

# Progressive Christianity Network – Britain

March 2010



Supporting and promoting open Christian understanding

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## Evolution: the next step

by Howard Grace

*Howard Grace taught maths up to A-level in a Comprehensive school for many years. Fifteen years ago he left that to launch a programme, which has led to doing over 800 interactive sessions in Sixth Forms around the UK, with international teams of young people on subjects related to 'Purpose in Life' and 'Motivation'. He and his wife Maria give leadership to the Newbury PCN group.*

As a Christian who is centred on the spiritual aspect rather than on literal doctrinal interpretations, I see no conflict between evolution and my faith. In fact a realisation about how humanity is evolving shows me an inspiring path ahead. I personally see the evolutionary process as an expression of God. (In saying this I am not assuming anything about the nature of God which I personally have come to understand in a mystical sense.) But before considering the moral and spiritual implications let us consider briefly how this evolutionary process has developed. There seems to be a large consensus on four distinctive steps.

### First step

The first step is that about 13.7 billion years ago the universe started with a big bang. How this came into being is a mystery to our present understanding. The Milky Way galaxy, which we are part of, is thought to have evolved about 10 billion years ago, and the earth about 4.6 billion years ago. (The

exact figures I quote may be debatable but that does not concern me here. The point is that we are talking about huge periods of time.)

### Second step

Life on earth, in its simplest form, is believed to have begun to evolve about 3.5 billion years ago. It thus happened about 10 billion years after the big bang. It is the second of the four steps that I see as distinctive. From this eventually evolved an immense variety of more complex plants and animals.

### Third step

Right to the present day, the vast majority of life on earth is not conscious, but at some recent stage during this time consciousness arose. Some animals developed who could think and be aware of what was going on around them. They had brains. This for me is the third distinctive step.

It is largely agreed now that some mammals have some form of consciousness. However although conscious they wouldn't be able to ponder the origins of the universe, the nature of love and things like this. It is worthy of note though that bees, salmon and many other species reach a stage at the end of their lives where, by instinct, they relinquish their personal existence for the ongoing propagation of their species. Also,

many parent animals have an instinctual defence of their young.



Howard Grace. Pondering the next step

### **Fourth step**

Then human beings came on the scene hundreds of thousands of years ago. Thus, even our most primitive ancestors have only been around for a time which is about ten-thousand times less than when the universe kicked off. However, in this extremely short time we have evolved into beings who can think about and question so many things including the origins of the universe and our own being. How has 'matter' evolved to be able to think about itself!? To me that fourth step in evolution, which has led to our self-consciousness about our own place in the universe and our desire to survive, is as remarkable as the first step. This questioning ability has led to an extraordinary acceleration of scientific achievement, especially in the last 200 years. So, although human beings are only a minute part of life's story, they are having a huge impact on this planet. It is this I would like to focus on now.

### **Step 5?**

As self-consciousness emerged, becoming self-centred would also seem to have been a natural aspect of the fourth phase of the evolutionary process. However in recent millennia, as humanity has further evolved, some people have sensed that we should develop beyond being so egocentric. Love means that we should be prepared to sacrifice for our loved ones. And even beyond that. Such concepts as right and wrong have emerged. Religions have developed which suggest that all human beings are brothers and sisters, and in some circumstances the common good should

even come before our own lives. Great people like Gautama Siddharta, who was given the title "Buddha" wrestled with the need to embody 'non-self'. I suspect that his inner struggle, which came from a totally different context and culture, was of a similar nature to what Jesus ultimately experienced in the Garden of Gethsemane. Both were set free from the personal survival mentality. Many other human beings have struggled with this development in our spirit which puts humanity above our own lives. Some succeed more than others. But where is this leading us? Where is this conscious process heading?

To me religion has been a natural stage in our evolutionary process. We have wrestled with questions of meaning and purpose, and our religions have all tried to address this stirring in our spirits. It may be that now the human quest away from self-centredness is the next step in this process? However, it is distinguished from earlier evolutionary stages in that it is a conscious one.

A few days ago, in my morning time of reflection, I wrote, "I am a Christian. But in my heart I've moved beyond the doctrines of religion." I think that what I respond to in Jesus is the total self-giving to his deeper inner leading which, because of the society and times into which he was born he understood and expressed in terms of God's will, "Thy will be done."

I am nowhere near that stage of crossing out the ego. But I wrestle with it as an aspiration, and Jesus is my inspiration and guide on that path. Paul Tillich wrote about "The God who lives beyond the Gods of men and women." Could it be that our next step as humanity is to accept that we know as much about the Divine dimension as a cantankerous toddler knows about the complexities of life which he/she will encounter in full maturity.

### **Moral and spiritual implications**

The fourth step has given rise to self-consciousness. This has enabled us to make conscious decisions which could now effect the next stage of the evolutionary process. We can decide (and to some extent are deciding) that it is not the path of the survival of the fittest and strongest we want

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# Letter from the Chair



It is good to report continuing growth in both the membership and the activities of the Network. Details of the numbers involved are elsewhere in this Newsletter but I hope that you are encouraged

by what is happening around the UK. As I write this short letter the Management Committee is planning for its next meeting to be held in York on 20<sup>th</sup> March. There are a number of issues to be discussed, including the on-going co-operation with other partner groups regarding publications; additional resources to support members; encouraging local and regional groups to consider arranging more conferences; etc. A

report of the decisions will be posted on the website as soon as possible after the 20<sup>th</sup>. The Management Committee is extremely grateful to those members of the Network who have offered help and expertise to support its work. The Management Committee members continue to be mindful of the fact that we are servicing members and groups across the Network of 'independent' local meetings – we are not here to give a single 'official' direction to the work of PCN-Britain. The centre of the work remains the Eight Points within which the whole Network operates. Thank you to all who have renewed their membership, and welcome to all who have joined since Jack Spong's tour!

**John Churcher**

## The PCN-Britain Group Network



*Andy Vivian, the Admin Assistant to our Management Committee, writes about encouraging developments going on in our network of local groups; and also gives a timely reminder as spring gets underway about the need for membership renewal.*

PCN's website currently carries details of 42 local PCN groups. That's 11 more than this time last year. Of these new groups, 7 are now fully launched and the remaining 4 are aiming to launch as soon as they can. This growth is in response to a need among many progressive Christians for somewhere they can speak about their faith without fear of censure. The growth is likely to continue. Members from 10 other locations, currently not served, have expressed the wish to start a new group (see below).

The PCN Group Network is there to support progressive Christians whether or not they wish to subscribe to PCN itself. We ask only that the group should support the Eight Points and that there should be at least one member of the group who is part

of PCN and therefore able to act as the link person or convenor.

Our support comes in several practical ways:

- Space in this Newsletter for reports, contacts and notices
- A page on the main PCN website to post group information
- A PCN mailbox so that the group convenor can receive new enquiries by email
- A dedicated on-line forum for groups to exchange ideas such as books for study and potential speakers
- Assistance with outside publicity and press releases
- Geographically targeted mail-shots to PCN members
- Financial underwriting of special events, when agreed in advance
- Visits from PCN spokespeople.

And, of course, through the group convener, all the offerings of PCN - its newsletter, website, publications and conferences – can be made available.

Can there be too many groups? Personally, I think not. Groups which grow large may need to split into two in order to keep discussion on a personal scale. Each group develops its own dynamic and newcomers may often benefit from having a choice. True, the more groups there are the harder it is for the PCN chair, John Churcher, to get around to them all. But as the distance between groups decreases, an opportunity arises for groups to collaborate, pooling their efforts for a common purpose – such

as a regional retreat, a conference or a social gathering.

One of the targets that PCN has set itself is to hold a get-together of representatives from all the groups. This would offer a chance to put faces to names, to compare notes with other groups, and to feed back to PCN how it can improve or extend what it already does to help the groups.

Feedback is welcome. If anyone reading this would like to form a new group or to join one of the groups already set up or in the process of starting, please get in touch.

### Active Groups

Bath	Harrogate	North Derbyshire and
Bolton	Hastings	Sheffield
Carlisle	Herne Hill	Northants and Bucks
Chelmsford	Hertfordshire	Nottingham
Coventry & Warwickshire	Kendal	Richmond
Dundee	Keswick	Ruislip
Edinburgh	Leeds	Salisbury
Epsom & Leatherhead	Leigh	Sedbergh
Exeter	Lincoln	Skipton
Gloucestershire	Maidenhead/Windsor	Tees Valley and NE England
Hampshire Hub:	Manchester	Tunbridge Wells
A27 Book Club, Alton,	Mill Hill	Vale of Glamorgan
Solent Coast, Southsea and	NE Lincolnshire	West Midlands
Winchester	Newbury	Woodbridge

### Preparing to launch

Cardiff	Ipswich
Colchester	Lakenheath

### Interest in forming a group

Beccles	Horsham	Woking
Berwick	Norwich	Worthing
Bushy	Oxford	
Folkstone/Hythe	Westcliff on Sea	

## PCN-Britain's membership figures and current renewals

PCN finished 2009 with a total of 431 members. This compares with 402 at the end of 2008. So far this year we have added 42 new members. We may be a small band but through the groups and through our conferences and publications, PCN's work reaches a good many more. But that influence would not be possible without the generous and continuing support of the membership.

For that reason we hope that those of you who have yet to renew this year, will consider doing so soon. The deadline for renewals is June, but it's much less nerve wracking for the committee if you don't leave it to the last moment! If you are not sure whether you've paid your subscription then I'd welcome your enquiry.

**Andy Vivian, Admin Assistant**  
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andy.vivian@pcnbritain.org.uk

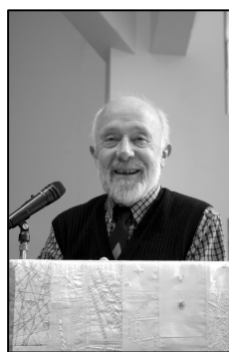
# Borg in Edinburgh in September

*Adrian Alker, for many years vicar of St Mark's, Broomhill in Sheffield, and now Director of Mission Resourcing in the Diocese of Ripon and Leeds writes about this year's autumn event.*

The highlight of 2010 for many members of PCN Britain will doubtless be the September conference in Edinburgh, when Marcus Borg will address the subject, 'Being Christian in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century'. We are delighted to welcome Marcus back to the UK, where in the past he has led two conferences at St Mark's Broomhill, Sheffield.

On Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> September the conference will be hosted at St John's Church on Princes Street, Edinburgh. It is really good to have a Scotland based event, in such a lovely city and at such a beautiful time of the year.

Borg is author of the bestselling *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*, *The God We Never Knew*, *The Heart of Christianity* and many other publications. For 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.



Mary McMahon from the Edinburgh PCN group and Adrian and Christine Alker are organising the conference on behalf of PCN Britain. Already the conference places are being snapped up (Friday's informal

gathering is already booked out) but there is still time to book in for the Saturday and, of course, to attend morning worship on the Sunday at St John's when Marcus will preach.

If you wish to book places please go to the PCN website where you will find the booking form. Alternatively contact Adrian or Christine Alker on 01937 583513 for a booking form and further information. If you have difficulty in speaking to Adrian or Christine, drop them a note at 29 Templar Gardens, Wetherby LS22 7TG (if they are away on holiday it will be answered as soon as they return).

*The Saturday event starts at 10 am at St John's and finishes at 4 pm. The full cost of the day is £22. But for paying members of PCN Britain and CRC Sheffield it is just £18.*

## Jesus and "authority"

by Tom Hind

*Tom Hinds lives in Windsor, and is the representative of the Great Park's Pastoral Area on the Bishop's Diocesan Pastoral Council in the Catholic Diocese of Portsmouth.*

I was wondering where we draw our authority from, our sense of legitimacy and rightness for saying or doing something. I wondered if Jesus' example might suggest some guidelines.

I looked at St Mark's Gospel, only that one, as it is the shortest and probably the first written. (My references are to the *New Revised Standard Version*.) I found a number of different sources from which Jesus seemed to draw authority.

*Personal particular experience seems to matter. At his baptism by John "He saw the Spirit descending like a dove on him" (1.10), and "a voice came from Heaven "You are my Son, the Beloved"" (1.11). For the feeding of the five thousand: "He looked up to Heaven and blessed"... the bread (6.41); he sensed this was the right thing to do, and found confirmation in looking-up. At the Transfiguration "from the cloud there came a voice "This is my Son, the Beloved"" (9.7). Jesus put an interpretation on his experience, gave a meaning to it.*

*Just being a human being was enough sometimes. When healing the paralytic lowered through the roof, Jesus said "The Son of Man has authority to forgive sins"*

(2.10). ('Son of man' usually means 'this person', 'this one in humankind', 'I'). When healing the possessed boy "All things are possible to the one who believes" (9.23). "Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it and it will be yours", this having been his own experience. (11.24). When replying to the High Priest at the Jewish trial "[Yes] I am the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One, (or "You say I am?") and you will 'see the Son of Man coming with the clouds of Heaven'" (14.61).

*His own reading from Scripture* was Jesus' basis sometimes. When accused of eating heads of grain in the fields on the Sabbath, he asked "Have you never read what David did?" (2.25), and quoted his own reading and its significance. On another occasion, to the Sadducees, he suggested: "Is this not why you are wrong? That you know not the Scriptures?" (12.24).

*The suppliant's own faith* was sometimes the thing that Jesus saw as the source for action and transformation. To the woman with haemorrhages "Your faith has made you well"(5.34). To blind Bartimaeus the same comment, "Your faith has made you well" (10.52).

*The power of God* was sometimes the thing that Jesus saw as his backing. After his baptism by John "The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness" (1.12). Later, "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and my sister and my mother" (3.35) About his comment 'the camel through the eye of a needle', which his disciples took as meaning 'never', he countered with: "For God all things are possible" (10.27). In a different challenging discussion, about the after-life, he suggested (to the Sadducees) "Is this not why you are wrong? Because you know not the power of God" (12.24). He advised his disciples, at a time of arrest and

trial "Do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you to say, for it is not you that speaks, but the Holy Spirit" (13.11). And in the Garden of Gethsemane "Not what I want, Father, but what you want" (14.36).

*Some things don't need to be explained or justified*, but, of course, every statement can be challenged and become a focus for discussion, and may have consequences.. "The Pharisees asked him for a sign from Heaven to test him. He sighed deeply in his spirit and said 'No sign will be given'" (8.11). On another occasion when the elders who were probing his authority gave no reply to his counter-question about John's baptism, whether it was from Heaven or of human origin, he said "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things" (11.23).

**This is my conclusion:** Jesus' example suggests to me that each of us must draw, create, make our own authority in our seeking God, seeking the fullness of Love, seeking the ground and goal of Life. It's not a matter of permission, not a matter of being given authority by another. However, we must be open to a reply, and be open to the consequences.

Perhaps we have to be able to imitate Pontius Pilate, at least in this one respect of self-confidence. When asked to change the inscription which had been put on Jesus' cross he said "What I have written I have written", (John 19.24). Perhaps our view has to be: "What I say or do comes out of who, what, and where I am. I say it or do it because I am I, the 'I' that I am just now. That's reason and authority enough. I stand on that authority because there is no other that comes from the depth of my essential self. And I can live with the consequences!"

## For God's Sake!

by David A Keddie

As Bill Clinton probably didn't say, "It's the God word, stupid!" Let's face it, we are in a collective mess over this word GOD. Having rejected as absurd the notion of an eternally pre-existent, self-generating inter (and intra)

personal triune being "out there" who interacts with the creation (and who may have made it, but probably not), who "sent" Jesus, we are now left with what George McLeod called the "God-shaped blank."

In response to the question posed by Isaiah – “To whom then will you liken God” – we have scratched around for the last 40 or 50 years and come up with not very much. I was at New College in Edinburgh when “Honest to God” hit the shelves and God became the “Ground of our Being” – whatever that meant. Since then we have had many attempts to find an “image” and they have all failed.

I was not much encouraged by some of Jack Spong’s efforts as reported in the December 2009 PCN Magazine. “Maybe God is the experience in all things, the life that flows through the universe” – that’s Hinduism and North American Indian philosophy. “Maybe God is that quality of love...freeing us to love wastefully” – come again, any atheist can love wastefully. Or try this for size, “God is the Ground of Life coming into our consciousness.” What does that actually mean? Just words....

The word “God” is of course a code word – a word that can point towards something, but which can never contain it. When we lead worship people will assume that we are meaning a Being out there and it’s pretty

difficult to offer prayer to “The Ground of Life....”

So the implications for worship when we abandon traditional belief are enormous. Unless we are going to engage in a massive re-education programme to explain that the God word is essentially symbolic of something - but we are not quite sure what - then we will remain in a liturgical and indeed theological mess.

We could start by giving up all prayer that explicitly or implicitly is directed to “a being” capable of listening and responding. Oops – how then do we worship? And what does worship then become? So maybe that’s not really a realistic starter. Or we could stop using the word “God” altogether given that it has no content or likeness and make our worship a purely human and sharing activity. Or we could say (as I would quite like) that Jesus is God and there is no other.

I’d better stop now, I have to go and write some prayers!

*David A Keddie is a Church of Scotland minister living in Glasgow, and convenor of the Education Committee of the Glasgow Presbytery.*

## News from local groups

### **Bath**

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

PCN Bath normally meets 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.

We have been delighted to welcome some people from churches other than Central United Reformed Church in recent months, and have enjoyed sessions on various topics led by members of the group. The November meeting created much interest as it centred on the two lectures given by Bishop Spong in London. There was much discussion about his views on creation and God. Prior to that we had two meetings centred on the letters of St. Paul and on the challenges faced by Progressive Christians today – both these used material from the DVD, *Living the Questions 2*. Since Christmas we have considered other topics from the DVD – the question of evil in January, and the crucifixion in

February, and will look at the Resurrection in March.

The programme until the summer is:

29<sup>th</sup> March Transforming power: looking again at the Resurrection

26<sup>th</sup> April Praying progressively

24<sup>th</sup> May Rev. Tony Rutherford: Can we be radical in practice?

We also maintain a library of Progressive books, which are all available for loan.

### **Birmingham and West Midlands**

(Tessa Carrick 01527 873135  
tessa.carrick@pcnbritain.org.uk)

The group has been expanding with more than twenty people showing interest. At our recent meeting, postponed because of the weather, twelve people came together despite a further snowfall. We meet in people's homes across the West Midlands and meetings last about one and a half hours. For venues, please phone Tessa. The two meetings planned for the next few months are:

Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> May. 2.30. p.m. near  
Wolverhampton.

Topic: Using the text of the Archbishop of  
Canterbury's Presidential Address at the General  
Synod as a starting point for discussing "Issues of  
Differences" as raised in the address. The  
address can be downloaded using  
[www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/feb/09/full-text-archbishop-canterbury-speech](http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/feb/09/full-text-archbishop-canterbury-speech)

Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> July 7.30 pm. In Stourbridge.  
We will begin discussion of Karen Armstrong's  
*The Case for God*. The exact topic is still to be  
decided.

The group is also interested in setting up a day  
meeting, probably in 2011, on "Living alongside  
other faith groups", using contacts with the faith  
groups worshipping in Birmingham. We would  
be interested in hearing from others who would  
be prepared to help with the organisation.

### **Bolton**

(Jim Holleyman 01204 456050  
[jim.holleyman@pcnbritain.org.uk](mailto:jim.holleyman@pcnbritain.org.uk))

The Bolton group continues to meet every six  
weeks. Having enjoyed Adrian Smith's  
*"Tomorrow's Christian"* as a starter for discussion  
for many months, we are now moving on to  
looking at the Wild Goose Resource Group's  
DVD material DreamThinkBeDo. The material  
looks at Faith as a Journey; Stories of Creation;  
Reconciliation; Jesus; and Risk. New members  
always welcome. Check the website for further  
details.

### **Cardiff**

(Rob Crompton 02920 540071  
[robocrom@gmail.com](mailto:robocrom@gmail.com))

Rob Crompton writes: A new Cardiff group is  
starting, meeting alternate Tuesdays beginning  
March 2nd, 7.30 pm at Pontprennau Community  
Church Centre. Anyone who is interested in  
being part of the group is welcome to email me  
at the address that is given above.

### **Chelmsford**

Jane Anderson 01245 466160  
[jane.anderson@pcnbritain.org.uk](mailto:jane.anderson@pcnbritain.org.uk)

There are around 11 of us from various  
denominations - Unitarian, Quaker, Baptist &  
Anglican. We began in October and have decided  
to use the 'Living the Questions' course —  
session 4 next month. For more information  
please do contact Jane Anderson as above.

### **Dundee**

Gordon Sharp 01382 643002  
[gordon.sharp@pcnbritain.org.uk](mailto:gordon.sharp@pcnbritain.org.uk)

Group meetings are small, but we're going to try  
out the "DreamThinkBeDo" DVD. Plus, we plan  
to have Ian Bradley, Reader at St. Andrews

University provide a Dundee launch to his new  
book during the summer. It is entitled: "*Grace,  
Order, Openness and Diversity*". It is about a liberal  
theology that counters the modern trend  
towards exclusiveness and fundamentalism.  
We'll provide an update on views about the  
DVD for a future newsletter.

### **Edinburgh**

(Mary McMahon 0131 441 3337  
Email: [mary.mcmahon@pcnbritain.org.uk](mailto:mary.mcmahon@pcnbritain.org.uk))

We continue to meet in the Cluny Centre,  
Morningside from 7.30-9.30 on the last Monday  
of the month, and look forward to having  
Michael Fuller, a scientist and Episcopal priest,  
with us on 29<sup>th</sup> March to lead our thinking on  
'Science and Religion –Why all the fuss?'

On 26<sup>th</sup> April we're anticipating a talk from  
Russel Moffat, a Church of Scotland minister,  
who has chosen as his title 'Cages, Balloons,  
Kites and Amphibians!' On 31<sup>st</sup> May Mary  
McMahon will facilitate a session about Marcus  
Borg and 'the emerging paradigm', in preparation  
for the latter's visit to Edinburgh for the  
weekend of 12<sup>th</sup> -14<sup>th</sup> September, when he will  
deliver a series of four lectures under the  
auspices of PCN at St John's Church, Princes  
Street.

All are welcome to any of our meetings, whether  
PCN members or not.

### **Exeter**

(Liz Vizard 01392 668859  
[liz.vizard@pcnbritain.org.uk](mailto:liz.vizard@pcnbritain.org.uk))

Exeter PCN group are starting a new series  
entitled: *A Pearl of Great Price*, inviting visiting  
speakers from different Christian perspectives  
and other faith backgrounds to tell us about their  
'pearl'. We felt the need to be challenged in this  
way, as we could be too comfortable listening  
only to those with whom we agree theologically.  
On February 28<sup>th</sup> we heard from a Jewish  
woman member of Exeter synagogue. On April  
11<sup>th</sup> the Rev Gwynne Edwards, a retired Baptist  
minister will speak and on May 16<sup>th</sup> the Rev Roz  
Harrison, minister of URC Southernhay Exeter  
will be our guest speaker. All meetings include an  
excellent level of discussion, are open to  
everyone and are held at Southernhay URC  
Exeter, (Southernhay hall entrance behind the  
church), from 2.30 - 4.30, including a break for  
tea and biscuits.

We now average around 20-30 attendance from  
a mailing list of more than 60.



## Hertfordshire

(Diana Reddaway  
diana.reddaway@pcnbritain.org.uk)

January's meeting was a 'meet the authors' Rachel and Sarah Hagger-Holt, who introduced their new book, "A survival guide for lesbian, gay and bisexual Christians and their friends, families and churches". The authors shared with us their experiences, and those of their wide circle of friends and acquaintances who have been personally involved with this sexuality issue within their faith communities. The February meeting was led by Nina Johnson, Methodist Minister involved in community development on a large housing, commercial and university site that was once the Hatfield airfield. Her subject was 'Spiritual Abundance'. The March meeting was another 'meet the author', John Churcher, who discussed his recent book 'Setting Jesus Free'. The future programme has yet to be confirmed but the dates are 18<sup>th</sup> April, 16<sup>th</sup> May, 20<sup>th</sup> June and 18<sup>th</sup> July. All hour-long meetings are held at the Backhouse Room, Handside Lane, Welwyn Garden City and begin at 4 pm, followed by informal discussion over refreshments. Details available from Diana Reddaway on the email address above.

## Kendal

John Hetherington 01539 726181  
john.hetherington@pcnbritain.org.uk  
PCN Britain's Kendal Local Group works alongside the Kendal Ecumenical Group (contact keg@gmail.co.uk) to study and discuss books, DVDs and other material of joint interest. We are continuing to meet on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Thursdays of each month, breaking in July and August. We have been listening on CD to a series of talks by Anthony Freeman on "Life After Death", which we found challenging. Details of future meetings from normanburnell@gmail.com.  
The other important piece of news from Cumbria for PCN Britain Members is that a meeting was held on 13<sup>th</sup> February in Penrith to launch an umbrella organisation, "Open Faith and Spirituality" – with the strap line: "Seeking to discover The Way for today in Cumbria". It has been formed jointly with groups linked to PCN Britain in Cumbria and others which have developed independently but are within the progressive Christianity milieu, such as the Keswick Contemporary Faith Group. We have agreed to create a web portal (possibly using Facebook), and hold a yearly gathering as well as one business meeting.

The other organisations include several active PCN Britain or similar groups, in Brampton, Sedburgh and Kirkby Lonsdale. We are aware of others "out there" and hope to build on the links. These all developed from the original Kendal PCN Group formed at the time of PCN Britain's Northern Launch, with Jack Spong, but there are also close links to a number of other like minded groups – such as Christian Meditation Cumbria, which arranges a substantial programme of talks and meditation opportunities across the County." All very exciting – as progressive faith is slowly but surely growing as people awaken to new ways of being church.

## 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. On 13<sup>th</sup> March discussion will focus on *Who do we believe?*  
Topics for 10<sup>th</sup> April and 8<sup>th</sup> May have yet to be decided; on one of these dates we may listen to and discuss one of Bishop Jack Spong's talks (on CD).  
On 12<sup>th</sup> June Adrian Alker, a National Committee member, will speak on *The Persistence of Hope*.  
Our monthly Wednesday evening meetings have now become fortnightly Monday evening meetings - 'Questers'; for exact dates and the address of the venue (a member's house) please contact me. At present we are looking at the book *A Credible Jesus* by Robert W. Funk, but it is not necessary to have bought the book or read the relevant chapter beforehand. There is some overlap of attendees between Saturday and Wednesday meetings, but there are some who find just one of those days possible.  
We are always pleased to see regulars, occasional visitors and newcomers alike; our group contains all of these. A frequent comment after attending a first meeting goes something like: "It's such a relief / It's wonderful to be able to say/ask anything without being judged."  
Please contact me [Sandra Griffiths] for further information or directions to any of our meetings. It might be possible to arrange a lift too.

### **London: Herne Hill**

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

We were pleased to welcome new members to our group this term who are contributing actively to our meetings which continue at monthly intervals. We are still engaged with *The First Paul* by Borg and Crossan and the discussions are lively despite a fall in attendances through the winter months.

We wait with hope for the outcome of the Synod on the issue of women Bishops and are heartened by the article in the last issue by Liz Terry on Affirming Catholicism and the strong stand they have and are taking on this issue.

### **London: Richmond**

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

The Richmond Group meets on Saturday afternoons at about six weekly intervals. Unfortunately the newsletter went to press just ahead of the group's March meeting, at which future dates were to be fixed. For more information contact Alan Powell as given above, or look on the website.

### **Maidenhead & Windsor**

(Malcolm Stebles 01628 630699  
malcolm.stebles@pcnbritain.org.uk)

Susan Hinds writes: During last autumn we spent three sessions with St Paul, using *'The First Paul'* by Borg & Crossan as our guide. Then: the contrast. We listened to a recording of Daphne Hampson, post-Christian theologian, giving the first of the series of Carr's Lane Lectures for 2008, on 'Exclusion on account of gender'. 'I have not been excluded,' she said, 'I have excluded myself'; and proceeded to explain why she no longer believed in Christianity ('because it could not possibly be true') and how she had reached the conclusion that Christianity could never be inclusive. It was, therefore, unethical and she was not now a Christian. She was, however, a theist and suggested it is time we grew up and developed a new, modern concept of that dimension of reality which we might call 'God'. (In her book *'After Christianity'* she writes: 'I am theistic on account of certain observations as to the presence of power and love in the world'.)

Professor Hampson is a compelling speaker, and released afresh in us our anger and dissatisfactions with the Church as it is today. Like her, many of us are seeking a concept of God which is not anthropomorphised and *out and up there* (my italics). 'Can one be a Christian and not go to church?' asked someone

afterwards. This writer thinks not, but one can be a follower of Jesus.

Daphne Hampson challenges us to think again about the personal position we adopt towards and in the Church. Do we stay with it and work for change from within (Spong's position)? Or leave, and find other like-minded folk with whom to explore that 'dimension of reality' which we might call God.

In January a member of our group, an economist and a Quaker, addressed us on 'Economic & Social Justice – its implications for us.' The title attracted the biggest turn-out the Group has seen for months. The subject is daunting – as unsolvable as the mystery of God – and we were perplexed, to say the least. Can there ever be a fair economic system that works and is sustainable? We were driven to consider the small but potentially powerful, far-reaching actions we could as individuals take – if only we would make the effort.

### **Manchester**

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

The Manchester group has continued to meet on a monthly basis at St Agnes, Reddish, Stockport. The starting point for most evenings has been the "Living the Questions" DVD based course, although we have tried to be flexible about this and dealt with other topics if this were felt to be more appropriate on the night. We have been pleased to welcome some new faces to the group and have generally averaged an attendance of about 12.

It is hoped to continue along the same lines for the coming months, so the next few meetings will be:

24<sup>th</sup> March; 28<sup>th</sup> April; 26<sup>th</sup> May and 23<sup>rd</sup> June.

As always an open invitation is extended to everyone who may be interested. Meetings are at 7.30 pm at St Agnes, North Reddish and last for about 2 hours.

Further information is available from John Ramsbottom, as given above.

### **Newbury**

(Maria Grace 01635 47196  
Email: maria.grace@pcnbritain.org.uk)

The Newbury group meets on the last Friday of the month in various homes. We have started the 'Saving Jesus' DVD sessions, which has led to some exciting discussions and new ways of understanding Jesus.

In the next session we will have a visitor (from Norwich) who responded to our piece in the last PCN newsletter! In April we have a visiting

speaker, Ray Simpson, who is a monk on Holy Island and author of books on Celtic Christianity. New members will have a warm welcome!

### **Northamptonshire and North Buckinghamshire**

Monty Lynds 01908 543206

monty.lynds@pcnbritain.org.uk

The group is now meeting on the second Wednesday of each month. Enquiries to Monty Lynds about venue.

One other development: *"The Fifth Sunday"*

The group is running, jointly with St Nicholas Church Potterspury, Northants, a service on the fifth Sunday of the month whenever this arises.

The first of these will be on Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> May 2010 commencing at 4.00 pm. Some of the services will be Eucharistic some not. All will be creative/ liberal/progressive liturgies with contemporary music. We are hoping to attract a number of guest speakers/preachers.

These service will all be at St Nicholas, Potterspury, and information and directions are available from Monty who, closer to the date, will be posting further information on the PCN website.

### **Tunbridge Wells Radical Pilgrims**

(Pat Churchill 01892531541

pat.churchill@pcnbritain.org)

## **Prayer**

by Hazel Day

My understanding and use of prayer today has changed from earlier years. As a child I was taught to pray when I went to bed and to thank God for a good day and ask him to bless my family and friends. When unhappy in my teens I would pour this out to God when I was in bed. Then I thought of God as being like a kind of super human who could control the world and everything in it. God in control was appropriate in Biblical times and for many centuries when it was easy to believe that he lived above the clouds with Jesus at his side. This needed new thinking with our ever growing knowledge of the universe and the almost unbelievable kind of power that must inevitably be behind it.

The use of the word God or the equivalent in other faiths tends to make one think about how we understand this today. The "ground of our being" is a helpful phrase as for me as it gives new meaning about the Holy Spirit. When I read that the Hindu

Everyone is welcome to our meetings which are generally on the last Thursday of the month. (Do ring Pat Churchill to check time and venue). We have welcomed a few new members recently. We tend to pick topics to discuss rather than following a set course.

Our December meeting was cancelled owing to a heavy fall of snow.

At our January meeting we watched part of a pro- Darwin video and discussed that and some of the content of the wasdarwinright.com website. It proved a stimulating evening.

We met again in February when a member who had been part of the ministry team at the COP 15 Climate change conference spoke of hopes and the many disappointments that were generated. He pointed out that we all would have to do as much as possible. There are several transition towns fairly close and villages were also going green. Some felt despondent, feeling that we could do so little, another member commented on green banking.

Our next meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> March will be a planning meeting. To try to work out a programme for the next few months and with the possibility of being involved in locally hosting a multi faith tour arranged by "Spirit of Peace" in October.

greeting means "I salute the divinity in you" this, for me, connects with what it means to be made in God's image (Gen 1.26). This becomes the Spirit that I think must relate to the descent of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament - the time when Jesus and his disciples became aware of a power that helped them to live a good life of love to God and to their neighbours as well as for all who think of God primarily as "the ground of our being". When Jesus spoke of God the Father, it means for me that the guidance of the Spirit is like that of a good father who teaches his children to live a good life.

As years have gone by I become more and more conscious of a presence within and surrounding me that gives me a sense of peace, comfort and often happiness - the equivalent of the Spirit. When I am concerned about friends or a situation somewhere I get a strong feeling that somehow I feel closely connected to them.

Does this explain why someone has said “I knew you were praying for me” or why there is a theory that Christians who are ill often have a better recovery rate? Is it why a Muslim friend asked me to pray for his sick wife? Does it explain why there have been times when out visiting people I have sometimes gone twice round a roundabout on the spur of the moment to go and see someone and then found they wanted my help? This thought makes me think of the old telephone switchboard where one put a plug in to make the connection!

Whenever I am thinking deeply about a situation I believe thoughts about it becomes the equivalent of prayer, a sensation I can be conscious of when reading bad news in the papers or hearing it on radio or television. If I am thinking thankfully about something there is no difficulty in giving thanks to God or when I am unhappy about something

consciously turning to God. Intercessions are different. Again, in Gen. 1.28 God gives humanity dominion over all life on our planet. We are here to play our part in looking after it. Judaism teaches that there is interdependence between God and humanity. We are dependent on his power within us to guide us in what we should be doing, and God is dependent on us to take any appropriate action. It is no good praying for people starving or without water to be fed. We need to do something about it. If it is neighbours who are in need of our prayers it is a reminder to take some action to help them - it might just be a note of sympathy after an accident or bereavement. For me prayer is an important part of daily living in that it helps me in trying to live in a way that makes me a better person in my concern for all humanity and which I believe is through the God-given power within.

## Insights into Quaker conviction

*The text below is adapted from a press release which we received a couple of days before the newsletter was being prepared for printing. We have requested review copies of the two books it refers to, and hope to review them in our June issue.*

Over the past year, Quakers have featured in the media in a variety of ways: their historic campaigning innovations against the Slave Trade; the decision in August last year to perform marriage ceremonies for gay couples; profiles of Judi Dench and Sheila Hancock referring to the value they find in Quaker silent worship; the success in the T.S. Eliot prize of Quaker poet, Philip Gross; and – in the light of the recent takeover – references to the enlightened management practices on which the Cadbury business was founded.

Many are curious as to what motivates this relatively small but effective religious group. Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> February saw the launch of two accessible books that seek to clarify and affirm the values at the heart of the Quaker community. Primarily written for Quakers, they nevertheless offer sharp insights into the challenges of Quaker faith and practice that will be revealing for others. Both books have been developed in the unique learning environment of Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre in Birmingham.

*Rooted in Christianity, Open to New Light: Quaker spiritual diversity* by Timothy Ashworth and Alex Wildwood (London: Pronoun Press, 2009) explores the distinctive Christian heritage of Friends, showing how it differs from other Christian groups and how, as an evolving tradition, Quakerism in Britain now embraces both Christian and non-Christian perspectives. “In a world understandably wary of religious fundamentalism and intolerance, the book shows how Quakers operate effectively together without hierarchy and inclusive of increasing spiritual diversity – something likely to be of interest to other religious groups,” says author Timothy Ashworth.

The launch also featured the latest book from Ben Pink Dandelion, Honorary Professor in Quaker Studies at the University of Birmingham. As a sociologist by training he is a sharp observer of Quakers. For *Celebrating the Quaker Way* (London: Quaker Books, 2009) he sets aside his academic specialism and writes about Quaker life from the inside. Powerful and moving, this pocket book for Friends illuminates why Quaker life elicits such commitment in its followers, enabling them, when they feel the time is right, to act in support of unpopular causes and persevere until change is effected.

# Book Reviews

## **The Path of the Blue Raven, by Mark Townsend**

O Books 2009, pb 241, £11.99 (£7.25 on Amazon), ISBN 978 1 84694 238 9

Mark Townsend's book, *The Path of the Blue Raven* is best explained by its subtitle: *From Religion to Re-Enchantment*. As we read with Mark we realise we are sharing a truly honest account of his journey into the 're-enchantment' path I am also travelling. Church going folk have been taught to see God through beliefs: doctrines and ways of behaving. Since the enlightenment in the west we have forgotten that once the world was 'enchanted', a place of mystery, fear, joy and magic - a domain for encounter with Life itself. The prologue makes us realise that we have always had the wings to fly spiritually, but most of us just tuck them out of the way. Mark has not done that, and it has proved a hard path, which we are invited to fly with him.

Mark, through this book, makes it possible to rediscover that we can be set free to explore beyond the confines of religious orthodoxy. For him it is in nature and magic that his exploring has centred. We are invited into his life and thought, and discover a sincere Church of England priest, trying to adapt to individual needs by shaping ceremonies to mark life's changes, often beyond the limits of his church structures. He shares the pain of rejection by the Church for having too much integrity. We are led to understand that religion and the "divinity" in nature are not two different things, but two sides of one coin.

Part 2 opens with a summary of what the "spiritual", "awakened" life can be. Ideas like, "The source of life is pure limitless love" and "All religions and paths lead to the same goal" and, "the heart of the spiritual life is the search for wisdom and compassion." Like me he has explored the burgeoning literature describing the

## **Free Range Christianity, by Graham Hellier**

Authorhouse 2009, pb xii + 340 + indices, £13.50, ISBN 978 1 4389 7933 5

This is a lovely book. Graham Hellier needs no introduction to the majority of PCN members and friends. He wrote the excellent little pamphlet *Is God a Delusion: a Christian Response to Richard Dawkin*, which was usefully studied in a lot of our local groups as well as by individual members. He also gave us a wonderful front page article for the 2008 Lambeth Conference issue of this newsletter, *Heresies: and why we should welcome the*, which certainly caught the eye of some visitors to PCN Britain's stall there - not all of whom immediately turned away!

21st Century's post modernist discovery that all faiths and paths are valid ways to express our partnering in divinity.

The strongest sections of the book are his Journal entries, where he often, in confusion and pain, delves deep into his heart to hear the voice of Love, Compassion and Forgiveness. That Voice calls us all to "Re-Member" - to know the "voice of your deepest self" as your God. I loved his Chapter called a "Re-enchanted reading of Christianity". Quoting Tom Harpur's *The Pagan Christ* with Tom's permission, he reproduces Tom's Seven Principles of Cosmic Christianity. Everyone should check these out – see: <http://www.tomharpur.com/visionstatement.asp> It was for me, my own way being made plain.

In the final part of the book, "*Tales from Beyond the Magic Doorway*" we are introduced to Celtic Christianity, Druidry, Paganism and American Indian wisdom. Insiders share much insight from their own journeys, and the book is strengthened by letting their own voices speak.

Without a doubt I would recommend this book to those on the journey from orthodox religion to a living encounter with the divine within and in all life, and for anyone else with courage to explore.

(I have also two earlier books by Mark Townsend from Amazon, and am pleased to commend those too: *The Wizard's Gift*, and also *The Gospel of Falling Down: The Beauty of Failure, in an Age of Success*.)

John Hetherington

See [www.facebook.com/john.hetherington](http://www.facebook.com/john.hetherington) and <http://progressivespirituality.blogspot.com>

*Free Range Christianity* is a very substantial revision of his *A Thoughtful Guide to Christianity*, which I reviewed briefly here in March 2005. It consists of 170 'themes', starting from 'truth' and finishing with 'free to range'. The themes are listed in 12 broader headings, and between them cover the full sweep of Christianity's concerns, both past and present. Each theme has a two page spread of text – frequently, though not always, the right hand giving the author's thoughts on the topic, while the left carries a medley of quotations offering a slant on that

topic. The range of these is enormous, indicative of the author's own extensive reading, and they are brilliantly and also generously chosen. Hellier is a true and properly inclusive progressive, regularly giving space to those whose views differ profoundly from his own, and in his introduction urging 'that they are not passed over lightly – many of these voices are more important than mine'.

In one sense that may well be true. But Hellier's voice is a very welcome one for me certainly, and there are gems on every page. On sin: "It may be better to jettison the word 'sin' – it has become too 'religious'. Better to say what we mean in common parlance." On faith: "There is no sense in which faith is ultimately opposed to reason, nor is it 'believing the impossible'. On the contrary it is believing the possible... Faith is

### **The Ordinary God, by Hilary Wakeman**

The Liffey Press 2009, pb vii & 155, €14.95 (£11.95 from Amazon), ISBN 978 1 905785 73 5

The 38 short essays collected here all began life as newspaper articles, mostly published in the *Southern Star* in County Cork in Ireland. Hilary Wakeman writes of her respect for the down-to-earth-ness of the ordinary people of West Cork and that respect comes through time and again in what she writes here, which is rooted in her own practical, concerned, down-to-earth portrait of God and what God might be about. She writes out of a progressive Christian understanding, but she shows much more interest in building bridges and creating dialogue than in criticising other versions of faith.

The essays range widely, sometimes reflecting the seasons of the Christian year, sometimes people she has met and places she has visited, and also concerns of our time, issues in religion, and just the business of being a human person. Some of them look with hope at the possibilities of renewal and recovery in Ireland in the wake of the bursting of the Celtic tiger bubble. Hilary's thoughts here could be usefully pondered by British readers more recently acquainted with recession and the end of 'boom'.

She has a good deal to say about the rediscovery of spirituality - hardly surprising in the person who founded the Julian Meetings right back in the 1970s – and this reviewer found those sections especially helpful. She writes sincerely and with conviction, aware of a long tradition of reflection and contemplation in human religious

### **Evolution: the next step**

Continued from page 2

to be on, but the development in people of love, care and selflessness.

reason grown courageous with the confidence that right will triumph."

If you don't own *A Thoughtful Guide to Christianity* you should buy *Free Range Christianity* immediately. The title is itself such a wonderfully evocative image in the picture it paints. If you do have the earlier book, this one is even better, with new themes included, and other substantial changes too. One in particular I noted. 'Directions' was the first heading on the original; here it has been replaced by the more modest, tentative, yet so attractive and inviting 'Provisions'. Hellier's is a very gentle progressive voice, wary of the sort of authoritarianism or fundamentalism that many of us can sometimes fall into. It's a voice we need to hear.

Hugh Dawes

experience, free of the shallow trendiness of some other progressive writing on these themes. She is especially good on the worth and freedom of just living in the now, the present moment. "The divine has escaped," she writes, "out of the box [of religion] into our daily lives."

Yet whilst critical of much that religion has done and still does, she knows that spirituality "can open the door to evil too, if it is an escape from reality." Looking into her crystal ball, she visions a church renewed: "beautiful, colourful buildings, full of life. People pouring in and out, women and men, babies and children. Stopping to talk, to play, to help." Inside the building all is also colour and music and light, and light. "But where are the priests, the ministers, the clergy. There is no-one in black with a white colour. No one walking about looking as if they own the place. Someone explains it all to us. The clergy are part of the team. They are not paid, but have a normal job like everyone else. They have been chosen by the community for their capacity to inspire goodness and godliness, their ability to encourage spiritual growth." There is no "spiritual 'big boss' any longer, for "that was unhealthy for the congregation, which was infantilised – 'Daddy will do it'. It was also unhealthy for the leader himself."

There is much to ponder - and still more to act upon - here. I highly recommend it.

Hugh Dawes

This is affecting our attitude towards such issues as global warming. It is not only instinct that

leads some to make decisions for the common good, rather than just to live in a way that is convenient to ourselves. In varying degrees we are thinking for future generations. To be realistic, though, the picture is not all rosy. A biologist friend of mine pointed out that, "For 99.99% of the time that there has been life on this planet there were no humans and everything got along OK. Now this experiment by Nature with this clever, self-conscious being is leading to countless thousands of other species being driven to extinction. If the other 10 million or so species could vote we'd be sent packing."

Focussing on the positive impulse however, we are aware that there are so many needs out there. Our journey forward is not primarily a personal struggle with self. It is a total giving of

## Look for the living

*Your editor requested contributions exploring Holy Week and Easter themes for this issue, but sadly none materialised. Hesitantly, therefore, I offer my own.*

*For worshippers in communities where the Revised Common Lectionary is followed, the gospel passage set to be read this year on Easter morning (Luke 24.1-12) may feel disappointing in the extreme. Why this dull account of three women coming to the tomb at early dawn, when the so much richer story of the Emmaus Road is ignored not only on Easter Day, but doesn't get read at all in the Easter season.*

*In previous years of Luke in the three year cycle I confess I have regularly changed the reading to something else - very often Mark's more enigmatic brief account - so as to be able to preach. Three years ago, I decided it was time to face it head on. And surprised myself! What follows draws upon the sermon I preached then.*

*"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen." Luke 24.5*

Christian history has been fascinated by the empty tomb. Many are the books of the 'Who moved the stone?' variety that have been written about it. Great has been the interest in its location and in its possible relics - hence the appeal of the now discredited 'shroud of Turin'. Visitors to the Holy Land still trek to see it at the church of the Holy Sepulchre. Florida offers a full theme park experience of it. Countless sermons proclaim it regularly.

And yet what are the words which Luke the storyteller actually ascribes to the two men in dazzling clothes when the women come to the

self for the needs of others, the environment, the living world and humanity. As a Christian I see this as what Jesus was embodying. And it was his living and dying challenge to the whole of humanity to follow his path of total self-giving as the way forward for us all to emulate.

I sense that we are thus an integral part of the essence of God. The conscious submission of the 'self' - of our hearts, minds and wills - to the infinite, encompassing, Divine Spirit could be the next step in the evolution of humankind. To be part of that may be a big step in faith. But whatever our beliefs about the source of that inner impulse, for each person the next step involves a moral and spiritual choice.

**Howard Grace**

tomb with the spices and ointments they have prepared to anoint a body? "Come in? Take in all the details? List each minute particular of what you see and of what you do not, for you need to be storing up proof texts for the future?" Hardly.

Theirs are instead words that challenge all this kind of idle speculation which so many seem so to delight in. 'Why do you look for the living among the dead?' is what they say. Why on earth are you hanging around here? And if that is how the three women were addressed, who might be forgiven on the grounds that they felt they had a job to do, how much more strongly must the rebuke be made to us if we speculate in this kind of way?

'He is not here, but has risen.' The new life of Jesus belongs not to history, to ancient evidences and proofs, but to the present and to the future. It is anchored in the experience of Christians - and others too, many others, who are on the side of what is right and good - that Jesus (who for Luke is always the faithful martyr, the innocent victim) Jesus has not been undone, beaten or negated by the undeserved death done to him on Good Friday. That in that death, rather, he and all that he represents was vindicated and affirmed - as it had been in his living.

That must be said. Yet even words put so cautiously will not of themselves convince. When the women came back from the tomb to the apostles with their much more impressive story, it in fact made no impact at all; something which those who repeat it as if it

said everything would do well to remember. 'These words,' we read, 'seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.'

Words are not what it is about, any more than an empty tomb is. The one who lives is with the living, the two men in white say. That is where we shall be able both to discover – and to represent - him who is Jesus the Christ.

Jesus is present, Luke believed, in his church, in you and me, when it chooses to live - rather than opt for the death of nostalgia. He is present in all those who consciously look to him, and, however imperfectly, try to continue that life of unselfish generosity - even to death - which we see in him.

But that is only half of it. For he is also present in those who may not look to him, but on whom *his* gaze would have looked with compassion during his earthly life. So he is present in the sick; the unhappy; the overburdened; the despairing; the prisoners; the asylum seekers; the victims of war and of genocide; in those who are facing death. All those whom he represented, that is, as he walked to 'the place that is called The Skull'; all of the people whom the Christian community also represents in its annual keeping of Holy Week. And in and through them he looks to us, as he looked to Simon of Cyrene on Good

Friday, for someone who will follow him and share and support their carrying of their particular cross.

Baptisms are a regular and proper feature of the church's worship on Easter Day. I'm always pleased when there is the opportunity to baptise children at the Easter Eucharist. And it is into the possibility of that sort of a life that we baptise them. 'Do you renounce evil? Do you repent of your sins' are the questions I put to a child through her parents and godparents. Behind the church-speak, these questions ask something very simple, but profound. 'Do you want the world a different place? Will you take the side of others and not just yourself? Christened and made Christ, will you be his hands, his heart, his love for the world? Will you be the risen Jesus? Will you make the sunrise of Easter something that is real?'

Luke had faith in the church, the Christian community, as much as he had faith in Jesus. He saw faith as a way of living, not a set of beliefs. Sadly in our time that faith is often strained – for the church often appears unlovely and unloving. But it doesn't have to. We do not possess Christ, not even on Easter Day. We serve him and we live him. "Why do you look for the living among the dead?"

**Hugh Dawes**

**Copy date for the next newsletter.** The next newsletter will appear in early June.

Contributions for it should be with the editor, Hugh Dawes ([hugh.dawes@pcnbritain.org.uk](mailto:hugh.dawes@pcnbritain.org.uk), or by classic mail to the PCN office address below) by **Friday 28<sup>th</sup> May 2010 at the latest** - earlier if you can manage it.

Pieces with a summer slant would be good to have. Hilary Wakeman's book *The Ordinary God*, reviewed above is very much concerned with the working out of progressive faith in life lived; and I notice that this year's conference of our sister network *Sea of Faith* has as its focus *Religion as Social Justice*. Anything around that aspect of faith as a way of living would be really welcome – and helpful and attractive, I think, to lots of us. Please put **NEWSLETTER** in the header of any email, or on the envelope of posted contributions.

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](http://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](http://www.tcpc.org). You can email us at [info@pcnbritain.org.uk](mailto:info@pcnbritain.org.uk), phone us on 020 7274 1338, or mail us at PCN Britain, St Faith's Vicarage, 62 Red Post Hill, London SE24 9JQ.

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