

Le Chéile - 'together' -

an occasional newsletter
of hope for Christianity in Ireland

issued by the Open Christianity Network

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Editorial

A chairde – friends –
OCN meetings are happening now in almost every corner of Ireland: Belfast, Dublin, Cork, and now Limerick. Meetings of people who want to talk about what religion really means to them, or to discover what others are thinking, and whether that can help them in their own faith journey. It is of the essence of the Open Christianity Network that participants with traditional views on such things as doctrine and church authority are heard as readily as those with more radical opinions. Certainly the mixture, in the groups, of different denominational backgrounds is an enrichment for us all.

Many, many people are surely looking for the opportunity for this sort of open but safe discussion. The network will of course become known by word of mouth, but let us remember to take opportunities to speak about it to friends and acquaintances wherever possible.

And meanwhile, this newsletter continues to aim to bring news of any sort that gives us hope for the future of Christianity on this island. Do please continue to send in such news when you find it.

Faoi choimirce Dé thú.
Hilary

Dublin OCN discusses Holloway talk

Who is entitled to call herself or himself a Christian? That was one of the key discussion points at the October 28 meeting of the Dublin group of the Open Christianity Network. It arose out of Richard Holloway's public lecture, 'Shaking the Kaleidoscope: religion in the 21st century', which had been held in Dublin in September.

After a biblical reading and a short silence, Andrew Furlong gave an overview of the main points of Dr Holloway's talk. There was then some lively plenary and small-group discussion. On the matter of who can name themselves Christians, the conclusion was reached that those who follow the teachings of Jesus, and choose to call themselves Christians, are Christians.

Eighteen people attended the October meeting and there were nine apologies, many due to its being a bank holiday weekend.

Topics proposed for future meetings included Spirit, Authority, Unity, and Fundamentalism. Andrew Furlong will be the speaker at the next meeting, introducing the subject of Fundamentalism. That will be on 20 January 2007, probably at 2pm at the Taney Parish Centre in Dundrum.

Cork-OCN: What are you reading?

The Cork group of the Open Christianity Network met at St Anne's Church, Shandon, in Cork on October 21. The weather was foul, and only four brave souls turned up, though there were several apologies. Their next meeting, at 3 - 5pm on December 6, will be held in Kinsale, when they will be talking about, and recommending, books they have read, that have impressed them, on the subject of religion.

For further information about Cork meetings contact the editor of this newsletter.

Limerick-OCN

An exploratory meeting in Limerick, for people within reach of the city, is now being planned. It will be for a couple of hours in the early afternoon of a Saturday in January.

Anyone wanting information about this meeting should get in touch as soon as possible with the editor of this newsletter.

Letter

"Something quite interesting is happening in Clonakilty. Each month we (the different Churches) are getting together to have a good look at the Gospels for the month. The clergy who are doing it are John Purdie (Methodist), Ian Jonas (Church of Ireland) and Gerard Galvin (Roman Catholic). Of course it is news to most of us that we all have the same readings; even a priest friend of mine said he has only discovered that fact recently! We have been with the Methodists and this week it will be Ian's turn to lead us."

Jennifer Sleeman, Clonakilty, Co.Cork

LGBT Christmas Carol Service

The 8th Annual Christmas Carol Service for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Community and their families and friends will take place on Saturday, December 9th, at 8pm in the Unitarian Church, St Stephen's Green, Dublin. Afterwards there will be mulled wine and mince pies. It is an open and inclusive service and all are most welcome. We have packed the church for seven years (with, interestingly, a predominantly male congregation) and hope to repeat that again this year!

Do you know anyone who is gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered and is seeking a space to meet with others where their spiritual journeys are recognised and celebrated? Please let them know that such a space exists. It is created on the last Sunday of every month in the

Franciscan Friary at Multyfarnham, near Mullingar. About 30 people gather together from 10.30am to 4.30pm, and they include all LGBT strands and parents of LGBT sons/daughters. It is a very special and inclusive space and central to it are a celebration of the eucharist and a shared lunch. Each month members prepare meditations, inputs, quiet walks, etc. Participation in any part of the day is voluntary. To get on their mailing list email ciaran@glen.ie *Please forward this notice to friends.*

Congregations share churches

When the Catholic church in the small West Cork village of Innishannon needed extensive repairs the parishioners were invited to use the local Church of Ireland church for Mass. Now, four years later, the favour is being returned. At the invitation of Fr John Kingston the Church of Ireland congregation has been using the Catholic church on Sundays while their own building is undergoing renovation. The Rector, Nigel Dunne, says the exchanges are a testament to how far the churches have come in ecumenical dialogue in recent years.

Quote

“At different stages of our lives we experience the otherness of the unknown differently and construct different images of it. We come to God at first through the way we need God to be. Only slowly and with much experience of prayer can we allow God to come to us. Only then, after we have examined and recognised our introjections and projections for what they are, can we really hear another voice than our own.”

Ann Ulanov, *Primary Speech*
(SCM, 1982)

Quote

“If we fail to recognise that the term ‘God’ always falls short of that towards which the word is supposed to point, we will end up bowing down before our own conceptual creations forged from the raw materials of our self-image ... Hence Meister Eckhart famously prays, ‘God rid me of God’, a prayer that acknowledges how the God we are in relationship with is bigger and better than and different to our understanding of that God.”

Peter Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God*
(SPCK, 2006)

Quote

“The purpose of Christian religious education is to promote a lived and living Christian faith towards God’s reign in the lives of participants and communities. Jesus’ own life purpose was the reign of God. This faith requires a personal relationship with God in Jesus Christ, and requires the whole of the person, their very being. It shapes their identity and agency in the world and has

cognitive (head), affective (heart), and behavioural (hands) dimensions.”

Dan O’Connell
in *The Furrow*, July/Aug 22006

Book review

The Jesus Dynasty by James D. Tabor (Harper Element, UK£10.99)

Professor Tabor is a biblical archeologist and scholar of ancient languages. His book is dedicated to the memory of Albert Schweitzer ("in whose shadow we all stand"); you would thus be right to assume that this work aims to shed new light on the search for the historical Jesus.

Interestingly, you do not have to accept Tabor's conclusion (based nevertheless on a lot of convincing evidence) that Jesus believed his mission was to re-establish a royal dynasty, to learn a great deal of unquestionable value. For instance, have you ever wondered why John places the Last Supper not on Thursday but Wednesday? Tabor states that here, as elsewhere, John is correcting a mistake in the synoptic gospels, because Jews have always considered the Passover to be an additional Sabbath. (The Greek of Matthew's Gospel in fact refers to "Sabbaths" in the plural.) The idea that we should commemorate the Crucifixion on Thursday comes as a shock, but will please those who want "after three days" to mean what it says.

Another of Tabor's convictions - and it is important that he has no axe to grind, he is simply stating what his studies have forced him to believe - is that Jesus saw his mission as a joint one with John the Baptizer [sic]; the Jews of Jesus' time believed that there would be both a kingly messiah and a priestly one: much evidence of this is to be found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, but also in Zechariah and elsewhere. Tabor believes that Mark's Gospel was written under the influence of Paul, all of whose letters predate it and who had his reasons for playing down the importance not only of the Baptizer but also of Jesus' brother James.

There are many other fascinating insights in this scholarly yet easily read book, and perhaps I might mention one more, which is of particular interest to me personally. I have long been troubled by the attribution to Jesus of the words "This is my body ... this is my blood ...". Tabor points out that the idea of drinking blood would be inconceivable to a Jew, and that the 'corrective' Gospel of John makes no mention of these words; furthermore, this idea is not mentioned in an instruction manual on the Eucharist dating from the early second century. Don't read this book if you are not prepared to question accepted doctrines!

Christopher Fettes

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