Mark sail over to the mainland. At this point, John Mark left them. That is the only indication we have of the young man's opinion of what happened. He may have been glad to get away and get a boat home. He may have remembered stories from his mother about Jesus opening the eyes of the blind, but not much about blinding his opponents. Once again, the Holy Spirit is credited - or falsely blamed - for the incident.

Barnabas' point of view is hinted at in 15.36. Paul wants to revisit some of the places he has preached. Barnabas wants to take John Mark, Paul refuses. So Barnabas won't go with Paul, he takes John Mark and revisits Cyprus with him.

Fortunately Luke shows that both leaders became less alarmed by opposition, even when irritated by immature baptised learners.

# Humble Glory

'Glory to God in the highest' –  
the terrifying experience of those unnamed  
shepherds.  
Wealthy, educated wise men from the East  
observed awesome glory in the heavens,  
beckoning them on a mystifying journey,  
but becoming such a threat to Herod's self-centred  
glory  
that for the Holy Family – a night-time flight  
and death for little boys in anguish-filled Bethlehem.

But this challenge was not to the glory of human  
might, majesty, dominion, power and wealth,  
not to any of the usual trappings  
which accompany earthly glory.  
Here was a new kind of glory,  
equally unmistakable,  
evoking awe, wonder, silence -  
a sense of God's very presence among us.

The shepherds joyfully shared their experience,  
and Mary treasured their sayings, pondering what it  
all might mean. .

The wise men presented valuable gifts,  
each with a different kind of significance.  
Gold for kingship, (though not of this world).  
Frankincense for the indefinable, unconfined  
depths of spirituality about to be revealed.  
Myrrh indicating the costly suffering which lay  
ahead.  
Strange gifts for a baby,  
but so appropriate in the end.

Wise old Simeon,  
recognising something of humble glory,  
foresaw in the eyes of this vulnerable child,  
that this glory would bring  
not only enlightenment to the Gentiles,  
glory to Israel,  
but a sword into Mary's heart.  
And so it has been,  
then and since.

Attempts during Jesus' life  
to glorify him in human terms,  
he resisted and rejected during a soul-wrenching  
time of temptations in the wilderness,  
avoided after crowd-gathering healings and story-  
tellings.

He chose to move on to other places

rather than revelling in earthly glory,  
seeking God-filled strength in solitary prayer,  
leading inexorably to a crown of thorns  
and the 'throne' of a cross.  
Humble glory indeed.

But that was not the end of the story or the glory,  
for God's strength, wisdom and ways  
are not those of the world.  
No dramatic overthrow of Roman or other earthly  
glory  
but the unquenchable wind and fire of the Spirit,  
going where it will,  
then and since,  
with the mystery of the resurrection  
spreading this humble, love-filled glory far and wide.

Humans still try to clothe this heavenly power  
in the trappings of earthly glory,  
to define it in dogma,  
confine it in churches,  
in glorious cathedrals,  
in pomp and circumstance,  
in human greatness and domination.

But God moves on, as ever,  
then and since  
in humble glory,  
reflected from that great light of transcendent love,  
glimpsed in human eyes,  
new-born and in death,  
in humble circumstances,  
in poverty and humility,  
in dire circumstances.  
Unmistakable,  
never to be forgotten,  
life-changing,  
deepening our faith,  
transforming us towards wholeness  
as we too, live out this humble glory in our needy  
world.

Like those shepherds and wise men,  
we too have seen his glory  
and have come, not only to worship,  
but to commit ourselves to God's paradoxical, life-  
changing humble glory.

Ros Murphy

# White Privilege

The killing of George Floyd in America has reignited a debate in this country about racism and the cultural legacy that is sometimes called white privilege.

According to my dictionary, a privilege is a benefit enjoyed by an individual or group beyond what's available to others. The renunciation of privilege used to be one of PCN's eight points. It was the old 8: "We recognise that being followers of Jesus is costly, and entails selfless love, conscientious resistance to evil, and renunciation of privilege."

In 2014, following a lengthy consultation with members and groups, the phrase 'renunciation of privilege' was dropped from the new version, along with the notion of costliness. The old 8 is now represented by the new 3:

*"We recognise that following Jesus leads us to act with compassion and to confront evil."*

I've been looking back through the consultation of 2014 to discover why the phrase 'renunciation of privilege' was dropped. I discovered that over 30 people expressed dissatisfaction with its inclusion. The general feeling seemed to be that it was unrealistic and perhaps too much to ask. Race was not mentioned. This comment sums up the general feeling:

*"We are all privileged in the western world so will we really renounce all that we have inherited?"*

Not long ago, I attended a wedding between two white friends. The couple had grown-up children from previous marriages. At the reception the children, along with their partners, were deployed to take round trays of food cooked by the bride. As it happens her daughter was married to a black doctor. After a few minutes he returned to the kitchen with his tray asking to be excused from the task since the guests appeared to feel awkward in his company and he had no wish to cause further discomfort.

In Britain it is not unusual for black people to encounter awkwardness and also condescension from white people. And while both parties may feel the discomfort, the effort of navigating the situation almost always falls on the black person. That, at least, is the conclusion of a book called *White Fragility* by an American author, Robin DiAngelo. In this case the black son-in-law removed himself because he was discomforting the white guests. The guests remained comfortable in their white bubble, untroubled by the impact of their attitude towards the young black man.

DiAngelo reminds us that when white people attend a job interview they don't have to worry whether their skin colour might count against them. They can send their children to school without worrying that



**Andy Vivian** is the former PCN Britain administrator, leads the Gloucestershire PCN group, and is a Quaker.

the teachers will think they are dim because of their skin colour. White people can walk into a staffroom, lecture hall, hotel or courtroom and no one is going to assume they are there to do the cleaning, serve the tea or answer charges. Black people don't enjoy this privilege, as the widely reported case of Alexandra Wilson demonstrates. She is the black barrister who was mistaken for a defendant three times on the same day in September 2020 by different officials at an unnamed magistrates' court in England. (Why wasn't the court named – protecting white blushes perhaps?)

DiAngelo makes the point that stereotyping people in a different group to our own is normal and unavoidable. She says it is not a question of blame and shame because the attitudes which inform racial dynamics are instilled into us as children. They are part of our cultural inheritance. What matters is whether white people will take the trouble to examine their bias and try to overcome the barriers it perpetuates.

Were we too hasty when we removed the renunciation of privilege from our eight points? Some said at the time that acknowledgement of privilege would feel more appropriate. This is a fair point but will it get us where we need to be on white privilege? I think DiAngelo is right to call us to interrupt white privilege.

DiAngelo ends her book by outlining a number of actions that white people can take to try to *interrupt* white privilege and overcome prejudice. Here are four of them:

1. Do your homework, educate yourself and be prepared to be taken outside your comfort zone. (For a British viewpoint you could try "Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People about Race", by Reni Eddo-Lodge)
2. Seek out cross-racial relationships if you don't currently enjoy any.
3. If you have been acting on racist assumptions be prepared to return to the situation and to the people involved.
4. If you come across racism be prepared to call it out – not to change the other person, but do it for your own integrity.

# Spiritual Styles

I'm fascinated by personality indicator tests, like Myers-Briggs or the Enneagram, but a while ago I read about a new system - Spiritual Styles. (International Journal of Children's Spirituality, Issue 3 August 2009, p.213–224) This was arrived at following some research with three small groups of children taking part in 'Sunday school'. The researcher, David Csinos, was interested in how the physical environment affected children's spiritual awareness. Csinos was supervised by Joyce Bellous, who was already working in this area, and together they used his research data to arrive at the system that they called Spiritual Styles.

There are four styles, named Word, Emotion, Symbol and Action. It is important to note that we are each a blend, but usually one dominates. To know your personal balance, you need to answer their questionnaire, but the critical thing is that these styles have no pecking order. Each is equally valid and important, but knowing which predominates can be enormously helpful in understanding how I work, and how you work, differently but both equally valid.

Traits within people who favour the Word style:

- Word and accuracy are more important than aesthetics. Are less concerned with the immediate environment or what something looks like. They focus in on the spoken or written word and will correct it to make the most fluent version.
- When the words are right, the world makes sense. They may ask people to explain themselves or be careful in the words they choose to employ.
- Ethical living is of great significance. Emotion may not be understood as relevant to truth. Word people are good at ethics and can see through to the nub of a problem by analysis.
- Extreme cases don't recognise that thinking and feeling work together. Sometimes Word people can seem abrasive to other Styles as they can be direct in their language.
- Their contribution to society is understood to come from intellectual wealth. Word people work hard to be as well educated as they can be, and value formal education highly.
- Could be described as 'left brain' thinkers.

Word people within the Church bring an ability to rationalise debate and to cut through emotive language. They contribute to the ongoing development of Theology, often at a high level, and are very helpful at committee work. Word children for example will often be found with a book or working hard to hone the language of a prayer they are writing. Word adults are often found in such fields as law or accountancy, and on senior committees within a church structure. They tend to choose churches who prioritise scripture.



**Ronni Lamont** is Canterbury diocese Faith and Nurture adviser and author of 'Faith in Children' (Lion Hudson, 2020)

Traits within people who favour the Emotion style:

- Compassionate, relational people. Emotion style people are 'People people' and relate well to others. They may have a well-developed intuition.
- They use language to express feelings rather than facts, which can present problems for Word style people. Their vocabulary may be used in a very different manner, expecting others to intuit their full meaning as well as the spoken meaning.
- Often charismatic leaders, Emotion people may refuse to be accountable for the hold they have over their peers. They don't always recognise how powerful they are, assuming that everyone could be that powerful too - if they actually consider this. In our context, these children may have a close set of friends over whom they unconsciously wield enormous influence.
- Decisions may be made following hunches, thus steering a group towards possible harm. Emotion people aren't usually as thorough or systematic in their decision making as Word people, so they may 'jump' rather than consider.
- They will often clash with Word. This is not deliberate, but a reflection that the two styles think in very different ways and so can find that their language is causing the problem, not the motivation behind the words. They can feel insecure in a group which is predominantly Word.
- Could be described as 'right brain' thinkers.

Emotion people bring to the church an ability to worship through visual and performance arts, as well as powerful oratory. Thus Emotion children and young people are often keen to be involved in presenting dramas as sermons, or dance or using flags in worship. Emotion people love singing as part of a larger group, so these children and young people may join choirs. Classically, they find sermons almost impossible to journey with, getting distracted in the process, and may find the 'best bit' of a service the coffee and fellowship at the end. They will be found in any church, as they have the ability to screen out the parts of worship that they don't access, and 'go off at a tangent' according to what is happening.

Traits within people who favour the Symbol style:

- This person withdraws from trying to express outwardly what is perceived inwardly. Symbol people may not want to join in with debate, but to

listen and observe.

- Life is a mystery, more felt than spoken. This means Symbol people find liturgy too wordy, and may prefer to be silent, taking in stillness and pausing while others may want to move on.
- Their spirituality combines emotion, symbol, solitude, ritual and 'the music of the spheres'. They may have a strong attraction to less well-defined traditions, or to those that have a high aesthetic such as Orthodox or Roman Catholic.
- They aim to form a connection with the world that doesn't need to be expressed through words.
- Symbol people may live in quiet and isolation.
- Symbol people love to be outside, in nature. They will often experience 'awe and wonder', stopping to gaze at the sky or their environment.

Symbol people bring a sense of innate spirituality to the church. While they find group work more challenging than Word or Emotion people, they offer a different perspective on worship. How well they communicate with the other styles will depend on whether their Word or Emotion element is more present. Symbol people are not naturals in the church context, preferring to be out in nature to connect with God, walking in silence, or even gardening. Recent moves such as 'Walking church' or 'Forest/ Wild Church' cater well for Symbol style people. Traditionally they are found within Quaker meetings, or high Anglo Catholic churches, where 'bells and smells' give a special aesthetic.

Traits within people who favour the Action style:

- The overriding attitude is 'what one does, not what one says'. Thus value is given to others through what they actually give to the world, and Action people can be very perceptive in seeing through posturing by others.
- They have a strong desire for justice, acting for world changing conditions. Action people work to change life for the better whenever they can, and this may significantly affect their choices.
- Single minded, passionate, observant and impatient for change, Action people can be direct, and can get frustrated when other people can't understand or come alongside them in their impatience for change.
- Sometimes unable to express their needs through language, Action people may experience great frustration when thwarted.

Without Action people within our worshipping communities, nothing would get done! Action people drive the church forward and can be seen in many areas of Christian life volunteering and slowly bringing about change. Our Action children and young people are the ones who organise charitable events and get involved in them. They may well work for NGOs when they grow up or get involved in politics. They run our food banks, are Street Pastors

and may volunteer for organisations like the CAB. Action children and young people mean that we can never just 'tell a story', we always need to wonder together what the story means for us today - how does it challenge us, how does it impact upon our lives?

Traditionally

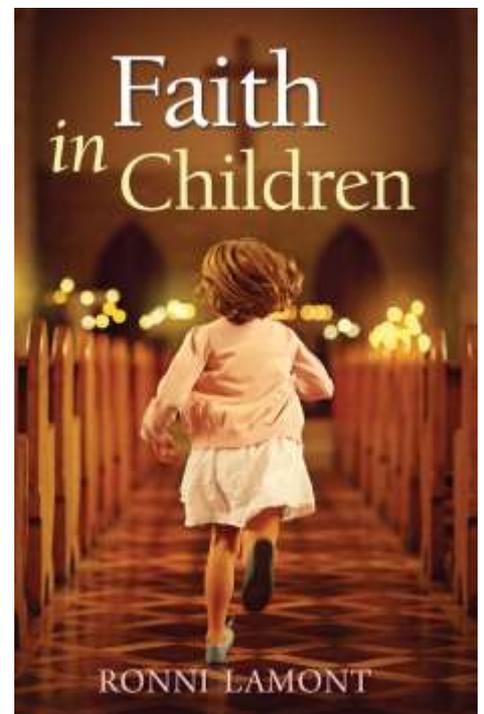
Action people would choose a socially active church such as the Salvation Army.

The implications of Spiritual Styles:

I believe that there is little or no correlation between the Styles and any other personality indicator that I have come across. For example, Active learners are not necessarily Action Spiritual Style. Extroversion/Introversion figures across all four styles, although many Symbol people are more introverted in my experience. Other factors on the MBTI or the Enneagram do not feature strongly in one Style - it would seem to be something entirely different.

It is in group work that the Spiritual Styles can be most evident, in tensions when miscommunication arises, albeit without intent. Think about those groups when one or two people just don't 'get' what's going on - could that be due to their style? Or how about when you have an explosive argument within the group - is that two styles clashing? If it is, it's often Word and Emotion. Do you have someone who seems to exist in a different world to the others? They may be Symbol and needing reassurance that they're fine. If the person in charge of your worshipping community is Word, as they often are, they may be better at strategy and management than people skills - the trick is to make sure you also have an Emotion person working with them to form a balance. If you work with children and young people, chances are your predominant style is either Emotion or Action, which makes absolute sense if you think about it. Preachers are often Word, and story tellers Emotion or Symbol.

We all 'hear' people from within our own Style and find those of other styles more difficult- and that is why having an awareness of Spiritual Styles will help us all navigate sessions more successfully, with more positive outcomes.



# Kabbalah and Healing

When my first husband, Henry, was given a diagnosis of metastatic melanoma back in 1989, and we were both reeling with the shock, I went to the Bible that we had been given on our wedding day and opened it at random. I was asking for a sign from God and my finger fell on a line from Psalm 118, "I shall not die; instead I shall live to praise the Lord my God." Of course, I interpreted it that Henry wouldn't die, but it meant me. I would not die from this time of trauma, rather I would be shaken out of my lifetime of being an armchair Christian and start to discover what I truly believed. It didn't mean that there wouldn't be a barrow-load of crud to get through first.

Move the story on by a decade and my second husband and I had just broken up. He unadvisedly told me that it was all for my good and that I'd thank him eventually. He was absolutely right but, at that specific time, it felt a tad tactless and I was very sore. I went up to Birmingham to stay with my mum and we went to Evensong at the church where Henry's ashes had been buried. I remember standing by his grave before the service and thinking, "This is the second time my world has been destroyed." Then I went into the church, opened my hymn book and a sheaf of paper fell out. It was the 118th Psalm with a sentence underlined. Which line? "I shall not die, instead I shall live to praise the Lord my God."

Another decade passed and I was diagnosed with follicular Non-Hodgkins Lymphoma, a medically-incurable blood cancer. I went on retreat to the Poor Clare's Monastery in north Devon for much-needed time for myself to meditate and pray. I was able to join with the nuns in daily worship and at 5.30 each morning I went to Choir for the morning Angelus followed by Lauds. It's a magical time. "I will awaken the dawn with praise," sings Psalm 108 and this feels like the most ancient of ceremonies, perhaps even similar to the Egyptian Pharaohs calling the sun to rise again.

One of the sisters was Swedish and I had noticed that she sometimes sang verses of the liturgy out of order. On my very last morning there, it was her turn to sing. She sang one particular line and the rest of the nuns stopped dead because it was the "wrong" line. They started again at the beginning of that psalm. Which one? Psalm 118. Which line did the sister sing out of turn? "I shall not die, instead I shall live to praise the Lord my God." I finally realized that it was time to start listening to what God had been trying to yell in my ear all along.

It's fair to say that there were many days after that which had an anoraked, hatted, gloved and fearsome Maggy stomping her way across Dartmoor in wind and rain yelling "I shall not effing



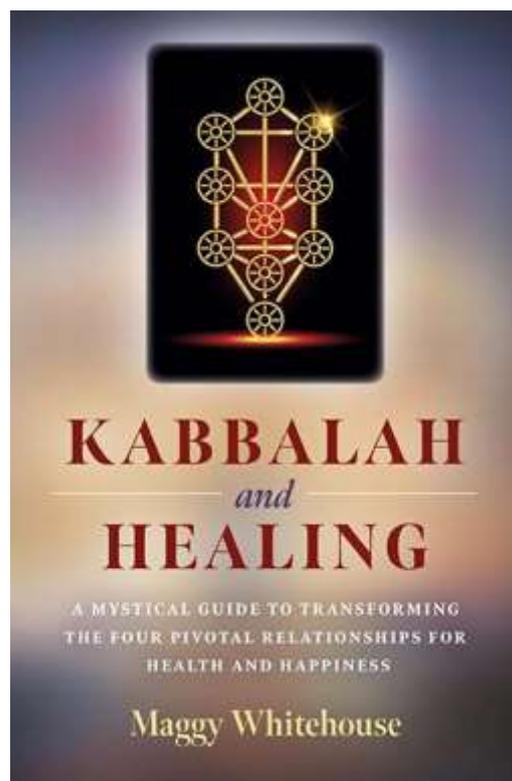
**Maggy Whitehouse** is an independent sacramental minister, stand-up comedian and author on Kabbalah and prosperity.

die! I shall effing live to effing praise the Lord my God!" but every time I did that, I would start laughing and that was the best part about it. Because I had finally healed what I call the first relationship. God laughed with me. Not at me, or about me, but with me, and we walked hand-in-hand on the whole journey from there.

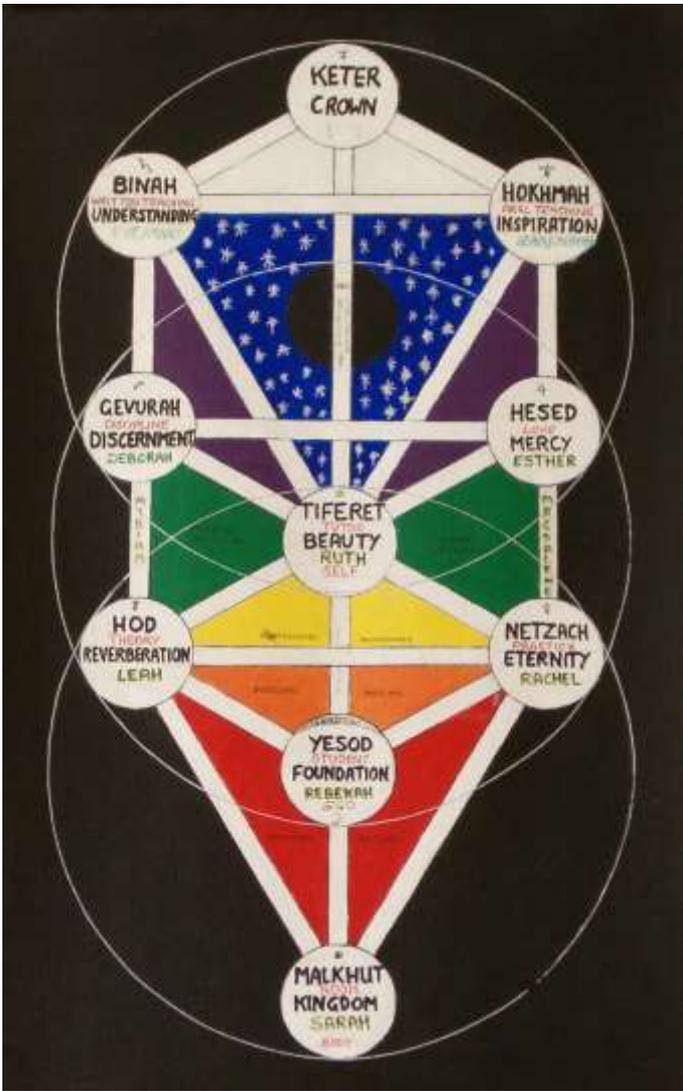
My book comes from a combination of what I learnt during those years with cancer and my studies of the Judaeo-Christian mystical tradition of Kabbalah. In chapter sixteen I have included some more of my own healing journey.

But first things first – I'm not Jewish and I'm a woman. For many folk both of these are no-no's from the start when it comes to Kabbalah. An orthodox Jew will tell you that Kabbalah may only be studied by a man over the age of 40. In addition to that, I may be thought to be simplifying a complex ancient tradition which requires you to be able to read and understand Hebrew texts before you even start. My response is that neither of these views are supported by the true nature of Kabbalah.

Kabbalah is the Hebrew word for "receive." It is an oral tradition which updates for all times. This is the whole point – that it is a system intended to work for all peoples in all ages. The tradition is held true to



itself by adherence to its scaffolding, the diagrams known as the Tree of Life and Jacob's Ladder. These are what prevent this perennial wisdom teaching from becoming mere Chinese Whispers. For many



years Kabbalah was studied in secret (it is the root of the word Cabal which is associated with intrigue and secrecy) but in the 21st century, the cat is well and truly out of the bag for better or for worse, with all kinds of groups and societies - both good and maybe not-so-good - studying and teaching Kabbalah worldwide. Of course, most of the groups are claiming that all the others are wrong, which is how the human ego works. They are not all wrong; they are just different styles on the same clothes horse. If you like stripes you'll go for one, if you like spots, you'll go for another.

There are many books about Kabbalah and many groups studying it and, if you are interested, you will find the one that suits you, with the nuances, the Biblical adherence – or not – and the beliefs of its author. But you should also find that the Tree of Life is always present. If it isn't, then the house is built without scaffolding.

Scaffolding is like a skeleton. It's pretty similar for all mammals, just that some of us have tails that show and some don't, some of us walk upright and some don't. As humans, we can be black, white, brown, orange, gay, straight, transgender – whatever - we're built on the same scaffolding. We are all children of the same God because, ultimately, Kabbalah is about finding our soul and spirit –

neither of which gives a rap about our sexuality or our race or colour or creed. Its purpose is to help you come to your soul and find the non-exclusive, totally loving aspect of you which is the seat of all healing. This is known in both Judaism and Christianity as the Kingdom of Heaven and the door that gives access to it is both hidden and unlocked.

What I have discovered, over more than a quarter of a century of study, teaching and writing books on Kabbalah, is that used as a tool for inspiration it is a magical loom on which we can weave our healing—and from that healing, we become an agent of healing for the World. Kabbalah tells us exactly where, when, how and why, we may be out of alignment with health, finances and relationships and, just as importantly, how to re-align ourselves.

So I've written a book of information matched with some experience about what I've learnt over nearly half a lifetime. It began with chronic lack of self-esteem which, in turn, led to many a humiliation, widowhood, shark attack, failed emigration, debt, divorce, shame, misery, hatred and what the doctors called an incurable illness which now no longer exists. It can be summed up, in a way, by how the first eight aspects led to the final one and how Kabbalah taught me how to heal them, from finish to start. After all, "incurable" surely means "curable from within."

My prayer is that you will be able to use the teaching in my book to bypass most, if not all, of the above sources of suffering and find your own true healing. I have included many of the techniques which I have found invaluable in my own continuing healing. These are simply proffered as suggestions; they are not medically proven to work nor guaranteed. You may well find other techniques which work better for you.

On the journey, we won't be using much Hebrew, we won't be following the 613 laws of the Hebrew Bible; we won't be reciting any multi-lettered names of God. All of those are fine and dandy if they are part of your culture and your healing, but they have not been a part of mine and, ultimately, the only story you can tell with any validity is your own.

What we will be doing is using this ancient scaffolding in a way that is totally appropriate for the 21st century, whatever your belief system, culture or status. Properly used, it will work for all of us because that's what it's designed to do.

There are two ways you can read my book:

- Refer to the diagrams and immerse yourself in Kabbalah.
- Read it simply for the information within, bypassing the reference to Kabbalah.

Or, of course, you could decide not to read it at all!

The choice is yours. I wish you peace, health and happiness and a life filled with Grace.

# Local groups

Please contact group convenors or see the relevant PCN Britain web page for further details and to check when meetings restart. Newcomers are always welcome.

**Abingdon** Cliff Marshall  
01235 530480 cliff.marshall@pcnbritain.org.uk

Our Aug Zoom meeting focused on the story of Greg, and of Patrick and Davy, from Made of Stories. A question posed gave us our theme for Sept, 'How has religious identity been a force for good and for evil?' Oct saw our annual meeting at which we review past meetings and look ahead. A general theme emerged of how we can communicate what we think about Christianity both within and beyond our own churches. We decided to look at what we might be able to say to non-churchgoers with an interest in what Christians think and do. The first topic, in Nov, will be prayer and what its effects may be. We shall start discussing Ben Whitney's, 'The Apostate's Creed', in Dec. We are looking forward very much to welcoming Ben to our Zoom meeting in Jan. Anyone, anywhere, can join us on Zoom, at 7.30pm on the first Tue of the month. We already regularly welcome members from Yorkshire and Seattle!

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

We are in touch by email but, when we are allowed to meet again, (when O when will it ever be?) our meetings will continue to be on the first Wed of the month at 1.30-3 pm. Held at 121 Junction Road, Bolton, BL3 4NF. Individually we viewed the Made of Stories films and did our best to share thoughts and comments via email. We found it quite difficult to be spontaneous by email, and not everyone has access to Zoom. We know that if we had viewed them together, the discussion would have flowed. This doesn't mean we didn't like them. Opinions were almost all complimentary. Most members thought each of the films would be good to use to challenge people's thinking about faith and church. Currently a number of members are reading Holloway's, "Stories we tell ourselves" and Martin Camroux's "Keeping Alive the Rumor of God" (Yes it is US spelling!)

**Gloucestershire** Andy Vivian  
07966 985339 andy.vivian@pcnbritain.org.uk

We continue to meet monthly on Zoom. Led in Oct by our national chair, Adrian Alker, who observed that Zoom has doubled the size of some congregations and has done away with coffee and flower rotas, counting the collection and all the other clutter that gets in the way of the search for meaning, learning and faith. He advocated dialogue with all who work for the common good, including non-theists as well as traditional believers.

One drawback of virtual meetings is that if the speaker loses their internet connection you are stymied. This is what happened to one of our speakers, a Buddhist monk called Tenjo (aka Bill) Hopwood. I'm pleased to say that he is able to try again in Nov. We hope to learn what it means to practise Buddhism and whether Buddhism has things to offer the modern world that Christianity is less good at. Among the subjects we are thinking about for coming months are gender transition, white privilege and what we might say if asked how we pray.

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

We are still here! Things have been in limbo since the first lockdown. We have recently tried to resume using Zoom. So far 10 of us watched, then discussed, two of the "Made of Stories" films. This seemed to be suitable for the limitations of Zoom. We selected 'Gemma's Story', and then 'Nathaniel's story'. As this seemed to work quite well in Nov we will look at two more. The usual venue for our face to face meetings, once we are able to resume - on the 4th Wed of the month, at Heaton Moor United Church in Stockport.

**Newcastle** Liz Temple  
01207 505564 liz.temple@pcnbritain.org.uk

We managed to meet in Sept, with masks, to share our own insights and emotions relating to Covid-19. A great privilege to be with friends to hear and honestly speak about the situation. However, the pandemic led us back to Zoom for Oct, 'Healthcare Chaplaincy & Spiritual Care' led by our invited speaker Rev Martyn Skinner. Martyn guided us along a

fascinating pathway, from the compassion of a convert to Christianity, St Martin of Tours in the 4th century, to the present-day NHS and elsewhere. We learned through his extensive chaplaincy experience, and individual stories, about 'person-centred holistic care'. Particularly memorable is the image of lighting tea-lights one by one, related to the care which a group offers to those in isolation or with mental health needs. We are looking forward to the year's remaining meetings, expected to be by Zoom. We hope to have a local speaker in Nov giving us his 'Muslim Perspective' on community work and more. Then for Dec Joyce has offered to bring us 'Christmas Festivities through the ages' with modern celebration in song.

**Northants & Bucks** Monty Lynds  
01908 543206 monty.lynds@pcnbritain.org.uk

Before the first lockdown, we had become dormant. Then, we took the step to join with an alternative discussion group from Saint Nicholas Church, Potterspurty, 'Food 4 Thought', realising our similar ethos. We decided to meet after our, "Fifth Sunday" alternative services. Before lockdown and at the end of Sept this was proving to be a successful formula with a very eclectic bunch attending. Including Baptist ministers, agnostics, new agers, local Pagans, Anglicans, progressives, and LGBTI and Amnesty International activists. We have started a Facebook page "5th Sunday and food4thought" which now has about 80 followers. We will be, "broadcasting" live on Facebook at 4:00pm on Sun 29 Nov. It is our intention to return to Saint Nicholas' as soon as allowed, and we hope to meet more frequently.

**Oadby** Keith Baker  
keith.baker@pcnbritain.org.uk

We have managed to meet monthly on Zoom. We are a small group from four denominations who have shared and developed our faith journeys. We have been supportive friends during this difficult period as well as being able to look at our beliefs and local church challenges. We always start with feedback from each of us about what we may have come across of interest and challenges we are facing, an example being that some us watched Richard Holloway talking at the Wigtown Book Festival and, together with Adrian and Christine's

review, we were encouraged to buy his recent book. We have worked through the 5 films, viewing before the meetings and then watching again together. We have used some of the material provided. They have stimulated discussion amongst ourselves, and raised the question of who we might share them with. We always use material from PV, which we find helpful and stimulating and our next meeting will use material from the most recent issue.

**Oakham** Peter Stribblehill  
07918 916466 peter.stribblehill@pcnbritain.org.uk

I'm pleased to be able to report that our meeting on 27 Oct, via Zoom, discussed the third of the Made of Stories films. We were delighted to welcome Richard, a founder group member, who now lives some distance away and was able to lead this discussion. A lively time ensued, this time on climate change, and it was good to see that, as our expertise in using Zoom increases, we are more able to debate. We have an attendance of around 15 compared with 20+ in earlier times so a good proportion is joining in. We are using the films monthly, with ad hoc discussions fortnightly in between, for those who prefer more frequent contact. We aim to finish the series by mid Dec and will then look to the New Year for inspiration.

**Rugby** Nicola Phelan  
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Getting used to Zoom has taken time, so we have just met twice since Sept. At the first we caught up and shared experiences of Lockdown. While the physical presence of others and services have been missed, there has also been reflection about the whole purpose and nature of gathering in a place of worship. One person noted that they could pray more easily when together with others and voicing liturgy communally. There is also greater insight into the experience of those who are housebound due to caring responsibilities or illness and how Zoom and other platforms have been invaluable for some. This aspect will hopefully continue although it does not suit everyone and can be tiring. One positive aspect is the ability to join with friends or family in another country, which one member had done and made new contacts too. A free account is time limited and we have not yet moved to two invites

with a gap so our Oct discussion from the Made of Stories website was limited to 40 mins. Having asked people to watch Gemma's story prior to the meeting we managed to share thoughts. Discussion also included the purpose of the films and how they might be used, and opinion varied. During a normal meeting we might have explored that more. The website though was shared beyond the group and found to be of value, so is the intention that the films have a life of their own. Next we will discuss Greg's story, which touching as it does on culture, community and leadership, seems very relevant.

**North Staffs** Nigel Jones  
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People have not felt able to meet face to face, so we are online. In April we emailed a text by Geoff Locke about the Puritans and the Mayflower, inviting people to comment. In June we were led via Zoom by Raphael Hirschi, a lecturer in Astrophysics at Keele University, about Science and his Christian faith. He confirmed the differences between faith and science and the mistaken literal interpretations some have when they read the Bible. It was a useful exchange, though I felt his theology rather conservative, but I learned from the comments some of our members made. In Oct we discussed "What about Viruses? A Christian Reflection on Covid-19", an article written by Robert White and Roger Abbott of the Faraday Institute of Science and Religion, which I found via Google. There is more about this on the website. A small number of us are continuing to meet online on the first Sun evening of each month.

**Tunbridge Wells** Sandy Elsworth  
radpilgrims@gmail.com

Since the start of the pandemic, we have held weekly Zoom meetings. At first they were principally a way of exchanging news and generally keeping in touch, but they have evolved into discussions on a subject agreed in advance. Discussions on trust and vulnerability led into forgiveness and reconciliation. These latter ranged from global issues to conflicts within families and within the church, including the role of mediators and counsellors, and situations where there is a need to accept guilt and forgive yourself. These themes were continued to cover the relationship between anger

and forgiveness, using quotes from Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela as a starting point. The discussion on anger covered jealousy and hatred, what makes us angry and righteous anger. Our most recent was on the subject of finding solace – reading and taking exercise figured prominently as worthwhile, particularly in these strange times. Our weekly meetings have been on Thurs mornings, but we have initiated a monthly Tue evening.

**N Worcester** David Tubb  
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We have been enjoying meeting on Zoom, talking about the varieties of poetry that speak meaningfully to us, as well as appreciating each other's company in these strange times. As a basis for our discussions we have been using Mark Oakley's, "The Splash of Words", which contains a wide range of poems with commentary on their significance for his faith. Along with the introductory chapter, this brings out the close relationship between the very language of poetry and the way we try to articulate our understanding of life's mysteries. So: "Religious faith is poetry plus, not science minus"; "If poetry is the language of love, it must also be the language of faith"; "The messengers of any needed transformation in society require a language which offers poetic hope, not prosaic plans". The poems we have shared together are from such as Plath and Kipling, E.E. Cummings and Rupert Brooke, Ecclesiasticus and Micah. Oakley writes approvingly of RS Thomas – "The meaning is in the waiting". Holloway talks of looking in the distance, others prefer certainty!

**West Yorks** Michael Burn  
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We continue to be on Zoom although sadly not all have been able to join. Our Sept meeting watched and discussed the film, "Gemma's Story". We were impressed and decided to watch another in the New Year. The Nov meeting took the form of a discussion of the issues raised in Richard Holloway's book, "Stories We Tell Ourselves". We were grateful for the review of the book by Christine and Adrian Alker in PV as a discussion starter. On 11 Jan we are to watch and discuss "Holly's Story", and on 1 Mar, St. David's Day, we will use Patrick and Davy's Story.

# Reviews

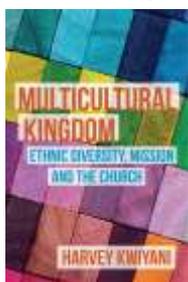
## **Too Much Information by Andrew Graystone, Canterbury Press**

The subtitle, 'Ten Essential Questions for Digital Christians', raises, given the pandemic, some important issues. Zoom has allowed many of us to attend services, discussion groups and 'coffee' mornings to stay connected. Email and Skype, and other platforms,

allow us to communicate with family and friends and to make new contacts. We are able to attend a yoga class at home and listen to talks from far and wide. All good, largely, and reasonably accessible with some help and resources. But there are dilemmas. Andrew writes not about digital technology, a tool to use, but of the digital culture in which we live, whether we are online or not. 'What', he asks, 'does it mean to be a disciple in a digital age?' He explores: 'What is the difference between a Person and a Machine?' 'Who is my digital neighbour?' 'Who am I these days?'. 'Who can I believe?' and as virtual church rises 'Is it time to CTRL+ALT+DELETE the church?' The final chapter looks at the issue of robots. How much of our bodies are we willing to replace or supplement with devices so that they can last longer or work better? Importantly, will access to these life extending technologies, along with computer-driven personalised medicine, be available only to the richer people or nations? He is not a Luddite but he does challenge us to think about the world in whose creation we are colluding and what this means for those who are tasked to love their neighbour as themselves. A good, thoughtful read.

**Christine King**

## **Multicultural Kingdom by Harvey Kwiyani, SCM Press**



Kwiyani, born in Malawi, has worked in Europe and North America and lectures at Liverpool Hope University. He offers an image of the global church as a mosaic where 'God is building a

kingdom in which people ... belong together.' It is, he writes, 'the folly of our time that we ... justify segregating churches'.

A major omission is any reference to the distinct traditions of the Anglican missionary societies, CMS, [U]SPG and UMCA, which brought evangelical and Anglo-Catholic Anglicanism to Africa. The resulting diversity within African Anglicanism includes the conservative evangelical approach in Nigeria, and the open and liberal ethos of southern and central Africa.

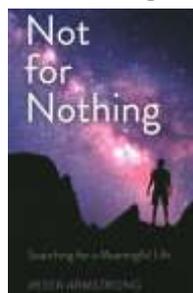
Kwiyani's account of the explosion in membership of the former colonial churches fails to link this with the establishment of local leadership: something foreseen by the Anglican mission in Borneo as early as 1848, where local converts soon became catechists responsible for areas not served by missionaries.

He describes Christian diversity in Britain and the many black-led churches; he argues strongly that British churches should be multicultural. For him it is a biblical expectation, a theological necessity, a reflection of contemporary Britain, and a challenge to racism and anti-immigrant movements. A fuller examination of the nature of identity would have helped develop this argument. There is no reference to some of the more interesting examples of multi-cultural congregations such as Taizé, Greenbelt and Iona.

He critiques McGovern's view that homogeneous units are the basis for growth; a more extensive critique of monocultural HTB plants, often full of younger people, is also needed. He shares his research and thinking, which will be a valuable resource for many: [www.harvmins.com](http://www.harvmins.com).

**Peter Varney**

## **Not for Nothing by Peter Armstrong, Christian Alternative**



The starting point for this work is the statement 'I need life to mean something.' Peter admits that this is personal and subjective – he 'feels' life is worth living even though

he knows he cannot 'know' for sure, and even knowing can be illusory. But for him the observable world of rationalistic scientific inquiry is not enough: too deterministic for true

moral autonomy, not fully able to make sense of love, beauty, or creativity. He suggests that we need God (not just the concept of God) to provide meaning, though for him an understanding of such a God is like a jigsaw which he has had to work at to discover a coherent image. The 'kingdom of love' gets close since God is love, 'the ultimate life-value.' Many will recognise his dissatisfaction with traditional Christian ideas and practices. In this spiritual journey, he calls them 'paths not taken'. His search led him to question these things, yet not to the point of denying anything transcendental. He calls himself 'a Christian agnostic, who believes in God who grounds life in meaning'. His agnosticism is in part that of the seeker, but mainly that of a believer committed to the idea of God as a love that provides and underpins all meaningfulness. Two main themes come from this: the need to re-mythologise our traditional Christian ideas, and the way in which the divine in us can be recognised and developed. The case he makes, the life he describes, is sincere, moving, perceptive, and in the best sense progressive. Even a philosophical humanist might revise their views on reading this book, and the intelligent Christian will certainly go back over their life and ideas to ask the very questions he raises with and for us.

**Stuart Hannabuss**

## **God is Green by Ian Bradley, DLT**



30 years after its first publication, it's back! Many will not need reminding of this seminal work, which re-evaluated the Christian approach to ecology and the environment. His

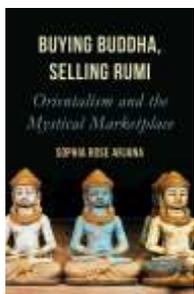
case is that interpretation of both Old and New Testaments has distorted our understanding of the true relationship between God, humanity and the natural world. Having 'salvation' central to church teaching (anthropocentric thinking) has given humanity apparent carte blanche over the planet, displacing the original concept that we and the world are one Creation, one unity before and within God.

He develops this idea through great depth and range of reference and exemplification, including many recent texts and writers. This

provides a rich vein of research and further reading, but also implants a feeling of a unity of vision which stretches across ages and traditions. The past years have not diminished Bradley's conviction. Indeed he now aligns himself with the view that the destruction and exploitation of the natural world is in effect sin. He doesn't stop there and challenges us that even claiming 'stewardship' as humanity's role in our current world is too domineering, implying our controlling nature as opposed to living alongside it, in 'companionship and communion'. He previously concluded that our role is to bless and redeem Creation but he argues now we must accept our being one of many partners of the mutually dependent natural world. By accepting and exploring this we will develop our understanding of God. 'This means moving beyond stewardship towards companionship, recognition of mutual interdependence and deep humility.' This text provides the theological foundation for addressing our relation with the natural world, and should be a part of your library.

**Andrew Lancaster**

**Buying Buddha, Selling Rumi by Sophia Rose Arjana, One World**



The subtitle, *Orientalism and the Mystical Marketplace*, gives a flavour of her argument. Arjana speaks of the 'bliss clique' in the West (USA, also Europe) who are drawn to orientalised spirituality and mysticism because they reject 'religious hierarchies and the institutions that support them'. She describes their approach as muddled Orientalism and expands the phrase thus: 'Modern mysticism exists in a system of cultural exchange born of colonial encounters and transformed into entrepreneurship, dilettantism and spiritual voyeurism through the creative force of Orientalism'. The entrepreneurs, 'colonize imagery, practices and symbols from other religions and sell them as something non-religious - as mystical and spiritual' to those who reject religion. After describing the narcissistic and hedonistic nature of 'global mysticism', she contrasts and honours Thomas Merton who while 'deeply influenced by Buddhists ...

did not exploit these traditions for profit' but integrated 'Buddhist practices into his own Christian contemplative tradition'. She exposes the profit-focused nature of modern mysticism when she describes the best seller 'Eat, Pray, Love' as 'not just a book, it is a capitalist enterprise'; and Bali, a centre of money-making mystical tourism, as a 'Mystical Neverland'. There is an overabundance of examples in this academic yet eminently readable book indicating wide research and experience. The overall message: modern mysticism is a muddled Orientalism, that plunders eastern religions, decontextualizes what is stolen, creates millionaires and is a consumer product par excellence. It is a sobering example of where so many people turn when they find the beliefs and stories of organised religions simply unbelievable; or they are searching for something that is missing, or new. It is a reminder that we need to be spiritually discerning.

**Fred Pink**

**Ghost Ship by A. D. A. France-Williams, SCM Press**



In the current climate this is a very apposite read. It is about institutional racism and the CofE by one of its black priests but would be valuable to those in other traditions. It is a heavy read, even for those who have done antiracist training, and would be a good resource for a group leader that wishes to deeply explore institutional racism within the CofE or as an exercise within PCN. The chapters give a voice to many Black and Asian clergy about their experiences. It is not about white people giving black people 'a chance' or even a voice about racism; it is about working with our Black and Asian clergy to hear their concerns about the past and how present day people deal with the legacy of our (British) racist past including the standard of living which many of us enjoy today. One quote: 'Reconciliation will only take place ... the day whites feel offended by racism instead of feeling sorry for the blacks'.

**Martin Bassant**

**Resounding Body by Andy Thomas, Sacristy Press**

It is no exaggeration to say that Andy

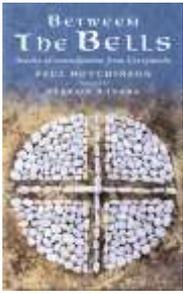


Thomas is the Gareth Malone of church music. Andy came to St Marks Broomhill in my time as vicar to study for a doctorate in philosophy at Sheffield University.

Not only has he got a fine mind (his full time work is as a senior civil servant) but his heart and soul lie in music-making, both as an organist, pianist and choir conductor. I have been privileged to see how he can enthuse both professional and very amateur singers in the delivery of all kinds of religious music, from the Chichester Psalms to African folk songs and all else in between. Moving to London he became Musical Director at St. John's, Waterloo and it his experiences there which have led to this book. Andy was always keen to see how music serves the building up of the church community and its wider audience. In this book he uses the Pauline imagery of the body of Christ with great imagination in his conviction that music-making can enable the transformation of individuals and communities. Very much a friend of the progressive approach to Christian faith and practice, Andy has helped PCN on three occasions in leading our radical sing days. This book however will be a great help to music leaders of all Christian traditions whenever they seek ideas or feel dispirited. Each of the five short chapters begins with a personal and helpful story of Andy's time at St John's in building up a choir from scratch. There are questions for discussion at the end of each chapter and a useful set of notes and bibliography. Andy shows what can be achieved in building up a musical component to worship when its director has energy, a deep empathy with singers and a desire to see the church's worship as embodying the practical outcomes described in Romans 12: using one's gifts for the whole community, ministering to each other in love, and fostering unity within the body of Christ. Amen to that!

**Adrian Alker**

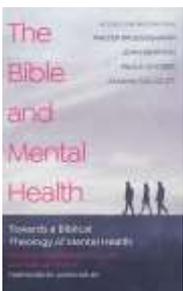
**Between the Bells by Paul Hutchinson, Canterbury Press**



I've always had a fascination with the way Christianity manifests on the island of Ireland. Partly it's to do with a lifelong interest in Celtic Christianity; it also stems from an admiration of those who have sought to live out authentic Christianity by building bridges of reconciliation and by reclaiming the message from political bigotry. The book is partly a collection of stories and insights gained from the author's time as director of the Corrymeela centre. Incidents that really stand out are what happened when an extremely left-wing Palestinian activist was asked to lead a time of worship and reflection, and also the author's response to a visit to the centre by former IRA activist Martin McGuinness. Some of the other stories and reflections on them weren't as powerful and seemed a bit of a stretch. These are intermingled with liturgy that arose from the incidents touched on. I was predisposed to like the book and I would definitely say it was well worth a read, even though I found the narrative style a bit diffuse and distracting at times. The book is best read in small bursts followed by longer periods of reflection.

**Guy Whitehouse**

**The Bible and Mental Health edited by Christopher C H Cook & Isabelle Hamley, SCM Press**



There is no one better than Christopher Cook, both psychiatrist and priest, to set the scene. Books like Spirituality, Theology and Mental Health (SCM Press, 2013) help to

map out the parallel paradigms - of (broadly secular) psychiatric approaches to mental health, and of theological and spirituality-centred approaches to it (in this case, Christian). Each has been, and often still is, sceptical of the other, although the direction of travel is towards integrative therapies. Each seems to be held back by, in the one case, an insistence of medicalizing mental health, and, in the other, a traditionalist complacency about the

superior sensitivity of spiritual carers to understand and manage clients who suffer. Each often doubts the credentials of the other. This book reflects this state of affairs well. The fifteen essays are by writers like Jocelyn Bryan, John Swinton as well as the two editors, Cook and Hamley. They fall into three groups. First the two paradigms issue, second the theological approach, and third where applications are suggested that work in the real world. This 'real' world is one where Christians generally, and faith communities in particular, can and do really include those suffering from mental health.

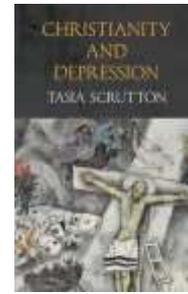
Mental health is a spectrum of conditions, from transient depression to dementia, bipolarity and schizophrenia. Terminology is slippery too, since psychiatric language is complex and theological language arcane, both in their turn remote from the experience of many of us. Many suffering from mental health are unable to articulate their fears and hopes, many feel the social stigma of exclusion, and often carers and helpers feel helplessly alone themselves. When we turn to the Bible - Old and New - terms like mental health and anxiety never appear, and interpretations of scripture can lead to misleading anachronisms. Also, talk of demons (as in the Gerasene demoniac) seems eccentric. As Justin Welby says in his preface, we cannot discuss (I hope he means sort out) mental health from the pulpit. This, then, is a book which rightly uses the word 'towards' in its sub-title, signposting what can and should be done in this field in practical ways (the only really effective ones). Cook is right to suggest that medical and spiritual approaches offer only part of the answer, and can best meet the challenges when they work together. I can still recall from a counselling session a client saying 'I am depressed, but I'm not mad, you know! And I certainly didn't come here for pity.'

This text will join others on my spiritual care shelf, but it will be one of the ones I continue to consult.

**Stuart Hannabuss**

**Christianity and Depression by Tasia Scrutton, SCM Press**

This is a book with both practical and theological depths. At one level it offers an overview of how Christian believers might view their own and



others' experience of depression and mental illness. In understanding this they might be able to come to terms with what is happening to them or, in the case of church communities

or mental health professionals, best offer support. Thus she explains how mental illness can be seen as the result of sin, or a 'lack of faith' or indeed, even, in extremis, to be the work of demonic forces. These each clearly have the potential to shape the experience in a negative way. For others the journey into depression might be seen as a spiritual episode - a 'dark night of the soul'. For most Christians, however, along with current medical thinking and practice, depression will be seen as an illness, with a biological explanation - of processes going wrong in the brain - best treated by medication. Whilst this approach removes the element of blame, it misses, our author argues, the real point. Depression, she says, is as much social and psychological as biological. Here we see Tasia's prowess as a philosopher of religion and a theologian. She discusses how a non-dualistic world view allows us, instead of seeing mental health problems as either physical or spiritual, to realise that these two are one and can arise from our alienation from each other, from nature, from other animals and from our real understanding of our destiny. There is practical advice here, for those with depression, for their pastoral supporters and for the professionals charged with their care. This is also a thought-provoking read for anyone interested in matters of faith and the human condition.

**Christine King**

**To Thine Own Self be True by Howard Grace £4 inc. p&p / pdf free [howardgrace40@gmail.com](mailto:howardgrace40@gmail.com)**

This spiritual and religious



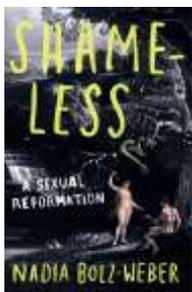
autobiography spans 80 years with a faith journey ranging from militant atheism through orthodox Christianity to a homecoming with Quakers and charitable service.

Howard's quest is to find answers to: "What might be the bridge between people whose perspective is from some sort of a belief in God, and others to whom this is meaningless? Can we explore together whether there is an encompassing World View which transcends "beliefs", which we can all more fruitfully engage with?"

For the first decades of his working life, he experienced an amazing selection of countries covering five continents. This vast experience of the humanitarian tasks he undertook and the people he met led him to constant self-questioning. Inevitably his ideas evolved. In particular: "I was still trying to relate to doctrines which I found to be unbelievable, whilst trying to live the life that I perceived Jesus embodying." Howard adds his thoughts on the universe and the mystery of creation before coming to the conclusion that, respecting our differences, the reality of our common humanity is a unifying force for justice and peace. This is an exceptional life of service. Howard's long spiritual and religious struggles will resonate with many readers of Progressive Voices.

**Robin Story**

**Shame-less by Nadia Bolz-Weber, Canterbury Press**



Be prepared to repent if you read this book! Nadia aims to challenge Christian thinking on sexual ethics and encourage you to think again.

She is founder and former pastor of

House for All Sinners and Saints, a Lutheran congregation in Denver U.S.A. On their website they describe themselves as 'a liturgical, Christo-centric, social justice-orientated, queer-inclusive, incarnational, contemplative, irreverent, ancient/future church with a progressive but deeply rooted theological imagination'.

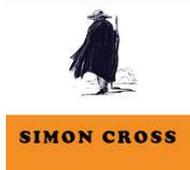
With brutal honesty and robust integrity, she interrogates Christian teaching on sexual ethics. Her story telling is compelling, unpacking the experiences of people who have been hurt and harmed. She charts inherited codes of practice and reviews their Biblical foundations. The exegesis throws a different light on the Bible but always through the lens of Jesus' life and teaching.

In the opening chapter readers are invited to 'forge a new Christian sexual ethic'. Throughout the book the 'thou shalt not's' are deconstructed and an alternative code of mutual respect, non-judgemental positive regard and human flourishing is suggested. It was not easy reading. I identified with the teaching and indeed have taught it. I have also experienced the difficulties and pain caused, yet I have not known how to teach it differently. This book could be a starting point for discussion on a new understanding of sexual ethics in church – a conversation which still needs to be had.

The book finishes reflecting on the 'lies of the accuser', the words of shame on continual loop in the minds of many hurting people and those who cause hurt. The invitation is to hear the voice of God who, 'calls forth our truest, most flawed and beautiful self'. The invocation is to change your mind.

**Meryl White**

**The Good Life by Simon Cross, [simonjcross.com](http://simonjcross.com) £4.99 +p&p**



**SIMON CROSS**

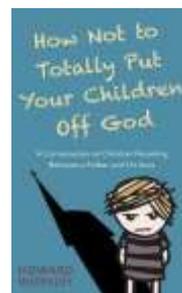
Subtitled: 'A wander through three thousand years of thinking about how to live'. Simon Cross has published this little handbook in the 'hints and tips' style of the self-help

genre. The preface offers some starting points: 'The best you can do with your life is have a good time and get by the best you can' is advice from The Message's translation of Ecclesiastes 2:24 'This book is for anyone who has laid awake at night and thought- 'is this all there is?'. What follows is a set of short essays accompanied by a series of brief exercises. We start with Socrates and move on to Plato who says, we are told, that you should deny yourself for your own sake. We then move through the Stoics (doing the right thing, because it's the right thing, not because of what you'll get out of it). Aristotle comes next, after a break for a brief body scan exercise, followed by Kant (doing what you should do). A sitting meditation is followed by Simone de Beauvoir who reminds us that accepting one's lot in life is a luxury that the oppressed cannot afford. Nietzsche (of 'God is Dead' and

'there are no facts only interpretations') tells us to question the values that have been handed down. A brief contemplation on how to live mindfully follows. There is advice from Buddhism, Mahatma Gandhi and Jesus ('treat others the way you would want to be treated'). Hannah Arendt, Alfred Whitehead and Gertrude Anscombe follow (plus exercises). Lessons from Star Trek offer a finale. This is a delightful, thought provoking and highly enjoyable book. It's on my Christmas gift list for several friends!

**Christine King**

**How Not to Totally Put your Children off God by Howard Worsley, Lion Hudson**



Before beginning this book, written primarily for parents although also for anyone working with young people, I was not sure what to expect. I was not prepared for what I found.

"Parents are partners with God," writes the author. "Christian parenting is best achieved when we have discovered a vision of kingdom parenting (doing it God's way) and then learned how to build kingdom habits so that our families live with Christian habits that are naturally ingrained." These are telling stories, going on adventures / making memories, praying, philosophising, and going to church.

Each chapter is devoted to one habit: reflections on 'what worked' followed by a critical perspective on 'what didn't work so well'. Howard is a vicar, his wife a bishop, and they have three sons who seem grateful for their upbringing, albeit not uncritically. The book is interspersed with comments from the sons, which I was relieved to read - especially "I am sceptical about 'truth claims', but I have a reverence for stories. I agree with Schiller that deeper meaning resides in the fairy tales told me in my childhood than any truth that is taught in life."

The author maintains both explicitly and implicitly that for him there exists the Christian story; the authority of the Bible is unassailable, Christian parenting is underpinned (mainly) by biblical stories and there are some tenets of faith that are non-negotiable. Given that the boys were encouraged to reflect on questions of

faith, I was disappointed to read that the virgin birth and the divinity of Christ were matters that Worsley “left to others to debate with his children.” He writes openly and honestly, but a comment about philosophy seems to characterise his attitude to parenting: “it needs to come with a Christian ‘government health warning’.

**Sandra Griffiths**

**Faith in Children by Ronni Lamont, Lion Hudson**



Ronni highlights the belief of Jerome W. Berryman (author of Godly Play) that children are born with knowledge of God, but that as they grow up they lose that knowledge, even without having

a name for God. By understanding a child’s faith, she maintains, we are enabled to understand ourselves in a deeper manner.

Following a consideration of spirituality (rarely discovered in the same sentence as ‘church’ or ‘worship’!) we examine a child’s intellect, personality, spiritual and social development, learning styles and language development. Faith development comes next; sadly(?) some adults ‘never move on’ to distinguish between the real and the seemingly so. Also, as many of a child’s feelings remain throughout life, even subconsciously, language used about God and faith should not be negative or judgemental.

This book is commendable for advocating ways in which adults and children together can be church, recognising that both have much to learn from each other. The wisdom of removing children totally or partially from the main worship is questioned - try sending adults to the children’s room instead of the children! Intergenerational worship should be the church’s aim, rather than all-age worship.

The Godly Play model of being church - incorporating play, creativity, participation, open questioning, sharing experiences and imagination - is worth a trial. In most religious education, she states, children are told who God is; in Godly Play they discover who God is. Much could be usefully learned and acted upon - probably gradually. In this otherwise excellent book I found it disappointing to read: ‘If faith is based on the death and

resurrection of God’s Son, we need to help children with the complex idea of salvation and atonement.’ Of course equip children with the language to speak ‘theologically’, but theology should not be ‘dictated’, rather it should be experienced.

**Sandra Griffiths**

**To the Survivors by Robert Uttaro, CreateSpace**



Uttaro became a rape crisis counsellor in 2007 in the USA. He describes his experience using a series of case studies which, in the realistic language of the victims

themselves, illustrate his work. He highlights how rape is more about power and control than about sex. As a result, the victim feels disempowered, above all when told to ‘get over it’, ‘move on’, and not being believed. In fact, many suffer in silence, never moving on, for years trusting nobody, enduring depression and failed relationships. And not seeking help, not admitting their need, even to themselves. Uttaro’s own journey was shaped by his Christian faith, although the wide range of case studies proves that we all find ways of helping others in many ways.

Counselling is often seen as a secular activity, while Christian counselling may appear agenda-driven. So the critical test must be how Uttaro deals with this challenge, and he does it convincingly. He lets the men and women speak for themselves in their own ways.

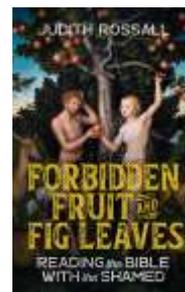
This means that, if they find ways of speaking out and trusting, it is authentically theirs; if they refer to dignity and self-respect, taking control of their own lives, and even feeling stronger by feeling forgiveness, then it comes across as real. Some, like Uttaro, achieve this trust and self-respect by believing in God: that faith in God’s grace is a key factor in their rehabilitation. They learn ‘to forgive in their own way’, forgive yet not forget, and see how a healing peace of the spirit is possible.

He finishes with a useful acronym for everyone involved in such work, BLESS: Believe, Listen, Empathy, Safety and Support. But this is not to imply the work is easy: it can affect

us all and gracious books like this help to remind us of that.

**Stuart Hannabuss**

**Forbidden Fruit and Fig Leaves by Judith Rossall, SCM Press**



This is an interest and thought-provoking book in which Judith considers the issue of shame in the Bible. Shame is described as “a cold hard, pain around the heart, a lurch in

the guts... it is something we feel but who wants to talk about it?”. Yet, as this book clearly demonstrates, it is worthy of discussion and, not only shame itself but its relationship to sin and guilt. In tackling this difficult subject, she is to be congratulated for skilfully pulling together the views of other writers. In the first five chapters the focus is on the OT, which she terms the First Testament. Starting with Adam and Eve, we move on to consider Cain and Abel and then the Exodus and Exile. In the chapter on David, she challenges the traditional interpretation of his tryst with Bathsheba. By looking at the story in its historical context, we are introduced to an alternative interpretation which shows Bathsheba to be the innocent and silent victim in a power struggle between David and her husband, Uriah, both of whom, it is argued, were seeking to shame the other. In the final four chapters, she considers aspects of Jesus’ ministry as the Messiah and the discussion is on such things as Jesus’ dealings with outcasts, healing, faith and forgiveness. The chapter, “The Shamed Messiah”, considers the crucifixion and how Jesus had to bear the shame not only of death on the cross but also of being deserted by his followers. In the final chapter there is an interesting discussion, in the context of shame, of the interaction by the Sea of Galilee between Jesus and Peter after the Resurrection. Although I found this book demanding, I enjoyed the challenge and can recommend it as a valuable resource for preachers and biblical scholars alike.

**Nigel Bastin**



# The Ten Commandments

or The loving embrace of Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20  
Remember, God seeks liberation for you and for all. Celebrate,  
encourage and live out that liberation.

God is beyond anything you can imagine, create or sense.  
Nevertheless, keep your minds, hearts and senses  
open to the divine.

Be humble when you strive to discern and share God's  
message. Do not constrain your life, or that of others, by  
restricting God.

There is a pattern to our days, weeks, seasons, years and lives.  
Live in tune with those patterns.

Relationships are important. They can be simple or complex.  
Affirming or detrimental. Superficial or all-consuming. Deal with  
them as best you can.

Life is sacred. Never lose sight of that, even in the direst of  
circumstances.

Honour your commitments, and those of others. Be honest with  
yourself and honourable to those you have made commitments  
to. Think through the possible consequences to your actions  
before you take them and, if all else fails, break any  
commitments with your words rather than by your actions.

Everyone values what they have, so do not take what is not  
yours. Do not hoard what you have or exploit the system for  
your benefit. Share what you have. Strive to make the system  
just and equitable for all.

Be truthful.

Be thankful for what you have. Celebrate other people's good  
fortune and support those whom you are able to help.

These words have structured life and faith for centuries. Do not  
read them in fear. Be embraced by them in love. God loves you  
and knows that life is seldom straightforward. God is within the  
complexity and urges you towards the better path. May love be  
your guide as you journey.

Love God. Love others. Love yourself.

David Coaker

# made of stories

Short films with big challenges  
for religious faith

<https://madeofstories.uk>



*This is gentle and engaging film-making*  
**Paul Northup, Creative Director, Greenbelt**

*I highly recommend the beautiful new short films from PCN*  
**Brian McLaren**

*These films invite and inspire us to engage in the holy complexity of  
Christianity* **Naomi Nixon, CEO, Student Christian Movement**

*A powerful and moving film (Holly's story)*  
**Steven Croft, Bishop of Oxford**

*Spiritually generous and heart-warming, Gemma's film shows that  
only love can prove a faith* **Richard Holloway**

