

# Le Chéile - 'together' -

an occasional newsletter  
of hope for Christianity in Ireland

issued by the *Open Christianity Network*  
[www.ocnireland.com](http://www.ocnireland.com)

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## Editorial

*A chairde* – friends –

It has been a long time since one of these newsletters appeared. After *Le Chéile* 32 came out in January, the computer on which it is typed and sent went over to a new service provider. And in the move, the entire *Le Chéile* mailing list disappeared. Although all available technical assistance was brought in, there was no way of retrieving it. This issue now will go out to all the names that it has been possible to find or to think of, to include in a new list. That is about seven-eighths of the original list. If you are receiving this and know people who might previously have been getting it, we'd be very grateful if you could ask them if they have had this issue and, if not, to get in touch with us.

A survey by the Iona Institute and the Irish Evangelical Alliance, reported this week, shows that a startling number of young people do not know even the basics of Christianity. Is this: a) a bad thing; b) a good thing; c) inevitable; d) changeable; e) irrelevant? Answers on a postcard please. Or e-mail.

*Dia daoibh.*  
Hilary

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## Quote

'The words which are most used in religion are those whose genuine meaning is almost completely lost and whose impact on the human mind is negligible.'

*John Robinson,*  
quoted in *The Inclusive God*  
(see review below)

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## OCN National Gathering

Peter Rollins will be the speaker at the annual OCN gathering in Dublin on Saturday September 15. He is the founder of the Ikon community in Belfast, which describes itself as 'apocalyptic, heretical, emerging and failing'. A lecturer in philosophy, he is also author of the much-talked about book, 'How (Not) to Speak of God' (135pp, SPCK, 2006 - ISBN 0-281-05798-2). Full details of this day-time meeting later.

## Regional Open Christianity groups

### OCN Northern Group

The next meeting of the Northern Group will be held on Monday 16 April at Grosvenor House, 5 Glengall Street, Belfast BT12 5AD, from 6.00 – 8.00pm.

*Bill Patterson reports:* At the previous meeting Charles Kenny introduced David Jenkin's autobiography 'The Calling of a Cuckoo'. There followed a wide ranging discussion on a number of questions. It would be fair to say that the range and depth of the contributions which included a lot of active and appreciate 'listening' made the meeting quite special. It would be too much to try and record the exchanges or indeed do justice with a brief summary. Perhaps we just 'let it be remembered' as a good night.

It was generally accepted that 6-8pm was more a more suitable meeting time than 4-6pm. However I would stress that we are very conscious about being flexible on time and location. So please suggest alternative times and locations if the above does not suit you. We wish to make sure that everyone has an opportunity to meet.

For the April 16 meeting we are reading 'Discovering Girard' by Michael Kirwan published by DLT (2004). Sean O'Conaill will be providing an introduction.

### North West Group

Sean O'Conaill has agreed to be the OCN web contact point for the North West. We have a number of members from the NW who might wish to meet at a more convenient location and time. It all depends on numbers and interest. So if you are interested in a North West meeting let Sean or myself know.

*Bill Patterson*

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### OCN Cork Group:

Sally Ann Attale ([saattale@eircom.net](mailto:saattale@eircom.net))

### OCN Dublin Group:

Andrew Furlong ([tiripo@gofree.idigo.ie](mailto:tiripo@gofree.idigo.ie))

### OCN Limerick Group:

Donal O'Connor ([donlocnr@eircom.net](mailto:donlocnr@eircom.net))

### OCN Northern Group:

Bill Patterson ([william.petterson@btopenworld.com](mailto:william.petterson@btopenworld.com))

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*This poem was used to begin a recent meeting of the Dublin group of the Open Christianity Network.*

## Surprised by God

Sometimes it's through people,  
persons we have measured,  
From whom we expect just so much,  
and nothing more.  
Then these very persons  
one day will astound us,  
And our world is shaken.  
Surprised by God.

Sometimes it's through nature,  
which we take for granted,  
Only to be stopped, as we feel

its awesome force.  
Beauty beyond telling,  
power often deadly,  
And our wonder's wakened.  
Surprised by God.

Sometimes it's within us,  
sought or unexpected,  
Leading us to peace, or to where  
there is no peace.  
Finding a connection,  
finding a direction,  
And our heart is taken.  
Surprised by God.

William Flanders <http://www.williamflandersmusic.com>

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## 'Search for unity can't wait': Archbishop

In the first-ever visit of a Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin to the Church of Ireland Theological College, the Most Revd Dr Diarmuid Martin said that 'the search for unity...cannot be put on the long finger' and that 'we should wake up each day feeling the wound of divisions and inspired to work today and each day for unity.'

Source: *Church of Ireland Gazette*, 23.03.06

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## What would Jesus do?

'The ecumenical movement faces a simple question: to what extent do any of our 21<sup>st</sup>-century churches measure up to what Jesus Christ intended? When we compare the conduct and values of the institutional church today, we see that something has gone seriously astray.'

From 'Thinking Anew' column by 'GL',  
*Irish Times* 20.01.07

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## Peace conference at Corrymeela

Church and Peace, with members from 11 European countries, invites you to join them at their conference 'Not by might nor by power.... but by my Spirit', 14-17 June at the Corrymeela Centre, N.Ireland, which will 'take a critical look at the effects of the current security ideology and strive to define alternative community policies rooted in the choice of unarmed vulnerability and the pursuit of justice, two essential pillars of the Church's calling'. Speakers from the WCC Decade to Overcome Violence programme, from Corrymeela, from Uruguay and from Croatia will be joined by Norman Kember, former hostage in Iraq.

Booking and further details from [intloffice@church-and-peace.org](mailto:intloffice@church-and-peace.org) or 172 Ruskin Road, Northampton NN2 7TA. Cost £166. [www.church-and-peace.org](http://www.church-and-peace.org)

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## Book review

*The Inclusive God*, by Steven Shakespeare and Hugh Rayment-Pickard (Canterbury Press, 2006, 123 pp., £12.99 stg)

Inclusivity is not a matter of liberal fundamentalism, the authors of this book say. Including the aliens has always

been part of the grammar and instincts of Christian theology.

At the core of this excellent book the 'open table' of Jesus, where all are welcomed including the despised and rejected, is contrasted with the Essenes' 'house of holiness', where places were reserved strictly for insiders. Jesus' teaching and actions were totally inclusive. Some of the most passionate pages of the book concern the way the Church has used the Eucharist to control the life of the believer. Both Catholic and Anglican churches, in their different ways, withhold Holy Communion from some of their members. The authors, who are both Anglicans, are particularly hard on Protestant versions of the Eucharist: 'Rather than a lived experience of the presence of Christ and the inbreaking of the kingdom, the Eucharist [has a tendency to] become a memorial of a past event' – with inclusion restricted to those who have grasped church teaching – 'all very cerebral and unforgiving'. They sum up: 'What a sanitised and anxious meal this has become!'

'The pity is,' they say, 'that the Eucharist is the test of our hospitality, of our faithfulness to the radical hospitality of God in Christ.'

Creeds and scripture can be used to exclude the aliens. Yet creeds can be stepping stones to a more exploratory faith. Christian revelation in scripture and elsewhere has no timeless language, as everything we are and do is mediated through our existence in time. So it is always open to new interpretation. The Trinity is a case in point: it is neither an intellectual puzzle nor a dogma we have to force ourselves to believe in, but simply an expression of the inclusiveness of God, reminding us that there is never only one way of defining the divine.

There are so many good things in these pages – what the Garden of Eden represents; flawed theories of the cross; and how the Church has no more property rights over Jesus than any Muslim, Jew, Hindu or atheist; and more – that it is difficult to be mentioning so few of them in detail. This is easily the most stimulating and encouraging book I have read this year.

In the April issue of *The Furrow: a Journal for the Contemporary Church* there is a review of David Hay's *Something There* (Darton Longman & Todd, 2006). The book deals with the significant decrease in church going, the paradoxical increase in the number of people admitting to having a religious experience, and the gap between the institutional churches and people's personal religious experience. In keeping with Hay's previous writings, it is built on a huge number of interviews, and ultimately argues that spirituality is biological and not just socially constructed. The review makes it seem desirable reading. But those for whom the price (nearly £16, or about €24) is a deterrent might like to know of a much slimmer publication by David Hay and Kate Hunt which is the obvious precursor of *Something There*. Published in 2000, this is a report on the findings of the Adults' Spirituality Project at the University of Nottingham, titled *Understanding the Spirituality of People Who Don't Go to Church*, and available for £2 plus 15% postage from the Living Spirituality Network, The Well, Newport Road, Willen, Milton Keynes MK15 9AA, UK.

Hilary