

Progressive Christianity Network – Britain



June 2010

Supporting and promoting open Christian understanding

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We are still Christians, right?

by James Quinton



David A Keddie's article For God's Sake? in the March newsletter has generated a lot of comment and interest. In this issue we print two rather different responses.

James D Quinton is a 32 year old writer and lives in Lakenheath, Suffolk.

I was delighted, relived even, when I stumbled upon the PCN Britain website last year. Coming to faith outside of a church environment I was often perturbed and bemused by the churches I attended while searching for fellowship. Without going into details, I have struggled to find a vibrant, passionate and inclusive community that chimes with the essence of the Bible, and Jesus' teachings, as I have read outside of a traditional setting. But upon reading the 'eight points' I had, at last, found somewhere that focused what I had been feeling all along.

As someone who describes himself as a left-wing, red letter, reformed, emergent, quaker-ish Christian, heavily into social justice, and who would like to see a new

Reformation, and a new version of the Bible with progressive/liberal footnotes for the parts of the text that stop regular people from even considering the possibility of God, including; the Genesis poem (It was nice to read Howard Grace's Evolution – the next step, in March 2010's newsletter), the of-its-time holiness code of Leviticus and the mistranslation of Malokois and Arsenokoitai in Paul's letters that has led to the false persecution of gay brothers and sisters in God's name. Because, as we know, it is essential that we view the Bible with 21st Century eyes ('find more grace in the search for understanding than we do in dogmatic certainty') if the religion is even to survive – yes, I believe it is that serious.

The acceptance of other faiths was also something that warmed the heart 'recognise the faithfulness of other people who have other names for the gateway to God's realm'. There is no doubt that the ancient religions/faiths, before especially, but also after, Christianity, were all looking for a truth, for God - the God we know, and I have to say that because I am a Christian. That is not to say one faith is better than the other. In these anti-faith times (I speak of the rise of the anti-theists, blasphemy days etc) all religions grounded in Love must 'stick together', whilst keeping the sanctity of their beliefs intact.

However, I feel there is a real danger that we lose sight of our God, the Christian God. So it was encouraging to read David A. Keddie's article also in March 2010's newsletter. He is right. At the same time as appreciating 'other names for the gateway to God's realm' I am slightly concerned that the 'balance' is tipping towards an embracing of 'spirituality' and 'mysticism' (rather than an respectful acknowledgement of) and magic, not the Paul Daniels kind, which is something I cannot fathom (Rev 22:15 anyone?). This will probably keep us in the collective mess, as David puts it, and lead to a haughty, vague and rootless theology. The result will be that we are a rather ineffective group (much like our polar opposite brothers in the Christian

right) that will struggle to be taken seriously and to be the force for go(o)d that it should, and also offer little to 'those who hope for a better world and those who have lost hope'.

If we're looking to quantify God, this is simple. God is Love. That's it. God is Love and everyone is welcome to share in the good news as delivered by Jesus in the gospels. If we, as Christians, cannot put our faith into the God of the fallible-human-written-open-to-re-evaluation-but-'inspired' Bible and 'protect and restore the integrity of all God's creation', then maybe the PCN should be renamed the Progressive Spirituality Network and I'll have my £15 back.

“Jesus is God”? You can't be serious!

Are we talking Christianity or is David Keddie reviving Docetism?

by Jack Dean

Jack Dean speaks of himself as “an ex-member of the URC, resigning last year after more than 65 years of membership of several free churches. During that time I served as deacon, elder, and church secretary, and was a lay preacher until some local clergy objected to my rejection of the party line.” He is a member of the Maidenhead and Windsor PCN Group.

I agree that the Church, which most believers erroneously think was inaugurated by Jesus, is still attempting to define the indefinable – God. This search is as old as humanity's first groping for the deities it has itself created. The 'church' is what the body of people originally called 'followers of the Way' came to be named. These followers acquired the name 'Christian' soon after the life of Jesus ended and ever since many efforts have been made to define what one had to believe in order to be a Christian. It is unfortunate that the title 'Christ' was appended to Jesus. Roughly equating with 'Saviour', it applied to a mighty leader who would save Israel from its predatory neighbours. Eventually it came to mean one who would save those who accepted his lordship from the sin which was said to alienate us from God, notwithstanding Jesus' reassurance that God does not reject anyone

for any reason. How sad it is that this Jesus the Christ has all but obliterated Jesus of Nazareth.

I claim that it is time to recover the roots of our faith – to seek the itinerant teacher (one among many in those days), the 'secular sage' to quote Robert Funk, the founder of the Jesus Seminar. That Jesus was a normal human being is born out by the earliest Christian writers, the Pauline school, who give no indication that his birth was extraordinary. This same understanding was shared by the writer of the first Gospel, one attributed to someone called Mark. Paul stated that Jesus did not reckon himself equal to God. I find it enigmatic that if Jesus was an aspect of God, to whom did he address his prayers?

Despite any contrary impression we may gain from our reading of the Gospels, this fully human Jesus, wandering around rural Galilee with some interested companions, probably not twelve, nor all-male, not always the same people, would have been relatively unknown. Although he was steeped in Judaism (more a way of life than a religion), he 'may be said to have been irreligious, irreverent and impious' according to Funk.

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We don't want to say goodbye...

More than seventy PCN members have not yet renewed their membership for 2010. If you have received an affiliation form with this newsletter, it means that, according to our records, you are one of those. It is easy to overlook the need to renew, especially as we have continued to send newsletters to all of last year's membership. Unfortunately, if you have not renewed, unless we receive the affiliation form back very soon, this will be your last newsletter.

PCN Britain aims to be open to all. To attend our local groups you do not need to be a member. So why do we have PCN membership? The income from membership is the way we pay for supporting and promoting progressive Christianity. The

money sustains the website and newsletters, provides resources for groups and individuals, sponsors events and finances publications. Membership of PCN is normally £30 a year but is available at a lower rate of £15 for those on limited income, as well as £45 for those wishing to support the network further. Members receive four newsletters a year, get monthly e-updates and are given a discount at PCN events.

There is a growing thirst for progressive thinking about Christianity. We frequently receive appreciative emails from people who've come across our work for the first time. PCN is part of the new reformation. We value your support.

PCN Britain Annual General Meeting and Free One-Day Conference. Saturday 13th July 2010

The Network's Management Committee needs you! Would you please seriously consider joining us? There are vacancies on the Committee for PCN members who

- a) are passionate about the growth and development of the network,
- b) can commit themselves to attending an all day meeting six times a year, including an overnight residential - days to be negotiated, venues normally alternately in London and York,
- c) have some time (not necessarily much) and energy to give.

We would particularly welcome members who are female, lay and younger (under 50!), but of course it is more important that you fulfil the three requirements in the previous paragraph. For committee engagements, all fares by the cheapest available route are covered.

Nominations need to reach us at the new Network address - given both on page 9 and on the back page - by **3rd July 2010**.

Full papers for the AGM, including the nomination forms you need if you wish to stand for the committee, are currently going out to members and will have arrived by the time this newsletter reaches you; the Annual Report should be available to read on the website by the start of July, and there will be printed copies to

take home at the AGM. Please respond to your invitation to the AGM if you intend to be present for it and the conference, so that we have some idea of numbers. As the conference is open and free to non-members as well, why don't you bring along your contacts and friends? And let us know how many will attend.

The meeting will be held at 11 am on Saturday 13th July 2010 at St Columba's with New Lendal URC, Priory Street, York, YO1 6EX. The venue is about 10 minutes' walk from York Station, and easily reachable via shuttle buses from the main 'Park and Ride' car parks around the city. Precise directions will be emailed or sent if you require them.

After the completion of AGM business which we hope will be fairly quick, our one day conference – for which there is **NO CHARGE** - will start. Our speaker Dave Tomlinson's topic will be "How churches must change or die".

The day will look like this:

10.30 Registration and coffee
11.00 AGM, followed by the 1st session with Dave Tomlinson

1.15 - 2.00 Lunch - please bring your own. Hot drinks will be available.

2.00 - 3.15 2nd session with Dave Tomlinson

It promises to be a good day. All we need now is **YOU!**

Letter from the Vice-Chair



Dear fellow-PCN members,
In the absence of our Chair, I am, I fear, your poor substitute for this issue of the newsletter! John is currently on a month-long visit to North

America, has already among other commitments spent two weeks as 'theologian in residence' at a church in Boulder, Colorado, as a Sunday lunch speaker at Christ Community Church in Michigan, and was last sighted *en route* to Canada and more engagements there!

PCN continues to develop as a network, linking people across the country who seek to remain open to the questions and to new challenges faced by faith communities in the 21st century.

Our riches are in the diversity of our members and in the variety of its groups, and in an attempt to facilitate greater dialogue and to support the groups, the committee of PCN is organising three regional meetings in the autumn - North, Midlands and South of England (and 'I have a dream..... that one day there will be a Scottish regional gathering!'). They will on this occasion be for group convenors, or a representative from each group, and we hope the agenda will reflect the expressed wishes of convenors, and be both an opportunity to get to know the others in their area, and to exchange ideas and experiences. From those encounters might well arise chances for wider participation in regional meetings. We shall have to wait and see...

Adrian and Christine Alker (with the support of the Edinburgh local group) are working at the organisation of the visit of Marcus Borg to Edinburgh in September of this year. Tickets have been selling well, with the result that Friday evening is now full, while places remain for the lectures on Saturday. It promises to be an exciting weekend!

At the committee meeting in London in May, it was decided to buy a few copies of five or six well-known progressive theology DVDs such as the well-known 'Living the Questions' series. These can be borrowed by groups for a small rental to help cover licensing fees.

Finally, I am sorry to have to report the resignation of two committee members. Sue O'Hare, from Wales, who has resigned due to family commitments, and John Hetherington, our Hon. Secretary, who has brought a wide-ranging experience and warmth of personality to the management committee over several years' service to PCN. We wish them both well for the future. John's departure leaves a need for a new secretary for the network, and perhaps a member with those skills might consider volunteering....? Meanwhile, please note that the mailing address has changed from St Faith's Vicarage to that of the Administrative Assistant, and all postal communications for PCN should now be sent there.

It will be good to meet old friends and new at the AGM in York in July. I look forward to that and to the fruition of all our plans for the rest of the year....

Shalom,

Mary McMahon

PCN is going to Greenbelt

Greenbelt is a four day festival over the August bank holiday which attracts over 20,000 people each year. It is 37 years old and is based at Cheltenham racecourse.

Greenbelt is about a lot more than the music. The programme includes talks, worship and seminars all of which bring into focus a range of religious, spiritual, social and environmental standpoints.

The festival is rooted in Christianity – interpreted in an open and inclusive way. Last year Bishop Gene Robinson's talks attracted some of the largest crowds and were received with standing ovations.

PCN Britain has a natural place here. Greenbelt provides a chance for PCN to raise its profile with a younger, family audience. Since this is our first year, we have simply

taken a stall where we can welcome festival-goers and explain why we exist. We will be in the G-Source tent which is the largest tent on the site. It has a café at one end and a small stage at the other and lots of organisations exhibiting in between.

In the G-Source tent we will be alongside other progressive Christian groups such as the

Modern Churchpeople's Union, the Student Christian Movement and Spirited Exchanges.

If you were thinking of going to Greenbelt and would like to help staff our stall, please get in touch with PCN's Admin Assistant, Andy Vivian, andy.vivian@pcnbritain.org.uk. Information about Greenbelt itself is available at <http://www.greenbelt.org.uk/festival>

News from local groups

Bath

(Sheena Carter 01225 331806
s.m.carter@pcnbritain.org)

We have had an excellent year, despite having lost our founding leader last summer, when he had to return to the United States. The membership is comprised largely of members of the Bath Central United Reformed Church but I am very pleased to be able to say that this year in particular we have been joined by people from other churches in the area, and indeed by a couple who do not currently attend any particular church.

The members have taken it in turn to lead meetings, and we have had some excellent discussions. We have often based sessions on material in Living the Questions 2, but have also aired Spong's thoughts based on his visit to England last September, and had a look at the issues prayer raises for progressive Christians. The year was rounded off by Tony Rutherford, who was our guest speaker in May, and led a very stimulating discussion on 'Can we be radical in practice?'

At the time of writing the programme for the autumn has yet to be finalised – details will be posted on the PCN website. The first meeting will be on Monday, 26th September.

We normally meet on the fourth Monday of the month from September to May (excluding December) in the Central United Reformed Church Halls (Grove Street entrance) at 7.30 pm. If you are in the Bath area and would like to come along, please do.

Cornwall

(Julyan Drew 01736 364707
julyan.drew@pcnbritain.org.uk)

It is hoped to form a new group in Cornwall and interested people are invited to contact Julyan as above.

Exeter

(Liz Vizard 01392 668859
liz.vizard@pcnbritain.org.uk)

We are enjoying a series of talks entitled A Pearl of Great Price: speakers tell us what their 'pearl' is and, we hope, challenge our progressive stance. So far we have heard from a Jewish woman member of the Exeter synagogue, a retired Baptist minister and a URC non-stipendary woman minister. On Sunday July 4th we look forward to welcoming a Muslim woman from Exeter Mosque. In the autumn we hope to have a talk from a Baptist minister who is also a philosophy lecturer, on why we need a God outside ourselves as well as within - date to be arranged.

The reason for this theme is to avoid 'talking to ourselves' too often, with the temptation to be smug about our progressive thinking. Meetings continue to be well attended, with an average of twenty people (from a mailing list well above sixty) taking part in lively and well informed discussion. We have welcomed quite a few new members so far this year. All meetings take place in the Southernhay URC Church hall, Southernhay, Exeter on Sunday afternoons from 2.30- 4.30 every six to eight weeks.

Gloucestershire

(Frank Godfrey 01452 533825
frank.godfrey@pcnbritain.org.uk)

We have continued our exploration of authenticity - Can we believe the records? - looking at Birth stories, Baptism, Miracles and Resurrection. Another member summarised and reviewed Bishop Spong's recent book ("Eternal Life: A new Vision") Some of us met for lunch and attended the celebration of Fred Kaan's life and work. At our next meeting we look forward to welcoming Jerry and Sybil McLeese - from USA who are keen TCPC members, and to learning something of their

experiences 'over the pond'. We plan to use Brueggemann's DVD, "Countering Pharaoh's Production/Consumption society today" from September. We meet - usually the first Saturday in the month - in Gloucester.

Hampshire Hub

(Martin Godfrey 023 8076 6312
martin.godfrey@pcnbritain.org.uk)

Material from the new atheists, A.C. Grayling, Richard Dawkins and Julian Baggini is engaging Hub groups around the county this spring. Also the Scientific and Medical Network has been teaching us about how the brain has shaped our world. And Green Spirit will be leading us on the path to a new consciousness in June. No doubt the various conferences that members are attending will provide inspiration for the autumn programme.

For details of the different places and dates and times for the Hampshire meetings, contact Martin by email or phone.

Hickling (Norfolk Broads)

(Merrie Longbottom 01692 598844
merrie.longbottom@pcnbritain.org.uk)

The Hickling (Norfolk Broads) PCN group has just affiliated with PCN, but we have been meeting for over a year each Thursday afternoon at 2 pm, in various member's homes. Our small group grew out of a Lent course undertaken in 2009 and the desire to continue to meet together, but with a view towards exploring other new and exciting ways of approaching our beliefs (and non-beliefs!). To date we have watched and discussed Living the Questions I, DreamThinkBeDo, and have now begun looking at Saving Jesus. Along the way we have shared books and articles by Bishop John Spong, Gretta Vosper, Marcus Borg and several others. If you would like to join in our journey, we would like to meet you.

London (Herne Hill)

(Ted Offerman 020 8852 7063
ted.offerman@pcnbritain.org.uk)

We have completed our journey through *The First Paul* by Borg and Crossan and are in the process of considering what we might look at next. Our attendance numbers have fallen a bit of late (perhaps a reflection on Paul?) but the May meeting was certainly lively. For our next meeting on 10th June (7.45 for 8.00 as always) members are all invited to bring thoughts about an article we liked or found interesting in the March 2010 PCN newsletter. On Tuesday 13th July we have our

regular annual summer party at Saint Faith's vicarage, and will also be giving some thought to meeting patterns and venues in the future, since the vicarage will no longer be available to us after September.

London (Richmond)

(Alan Powell 020 8878 7355
Email: alan.powell@pcnbritain.org.uk)

The group has arranged four Saturday afternoon sessions (2.30 pm) on John Dominic Crossan's DVD "Victory and Peace or Justice and Peace".

June 12th - "Justice and World: What is the Character of Your God?"

July 10th - "History and Jesus: What is the Content of Your Faith?"

September 18th Worship and Violence: What is the Purpose of Prayer?"

October 16th Resurrection and Community: What is the Function of Your Church?"

Each of the four lectures lasts some 50 minutes and will be followed by post DVD discussion and refreshment. The sessions will be held in the chapel of Hickey's Almshouses, Sheen Road, Richmond. Non members of the group will be most welcome.

North East Lincolnshire

(John Sharp 01472509857
Email: john.sharp@pcnbritain.org.uk)

Our group has been following the "Living the Questions" course for over a year now and found it very stimulating. However, we now feel the need for a break from it and are about to embark on a detailed perusal of a book. The question is: which one? We have a short list of three to choose from: "Tomorrow's Faith" by Adrian Smith, "Eternal Life" by Bishop Spong and "The Naked Now" by Richard Rohr. Our members are busy dipping into these books so that together we can make an informed choice at our next meeting. We hope then also to take stock. What benefit do individual members derive from the group? What direction would they like it to go in? What questions still haunt us? We are a very diverse group - including Methodists, Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Christians of no church allegiance and agnostics - but have extremely amicable and profitable meetings. We always welcome new members.

Yorkshire - Leeds

(Sandra Griffiths 0113 258 2652
sandra.griffiths@pcnbritain.org.uk)

The Leeds Group meets at Chapel Allerton Methodist Church Centre (LS7 4NB) on the second Saturday of the month, with coffee/tea available from 9.30, between 10 and 12. Members continue to use our 'library' of books donated by or on loan from members. At our next meeting on 12th June Adrian Alker, a National Committee member, will speak on The Persistence of Hope. We will not be meeting over the summer, and so our first meeting after that will be on Saturday 11th September.

Our fortnightly Monday evening meetings 'Questers' continue. The group is currently considering which book to tackle next. For exact dates and the address of the venue (a member's house) please contact me. It is not necessary to have bought the book or read the relevant chapter beforehand.

We are always pleased to see regulars, occasional visitors and newcomers alike, and both groups contains all such.

Please contact Sandra as above for further information or directions to any of our meetings. It might be possible to arrange a lift too.

PS - The four members of our group who went to the residential weekend at St Deiniol's in May found it fun and very beneficial. I, writes Sandra, have said before that those who aren't there don't know what they're missing! I commend these weekends to all PCN members.

Manchester

(John Ramsbottom 0161 456 5119
Email: john.ramsbottom@pcnbritain.org.uk)

We have continued to meet on a monthly basis, basing the evening around "Living the Questions" DVD course, which has stimulated some interesting discussions. There have been some new faces who have joined during the year and attendances have been around 12 persons.

The intention for the future is to take a break over the summer, so future meeting dates will be:

June 23rd, September 22nd, October 27th and November 24th.

As a slightly different format, we are hoping that members will lead an evening on a subject of their choice. The planned topics will be:

Orthodoxy

The nature of God

Progressive Christianity and younger people
Progressive bible study.

Anyone interested will be most welcome to join us. Meetings are held at St Agnes church, North Reddish, Stockport at 7.30 pm on a Wednesday evening.

Further information available from John Ramsbottom as above.

Salisbury Group

(Lavender Buckland 01722 780488
Email: lavender.buckland@pcnbritain.org.uk)

It continues to delight and amaze us that people are willing to travel an hour to be with us: from Devizes, and from Fordingbridge. What a reflection on the attraction of PCN, and the need we all feel to discuss ideas - and to feel comfortable in doing so.

John and Lavender Buckland went to the Newbury Group, earlier in the month, at the kind invitation of Howard and Maria Grace, and greatly enjoyed the meeting [report elsewhere] where the speaker was Ray Slmpson.

It seems a very encouraging idea to visit other groups and be part of different discussions, with ideas to bring back to others.

Salisbury Group welcomes visitors: welcomes input from other groups; please be in touch! Mr & Mrs Buckland, Benedictus, Church Street, Bowerchalke, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP5 5AY. Contact details as above.

Sedbergh 'Open' Readers Group

(Martin Dodds 01539 620308
martin.dodds@pcnbritain.org.uk)

The group continues to meet roughly once a fortnight. Our pattern of activity is fairly low key, we function essentially as a discussion group which allows us to explore questions and problems relating to matters of faith, in a forum which is non-judgemental. Currently we are discussing Adrian Smith's 'The God Shift'.

Most of our members come from a variety of Christian cultural backgrounds, and most are attenders at some church or meeting house. We have just welcomed two new members. For more details, contact Martin as above.

Tunbridge Wells Radical Pilgrims

(Pat Churchill 01892531541
pat.churchill@pcnbritain.org)

Everyone is welcome to our meetings which are generally on the last Thursday of the

month. (do ring Pat to check time and venue). We tend to pick topics to discuss rather than following a set course.

Just before Easter a member of the group visited Palestine as a member of our diocese and kept us informed of events he attended and meetings that he had, all the while feeding back his impressions.

Our March meeting consisted of planning and general discussion. Somehow someone always has something of interest to introduce to the meeting.

April saw the start of the new 'Living the Questions'. Those of us who had experienced the first course felt that the second one was an improvement and we stopped the DVD frequently to discuss points.

We saw more of LTQ in May when we had a joint meeting with another Tunbridge Wells group and again there was much to discuss.

Our next meeting in June will be watching part of 'Bed among the Lentils' which should again give rise to thoughts and opinions that we can share.

Since a few of us have booked in for the talk by Karen Armstrong in June, the July meeting will most likely be discussion of this.

We are hosting the Tunbridge Wells "Stories for Peace" meeting promoted by peace organisations including Jerusalem Peacemakers on October 17th at the Camden Centre. The finer details have yet to be arranged.

There are so many events on the horizon such as Greenbelt, Marcus Borg, and Richard Rohr that feedback from these will keep us talking for many more meetings.

Vale of Glamorgan

(Janice Proctor 01446 401152
janice.proctor@pcnbritain.org.uk)

We continue to meet fortnightly in a member's home. The group finds this venue helpful to discussion and even the shyest feel able to contribute.

For a few months we discussed articles from magazines, on a variety of topics. Then we

found a rich source of discussion and a great deal of encouragement and hope in John Hick's article on "Believable Christianity". This is the text of an address given at the Radical Christian Faith conference in 2006.

More recently we discussed the Gospel of Thomas using a CD of a talk given by Elaine Pagels.

Members continue to be concerned about the need for peace between religions as a necessary precursor for world peace. We hope to be able to welcome representatives of other faiths to future meetings to assist our understanding of their beliefs and practices. A warm welcome is always offered to newcomers and visitors.

Woodbridge

(Julie Mansfield 01394 384370
julie.mansfield@pcnbritain.org.uk)

We are tentatively setting out on our intrepid journey of discovery and so far we comprise a gallant yet motley crew of eight searching souls, thrown together by our common frustration with the doctrines and dogmas of organised religion which don't seem to address our doubts or modern-day issues. On the other hand, we all very much affirm the human and community aspects of religion and above all value our group as a time for sharing together.

So far we have simply been getting to know each other and discussing our many and varied understandings of the word 'God'. We have also spent a little time chatting about and swapping books we've found helpful - or not! At our June meeting, Terence Cooper, PCN treasurer and Woodbridge Group member will present a lesson from the children's progressive curriculum "Jesus & His Kingdom of Equals". This comes from the USA and owes much to the work of the Jesus Seminar. We can report next time on how Terence got on and how we reacted to the material.

We would love to hear from anyone who would like to join us or make suggestions.

PCN Britain Groups Update

We are pleased to welcome into the Network three more local groups.

The first is an established discussion group which meets in Stoke on Trent called 20-20 Progressive Christianity. This was founded by a PCN member, Ian Gregory. They joined the

Network last month. Ian is available on 01782 614407, ian.gregory@pcnbritain.org.uk .

The second is a group which has been meeting for the last year at Hickling on the Norfolk Broads. They joined PCN earlier this month. The contact there is PCN member, Merrie

Longbottom, on 01692 598844,
merrie.longbottom@pcnbritain.org.uk .

The third, based in Cardiff, was launched in March by a group of PCN members. Robert Crompton is the contact there on 02920 540071 robert.crompton@pcnbritain.org.uk The PCN groups at Mill Hill and Leigh report that they have stopped meeting at present but the convenors, Elaine Cobb and Phil Sudworth, have agreed to continue as local contacts for PCN Britain.

If you visit the regional pages of the PCN website you will notice a number of new groups hoping to launch soon. These are Colchester, Cornwall, Glasgow, Ipswich, Lakenheath, Norwich, Oxford and Woking. If you would like to join them or any PCN group, the full list of forty-seven can be found at <http://www.pcnbritain.org.uk/index.php/locations/>. Alternatively contact the PCN Admin Assistant, Andy Vivian, on 01594 516528.

Network Change of Address

The contact address for PCN Britain has changed. Please do not write to or phone St Faith's Vicarage any more. Hugh Dawes, whose address it has been, is shortly moving.

In future mail should go to

**PCN Britain,
26 High Street,
Newnham,**

Gloucestershire GL14 1BB

This is the address of our administrative assistant, Andy Vivian, who can also field enquiries by phone on 01594 516528.

The general email contact remains
info@pcnbritain.org.uk

Over the Points

A series of talks traversing the '8 Points of Progressive Christianity' on 6 CDs, recorded at PCN Exeter meetings between 2008-2010 led by the Revd Iain McDonald, minister of Southernhay URC in Exeter. At each meeting a brief talk is followed by comprehensive discussion, with each disc divided into titled tracks for speedy reference and access. Discs are attractively cased in three consecutive boxes of two which are available separately (ie as pairs of discs) or as a complete set. Individual discs cannot be ordered separately or otherwise mixed. These recordings are a rich resource for personal listening, or equally suitable for stimulating and aiding local group discussions.

1. God and Jesus; 2. God Paths; 3. God's Banquet; 4. Abandoning Certainty; 5. A Spiritual Community; 6. Privilege. **6-CD full set £16.00. Any 2 sets (ie 1+2, 3+4 or 5+6) £11.00. Any single set (as above) £6.00.** Prices include post and packing.

Please print your name and address clearly, make cheques payable to C. Avis and post to 37 Clifton Road, Exeter, Devon EX1 2BN. Or you can order from chris.avis1@tiscali.co.uk using Paypal for payment.

Forthcoming events



Religion and Social Justice

The 23rd UK Annual Conference of the Sea of Faith Network.

Tuesday 27th to Thursday 29th July 2010 at Leicester University.

The Sea of Faith Network – one of our sister organisations – has a reputation for journeying into fresh territory for faith related conferences, and this year's looks to be no exception.

The speakers are **Maryam Namazie**, from the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain, **Kumi Naidoo**, the Executive Director of Greenpeace International, and **Julian Baggini**, the philosopher, author and broadcaster. In addition to their contributions, the programme offers workshops, base groups, early morning and fringe activities, and time just spent talking with

like-minded people. **Don Cupitt**, the radical theologian and author who inspired the Network, will also be present.

The conference fee is £160 standard accommodation, £199 en suite, and PCN members would be very welcome. (There is quite a bit of overlap between our two organisations. For further information and a booking form email sofconf10@yahoo.co.uk, or write to SoF Conference, 10 Brindle Close, Bassett, Southampton SO16 3PJ.

How Churches must Change or Die

“I see no future in the twenty-first century for expressions of Christianity that are not Spirited.”

St Columba's URC church in York on Saturday 17th July

A free day conference with Dave Tomlinson. *Author of “The Post Evangelical” and “Re-Enchanting Christianity”, founder of “Holy Joes” and vicar of St Luke’s Church, Holloway.*

The first talk is after the PCN Britain AGM at 11am, the second after lunch at approx 2pm.

Members and non-members are all equally welcome.

Call 01594 516528 or email andy.vivian@pcnbritain.org.uk for a programme and directions. Bring a packed lunch.

Being Christian in the 21st Century.



Marcus Borg. Saturday 11th September, 10 am to 4 pm, St John's Church, Princes Street, Edinburgh.

Marcus Borg is a firm favourite of many progressive Christians. His writings and lectures have offered a pathway of revisioning Christianity, of setting a new paradigm, which offers positive and intelligent ways of speaking about the Christian faith and how we can be passionate followers of Jesus the Christ.

Places are still available for the whole day Saturday event, and if you want to make a weekend of it you can also hear Borg speak at Sunday morning worship at St John's. To book places, either go to the PCN website, or contact Adrian or Christine Alker for a booking form and further information. You can phone them on 01937 583513, or write to them at 29 Templar Gardens, Wetherby LS22 7TG.

The conference fee is just £18 for paying members of PCN Britain and CRC Sheffield, £22 for non members.

“Jesus is God”? You can't be serious!

Continued from page 2

I glimpse in Jesus one who was perhaps more political than priestly. The impetus of his life drove him to openly criticise the domination systems that virtually enslaved the majority of the inhabitants, reducing them to destitution and forcing them into banditry and eventually rebellion. His brief ministry thereby brought him into conflict with the Roman controllers of his country and with the Jewish ecclesiastical hierarchy, who both imposed crippling taxation. It was the combined reaction of these two powerful groups, not the Jewish *people* (the misuse of the term 'Jews' was surely the root of

anti-Semitism) that led inevitably to his execution.

This common misinterpretation of the Crucifixion gave rise to the Eucharist, which Jesus did not appear to institute. Is it not likely that the references to the 'body broken' and the 'blood shed' were really a warning that those who followed his anti-domination crusade could expect to share his fate?

I cannot believe that the entire purpose of Jesus' life was to suffer the ignominious death of a criminal of the deepest dye, despite the fact that Christianity has made it central to its teaching and adopted the cross as its logo. The life of Jesus seems to me to be a seamless example of how human beings should treat each other, thus creating a fair, compassionate and equitable

society. This aspect of his ministry as the focus of our faith is totally absent from any Creed deemed essential to membership of the Christian church.

I agree with David in his comment about worship. The clergy regularly lead prayers which are obviously addressed to someone 'out there' and the worshippers, not trained in the seminary and thus destined to be a recipient of the delivered 'truth' naturally *do* assume that they are talking to a 'being' out there. When disaster strikes, many people, especially the 'non-religious', almost involuntarily recite the Lord's Prayer, as though it were a magical incantation. I know of a minister who was openly rebuked because she had (deliberately) omitted this prayer from an infant baptismal service. It is standard practice for the congregation to be requested to join in 'the prayer that Jesus taught us'. My reading of the gospel accounts is that Jesus was not issuing an instruction, but simply responding to a request 'teach us how to pray'; which would seem to indicate that no one ever heard what he said in prayer! In any case, the final phrase 'for thine is the kingdom . . .' is not Biblical.

I invite the reader to re-consider what we mean by prayer – what do we imagine we are doing? Rabbi Dr. Jonathan Romain explains that the English term 'to pray' comes from the Latin verb 'precare', meaning to entreat or supplicate. By contrast, the Hebrew term 'to pray' comes from the Hebrew verb 'hitpalleil' meaning to judge oneself. Here, prayer is an act of self-examination, not so much addressing God but oneself. Prayer would be more productive, I claim, if we meditated on our past actions and considered how we might act (possibly differently) henceforward in the service of others.

“This is my blood”

“Next Sunday, in the morning service, we will drink blood together - everyone welcome.”

by Graham Hellier

Graham Hellier is a PCN member, a Church of Scotland minister and former Senior Master at a Church of England School. He is author of “Free Range Christianity” published by Authorhouse.

Is this what we mean or do we mislead when, at the heart of our worship, we offer blood to drink? The meaning is unmistakable when we warn that those who do not participate are as good as dead — “Except you eat my flesh and drink my blood, there is no life in you” – Jn 6:53. For

Mindful of this new approach to prayer and aware of the lamentable lack of understanding on how to interpret the Bible, I think worship should become a time when we abandon our pointless liturgy and dreary three-point sermon (another aspect of the 3-in-1 theme?) and embark upon a programme of re-education, inaugurating a challenge to engage in life, as Jack Spong has already suggested. Realising how Jesus' teaching still informs us, we might then re-energise the Church into a movement leading the drive to create a just and compassionate society here and now – God's kingdom envisioned by Jesus.

Together with many others, I sense a stirring of an energising Spirit, within and outside the ecclesiastical communities. This Spirit is surely that which 'kick-started' the Christian movement. This Spirit maybe *is* God. Even the latest written Fourth Gospel attributed to someone called John, records words that Jesus probably never uttered when he addressed the fictitious Samaritan woman: 'God is Spirit'. In his recent book *Spiritual Intelligence*, Brian Draper writes “God is in you. God is in others and the Spirit of God courses through creation like a pulse, a heartbeat, a life-bringing, life-sustaining force for good.”

Jack Spong, whom David ridicules, recalls in his book *Born of a Woman*: “The Spirit in early Christian thinking was an aspect of God identified with life and breath. The Spirit was the force by which God moved the prophet to speak . . . the animating principle of Jesus' ministry . . . the empowering presence . . . that came upon the disciples after Jesus' death . . .”

Surely, this latter phrase is what the Resurrection stories mean?

this reason, many have stayed away and many more repress their doubts.

Is it conviction that retains these words or a questionable ecumenism or laziness of habit? Are they symbolic or literal? — if the former, they have served their time, and if the latter, they mask a greater truth. There are many reasons why we should revise them. Foremost is that, as F W Beare said of the texts of the Last Supper: “It is no longer possible to determine exactly what was said or done, or what was the intention of

Jesus". The New Testament accounts are too varied; the interpretations too diverse. Each writer sees with his own eyes — even to John's Gospel where the elements of bread and wine have no specific reference in the account of that final meal.

We have to be aware, in that first century, of the effect of competing cults. In the mystery religions, eating the flesh and blood of the god was commonplace. In the *taurobolium* the initiate descended into a pit. On the lattice cover above him, a bull had its throat cut and the blood poured down over the new disciple — a gory ritual well matched by Cowper's hymn: "*There is a fountain filled with blood, / drawn from Emmanuel's veins / and sinners plunged beneath that flood / lose all their guilty stains.*". Christians did not practise such full-blooded rituals but they may well have picked up the imagery that lay so easily to hand.

Blood did have its place in Jewish covenant thinking but we associate it with death and the Hebrews associated it with life. The covenant people became kin to one another — one blood and one nation before God. When eating flesh, the blood was not drunk but offered to God. Jews would have found the drinking of blood abhorrent — and this applies equally to the disciples of Jesus. Like many followers of many faiths, they may have succumbed to the downward drag of literalism — see the exchange in Matthew 16 — but there cannot have been any confusion in their minds between the elements and the reality of Jesus sitting before them at the Last Supper.

Even if Jesus used the words "*This is my body ... this is my blood*", there is no necessary emphasis on 'is' - nothing therefore to do with the nature and essence of the bread and wine. In Aramaic, the phrase would be: "*This - my body*" which surely referred directly to Jesus himself. As for the sharing of the cup, that was more likely to be associated with blessing, as in the Passover meal, and with the heavenly banquet, when all things are fulfilled. The Didache, following the work of Aaron Milavec and others, is now thought to be a first century training manual. It makes no connection between the wine and blood. The words used in its description of the Eucharist are: "*We give you thanks, our Father, for the holy vine of your servant David which you revealed to us through your servant Jesus. To you [is] the glory for ever.*" In the second century, Justin, in his account, follows the same tradition of praise and thanksgiving, without the emphasis on blood.

In the western church, the theme of priestly sacrifice was revived. It is one of the tragedies of

Christian history that this was taken up at the very time when Judaism was leaving it behind. As Dr Ramsay said: "*The old imagery of sacrifice is remote and repellent to the modern mind.*" [Sunday Times 20;12;64]. When the later concept of transubstantiation was worked out by Paschasius Radbertus in the ninth century and then adopted at the Lateran Council of 1215, it was arguably an attempt to avoid a crude literalism but, given the context of Aristotelian philosophy and its subtlety, it has little explanatory power for us today and seems to reinforce a mechanistic or magical interpretation..

Today such reductionist language has spread across the main denominations in a misguided attempt at ecumenism. Now that the hopes of the latest Vatican Council have evaporated and the prospect of institutional unity has receded, it is time to look again at what we say and what we mean. It was a mistake to encourage uniformity rather than diversity, and no more so than in the set forms of the eucharist. The effect of uniformity is to foster a sense of familiarity across the worldwide Christian fellowship but it is done at the cost of entrenching divisive doctrines.

But surely, you may say, John 6 is explicit enough — "*Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood ...*"? These may be the words of the writer or of an editor rather than Jesus but in any case, the teaching clearly pre-dates the Last Supper and leads emphatically to verse 63: "*It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh can achieve nothing.*" and the disciples are directed to Jesus' words, and not to his physical presence.

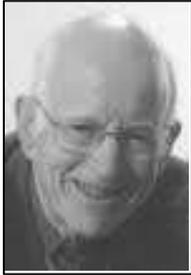
The early Fathers were quite familiar with the language of signs and types; figures, symbols and likeness, though they were as diverse in their thinking as we are. Gregory of Nazianzus conceived the priest's voice as a knife, cleaving asunder the Saviour's body and blood [Ep. 171] but Augustine represents Jesus as saying: "*You must understand what I have said in a spiritual sense. You are not going to eat this body which you see or drink that blood which those who will crucify me are going to shed.*" [Sermon 131,1; tract.in ev.Jn 27:5]. In Orthodox thinking today, a far wider sacramentalism is indicated for the elements are seen to be holy before ever they are consecrated. They are not changed.

There are both lesser and greater fears that are aroused by proposals to allow alternative language surrounding the bread and wine. The lesser fear is that the costliness of divine love is overlooked. Blood vividly forces us to recognise the agony of the cross and the suffering that real love entails. The risk is not great however —

hymns, readings and sermons are hardly likely to make the eucharist a shallow sentimental affair. The greater fear is that such changes might deny the real presence of Christ. Let us be clear — if the presence of Christ is shrunken to these tangible forms; if the only way of receiving the divine is through physical crumbs and drops of liquid; if we are limited to such fragmentary material made available by priestly authority; then we can only cling to such remnants of faith as we have left. But God is spirit and the body is

discerned in real relationships that yet break the bounds of space and time. To be 'in Christ' is to be drawn into a greater communion. It is enough to declare: "*The bread of life*" — "*The cup of blessing*". Like the Emmaeus travellers, we shall know Christ in the breaking of bread before ever we begin to eat, for he is there in our hearts. It is when we share in the company of God's people that we become strong to grasp the breadth and length and height and depth of his love (Eph 3:18). It is time for a bloodless coup.

Conversion or Convergence?



Chris Avis, longstanding member of PCN Britain, and generator of excellent recordings of progressive and liberal speakers and events, challenges the idea of a "Great Commission".

During my participation in a recent ecumenical discussion group, the question arose of how we view and communicate with those of other faiths or none. Words like 'respect', 'understand' and 'smile' were voiced, but it was not long before my increasing awareness of an underlying agenda of 'conversion' filled me with a familiar despair.

In an attempt to lob a gentle spanner into the theological works I asked whether it is right to treat those of other great faiths, such as Islam, as spiritually inferior simply because by accident of birth and culture they are part of a different faith structure to ours. The resulting consensus was that the Christian conversion of such people should be handled with great care and patience. My inner despair deepened.

I remember seeing a video on 'Emerging Churches': community-based Christian projects initiated to serve local needs, frequently with great success. Words spoken by one organizer remain in my memory, but for the wrong reason: "Now we've got them in, we must begin our mission!" Whilst I try to retain a degree of Christian charity, nevertheless it seems to me that Jesus' example of life lived in service to others was in this case principally a means to an end, namely that of conversion.

Like many Christians, my discussion group friends were, I think, misinterpreting the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20 as 'The Great Conversion'. As they saw it, the Mission of the Christian Church is to show all non-Christians (and more than a few Christian heretics) the errors of their misguided beliefs so that finally everyone who accepts the Truth and worships the Lord Jesus Christ will be rewarded with 'salvation' (now there's a word to conjure with!).

To me it is significant that this much-vaunted 'commission' is absent from the earliest gospel of Mark (which ends at 16:8), while Luke's version declares the preaching of 'repentance and the forgiveness of sins to all nations'; and John concludes his gospel around the command of Jesus to 'take care of my sheep'. That seems more like loving concern than determined conversion.

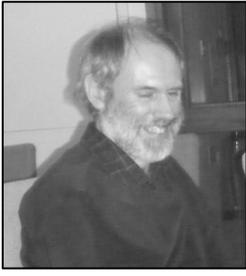
Matthew had his own Jewish agenda reasons for placing such words on the posthumous lips of Jesus, which would have been well understood by his readers in their situation at the time. Read within our very different circumstances and culture, the Great Commission so easily becomes the Great Omission when we fail to see behind it the need to transcend our destructive religious barriers and show by example the ways of love that were inherent in Jesus as a God-intoxicated, grown-up human being.

It occurs to me that the place where conversion is most urgently needed may well be within ourselves.

Book review

The Death of Thought – Bring it on!

The New Faithful: Why Young Adults Are Embracing Christian Orthodoxy, by Colleen Carroll
Loyola University Press, 2002. Pb, 332 pages. ISBN 978-0829420425 10 (£10.99 on Amazon)



Duncan Craig, a former treasurer of the Network, member of the Edinburgh local group, and a regular wise, thoughtful and perceptive reviewer for the newsletter, reflects on a partisan but

frightening book on the enthusiasm of young Americans for religious orthodoxy, and on the fate of the life of church communities in our time.

This book results from a young journalist being given a grant to research a social phenomenon: the growing number of young Americans who are embracing religious orthodoxy. Colleen Carroll's interest is far from objective: she is a cheer-leader for the movement. There is little analysis to be found here and the book is largely a catalogue of practices and viewpoints that she clearly approves of. Perhaps a page-and-a-half is devoted to critical views. Among these, though, is a small gem. The author mentions the concerns of a seminary professor who regularly receives phone calls from prospective students asking if the dogma is really, really strict and if they get to wear black robes all the time.

It is impossible to tell from the book just how big the movement is. The author is vague on numbers and puts the emphasis on quality, maintaining that among the new orthodox are some of the brightest of her generation. Some of the young people featured excelled in their careers and enjoyed huge material and social success at an early age, but found life empty. This is, of course, not a new story, although in previous generations the search for spiritual fulfilment might have led to the Far East, rather than the most hard-line versions of American evangelicalism, Catholicism or Judaism. Some take holy orders. One monastic order whose members live and work with the poor in deprived areas of New York has seen an exponential increase in recruits. The practice of adoration of the Eucharist has taken on cult status for many young Catholics, baffling the Vatican II generation of clergy. Many seek some form of spirituality or service to humanity that they cannot find in the churches they grew up in. A degree of fusion is occurring as Catholic "reverts" bring emotionally-charged evangelical forms of worship into Catholic churches, while evangelical churches are prodded into social action by people who have been impressed by the welfarist side of Catholicism. Conservative churches across the theological spectrum are putting aside historical and doctrinal differences

in recognition of the power of shared social and political values.

For many of the new orthodox, the driving force is a reaction against the perceived failures of their parents' generation. They are the children of divorce, so by some logic that the author does not feel the need to explain, they turn against pre-marital sex. They feel that their parents, teachers and church leaders failed to bring them up with clear values and beliefs. The hate words for this generation are "secularism", "pluralism" and "moral relativism". The notion that their parents' generation were reacting against the faults they saw in the prevailing norms of their day neither stops the orthodox judging, nor starts them thinking. Seekers turn to the most rigorous and traditional churches they can find, seeking to commit themselves totally to whatever the most uncompromising authorities can set before them. They seek faith communities in which they will be held accountable by their peers. The author continually and proudly emphasises that this movement is "counter-cultural", going against the grain of modern American society. Churches which value tolerance are despised, while those which promote absolute values with clarity and confidence are lauded. "Orthodoxy" is not just a word the author has picked on to describe the movement: it is the central idea that these young people are attracted to. The possibility that thinking out choices or "living the questions" (to coin a phrase) might be a rigorous way of life does not seem to occur to the author or her generation.

For some there is a vague feeling of guilt about homophobia, but they can live with it. The young orthodox are out to change the culture. They are consciously aiming to use their higher birth rate to outnumber the relativists and pluralists, assuming they can hold their offspring in the fold through home-schooling, faith-based colleges and parental control of dating. The assumption is that for the people surveyed orthodoxy will be a life-long commitment and that the culture of the US will be permanently changed. The possibility that their children, for whom orthodoxy was not freely chosen, might have other ideas barely registers. Commitment to hard doctrines and a strict moral code is everything. The generation with perhaps the greatest educational opportunities is rejecting thought.

Going by her website, the author is as fiercely ambitious as she is conservative. Eight years after the book was published (and now under the surname Campbell, with obligatory husband and children), she has innumerable publication

credits, works for a think tank and appears on worldwide Catholic television. She has been a script-writer for George W. Bush. On the Heritage website, a plug for *The New Faithful* is sandwiched between a button for opposing Obama's health care plan and a picture of a pretty blonde advertising "Waterboarding Instructor" tee-shirts.

In *The New Faithful*, it is taken as read that liberal churches cannot grow. Three thousand miles away from the right to bear arms and joke about torture, in the safety of a liberal Anglican church in Edinburgh, conversation over après-service coffee follows progressive themes. We all value

liturgical worship, but seem to have problems with the theological content. One person doubts eternal life, while another has never been very keen on the divinity of Christ. Everyone seems to know Richard Holloway but nobody can remember what he currently believes. A majority of the congregation are over sixty, although a few children weave through the throng, passing out pieces of 80th birthday cake. Endangered species though it is, the group is gentle, inclusive and comfortable to be part of. But are the mindless orthodoxy of young Americans and the thoughtful muddle of not-so-young Brits the only possibilities?

Duncan Craig

From the editor's desk

One of the pleasantest things about doing this job has been watching the newsletter becoming more and more *our* newsletter. There was a time when I would anxiously solicit articles for each issue, concerned that there should be something to print. But noticeably in the last couple of years I've been doing very little of that, as growing numbers of readers have been just sending pieces in, including a good number written in response to those others have contributed.

The first two articles in this issue are each responses to David A Keddie's *For God's Sake?*, which was published in March. James Quinton and Jack Dean read Keddie in very different ways, and I'm not the only reader, for sure, who will feel more empathy with one writer than the other. Equally surely many people's preference will be different to my own! For both are serious, convinced and progressive replies from within the community of our network. I share deeply James's anxiety about embracing a mess of pottage "of 'spirituality' and 'mysticism' and magic"; but I don't read Jack as endorsing that.

One thing that has become abundantly clear to me in my PCN Britain years has been the sheer diversity of progressive Christian understanding. As a cradle Anglican, and as someone who has never had any kind of religious conversion experience in my life, that should hardly surprise me. Historically the Church of England has always been a very broad church and - present disputes over human sexuality notwithstanding - its breadth has increased over the years. It's a slant on belief ("Tell all the truth but tell it slant"), a style of living faith, rather than a package of beliefs. Progressive Christianity has also to be a broad church. The Eight Points put down some helpful markers. But they don't seek to define, there is no 'right' reading of them, and each one of us brings to them our own story and

our own experiences, which colour how we read them – both for good and ill.

I've been reading recently two new books by Quakers which we trailed in March; Ben Pink Dandelion's *Celebrating the Quaker Way* and Timothy Ashworth's and Alex Wildwood's *Rooted in Christianity, Open to New Light: Quaker spiritual diversity*. I first encountered Quakers as friends some 35 years ago, when as a wet young curate I got to know the elderly Clerk of our local Meeting in Surrey. The copy of *Christian faith and practice in the experience of the Society of Friends* which he gave me then is still on my bookshelves and has been drawn upon regularly. I've worked with Friends since then, on social and political issues in particular, and in that context worshipped with them too. I do appreciate Quaker silence, as someone who has tried hard, though not with great success, to introduce real silence into Eucharistic worship. But I've never wanted to be a Quaker myself, and these books have done nothing to change that, and I certainly don't see myself joining the migrant queue of retired vicars at the Meeting House. The books' three writers are all of them converts, and that of itself is significant, and witnesses to the dissatisfaction many people do now feel with other denominational versions of 'Church'. One of them, Alex Wildwood, goes further. Having progressed through paganism and Twelve Steps recovery (both of which continue to nourish him, along with Buddhism) he considers himself now a non-Christian Friend. He puts the case for that being an emerging, developing grouping amongst British Quakers in a respectful dialogue with Timothy Ashwood. Ashwood's background is quite different. The oldest of six children of an Anglican vicarage, with a liberal priest as his father, he then converted to Roman Catholicism, trained as a

priest, served as one for 18 months, then left the church, married, shared the role of Warden at a Quaker Meeting with his wife and, after PhD studies, became biblical studies tutor at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre. There his dialogue with Wildwood is opened up to others in courses they lead together. In a series of models devised by Wildwood, they map out Quaker diversity. In the last model, two slightly overlapping Venn circles labelled 'Christian Tradition' and 'Other-than-Christian worldviews' are spanned by a wide banana shape labelled 'Q', and known as 'The Quaker Banana'.

Summarised in that way, all this may well appear surreal. I actually very much enjoyed reading the book, as I did Pink Dandelion's, which is a very short enthusiastic celebration of Quakerism, written for other Quakers.

But did I learn anything new? Not really. Because though this was in theory unfamiliar, virgin territory for me, it was all actually very familiar. The writers want to communicate the distinctiveness of the Quaker way, its difference from other denominations within Christianity: its freedom; its liberatedness; unbound by authority; revelling in good works; concerned for the planet; caring for those on the margins (for example helping sex offenders to return to life in the community with a support group) in ways no one else is said or thought to do.

But actually, in the south London Church of England setting of in which I live, people in many churches (and not only the Anglican ones) would praise similar activities and understandings within their own Christian communities. The frill-free nature of Quaker worship – as some would see it – perhaps makes more apparent their social and justice concerns, but these are not absent in other settings. And they can rate highly too in communities which would lay no claim to liberal or progressive understanding. Many evangelical churches offer tremendous care and support to sex offenders back in community life after prison - and do so a lot more calmly than some more apparently 'open' churches manage.

The pride that Quakers take in their multi-faceted tradition, the desire to celebrate it and share it, is utterly right, and good to know about. I hope the same is true of all of non-Quaker progressive Christians too. Religion is concerned with that which touches our deepest selves, the core of our being. If it doesn't matter profoundly to people of faith, something is wrong.

The challenge of course, for progressives as well as all other kinds of believers, is can we hold to what matters to us, without insulting or discounting what matters to others. And yes, somewhere in that area the dying of Jesus fits, as well as whatever may have been his 'teachings'.

Hugh Dawes

Copy date for the next newsletter. The next newsletter must be at the printers by Friday 3rd September, and will be mailed out about 10 days later. Contributions (including local group news) **must** reach the editor, Hugh Dawes by **Friday 27th August 2010 at the very latest** – and preferably a bit earlier. Email them please to hugh.dawes@pcnbritain.org.uk, or if you are posting them send them to Hugh Dawes, 28 Highshore Rd, London SE15 5AF (an address for the newsletter alone!)

Themes of Autumn, harvest, fresh beginnings, life changes might be attractive to some writers. And you might care to pick up and respond to some of what's in this issue. I said in March that anything around the area of faith as a way of living would be really welcome – and helpful and attractive to lots of us. I say it again!

Please put **NEWSLETTER** in the header of any email, or on your envelope if you use post.

The Progressive Christianity Network – Britain (Registered Charity No 1102164) is itself part of a wider international network of progressive Christian organisations, and has links in particular with the Centre for Progressive Christianity in the United States. PCN Britain's website is online at www.pcnbritain.org.uk, with information and resources. TCPC's website also offers a wealth of material for open and progressive Christian understanding. Visit it at www.tcpc.org. You can email us at info@pcnbritain.org.uk, phone us on 01594 516528, or mail us at PCN Britain, 26 High Street, Newnham, Gloucestershire GL14 1BB..

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