

# Spaceforsoul

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## Newsletter August 2023

Dear Friends,

We hope that you are enjoying a break from work over the summer and time with family and friends, or just quiet time on your own with the beauty of the natural or built world around you. I have just returned from a few days at the Ammerdown retreat centre where I enjoyed a course lead by John Bell from the Iona Community entitled "The Future of the Celtic Past". This was very interesting and I will do a write-up for a future newsletter. *Anne*

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1. **What's on at Space for Soul Bristol this autumn?**
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3. **Visio Divina – soulful seeing** an introduction to our September Soul Space meeting
4. **What makes a space sacred?** An interesting and thoughtful article

### **1.What's on with Space for Soul Bristol this autumn?**

**September 3<sup>rd</sup> Soul Space** Meeting on Visio Divina at 11.00 facilitated by Meryl  
Please note that due to the temporary closure of the Old Library this meeting will be held at **Network Counselling & Training Ltd, Elm Park, Filton, Bristol BS34 7PS**  
There is plenty of parking. If anyone requires a lift from our usual Old Library venue please let us know.

**September 20<sup>th</sup> Zoom Soul Space** at 7.00 p.m. Quantum Theology facilitated by Heather

**October 1<sup>st</sup> Soul Space** at the Old Library will be facilitated by **Dave Tomlinson**, our patron. We are awaiting confirmation of the topic. 11.00 – 1.00 Please note that this is not a public meeting but for members, supporters and those interesting in becoming a supporter/ member due to limitations of space.

**October 18<sup>th</sup> Zoom Soul Space:** we will be discussing Struggle, facilitated by Linda

## **2. Free Will:** 'You don't have free will, but don't worry'.

This was the title of the You Tube video that Tim and Ally invited us to watch before their session on Wednesday 19th July. I dutifully watched the talk by physicist Sabine Hossenfelder but must admit to being utterly flummoxed by the end of it. The physics, so the argument goes, says that we are made out of particles and particles follow their own trajectory.

Is choosing what we want the same thing as free will anyway? What we want is based on our history, culture and environment. The choices we have in life are often constrained anyway, as Tim illustrated from his own life experience.

We were invited to think about:

- Do you think we subconsciously make a decision before we're aware that we've made it?
- If you know that free will does not exist, how will it change your view of Christianity (i.e. Jesus choosing to die on the cross). Did He have a choice?
- If you know that free will does not exist, does it change your moral outlook?

We then had a lively discussion aided by Tim and Ally's useful precis of the YouTube Talk. One of the themes that came up is that of morality e.g. free will is given as the reason for sin (Adam and Eve and all that) so does that then put the kibosh on the idea of sin? On the flip side, the good choices that we are asked to make, such as forgiving others, are based on free will (I think!).

I must admit I am still defeated by the science but the session certainly gave my brain a well-needed work out!

### **Kate Clover**

#### **My thoughts on freewill** from **Meryl**.

The video Tim introduced us gave some fascinating insights into what we mean by freewill. Do I really have the power to choose or are my choices predetermined by life experience or the choices that are available? I was reminded that I once knew a buyer for Selfridges; buyers may think they are choosing their clothes but only because she had chosen them first! Theologically, humankind's God-given freewill is often given as a reason for the evil in the world, but if we don't have freewill, then where does evil come from? Can there be such a thing as 'sin' if we have no choice? Great questions, no answers, but plenty to think about!

Links from free will session:

Gideon Heugh's poem, 'It is Time' from his book Rumours of Light which can be found here:

<https://www.facebook.com/gideonheugh/photos/pb.100063203951713.-2207520000./3040327909531142/?type=3>

We ended with Gerard Kelly's poem, 'I choose to forgive' from his book Spoken Worship.

<https://archive.org/details/spokenworshipliv0000kell/page/36/mode/2up> (You will need to sign up to the Internet Archive to read it here.)

## **Visio Divina – soulful seeing**

### September Soul Space gathering at Filton

You may be familiar with *lectio divina*, an ancient practice of reading scriptures contemplatively. In *visio divina* the contemplative focus is not scripture but an image; the invitation is to encounter the Divine through soulful consideration of art. It could be described as listening with the eyes of the heart. In the first part of the morning we will unpack what the practice may look like. Participants are invited to bring images that they have found helpful on their spiritual journey. After coffee there will be an opportunity to practice *visio divina* either individually or as a gently guided group exercise. In closing there will be an opportunity to share what you have experienced. We look forward to seeing you there.

## **Meryl**

### **Prayer of Awareness**

by John Philip Newell

Light within all light

Soul behind all souls

at the breaking of the dawn

at the coming of the day,

we wait and watch.

Your Light within the morning light

Your Soul within the human soul

your Presence beckoning to us from the heart of life.

In the dawning of this day

let us know fresh shinings in our soul.

In the growing colours of new beginnings all around us

let us know the first lights of our heart

Great Star of the morning

Inner Flame of the universe

let us be a colour in this dawning.



## **What makes a place sacred?**

The Oxford English Dictionary definition of sacred space is a place that is 'consecrated, dedicated to a religious purpose, revered as holy and secured from violation'. But does this apply to all places we consider sacred? Does a space have to be 'consecrated and dedicated' as sacred, or are some places just felt as inherently so? Is a space universally agreed as sacred by being identified as such - or is an experience of a place as sacred an individual perception, a felt sense?

It is a topic that has been debated over the centuries. Pugin, the architect and historian, writing in 1841 bemoaned the commercialism of churches and cathedrals which, he felt, for many, were no longer experienced as sacred places. The religious historian Eliade, writing in 1961, proposed that sacred is inherent, stating: "something sacred shows itself to us" (Eliade, 1961, in Harvey & Bowman, 2008). Later academics disagreed: Knott asserting that: "Nothing is inherently sacred, but things, places, persons, and events are attributed with that quality by societies, groups, or individuals according to their own cultural context" (Knott, 2005, in Harvey & Bowman, 2008). Chidester & Linenthal supported this view: "sacred space is inevitably entangled with the entrepreneurial, the social, the political, and other 'profane' forces." (Chidester & Linenthal, 1995, in Harvey & Bowman, 2008).

So why is it, for example, that Glastonbury, with its Abbey, Tor and Holy Well, seems to be universally felt as a sacred place, attracting spiritual seekers from all faiths and none, whereas Milton Keynes, built in the 1960s along ley lines connecting it to Glastonbury, Stonehenge and Avebury and with streets named Midsummer Boulevard and Avebury Boulevard is not thought by many as being a sacred place?

When on holiday recently we visited Sainte Marie de La Tourette, a Dominican priory in France built by the modernist architect Le Corbusier. A brutal, concrete structure, it rises above a wooded valley, where there is no noise except the murmur of the pine

trees that surround it and the crunch of pine needles beneath our feet. Objectively the building resembles a 1960s municipal car park, but somehow its solidity and strength created a sense of spiritual calm. It was so still, so eternal, so itself in its boldness. What made a place like this feel a sacred place? Did I sense it as sacred because I knew its identity as a religious place or was the natural landscape itself inherently sacred?



A few days later we climbed in the heat up a wooded pilgrimage path, lined with stone crosses, to a tiny chapel hidden in trees on the crest of the hill. Since 1928 an annual pilgrimage has made its way up the steep stony path, the priest of the time creating a sanctuary with shrines and living quarters. Now, however, we found that all was derelict, the chapel locked, the buildings crumbling, the walled garden overgrown. This place, for so long a refuge for weary pilgrims, consecrated and prayed over, no longer felt sacred.



Returning to the OED definition, while both the priory and the chapel had been consecrated, dedicated to a religious purpose and revered as holy the chapel they had not been secured from violation. Its air of neglect, the authoritative signs warning of 'Danger', 'No Entry', the locked door, seemed to have taken away its sense of the sacred.

This led me to reflect that, for me, a sacred place is one that gives me a sense of peace, of timelessness and a living faith. I feel that a sacred space does not necessarily have to be consecrated or even dedicated to a religious purpose, although both these places were, but it does need to be revered as holy and secured from violation whether that is a space that is inherently sacred or one that has been attributed as such.

If, as it seems to be for me, a sense of a place as sacred is an individual perception, a felt sense, I wonder what makes a place feel sacred to you? Do you feel, like Eliade, that 'something sacred shows itself' or, with Knott, that 'nothing is inherently sacred...but...attributed with that quality'?

#### Reference:

Harvey, G. and Bowman, M. (2008) 'Sacred Space and Landscape' in Brunton, D. (ed.) *'Place and Leisure'*, Milton Keynes, The Open University

Many thanks to **Miranda Marsh** for this beautiful and thought-provoking article

Thank you to everyone for their contributions. The prayer on page 3 is taken from John Philip Newell's beautiful book "Praying with the Earth" (Canterbury Press). He includes readings from the New Testament, Hebrew Scripture (the "Old Testament") and from the Quran and also pictures from Hebrew, Christian and Muslim Art.

Warmest Wishes

*Anne*, Chair of Space for Soul (Bristol)