

Selections from the Summer 2006-2007 issue
of Spiritual Growth Ministries Journal of Contemplative Spirituality:
Refresh
"Creativity and Spirituality"

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COMMENT by Andrew Dunn

One of the greatest delights of life is our capacity for creativity.

Where does it come from? We might well reply, "Who knows?" because there are more than 60 different definitions of *creativity* to be found in psychological literature, suggests one writer (Taylor cited in the [Wikipedia](#) article *Creativity*). The simple fact is that human beings are richly endowed with abilities that generate responses and reactions to the endless situations and challenges faced in life - and also, often with nothing to generate it, we come up with, discover, unearth the most creative ideas, insights, inventions, artwork, computer programmes, in every area of life.

The simplest and most satisfying source of this creativeness is that we are *imago Dei*, made in the image of God and so embrace God's burgeoning creativity as we let our creative capacities flourish.

However, many of us feel we are not creative and so limit the possibilities for ourselves. Yet, it's amazing what we can do, make, create if we try and give ourselves the opportunity to learn. Sure, we may not be entirely satisfied with the results. Few creative people are. The New Zealand Maori weaver Kahutoi Te Kanawa, says of her work "I don't feel like I've yet mastered my art. I'm capable of it, but there's lots more room for improvement." Indeed, there is with all of us in everything.

This issue of Refresh seeks to encourage us to step out creatively in whatever ways God is inviting us to develop. While many of the articles are by people well skilled in their fields we are using their work to illustrate the range of ways we can express ourselves, and in no way want to suggest you have to do what they do. You might want to learn how to do something presented here and that would be wonderful. But our intent is to encourage creativity to flourish as an expression of who we are and how we are as people made in god's image - and to do it as prayer, as worship, as celebration, as participants in God's creativity here today.

The writer of Psalm 8 contrasts the glory and wonders of the universe and asks what are human beings that God should be mindful of them. It's easy to feel that when we look up and out and scan the wonders of Hubble photos of one galaxy after another beyond our own. And yet ..., and yet "you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honour" including the glorious gift of creativity in so many ways that it's almost God-like! Chips off the old block! Sparks off the central fire of creation! No wonder the writer can say, "O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" (Ps. 8:1 & 9).

And it's a sobering question, "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? ... God's temple is holy, and you are that temple", remembering that "you" is plural suggesting it's a corporate indwelling and not simply our own individual bodies (1 Corinthians 3:16-17).

Now here's a thought: If Isaac Newton dreamed up his ideas on gravity while sitting under an apple tree what might I dream up when sitting under a giant kauri?

CREATIVITY IS ... from various sources

Creativity (or creativeness) is a mental process involving the generation of new ideas or concepts, or new associations between existing ideas or concepts.

From a scientific point of view, the products of creative thought (sometimes referred to as divergent thought) are usually considered to have both originality and appropriateness. An alternative, more everyday conception of creativity is that it is simply the act of making something new. Although intuitively a simple phenomenon, it is in fact quite complex.

This mysterious phenomenon, though undeniably important and constantly visible, seems to lie tantalizingly beyond the grasp of scientific investigation.

www.Wikipedia.org - Creativity

Can't draw, can't sing, can't write, can't dance. How often have I heard people say, "I haven't got a creative bone in my body"? Yet this is simply not true.

Since each of us is made in the image of God the great Creator we all carry within us the ability to create; it is a built in part of the design, not an optional extra. In order not to be creative we must determinedly work against our very nature. And, sadly, that is what so many of us do because we have forgotten who we are.

Diane Benge. Reality June/July 2004. 5

In the beginning was creativity, and creativity was with God, and the creativity was God. All things came into being through the mystery of creativity; apart from creativity nothing would have come into being.

Paraphrase of John 1:1-2 by Gordon Kaufman: In the beginning ... Creativity. Fortress Press Press. 2004. ix

"Creativity is inventing, experimenting, growing, taking risks, breaking rules, making mistakes, and having fun."

Mary Lou Cook

Sometimes it just happens ... anywhere ... anytime! You may be busy at some menial task (e.g. mowing the lawn or washing-up), or driving the car, on the golf course, in the shower, or just relaxing or sleeping and ... into your head will come a thought, a bright idea that you immediately recognise as a possible solution to the problem you have been wrestling with for the past few days or weeks. A large number of world-changing ideas and inventions have seemingly begun as 'flashes of genius' in creative minds at the most unexpected times!

Alan Williams. Creativity, Invention & Innovation. Allen & Unwin, Sydney. 1999. 81.

"Everything Leonardo Da Vinci touched turned to eternal beauty", legendary art critic Bernard Berenson offered as a poetic view of Leonardo's accomplishments. Implicit in his words is a fundamental truth about the Maestro: his gifts and his works were manifestations of an unusually pure connection to the Divine. Leonardo's gifts emerged from this Source.

Michael Gelf. Da Vinci Decoded. Delacorte Press 2004. 29

What the country needs are a few labour-making inventions.

Arnold Glasow

Technology ... the knack of so arranging the world that we don't have to experience it.

Mark Frisch

The extravagant generosity of love that directs God's creativity offers us a share in the same artistry. We have been fashioned for artful living, for works that are good because in a profusion of colours, textures, shapes and sounds they recast the boundaries of our habitation according to the patterns of Kingdom life. (Ephesians 2:10).

John Mogabgab. Weavings March/April 2002. 3

CREATIVITY AND SPIRITUALITY by Susannah Connolly

Creativity and Spirituality, what an amazing duo, an incredibly hard task master (depending on how you look at it), what an inspiring tasty mouthful.

But what is this creativity? For me it has been a surprising journey in getting back to my old self. Yep I know that was supposed to die at Baptism, well I tried that twice and God kept enlightening my dull brain that the essential me was actually what was needed. So many people say "I'm not creative". This is so blatantly wrong, look at the dinner tables every night, look at what people wear everyday, look at the hair styles of teenagers, look at wrinkles on faces, oh they are so beautiful! Look at how you use words and more.

The part of me the church seemed to say was wrong was actually the part God created in the first place. Creatively I have found myself doing, being and using all the things I loved as a child in the life I now live.

I call it Creative Therapy: because I draw on, invite out of myself, God and others the deep inner beauty, pain, and experiences they've had and seek how best to see healing take place. I listen for the words from people's souls that have not been voiced before and encourage the song tapping on the heart to be sung. I rely on those sacred moments where God and person are seeing together the path ahead. In this seeing, creativity and spirituality consummate a union and growth is begun. Sometimes I'm there for the birth and sometimes not. But just like in the life of mothers, the need to be able to tell their story of birth so the directee/person.

Creativity has given me the knowing that I can trust myself, God and some others. That I am not wrong, maybe different, but not wrong. Joseph Chilton Pearce said, "to live a creative life, we must lose our fear of being wrong". This is so for others as well, our culture has deftly crippled our spontaneity. In the Philippine slums where I lived for four years I learnt that there was no need for shyness, everybody got up and 'had a go'. Their creativity was contagious, or was it their freedom? The poor did not have the facades, the shallow coverings I had, the fear of being wrong. They taught me unconditional acceptance of each other and self. It's taken a while to experience that here though. However, I can now stand in front of 100s and take funerals, retreats, teach and have a ball. When I'm relaxed and expectant of God and my self and others' creativity exudes out of my soul so fast I can't catch it.

Creativity in Spiritual Direction is the union of a person's soul with God, their spirituality is joined with creativity and flood gates open. Imagine a story being told and inviting that person to walk with you out side to see if the land, the garden, the sky will speak to them of their situation, just like Jesus' parables. Creation is standing waiting in pregnant expectation. Creation is waiting to show off its beauty and wisdom, and its warnings. We need to learn to listen, to have all our senses open, cleansed and receptive, and then we will be able to trust that idea, that image, that thought about how to do something. Creativity is trusting yourself, trusting your unique way of being in this world, of being to take a chance and step out, to speak out, and to reach out in a way only you can do.

Creativity in Spiritual Direction is like incarnation, it's like bringing myself back from the cultural, family, societal church teachings that teach us how not to live fully in grace, incarnationally being Jesus and seeing Jesus incarnate in everything and everyone. The film "Ray" speaks here: "unchain my heart, unchain my heart". Creativity is saying yes to yourself, to your true self. It's taken a while to realize I now do all that I loved as a child but got destructively challenged through teasing, taunting, and abuse of all kinds. I now use the dance I so wanted to do, the art I thought I couldn't be as good as others at, or that what I did was not what the teacher wanted. I use movement, metaphor, horses, music, and whatever the person brings with them. I know and trust that within that, will be a whole new world of echoes of their past and hints at how to open the inner sanctuary of each glorious heart.

Creativity has enabled me to truly delight in people and in myself. I was called delightful once by my first Spiritual Director. I went home on cloud nine, dancing and skipping, I was totally blown away that she would experience me that way.

Creative therapy has helped me recognize my inner self and how to discern my next move. Shakti Gawain says, "Every time you don't follow your inner guidance you feel a loss of energy, loss of power, a sense of Spiritual Deadness". This is true for me now, it wasn't before as I'd taken on what others said was okay. If they said, that type of dance move was not acceptable, and then I didn't do it. However, now I do it and quietly rumble inside with laughter.

Creative Spiritual Direction allows me to work deeply with myself, God and others walking a pathway toward holy wholeness. For me this means not being totally healed, but still a broken vessel humbly aware of my abilities, and my limitations and moving in and out of these. Creativity is a path of self discovery, in one of my eight week groups we moved from much pain and anger, tears and frustration into much laughter and joy, being able to inspire one another with our art, our selves! Somehow the process was the healer; the end result was not so much the target.

The last blessing of creatively working with people is that I am inspired, taught, challenged, and learn to listen more and more to others and myself along the journey. We can be triggered by so many different things, we hear a song and remember a long-lost love, feel a sense of grief or longing, we need to listen to that. We see a cloud that looks like a teddy bear, what is it saying, I need to feel loved, I need a cuddle. We feel prickly, what is poking us right now, we can draw it, dance it, move it, speak about it, write a poem, read a book, pick up a teddy and hug it, go to the Zoo and ponder the Lion and so much more.

It's important for me to remember that creativity never ever stays the same: today it's in this form, and tomorrow it may be entirely different. John Powell encouraged me years ago in writing that he may change from one day to the next as he's experienced so much new stuff. Creativity is like that, it is a journey deep inside oneself, at times a formidable journey not to be travelled alone, and at times the solitude is the freedom needed.

Creativity is owning ourselves, owning our shadow, our beauty. This is hard work at times, and we need to be able to look after ourselves. Just like beginning Spiritual Direction or counselling life can take on a chaotic stance. We need to trust our own co-creation/participation in the process.

I'd like to finish with this from David Whyte: "The way we tell our stories has a lot to do with the way we see ourselves in the world, with our identity. Perhaps one of the greatest blocks I see to new possibilities is our inability to tell our stories with the MAGNIFICENCE they deserve, in other words our inability to grant magnificence to our own lives."

CREATIVITY AND SPIRITUALITY has enabled me to begin this journey afresh with a deep, deep knowing. Bless you!

References:

David Whyte poetry
 Art and Creativity course with the Learning Connexion-Wellington.
 Menweb
 Expressive Therapies course-AUT

CREATIVITY by Nancy Clark

In the beginning was God, thought and word,
 And then a wondrous thing occurred:
 God made the light, separated dark
 It seemed of creation to be the spark;
 With waters spaced and sky between
 And soon some dry land could be seen.
 What fun as God shaped plain and mountain
 With here and there a sprinkling fountain!
 Then vegetation, trees and fruit,
 Some coloured flowers and tiny shoot,
 Next sun appeared with moon and stars
 Revealed the beauty made so far.
 See basins where the sea could foam
 As wisely You prepared a home
 For myriads of living things:
 All kinds of fish and birds with wings ...
 Soon creeping things for the world's food chain,
 Then animals became the main
 Focus of this fresh new earth
 As you brought different kinds to birth,.
 New, fresh ideas creative springing,
 Each to its niche new vibrance bringing,
 Filling all this fertile land
 And spreading out on ev'ry hand.
 To crown it, ere this spree should cease,
 You then brought forth Your masterpiece,
 So fearf'ly, wonderfully made,
 With integrated skill displayed
 You made first man and then his mate,
 In close affection to relate.
 You told them garden they should tend,

Of caring nurture set the trend.
 You looked at all, pronounced it good
 Yes, very good, as well it should
 Be at this stage. You'd made your best
 So on the Sabbath day took rest.

SOUNDING THE SONG: CREATIVITY AND MUSIC by John Franklin

"THE WORLD is charged with the grandeur of God. It will flame out..."

In God's Grandeur, poet Gerard Manley Hopkins celebrates the inextinguishable creativity of the Spirit of God. God's grandeur does flame out in blazing rhododendrons, from the night sky, and through the smiles of those who love us. And God's grandeur also sounds out. Have you listened to the overture scripted in Genesis 1 where creation sings its birth song? Have you stopped to hear "the trees of the forest sing for joy" (Ps. 96:12)? What "new song" is in you that is waiting to be sung, not to a recording engineer, but to the Lord (Psalms 33, 40, 96, 98, 144, 149)?

God's grandeur sounds out, in and through all that is, and we, as co-creators have our parts to play and sing. In Genesis 35 Bezalel and Oholiab are filled with inspiration, with the Spirit of God to create beauty in precious metals, in wood, and in fabrics. The same creative Spirit inspires the creation and sounding of music. Its grandeur may be its simplicity and delicacy or its body-vibrating magnificence.

With spontaneous music and dancing, David the Psalm-singer brought the Ark into Jerusalem (and got into trouble with his wife who thought his body-vibrating was a bit much! 2 Sam. 6:14-16). Then, with the establishment of the temple, music was an essential part of Israel's liturgies. The early Christians sang; Paul encouraging them to "Sing hymns and Psalms and spiritual songs to the Lord" which presumes that they knew words and music (Col. 3:16). J.S. Bach dedicated all he wrote to the glory of God and claimed that "Music's only purpose should be for the glory of God and the recreation of the human spirit." And with some humour, that giant of 20th century theology, Karl Barth, is reported to have said, "When the angels are around the throne of God, they sing their praises to the music of Bach. But when they are en famille, they play Mozart. And God, listening, is well-pleased," - as God is with The Newsboys, Falling Up, Evermore and you.

So how does it happen? How do I (for one) make words and make music? Numbers 21:16-17 is a clue. It tells how the Lord told Moses to gather the people. Needing water, they sing, "Spring up, O well."

The image of 'springing up' explains what happens for me. When I am called on to pray in public, when I sit to write, when I am prompted to make music, I pause, I go within, I wait for the spring to bubble, and when I sense the 'springing up', I am ready. What follows is often a surprise to me. And it is a delight as I sense the Spirit within me giving voice.

The song I am known for is:

Jesus, I sing your praise
 with the birds of the dawn,
 with the stars of the night...

It came on a dismal, grey day. Somewhat despondent, I heard myself say, "In the face of all that is dreary, there is a song here." I paused, I went within, I waited for a spring to bubble, and when I sensed the 'springing up', I went to the piano keyboard and words and music were just waiting to be written down. I am sure that my experience is not uncommon. I am sure that creating beauty in the sounds of words and music, we are participating in the creativity of God, the Holy Trinity.

As Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three points in a circle of equal self giving and receiving; as they are three focus points in a dynamic of love, creative energy and power; could we say that the Trinity is a circle of song, a trio of extraordinary sound, and the source of all that vibrates and resonates a universe into harmony?

Come, Creator Spirit, bubble within us and teach us the song. May our words be as song; may our song be as prayer; may our music gladden the human spirit and find you "well-pleased."

SEEN AND KNOWN

Palm 139:7-16a, 17-18 (NRSV)

Where can I go from your spirit?
 Or where can I flee from your presence?
 If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
 if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
 If I take the wings of the morning
 and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
 even your right hand shall hold me fast.
 If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
 and the light around me become night",
 even the darkness is not dark to you;
 the night is as bright as the day,
 for darkness is as light to you.

For it was you who formed my inward parts;
 you knit me together in my mother's womb.
 I praise you,
 for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
 Wonderful are your works;
 that I know very well.
 My frame was not hidden from you,
 when I was being made in secret,
 intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
 Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. ...

How weighty are your thoughts, O God!
 How vast is the sum of them!
 I try to count them - they are more than the sand;
 I come to the end - I am still with you.

In recent years we, in the western church, have been enamored with words. As a writer, I understand that passion. As a lover, I am intimately acquainted with their limits.

The direction of my soul when I am in love is toward knowledge. Artists are lovers, in love with the world, in love with a particular means of expressing their attachment. Art is a particular way of knowing, and imagination is the link to artistic expression to incarnation.

And incarnation, we know, is the path to God's future. On this day in the history of the world, and on this day in God's story, we are like those awakening from a long sleep. We have taken the red pill, and we are discovering how deep the rabbit hole goes. We are seeing how deeply immersed and accommodated we have become to a narrow set of values, anchored solidly in a limited Enlightenment epistemology, a particular way of knowing the world. Parker Palmer¹ and others are helping us discern the violence of that method, and we are discovering that while science illuminated one set of truths, it lost another. Holy imagination is helping us to rediscover our heart, and in the process, we might also reclaim the church as an alternative culture. Rodney Clapp writes,

*Reclaiming Christianity as culture enables us to move from decontextualized propositions to traditioned, storied, inhabitable truths; from absolute certainty to humble confidence; from austere mathematical purity to the rich if less predictable world of relational trust; from control of the data to respect of the other in all its created variety; from individualist knowing to communal knowing and being known; and from once-for-all rational justification to the ongoing pilgrimage of testimony.*²

What journey could be more important in this hour? The journey to renewed hearts won't be made by those who are immersed in propositions. Walter Ong writes, "Written words are residue...When an often told story is not actually being told, all that exists of it is the potential in certain human beings to tell it."³ The Hebrew word for "word," *dabar* means both word and event. Only what unites mind and heart, word and spirit, is incarnational. What is born of the Spirit in the Holy imagination may then take flesh.⁴

Sadly, artists and poets have not been welcome in the western church. Artists and poets reach for an unseen world, they grasp at transcendence. Moreover, "Poets remove the veil and give language to what people are experiencing. The poet listens to the rhythms and meanings occurring beneath the surface."⁵

What we see today in the west, according to Walter Brueggemann, is largely a religion of immanence. With the Christendom compact, what had been a missional movement became a civil and settled religion. Civil religion is about immanence, the economics of affluence and the politics of oppression.⁶

When Israel moved from a theocracy to a monarchy then God and the temple become a part of the royal landscape, with the sovereignty of God subordinated to the purpose of the king. From this point forward God is "on call" and access to him is controlled by the royal court. Royal reality overpowers the dimension of hope and the place of imagination. When a nation (or a church) establishes a comfortable and static rule, the last thing they want is people with new ideas to shake things up. And in terms of the economics of affluence, you don't want people delaying gratification in favor of some future hope, you want them seeking pleasure in the eternal now.

The result of all that pleasure is that, "in place of passion comes satiation." Brueggemann argues that one of the reasons we lose passion and imagination is precisely due to our success at achieving comfort and security. He states that, "Passion as the capacity and readiness to care and suffer, to die and to feel, is the enemy of imperial reality."⁷ TS Eliot links sacrifice and knowledge in *The Dry Salvages*,

*But to apprehend
The point of intersection of the timeless
With time, is an occupation for the saint--
No occupation either, but something given
And taken, in a lifetime's death in love,
Ardour and selflessness and self surrender...*

It would be easy to assume a dichotomy between word and Spirit for the Holy imagination, but it would be a serious error. I am fascinated that the second story of the creation of humanity displays Adam as the first poet. We observe God's invitation to Adam to name the animals. Imagination is at the heart of knowing, and humankind is a language-maker, invoking new worlds of meaning, a sacramental task. In the act of creation we make visible what was only implied; we connect matter with spirit. Imagination is God's power in us, part of the *imago Dei*, and it has the power to unite heart and mind and so move us forward into God's future.

*We now know that human transformation does not happen through didacticism or through excessive certitude, but through the playful entertainment of another scripting of reality that may subvert the old given text and its interpretation and lead to the embrace of an alternative text and its redescription of reality.*⁸

These are desperate times. We need artists who are prophetic and poetic. We no longer have the luxury of assuming that the old models or established leaders have the capacity to lead us forward. The prophetic task is to criticize the dominant consciousness. We must think seriously and creatively in two worlds simultaneously. Symbols that promise life but breed death are exposed as frauds and alternate symbols are offered.⁹ The poetic task is to evoke an alternative future among a people who are so satiated that they have lost the capacity to imagine a new world.

In *The Sky is Falling* Alan Roxburgh notes that the imagination of poets is not expressed in a modern manner. Poets "are not so much advice-givers as image and metaphor framers... What churches need are not more entrepreneurial leaders with wonderful plans for their congregation's life, but poets with the imagination and gifting to cultivate environments within which people might again understand how their traditional narratives apply to them today."¹⁰

Artists redefine the symbolic world of people so that people begin to see the kingdom of God at work in their everyday lives.¹¹ I close this article with the words of Peter Senge in *Presence*. Senge writes that a new way forward will emerge from building three integrated capacities: "a new capacity for observing that no longer fragments the observer from what is observed; a new capacity for stillness that no longer fragments who we really are from what's emerging; a new capacity for creating alternative realities that no longer fragments the wisdom of the head, heart and hand; a new capacity for cooperation that harnesses the intelligence and spirit of all people at all levels."¹²

1. In particular his work, *To Know as We are Known*, and *A Hidden Wholeness* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004).

2. *A Peculiar People* (Downer's Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1996) 186.

3. Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (London: Routledge, 1982) 11.

4. One of the most profound discourses on the Trinity as a creative paradigm was penned by Miss Dorothy Sayers: *The Mind of the Maker*.

5. Alan Roxburgh, *The Sky is Falling* (Eagle, ID: ACI Publications, 2005) 164.

6. Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1997) 30.

7. *Ibid.* 35.

8. Walter Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997) 29.

9. John Frye. Online <http://www.jesustheradicalpastor.blogspot.com/>.

10. *Ibid.* 166.

11. John Frye, Op Cit.

12. Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, Flowers: *Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future* (New York: Society for Organizational Learning, 2005).

Melinda Stevenson interviews John Ferguson, sculptor**Where did you come from John?**

I was born in 1953 and grew up in a Christian home in Bucklands Beach, Auckland.

From a young age I had a faith in God, which has grown stronger over the years. I've always had a passion for music, art and creativity but up until a few years ago I haven't been able to express myself through art. I think that's because I wasn't sure who I was and what I wanted to express. I have worked in the signage industry most of my adult life, specialising in pictorials, 3D logos and gold leaf.

When I was 46 my wife, Julie and our three young children and I went to live in Cluj Napoca, Romania to set up two small businesses. During that time I met Liviu Mocan, a prominent Christian Eastern European sculptor. We became good friends and he encouraged me to express myself through some form of art. After returning to New Zealand in 2001 I started to do just that!

Do you see a design in the stone? How do you start a work?

I look for a design inside of me and choose a stone or piece of wood, aluminium or steel that will best express my design. I've never had a stone speak to me, but I often find myself speaking to stones!!!

Oh yes and what do you speak to stones about?

Well, I tell them that I like them, have chosen them & wish to recreate something with them!

Ok, so where does the design come from?

Usually my designs come out of a time of rest; sometimes figuratively, sometimes physically...often as I'm waking up in the morning I'll get an idea for a design, and I'll sketch it while it's still fresh, the design develops from there. But I find that if life is too busy I get no designs... if I'm restful and peaceful ideas come to me through dreams, and in my first waking moments.

What is the connection between creativity and spirituality?

You know that verse where God says "Depart from me I never knew you!" He didn't say "Depart from me you never knew me!" I've been wondering how does God want to know us? I think he wants to know us like a bride & groom. A good groom wants to know his bride intimately her thoughts and feelings.

He wants her to come to him not dressed in beautiful clothes or with clever words but naked so they can really get to know each other....so for me, my journey of faith consists of learning to get naked before God...he wants to explore my feelings, thoughts, emotions, dreams, fears, my anxieties...the full range of ...not just my good emotions. But we tend not to see him as a good husband.

My journey over the last few years has been about learning to be restfully naked!

I'm learning to rest in the knowledge of Gods love. I've discovered that he actually really likes me. But he doesn't like, in fact he hates some of the religious claddings and wordings I find myself using when I approach him...because it isn't the authentic me.

I've found that creativity comes or is expressed easily when I'm being my true self, open & authentic - naked.

Do you look for scriptures or Biblical truth to be expressed through your art?

I don't find a scripture or a revelation and make up a design from that, I tend to get a design and then as I'm working on it, I get an understanding of what the piece is about. My sculpture "God Space" speaks to me about that space that can only be filled by God. I, like most, try to cram all kinds of secondary things, good things precious things like wives, family, work, home, hobbies, sport, church, art, even art into that primary space which should be reserved for God.

How does creating your pieces of work nourish you?

It reveals who I am. My art challenges me in that it acts as a thermometer; it exposes to me my intimacy, or lack of intimacy which is more often the case. My works help me to get in touch with my heart. My favourite works have come out of times of exposing the real me to my maker. In turn he brings to the surface my real identity, and out of that identity art comes as an expression of that reality.

Art stirs a desire in me for intimacy with God. For me intimacy starts with exposure, with presenting myself before God. Not the self that we would like to be, but the real self, the authentic me. When we come to him naked, he is delighted because he sees a glimpse of his own DNA in us.

CREATING WITH BREAD by Marcelle Pilkinton

"Oh no not again!"

Out of the oven came another heavy, yeasty loaf, destined for the birds if they dared touch it. That was nearly 40 years ago. I had just read the book "Hidden Art" by Edith Schaeffer. Her challenge inspired me to be creative in every situation and to fulfil God's image of creativity in us. In Genesis, after each creative activity God saw it was good. Being made in the image of God we too take pleasure in making things. In order to keep my creativity alive when the boys were little, and my husband Ross was travelling frequently, I set myself the goal of learning to make good bread. I became the library's most enthusiastic borrower of bread books. In one of these I stumbled across the secret of using vitamin C* which ferments dough quickly and thoroughly. With that clue along with thorough kneading, I was soon able to turn out light bread every time.

Once I had cracked this code, bread and bun variations were endless - pita bread, croissants, mixed grain and traditional shapes by the score. It was an activity our four boys could enjoy as well because unlike other baking, lots of handling is not a problem, in fact it improves the bread.

I became fascinated with the science and history of bread making. The use of wild yeast spores was practised, though not scientifically understood, by the Egyptians around 4000 B.C. In the tomb of Pharaoh Rameses II, is portrayed the interesting story in pictures of an Egyptian bakery - two men are leaning on staffs kneading dough with their feet!

Yeast is a single celled fungus organism which multiplies when it has optimum conditions of warmth, moisture, time and food - it converts grain starch into sugar. It gives off carbon dioxide and alcohol. The carbon dioxide becomes trapped in a web of moist flour gluten strands and pushes up the dough, while the alcohol evaporates in the cooking process.

It was not long before I found rich and intriguing bread stories and images in the Bible. It would seem that the Israelites did not make leavened bread until they lived in Egypt. When Abraham asked Sarah to make fast food for their angel visitors it included bread in the form of thin, round loaves. Today, desert dwellers and nomadic peoples make similar flat breads on heated stones. We know that in the Exodus the Egyptians had ovens as the frogs hid in them during the plague of frogs. How nasty! It was the custom of the Israelites to eat leavened bread, but on the night of the Passover there was no time for the bread to rise - so they ate unleavened bread.

Note that yeast and leaven are used interchangeably in the Bible depending on the translation. Until the production of commercial yeast in recent times, bread makers saved a portion from the previous days baking and stored it in flour. This was the leaven for the next baking. Traditional sourdough bread and Maori rewena bread is made using this method.

My favourite parable is Matthew 13:33, the parable of the leaven. *"The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough."*

Jesus must have often watched his mother make bread. The leaven was mixed and kneaded into a large amount of flour, making a heavy lump of dough. In time it became soft and pliable and when cooked, an appetising nutritious staple food for the family. This is a wonderful parable of the Kingdom of Heaven working silently, slowly, powerfully to transform the world.

On the other hand, Jesus also warns against the insidious leaven of the Pharisees, spreading corruption in the world.

In *Revelation* the relative values of barley and wheat are given - *"A quart of wheat for a day's wages and three quarts of barley for a day's wages (6:6)*. Barley bread was poor man's bread, not because it was less nutritious but because it was not possible to get such a good rise (greater volume) using barley flour, as with wheat flour. Wheat bread was the porterhouse steak of the bread world. So it is remarkable that at the miraculous feeding of the 5000 in John 6:9 that Jesus used barley loaves. Maybe there is an apologetic note in Andrew's statement, *"There is a lad here with five barley loaves and two fish. But what is that among so many?"* Is he hinting that the quality is not up to much as well as the quantity? In any event, it is typical of the Lord's graciousness that he identifies with the food of the lowly.

Ross says I am a fallen woman as we now have a bread-maker! But I have not lost the wonder of bread, bread-making and the eternal lessons it has taught me.

* These days *Surebake* and other yeast blends contain dough improvers including vitamin C, so it is not necessary to add vitamin C separately.

REEL JOURNEYS: A CREATIVE EXPERIMENT WITH RETREAT AND FILM by Warren Deason

It started with a phone call, "What do you think of the idea of having a seven-day silent film retreat?" Now here was a piece of creative lateral thinking. My friend and I had run several film retreat days where those interested would gather, watch a film, take some time to reflect and then share the fruit of our reflection. The idea was to take this a step further. Using the seven-day silent retreat model, we would show films for the first five evenings and invite participants to use their responses as the raw material for reflection and spiritual direction. Would this work? We had heard of groups using film as the basis of theological discussion but would those who would normally participate in a week-long silent retreat feel the films would intrude upon their silence or would provide an unnecessary distraction?

We decided to test the market and advertised in the SGM 2004 programme. There were sufficient responses and enrolments to encourage us to go ahead.

Now what films? We decided to choose from a range of genre and ended up with *The Colour of Paradise* (an Iranian film, made by a Muslim director), *Molokai* (A film about the life and ministry of Father Damien who ran the leprosy colony on the Island of Molokai), *Wings of Desire* (a German language, award-winning film directed by Wim Wenders), *Travelling Birds* (a documentary following the migration of several bird species filmed over three years and seven continents) and *The Station Agent* (a man afflicted with dwarfism retreats to a station agent's cottage in New Jersey only to find unexpected community and friendship).

We had intended to follow each film with a short discussion session and collect immediate reactions. We were surprised to find that there was a profound silence following the screening of our first film, a silence with a sacredness that we could not intrude upon. Subsequent films produced the same response, so the post-film dialogue was scrapped. We lightened each session a little by preceding the main film with some selections from *Leunig Animated*, a whimsical collection of brief *claymation* films written by cartoonist Michael Leunig. Though a little diversionary, they had their own impact.

We also provided a list of questions to help participants reflect upon their viewing experience. Though all the questions might not be applicable to any one film, we felt that they would be a useful starting point. We asked such questions as, "What feelings did the films evoke in you?" "How does the film's narrative/story connect with your story?" "What moments or actions of grace do you discern?" "How does this film connect with other experiences you are having on the retreat?" (For the full list of questions see the Winter 2006 edition of *Refresh* p43).

Most directees used these as the basis of their direction sessions and it showed that these films were making an impact and raising all sorts of valuable insights that were deepening their sense of God's activity on the retreat.

In the late afternoon we would meet for Eucharist and a short reflection would be given using the content of the previous night's film as a theme. Often this would have an uncanny link with the reading from the daily lectionary.

To our knowledge none of the retreatants found the films intruded upon their silence. Most responses were positive about the role the films played in their overall journey during the week. Not all films appealed equally to everyone; one especially was quite demanding and its pace, "slow-burning" as someone said, was a difficulty for some. However others found its demands stimulating.

Overall we judged the event a success, enough to warrant a repeat session this year (2006).

We were a little more confident this time around and decided that our format required little, if any, change. We determined that we would use a similar selection process for our five films and our list was: *March of the Penguins* (Oscar winning documentary on the breeding cycle of the Emperor Penguin), *The Legend of Bagger Vance*, (a 2000 Robert Redford film, using a golf match as a metaphor for personal struggle and triumph), *Les Misérables* (the 1998 screen version of the Victor Hugo novel - there have been at least 17 others), *Touching the Void*, (a gruelling retelling of the true story of two British climbers, one of whom had to cut the rope linking him to his friend, in order to ensure his own survival - a powerful story of survival and the power of the human spirit), and *As it is in Heaven* (a Swedish film telling of a famous conductor who, suffering from extreme exhaustion and heart disease, revisits the village of his childhood and takes on the job of a cantor in the local Lutheran church). This year, our diversionary films preceding the main screening included *Leunig Animated*, a Charlie Chaplin piece and one of the *Nooma* films.

We offered the same reflection questions but found that this time the films provided more of backdrop for most retreatants rather than the main focus. Overall the films were received positively.

Some film theorists write of the importance of viewing context when screening a film. This was borne out by our experience. Retreats are settings where, generally speaking, people come with an openness of heart and spirit ready to consider anything on the retreat as a potential God-encounter. This invites a reverence toward a film no less than might be evoked by the magnificent wilderness setting in which the retreat took place. With such openness, a deeper meeting might be expected.

Selection of films can be an issue. How careful, for example, should one be about content? We were assuming a mature audience, probably with quite a high tolerance threshold. However, we tried to be as careful as we could, realising that there was little to be achieved by setting out to deliberately shock or disturb. On the other hand we did not want to settle for saccharine. Theoretically there would be few topics that would be *a priori* out of

bounds; the question would be as to how the subject was handled. Was it dealt with in an exploitive manner, a deliberately sensationalising treatment or was it dealt with realistically, yet thoughtfully and carefully, wanting to raise genuine and provocative questions?

You would need to be aware of your own context and the values, attitudes and maturity of your viewers if you decided to run such a retreat.

Lists of films are available such lists as *100 spiritually significant films* can be found on the world-wide-web. However, it should not be assumed that because a film has an explicitly "religious" or "spiritual" subject or deals with a biblical character or even the life of Jesus that it will be a good or useful film for a retreat. Be imaginative and open in your selection. Again it should be emphasised that the setting does matter. Many films that might not evoke much reflection when viewed with friends in your lounge, may well be received quite differently in a retreat setting. Context can matter as much as text when finding meaning.

This was a creative experiment, one which we feel has broadened and deepened our own understanding of the varied contexts in which profound meetings with God may take place.

QUINTET OF PRAYER by Kathy Hughes

I
 Prayer can be like sitting at the beach
 watching the sunrise,
 enthralled at the beauty
 and thinking... Wow!
 Prayer is sometimes puffing up the Bridle Path
 heart thumping, feet plodding
 one after the other,
 glancing at changing perspectives,
 revelling in the intense, feelalive zing,
 saying "Hi" to walkers coming down,
 reaching the top and checking my time
 then the best part, stopping
 to drink in the view sunlight
 on sea,
 curve of the bay,
 plain at my feet
 stretching to mountains
 and filling up with awe.
 Prayer is often being still,
 silent without words
 with only images,
 feelings, impressions,
 being in God's presence.

II
 Prayer is like learning to ski
 those parallel turns
 relaxing my grip of control,
 leaning into free fall,
 learning to dance.
 Prayer is sometimes watching our rabbit
 running 'round our back yard,
 playing with his rope swing,
 helping me dig the garden,
 luxuriating in a good ear scratch,
 my wonder at his ease to be
 and to do in his rabbitty way,
 no puzzling over questions of
 "Who am I?" and "Who are you?"
 Prayer is often curling up
 in a tight ball,
 vulnerable, confused,
 out of my depth
 with no words,
 only raw emotion.

III
 Prayer is sometimes like light
 flashing on in the dark,
 a new thought conveying hope,
 a new idea for fun,
 fresh intuition.
 Prayer is like smelling bread cooking
 or smelling rain coming,
 salty sea air,
 the smell of clean towels
 hung in sun all day,
 babies after their bath.
 Prayer is often being a little child
 climbing into the ample, motherlap of God
 and sinking into a long, accepting cuddle
 where I can stay as long as I like.

IV
 Prayer is like lovemaking with my beloved,
 taking off layers, defences, pretends,
 becoming bare,
 naked and unashamed
 before one who knows me.
 Prayer is sometimes picking a tomato
 on a sunny day,

sinking my teeth into its roundness,
 the taste explosion in my mouth
 mmm... so good!
 Prayer is often lying face down on the floor
 full of remorse and failure,
 unable to be or to do as my ideals chide me
 and whimpering, "Help".

V

Prayer is like playing swing ball on our lawn
 laughing our heads off so much
 we can hardly stand up
 let alone hit the ball.
 Prayer is sometimes hearing crickets chirping
 on crisp starry nights,
 hearing loved ones come home,
 children's choirs singing,
 the silent rising dawn in Lewis Pass.
 Mostly prayer
 is simply being,
 being me
 with God.

CREATIVE THEOLOGY by Tracy Hunt

Does that sound like a contradiction in terms? But isn't theology a creative process of internalising the Scriptures, incorporating them into our life and experience then re-expressing their truths in new and relevant ways? It is so easy for biblical teaching to become a pacifier when we hear the same familiar reassurances and injunctions over and over again. It should instead be a sword stabbing with unnerving accuracy at the evils in our society, piercing hearts and causing us to sob for mercy. The value of creative theologies, such as the recent examples of *Lord of the Rings* and *Narnia*, is that they bypass the intellect and speak directly to the heart. But this power makes creative expression dangerous so the term creative theology reminds us that creativity needs to be tempered by truth if we are to be God's mouthpiece to an ailing world.

When we think of creativity in the Bible our minds go to the genius of the Psalms and the artistry of Old Testament storytelling such as the use of acrostics in Lamentations and Psalm 119. Take a look at the magnificent use of imagery in the words of the prophets or track the use of a symbol like "light" throughout Scripture and you'll find there is a remarkable consistency. Jesus Himself uses imagery in the parables to impact the heart, and His teachings interpret the Law in a way so simple yet radical that no one can plead innocence. In the Epistles we see Paul using the sacred texts creatively such as his illustration of our freedom through the story of Abraham, Sarah and Hagar.

Much of what we call theology today was formulated during the modern age in the Western world where logic, truth and structure were valued. It provided rational answers to questions such as "How can we prove that God exists?" and "How can we be saved?" Today people are more interested in stories which impact them emotionally and demonstrate God's involvement in everyday life. Similarly, there is an emphasis in missions on contextualised theologies which express the truths of the Bible in a way that is relevant to a particular group of people. For example, in cultures where human nature is considered good and reincarnation undesirable, theology might be creatively developed to explain what sin is and why eternal life is good.

Hildegard of Bingen, Germany (1098-1179) and Julian of Norwich, England (around 1342-1420) are great examples of creative theologians although, because as women they were not allowed to teach or study, they are known as mystics. Ironically this gave them a greater freedom than male theologians of the time who were constrained by their formal education because they were at liberty to study what came to hand, to ponder it and to write in the everyday language of the people what they experienced in their souls. The resultant writings bring biblical truths to life in ways that have impact even today.

We have a great need to create theologies that will speak to our world in new and exciting ways. Five ingredients are required:

1. Openness to the world around us, to people, books, movies, etc. so we are stimulated by new ideas and are able to speak in their language.
2. Reading Scripture until it becomes part of us so its truths are expressed spontaneously in all we do and say.
3. "Space" to pray and think so that the Spirit of God can breathe life into our thoughts.
4. Time to express the revelation we receive whether by writing or drawing or conversation or sculpture or.....
5. Courage to share it.

CREATING WITH SWAMP by Margaret Smith

We used to refer to it as "the swamp paddock" twenty-five acres of boggy land, rushes encroaching more and more, water courses undefined and blocked with willows, a small island of impenetrable blackberry.

We had retired from full-time farming and the days when every decision hinged on cost and productivity. We could indulge in a daydream a long-term (never-ending?) project to return the paddock to something of its former natural beauty.

We set to work with chainsaw, tractor and snig chain...had enormous bonfires...hired a digger to enlarge parts of the creek into ponds. We discovered springs, planted *toi toi*s for nesting shelter, oaks for food, maples and poplars for colour, almonds for blossom, cabbage trees for fun, and a few carefully-placed willows of different varieties. We made some rustic seats and tidied the messy area behind the garage to lead directly to the summer pond. A statue of St Francis stands there. It is known, affectionately, as "Frank's Patch".

We heard about the Quiet Garden Trust, with its headquarters in England. We visited a couple of gardens while we were there on holiday to find out how they operated and decided to offer our home and paddock now "The Wetlands" as a Quiet Garden.

My Waitaha friends tell me that this was the first spring water between the East coast and the Greenstone trail over the mountains to the West. It was famed for its fat eels! a stopping-place a place of hospitality. Feels like we are part of a long history.

There's something about water, isn't there, especially springs where you can watch the bubbles rise? It is soothing, calming, stilling. We make the connections with the woman at the well in the heat of the day and the One who offered Living Water swelling up from within.....a ford as a place of decision, transition, new direction - and Joshua taking the lead...

People come to take a day of rest, to lie back in the summer grass and stretch up to touch the sky....time to engage all the senses....or just a quiet hour to join in worship with creation.

*Toi toi bends low, graceful, in worship
 And catches her reflection in still water
 A cabbage tree waves his leaves
 And whispers "Hosanna. Hosanna."*

And He comes always He comes with blessing - for there's so much to learn no end to the ways to deepen our knowledge, our love and relationship with God.....when we see the sacred in the ordinary, as Jesus did.

*I had been feeding the pond for three weeks.
Most days, I took bread, broke it and threw it in long arches
across the water to entice her to trust, to come close, to feed
But she resisted.
She knew I was there
One day she stretched out her long neck
and honked and hissed
But kept her distance.*

*I was delighted she had chosen our "Fall pond"
to nest and hatch her cygnets.
I admired her, loved her and wanted her to know*

*Today, she came
It's our wedding anniversary
not that that's of any consequence to her, of course,
but it's a nice thought*

*She came
Our eye dog, and I
stood back a few yards from the pond edge
and watched her feed
I smiled and patted Scott's head
and whispered
"Yes. We've done it!"*

*I wonder how it is for You,
Bread-maker, Bread-giver?
You keep tossing Your precious Bread
upon the waters,
watching, waiting, longing for our trust,
for us to know Your love
And when, at last, we stop pretending to ignore You
When we stop reacting and begin to respond
and come with hands held out to receive Your broken Bread...
then, in the mystery of Your Trinity of Love,
You smile and say:
"Yes, we've done it!"*

CREATIVE JOURNALLING by Jo Anastasiadis

I enjoy journaling and have found it a great way to grow in my relationship with God. Adding creativity to the basic writing has been great fun, sparked new life into an already-welcome activity, and added to the ways God has spoken into my life. Below are some of the creative ideas that I have thought of, come across in my reading and been given by others. I hope that you might be inspired to give journaling, in its creative aspects, a go. I am indebted to a Creative Journaling Course run by Jenny Jordan for starting me off and helping me to be more creative in my journaling, getting me to think outside "the lined page".

- Cover your journal with a collage of pictures that speak of aspects of who you are now, who you have been and/or who you hope to be.
- Collage together pictures (and/or words cut from magazines etc.) that speak about your relationship with God.
- Write diagonally across the page. Write in squiggles, in a spiral, in a rainbow.
- Use different coloured pens for different days, or different sentences, or different ideas.
- Write with your left hand if you are right-handed or your right hand if you are left-handed.
- For the really adventurous write using your foot.
- Decorate your book with doodles, sketches, drawings, inspirational pictures from magazines or advertising. Use pressed, dried flowers, glitter pens, dried leaves, words cut from a magazine, pencils, pens, felts, stencils, drawings, anything you can think of.
- Journal the ideas that come to mind from a symbol like a triangle, circle with a dot in it, peace symbol, book title or picture...
- Do a time line of major events in your life and journal about their significance then and now.
- Write about the positives and negatives from the day before. Look at them, do you see any patterns? Journal your observations, thoughts and responses.
- Cartoon what you did yesterday, the choices that you made. How did you view them? How do you think God viewed what happened?
- Glue in or rewrite poems, sayings, other things that inspire you or speak to you and why. (Do include who wrote them and/or where you got them from.)
- Write at random all over a page using single words or short sentences how God has blessed you (in one colour) and how you respond (in another colour) or how God feels about you and how you feel about Him.
- Draw a path or road across your page and write on it aspects, feelings of your "current journey" with God. If you want to, illustrate it somehow.
- Go through a magazine cutting out words that speak to you of who God is and how He sees you. Glue them into your journal.
- Draw around your hand. Write inside what you want to release into God's hands today, or write one or more of His promises that you would like to hold onto today. Journal about your day in the light of these (around the outside of the hand) at the end of the day/the next day.
- Take 10 words at random or that draw your attention from a magazine or book or the Bible, and write a poem (or a story) using them. Include at least 2 verbs, 2 adjectives and 2 nouns. (See below for an example.)
- Put a theme, aspect that you're currently looking at in the centre of a page e.g. peace, and write Bible verses around it, going outwards from the centre like spokes on a wheel. After reflection, complete the outside of the wheel with how you are feeling about this theme/aspect now.
- Write about a hero or heroine figure for you. It might be someone famous, or it might be someone from your own relationships who you looked up to. What is it about them that attracted you? What other thoughts and feelings do they inspire in you?
- If God saw you as an "animal character", what kind of animal do you think He would see you as and why? Or what kind of an animal do you see yourself as right now, and why? E.g. if you are feeling 'prickly' it might be a hedgehog.
- Take a feeling e.g. irate or delight, and journal your associations/reactions to it, both good and bad, past and present.
- Journal about a Bible character's journey, what you know of it, how you respond to it and how it relates to your own journey current and/or past.

- Take something created e.g. a shell, flower, mountain, or bird etc. What is God saying through this creature or object? What is He saying to you? What happens if you become that creature or object? How can you take what you've learned into your world to your family, colleagues and friends?
- Choose a part of your body how does that speak to you about God and how He wants you to be in the world?
- Rewrite a psalm using your own words, situation and feelings.
- Take an image of God and the corresponding image e.g. Potter-clay, hen-chick, midwife-mother-baby and journal about the roles in the natural. What are their individual purposes or qualities? How do they relate to one another? E.g. Hen is protective, nurturing, attentive; chick is helpless, striving to be independent, determined but needs training. Hen cares for the chick, warns of danger. Now link this back to how God might want to relate to you.

The only rule is that you date your entries, the rest is bounded only by your imagination and creativity.

A Poem from 10 Words that caught my attention from the first 10 pages of a New Zealand Home and Garden magazine: skin, memories, crystal, breath, defining, developed, lost, Audi, stretched, debris.

Memories stretched across time:
 Some crystal clear,
 others lost,
 debris scattered beyond reach.
 Yet each one seeks
 the defining of who I am.
 Some have developed
 strength of character;
 others have taken all my breath away,
 leaving me wounded,
 as an Audi racing over skin.
 Still You meld all of the past
 into a future beyond the present.

WRITING: THE INNER JOURNEY by Joy Cowley

Creativity is about connection, connection with ourselves, with our past experience and our present yearnings, plus a connection with something beyond us that is deep mystery and yet universally known. Many artists liken the experience to meditation. We make a journey deep into the well of self until we come to that great underground river that feeds all life. At this stage we discover that we are not who we thought we were. Separation is an illusion.

Those of us on a religious path will probably borrow religious terms to describe the creative process. But whether faith is involved or not, the experience tends to be the same. A creative act can take us to a place of sacred awe where our boundaries dissolve and we become part of all creation.

As a writer, I discovered that this development did not come quickly. There was a long apprenticeship during which I had to learn how to discipline thought and how to use the tools of language to serve thought. I can't remember who wrote these words: "True art comes from practice, not chance; as those who move most gracefully have first learned to dance." That person knew the process well. For most of us, it is years before we have command of our craft. When the dance steps under our feet, the music notes under our hands, the words in our mind, are so well trained that they instinctively serve the creator in us, then our art is on holy ground.

In Writing Workshops, I do meditation exercises with writers to help them increase their awareness of where their writing is coming from. There is always a risk in these exercises, that people will come unexpectedly upon sad memories that they've locked away; but that in itself, is good. If the memory isn't named and owned it will come up in the author's work and life, in all manner of guises. This is not to say that the person's life has been traumatic. Survival is our strongest instinct, and it has the loud voice of fear. This means that recollection of pain and loss will usually rise first, when we tap into memories, and will eclipse happy events. If we look at the number of bleak books written for young adults, we see how many authors have projected the unhappiness of their teen years.

When I began writing, I didn't know anything about the process of projection and I'm very glad that all my angst was poured into books for adults, before I started writing for children. Actually, the same sort of thing happens when we start a routine of contemplative prayer. We can become quite alarmed at the darkness that surfaces. Historically, it was thought that the devil severely tempted people who began praying. It is a natural process associated with early inner journey. The negative stuff will come up first.

The next level, I often call the "justice" stage. This is a stage of healing, where we are resolving personal issues. These too, we tend to project in concern for our environment, anger at injustice and a desire for goodness. Writers can become crusaders, writing stories with strong messages, desiring to save the world. Again, it's a natural stage of journey.

Further on, definitions blur and become softer. There develops a broader vision that understands more, forgives more. We have journeyed some way down the well of self and are realising that in fact, the well has no bottom. Our creativity, our very existence is coming from something beyond us. There is a lightness in that discovery, laughter, occasional bliss. Sometimes, we seem to enter a child-like dream state and then come out of it, wondering who wrote those words in front of us.

I don't know that anyone actually reaches the river this side of incarnation, but we sense its presence, and its dominant gift to the artist, is love.

WHY BUECHNER? by Adrienne Thompson

There are books to skim while standing in a bookshop. There are books to borrow and return. And there are books to own; books which become part of the mind's furniture.

For me Frederick Buechner's books fall into the last category. Austere, profound, rigorous, yet tender, and occasionally very funny, Buechner grips me like few other authors.

One theme recurs imperatively through Buechner's work: *listen to your life*.

If God speaks to us at all other than through such official channels as the Bible and the church, then I think that he speaks to us largely through what happens to us Because the word that God speaks to us is always an incarnate word a word spelled out to us not alphabetically, in syllables, but enigmatically, in events, even in the books we read, and the movies we see the chances are we will never get it just right. We are so used to hearing what we want to hear and remaining deaf to what it would be well for us to hear that it is hard to break the habit. But ... if we listen with patience and hope, if we remember at all deeply and honestly, then I think we come to recognise, beyond all doubt, that, however faintly we may hear him, he is indeed speaking to us and that, however little we may understand it, his word to each of us is both recoverable and precious beyond telling. In that sense autobiography becomes a way of praying.

The Sacred Journey, Now and Then and *Telling Secrets* are three volumes of autobiography in which Buechner invites us to listen with him to his life and urges us to listen to our own. "There is no chance thing through which God cannot speak ... and the words he speaks are incarnate in the flesh and blood of ourselves and of our own footsore and sacred journeys. ...Listen for him. Listen to the sweet and bitter airs of your present and your past for the sound of him."

Buechner's life has not been particularly dramatic or remarkable. There was an early tragedy his father committed suicide when he was 10. He knew at the age of about 16 that he wanted to be a writer and his first novel was a huge success but the one that followed failed to make an impact. His childhood had little of church going or faith in it. But one year, living alone in New York. 'with nothing much better to do with my lonely Sundays' he started going to church. The sermons drew him, and at last one sentence opened a door for him: "I found Christ. Or was found. It hardly seems to matter which."

He decided at once to go to seminary and take ministerial training. He taught religious studies at a private boys school, married, became the father of three daughters, preached, wrote and lectured, and continues to do so.

When people come to me for spiritual direction they usually express their desire to listen to God. What I hope to help them do is to listen to their lives and discover, spelled out in what happens to them, the *alphabet of grace*.

The other side of listening is telling, and in particular telling secrets.

Buechner's father's suicide at once became a family secret, never, never to be spoken of. He describes his daughter's serious illness as "the secret that was too dark or dangerous or private or complicated to tell in any other language ... than the symbolic language of anorexia." Sad and hurtful secrets, guilty secrets, must be given air and voice for healing to occur.

... what we hunger for, perhaps more than anything else, is to be known in our full humanness, and yet that is often just what we also fear more than anything else. It is important to tell at least from time to time the secret of who we truly and fully are even if we tell only to ourselves because otherwise we run the risk of losing track of who we truly and fully are and little by little come to accept instead the highly edited version which we put forth in hope that the world will find it more acceptable than the real thing.

Of course, says Buechner, this sounds like psychotherapy, and so it is. But it's more. In the remembering and telling of our secrets we find the forgiveness of sins "the interplay of God's forgiveness of us and our forgiveness of God and each other."

Buechner tells his own secrets in words exactly chosen like a mosaic maker fitting the precise chip of coloured stone into a pattern. A man lies in an orchard. He longs and prays from the depths of his heart for some demonstration of the presence and being of God. He hears two branches knock together, click-clack. No more is given, that sound is somehow enough. I am moved by the honesty and stunned by the skill with which Buechner recounts such an incident; neither exaggerating nor diminishing his experience.

Buechner doesn't only write sermons, he tells stories. His novels are 'Christian' only in the sense that the writer is Christian. The main character of the four very entertaining novels that make up the "Book of Bebb" is indeed an evangelist but also a con man whose antics keep you wondering all the time: is this man of God a fraud or something else? The novels, like the memoirs, invite you to listen, watch, discern, the life of God in the ordinary lives of ordinary people.

Buechner writes of God who *holds back, in love, from overpowering us*. God in the stillness, holding his breath, loving us all, the only way he can without destroying us. That quality of "passionate restraint" is what draws me into Buechner's writing. Let me give you one more taste of it:

The fearsome blessing of that hard time continues to work itself out in my life in the same way we're told the universe is still hurtling through outer space under the impact of the great cosmic explosion that brought it into being I think grace sometimes explodes into our lives like that sending our pain, terror, astonishment hurtling through inner space until by grace they become Orion, Cassiopeia, Polaris to give us our bearings, to bring us into something like full being at last.

(All quotes are from the three autobiographical books. A Google search will take you to many articles. For a list of Buechner's works see the page titled "The Church of Holy Love" <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Olympus/1870/>)

BLOGGING: A CREATIVE WAY OF EXPLORING SPIRITUALITY & SPIRITUAL FORMATION? by Paul Fromont

"...People can and do use popular [communication technology and] media culture as a way of working on their own spirituality [so as] to constitute meaningful symbols [and resources] for themselves and their communities... popular media culture is an imaginative palette for faith..."¹

I've had a blog for over 4-years.² "A 'blog'? What's that?", you ask. A **web-log** is a frequently, or indeed infrequently updated web-based journal. It's an easy-to-use online 'tool' that allows one to publish on the world-wide-web.³

The author of a blog is often referred to as a "blogger." Blogs and blog content are as diverse as the people who create and post to them.

While not wanting to over-romanticise blogging⁴ I do want to explore something of my experience that blogging can be a *creative*⁵ way of exploring and discussing spirituality⁶. Blogging can provide a means of responding to God. Indeed, theologian Susan J. White suggests, "technology [and the use of technology] can become sacramental. It can become a bearer of the self-giving love of God to a broken [and searching] world."⁷

Blogging offers a means through which God touches, forms and shapes persons. The Spirit, in life-giving ways, blows inside and outside of cyberspace.⁸

However, before we get underway, I found it interesting (and peripherally related to this reflection) that the media accompanying a recent piece of research, from the US-based *Barna Research Group*⁹, noted that there was one area in which the spiritual activities of twenty somethings outpaced their predecessors: "visiting faith-related websites [this would include blogs]... while shunning traditional church attendance". They offered an opinion that this might be "an indicator of the impact that the internet may have on the evolution of the 21st century church." This trend, they say, "may motivate churches to provide more online presence, access and interactivity".

Re-Mixing Spirituality - A Spiritual Practice?

I wonder if blogging has the function of allowing us to attend to the lengthy rhythms of the creation of a self...and to the growing sense that our practice of blogging is related to the larger natural, social and spiritual rhythms of being formed as a distinct people of God...? ¹⁰

Blogging can be a contemporary spiritual practice, a creative component of a personal (or communal) "rule" or *rhythm*. It creatively recovers and re-mixes several traditional "practices" such as: study, journaling and self-examination,¹¹ discernment,¹² community, *lectio divina*, spiritual friendship, pilgrimage, the sharing of resources, encouragement, guidance and prayer. Like more traditional formational practices, blogging too requires intentionality and discipline.

I have...found blogging a powerful tool for continuing conversion. As Augustine wrote, "I am the sort of man who writes because he has made progress, and who makes progress by writing." - Augustine, Epistle 143.2-3.¹³

Len Hjalmarsen affirms my own experience when he says, [Blogging] "requires that we genuinely listen to our own lives... and to the lives of others... and that we reflect intentionally on what we are learning..."

He continues:

"At times I will begin to write a [post] and realize I don't have enough information, or enough clarity, or enough of a personal foundation to articulate the message. This sends me to other resources... friends, books, prayer... and becomes another pathway for growth. At other times I realize I haven't lived enough into the subject, and I either park the idea or write about another aspect of it. There are times when I feel profoundly inadequate for the task... [profoundly in need of the creative Spirit]."

Blogging as Wandering - Opening to the Mystery of Transformation

With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling we shall not cease from exploration...¹⁴

Mike Riddell writing about "cybermonks,"¹⁵ in what he calls an exercise in "poetic imagination,"¹⁶ has re-mixed the Celtic monastic practices of wandering and dispersion. He makes several points that I believe are useful for helping us understand some Jesus-followers who blog; and also, how blogging creatively mirrors the aforementioned twin commitments:

1. Bloggers, often as a response to the DIY impulse, are wanderers who travel freely "wherever the Spirit might lead." They take creative responsibility for their Jesus-shaped formation by making use of the resources and technology that are available.¹⁷
2. These monks were creative innovators, "largely self-resourcing" and self-motivated. So too are many bloggers who creatively and innovatively resource their and others' spirituality via globally-interconnected e-highways and byways. Their individual blogs are missional and spirituality outposts to which 'pilgrims' can 'travel' in order to nourish and resource their journey toward God.
3. Contemporary bloggers, like Celtic monks of old, relate as a loose, geographically-dispersed network of wayfarers united by shared interests, needs and journeys. They keep alive a sense of common purpose through the interactivity of writing "letters" (read: e-mail, MSN / SKYPE¹⁸ conversations, blog posts, the use of "comments" and podcasts), personal friendships, and occasional visits. Spirituality resources and creativity, the fruit of cyber-pilgrimage, are generously shared and available 24/7.

Formed in a "Web of Conversations"¹⁹

To varying degrees blogs gather community other bloggers and those who, while not having their own blogs, become regular visitors to blogs.

"Being somewhat of a misfit in my local church scene... [blogs] provide spiritual input that would otherwise be completely lacking. The blog posts I read can challenge me to grow as I relate to them and the questions they pose" (David).

And, while blogging can be individualistic, an outworked commitment to conversation across differences and cultures, to friendship, to sharing,²⁰ and to travelling and keeping company together means that for many bloggers the experience of a type of community afforded by blogging is a crucial element in their spirituality, spiritual growth and formation.

Len, whom I've already quoted above, wonders if perhaps blogging provides a rich opportunity to convert "loneliness into a solitude that can be shared" with fellow pilgrims, "cyber-monks," and wayfarers more generally.²¹

In other words, I'm formed, in part, as a consequence of the creative ways that web-technology allows me, from the quiet 'backwaters' of a small town in provincial New Zealand, to connect nationally and globally with others: to share (out of my solitude) and to have shared with me spirituality resources. I'm formed, in part, as I'm encouraged to work at deepening those places touched at the overlap of my life with the lives of dispersed others, and grace.

Want to Give Blogging a Go...?

- For a free online blog tool (good for those starting out), try blogger: <http://www.blogger.com/start>

Footnotes

- 1 Tom Beaudoin: excerpted [and adapted] from an interview with Tom in the September-October issue of *Crucible*.
 - 2 Can be found at <http://prodigal.typepad.com>. For nearly four years it was an individual project. More latterly it has become a collaborative "practice" with Alan Jamieson.
 - 3 One can publish personal thoughts, reflections, images, videos, music and hyperlinks to other online content.
 - 4 There are things about "blogging" that can be challenged; for example, its tendency to accentuate liberal Enlightenment commitments to the autonomous individual; or its tendency toward superficiality, i.e. there is a substantial risk that one is broadened but never deepened, one 'skips' over the surface of things.
 - 5 I understand the term "creative" as having to do with THINKING, acting, and working in an imaginative way typically characterised by a high degree of innovation, originality, and divergent thinking.
 - 6 In this context I'm thinking of "spirituality" as being "Christian Spirituality."
 - 7 Susan J. White, *Christian Worship and Technological Change*, p. 129.
 - 8 A play on a couple of lines from NZ poet James K. Baxter's *Song to the Holy Spirit*.
 - 9 The accompanying media summary was titled: *MOST Twentysomethings Put Christianity on the Shelf Following Active Teen Years*. It was dated 11th September 2006.
 - 10 Re-mixed from a 1991 statement by Delbert Wiens. His context was not "blogging."
 - 11 Blogs, however, unlike traditional journals, are very much in the public domain.
 - 12 Recognising and responding to God.
 - 13 Sourced from Canadian, Len Hjalmarsen who blogs @ <http://www.nextreformation.com/>
 - 14 T.S. Eliot, *Little Gidding*. This is the byline of our blog, *ProdigalKivi(s)*.
 - 15 I re-imagine Riddell's notion of "cybermonks" as referring to "dispersed network" of so-called 'monks' or bloggers located in far-flung "cultural outposts" who are supported, and encouraged by their being connected with others via web-based communication technology.
 - 16 See his excellent essay *Beyond Ground Zero: Resourcing Faith in a Post-Christian Era*. Available online at <http://homepages.ihug.co.nz/~mridell/> See under "Articles."
- For an interesting reflection on DIY Spirituality & Pop Culture see Philip Johnson's paper of the same title. It can be found online here: <http://emergingchurch.info/reflection/philipjohnson/index.htm>
- 18 MSN and SKYPE are examples of internet communication applications.
 - 19 Reworked from a statement by sociologist Niklass Luhman who said, "Community is a network of conversations."

20 Stories, experiences, questions, responses to questions, learning and spirituality resources.

21 Quote attributed to Henri Nouwen, "The mystery of love is that it protects and respects the aloneness of the other and creates the free space where he can convert his loneliness into a solitude that can be shared." Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*. New York: Doubleday and Co, 1975.

SYMBOLS

A very creative way to keep a fresh focus in our prayer place is to collect and use suitable symbols. They can be anything that catches our attention and expresses something for us in our faith journey, our struggles, hopes and discoveries often from creation (flowers, leaves, rocks etc) but also from art, candles, handcraft, photographs - the sky's the limit.

As one lively symbol loses its vigour put it away in a safe place and replace it with another. Used symbols can be a wonderful reminder of the past journey, struggles overcome, landscapes passed through, reminders of the way by which we have come .

Replacing them as their life drains away keeps us facing into the freshness of the journey with God, the lively companionship of Jesus, the invitations, cleansings, new beginnings of the Holy Spirit's stirrings.

DEEPENING OUR WORK AS SPIRITUAL DIRECTORS

Rich working questions are among the most fruitful offerings spiritual directors can make, often much more creative and helpful than teaching! Here are some offered from around New Zealand.

What signs of grace do you see at present?

What is God like for you at present?

Where is God for you at the moment?

Who is the God who is watching you at present?

This sounds like one view of God you have. What others are there?

What does being a disciple of Jesus mean for you at the moment?

What difference might it make if you allowed Jesus to companion you through this?

Is Jesus getting what he hopes for in your relationship with him?

What is God's invitation to you in this? or What is the invitation you are being offered here?

You say God is calling you to In what way is it offering you life, hope, freedom?

Where do you think this pathway is leading you?

What colour might you link with this? What does it represent?

Which season of the year best describes where you are at this point?

Where have you felt (or what has made you feel) most fully alive in the last month?

What are you most afraid of at the moment?

What are you afraid God may be asking of you at present?

What are you most afraid of in the silence?

What does your heart say/hear/see about/in that?

Tell me what the darkness is like?

I'm wondering if you have an image for that? Would you like to draw it?/What colour/shape/size is that?

What do you think is the central issue here for you?

Which passage of Scripture best relates to this issue at the moment?

For some reason or another while you have been speaking I have been thinking about Jeremiah or Moses or Miriam or ?? Do you see any connection between your life and theirs?

If you looked at this situation from Jesus' point of view what might you see?

What do you hope for from God/ What does God hope for in you?

What if God really likes you/ thinks you're great?

I'm wondering how the story of in the Gospels might speak into your situation?

Have you ever thought that God may not be wanting more words, but just your presence?

What might your life be like if you made that decision now, say in 5, 10 or 20 years time?

I'd like to invite you to find a symbol that captures what you are seeing/thinking/feeling/experiencing perhaps from your garden, the beach, the bush or wherever.

CREATIVE PRAYER QUESTIONS

"Lord, who do you want to be for me today?"

"Loving God, what is your invitation in this situation for me/for us at this moment?"

Sit for a while and reflect on Jesus' question, "What do you want me to do for you?" Matt. 20:32 (et. al.).

"How do you want me to love you today?"

"How can I take You with me into my life/work/ministry/family life/marriage/challenges today?"

"How do you see me Lord? What is your name for me?" Cf. Isaiah 43: 1

NIGHT DAWN An artist's response to the poem *The Dark Night* by Spanish mystic, John of the Cross
by Raewyn Whaley

(Click here for an image of Raewyn's Night Dawn 5)

The spiritual experience and ideas on the spiritual contain a certain subjectivity. Where the spiritual experience is individual, abstract art also comes from the unique intuitive perceptions of the artist, and evokes an individual response from the viewer.

Spirituality is demonstrated in the emotional and intellectual openness to the metaphysical (the science which investigates first causes of all existence and knowledge). (Collins New English Dictionary, London). It is an intuitive awareness within the human 'spirit' of an essential or invisible reality. There is a responsiveness to the mystery of the sublime, and to the uncanny, as can be experienced in contemplation through the senses in nature. Ideas on spirituality contain a search for an essential 'truth', or enlightenment. An experience of the spiritual contains both a response to intellectual ideas, and sacred things, as well as to the materiality of the world. It is a quest to gain understanding regarding the nature of 'man', and his place in the universe. The term covers all forms of spirituality, not being exclusive to any particular belief system.

In defining abstraction, its fundamental principle would be to reduce something to its bare 'essence'. This also defines abstraction in art, and may be demonstrated in either rational abstraction where ideas about abstraction itself are investigated, or the intuitive, where visual elements have subtlety, sensitivity and an element of mystery.

In my series, *De Noche*, created in response to the 1578 poem *The Dark Night* by John of the Cross, the painting *Night Dawn 5* describes the dawn, the accomplishment of the contemplative's journey, where the soul finds completion.

It was a love song, heard through his Toledo prison walls, which inspired Juan de la Cruz to write this lyrical poem. Its exotic imagery, drawing on the tradition of love poetry describes the soul's journey towards union with God.

It can be confusing at first glance as to the actual theme of the poem. Because of its title (to do with darkness) and the fact it was sourced out of the misery of unjust imprisonment and agony of the soul, it can be assumed that this is its focus. I was drawn to the poem because of my own need, and Kerrie Hide's essay on *The Dark Night* in 2000 in *Refresh* spoke to me deeply and answered my need as nothing else could, because it named my experience and laced it with hope. It impelled a turning point within my own crisis. I was finishing my Bachelor of Visual Arts and realised that I had found my theme to be realised within my art.

All my artmaking from that moment would become an expression of my own journey and the spiritual ideas and themes that I would discover. The primary idea which drew me to this luminous poem was that of transformation and making meaning from our fragmented experiences to trust that "all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well" (Julian of Norwich).

Last year on my tour of Spain as a tourist, I visited that dried up fortress of a city Toledo, and wondered at its majesty, silence and emptiness.

I felt the irony that probably not one person in that whole place had any thought for the passion of the man who had suffered there. Yet this seems true for all of us eventually. All our varied experiences of life of love and faith, misery, pain, and loneliness, wonder and delight, become as nothing soon after we have passed from this life. This could feel like God's ultimate joke. Yet, John of the Cross, and other inspired thinkers lead us further into trust and knowing a knowing that nothing is lost, all experience is seen and valued by God. Our very experience of it is sufficient.

The symbol of the *Dark Night* has associations with the incomprehensibility of God:

Thomas Merton called it "the tremendous existential silence of God."

The idea was borrowed from Dionysius the Areopagite, who spoke of "the rays of light that emanate from the Divine Presence as appearing to the soul as rays of darkness because, living as it did by the light of existing things, which is knowledge and reason, it was not attuned to receiving them...God appears dark to human intelligence."¹

For Juan de la Cruz the night through which God is dimly seen is the symbol for Faith.

Truth and ideas on essentiality have been found both in spirituality and in the practice of abstraction. Where abstraction in itself is innately a representation of an incomplete or partial state, this is also inherent in spirituality. In both spirituality and abstraction ideas of mystery and the uncanny are present. Spirituality contains an invisible reality, where abstraction implies an invisible inner state. Because of this, experience of the spiritual is difficult to express. This is also true of explaining the meaning of the spiritual in art. The senses are involved in perception of the spiritual and are utilised in the artist's intuitive practice. A sense of something almost within reach, or only within peripheral vision, but not quite fully in view, is implicit to both abstraction and spirituality.

Where there has been silence, abstraction has made it visible. Where there has been nothingness, abstraction creates presence.

Night Dawn became a record of a moment in time, providing a space for feeling, for mystery, where the viewer may intuitively become a part of the journey of contemplation.

Noche oscura

En una noche oscura,
Con ansias en amores inflamada,
Oh dichosa ventura!
Salí sin ser notada,
Estando ya mi casa sosegada.

A oscuras, y segura,

The Dark Night

On a night of darkness,
In love's anxiety of longing kindled,
O blessed chance!
I left by none beheld,
My house in sleep and silence stilled.

In darkness and secure,

Por la secreta escala disfrazada, Oh dichosa ventura! A oscuras y en celada, Estando ya mi casa sosegada.	By the secret ladder and disguised, O blessed venture! In darkness and concealed, My house in sleep and silence stilled.
En la noche dichosa, En secreto, que nadie me veia Ni yo miraba cosa, Sin otra luz y guia Sino la que en el corazon ardia.	By dark of blessed night, In secrecy, for no one saw me And I regarded nothing, My only light and guide The one that in my heart was burning.
Aquesta me guiaba Mas cierto que la luz del mediodia, Adonde me esperaba Quien yo bien me sabia, En parte donde nadie parecia.	This guided, led me on More surely than the radiance of noon To where there waited one Who was to me well known, And in a place where no one came in view.
Oh noche, que quiaste, Oh noche amable mas que el alborada: Oh noche, que juntaste Amado con amada, Amada en el Amado transformada!	O night, you were the guide! O night more desirable than dawn! O dark of night you joined Beloved with belov'd one, Belov'd one in Beloved now transformed!
En mi pecho florido, Que entero para el solo se guardaba, Alli quedo dormido Y yo le regalaba, Y el ventalle de cedros aire daba.	Upon my flowering breast, Entirely kept for him and him alone, There he stayed and slept And I caressed him In breezes from the fan of cedars blown.
El aire de la almena, Cuando yo sus cabellos esparcia, Con su mano serena En mi cuello heria, Y todos mis sentidos suspendia.	Breezes on the battlements - As I was spreading out his hair, With his unhurried hand He wounded my neck And all my senses left suspended there.
Quedeme y olvideme, El rostro recline sobre el Amado; Ceso todo, y dejeme, Dejando mi cuidado Entre las azucenas olvidado.	I stayed, myself forgotten, My countenance against my love reclined; All ceased, and self forsaken I left my care behind Among the lilies, unremembered.

John of the Cross

1. Brenan, Gerald, *St John of the Cross, His Life and Poetry*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1973) p 135, 136.

EXERCISING A BIRTHRIGHT - creativity in preaching by Paul Windsor

My journey into creativity began with doubt and fear. In my childhood there was music and drama and art. But I was hopeless and helpless with each of them. I was not creative and so I stuck with the sciences.

It was not until my thirties, with the help of two colleagues at the Bible College of New Zealand, that my perspective changed. Denise Edwards opened me to the possibility of thinking being creative. Chris Marshall showed me how the development of courses could be an exercise in creativity. I felt freed.

Focused by this testimony of healing in my life, the significance of creativity has featured in my teaching of preaching ever since. And I have discovered that for creativity to flourish in the preacher it needs a few associates.

Creativity needs convictions. The first revelation of God is as someone who speaks a word and has something emerge out of nothing. He is a creator. And being made in the image of this God means that we are creative creators, by definition. Creating is as much a part of being human as having fingers or noses. It is a birthright. Furthermore an echo of this first creative word of God accompanies today's preached word of God. There remains this possibility of life being created out of nothing in the lives of listeners even today.

Creativity needs space. The advertising industry is fascinating. With the print media exaggerated space in the margins draws the eye to the centre of the page. With the aural media silence can seem to shout. In the same way, for a preacher to be creative, there needs to be margins and silences. There needs to be space. And in that space the random thought must be chased. Over the past decade I have restructured my life to recapture that space. For me five minutes in the early morning can accomplish more creativity than five hours at night. Sometimes the creativity flows so fast I am unable to chase it all down.

Creativity needs time. Here the words are all so picturesque. Brooding. Simmering. Lying fallow. Incubating. Each one of these takes time. A key to being creative in preaching is to engage the text as early as possible. Plan well in advance. Allow time to pass. Give the subconscious a chance to fire the imagination. Saturday Night Fever-ish preparation will never stimulate creativity.

Creativity needs study. As we open the front door of our lives to research, the creative thought so often slips in the back door. It can happen even in front of the most dense of commentaries. Exploring the thoughts of those who have gone before stimulates our own thoughts. This diligence is an act of worship for the preacher.

Repeatedly I find God honouring the Spirit-dependent study which issues in the cry for Spirit-prompted creativity. The illumination the Spirit brings so often surges with creativity as the divine mixes with the human.

Creativity needs nurture. For creativity to be exercised in our lives, it needs exercise. It needs feeding. Take some risks. Think outside the square. Assail each one of the senses. Train the eye to see juxtapositions, the spiritually significant in the utterly ordinary, as Jesus did in the parables. Enjoy resources like *A Whack on the Side of the Head* and *The Art of Seeing Sideways* and *Sisomo* (sight-sound-motion).

Opportunities for nurture are everywhere. I plead with students to escape the tyranny of websites in the search for illustration. These are the last refuge of a bankrupt intelligence. Instead "invest in 'twirling': thinking, watching, inventing, reading, listening." It may take a decade but the dividend of being able to live an interesting life which generates its own illustration will come. I utilise a 'cliché coffin' in class. Each cliché they hear is buried

in the coffin and then at a later time we dig up the grave, paraphrasing the cliché in order to achieve some resurrection. Alongside that critical 'sermon in a sentence' proposition, I require students now to develop a 'prevailing image' which might remain with the sermon from beginning to end. I want them to see something as well as say something when they preach.

Creativity needs community. This one comes from my "If I am ever a pastor again..." file because I have no experience of doing this. Let the preparation of the sermon become a more communal task. It is the value of the brainstorm. It is the synergy of the sum of the total being greater than that of the individual parts. It helps the one with the primary call to live in the word to draw in those whose primary call is to live in the world. Create a small group. Change it every year. Incorporate their creativity into the wrestling for understanding and illustration and application.

But wait there's more! The bonus of this embrace of creativity is that it leads directly to a heightened spirituality.

STRANGE DESIGN VISIBLE FROM SPACE by Jeff Whittaker

My daughter Karen and her boyfriend Roland were playing with Google Earth, a programme that enables one to investigate satellite photos of just about anywhere on the planet. (Karen and Roland tell me that the places with the highest definition and clearest views are the continental USA and down-town Baghdad!) They were having fun zooming in on various places of interest in New Zealand, when Karen said, "Let's find the farm we holiday on in North Canterbury." In due course, greatly facilitated by an effective broadband connection, they followed the Hurunui River and located the said farm. Finding the cottage paddock, Roland began to zoom in to see the familiar features at closer quarters. Suddenly he exclaimed, "What on earth is that? It looks like a crop circle in the middle of the paddock!" After looking, Karen laughed. She knew what it was, and where it had come from. And she knew that the satellite image (click here for the image) must have been taken not long after December 2003.

In late December 2003, I took a group of young people up to the above mentioned North Canterbury farm for a post-exam early summer camp. A week or so before the camp, I went up to the farm to make some preliminary preparations. Because of my interest in Christian spirituality, I had thought that I would add some interest to the camp by creating a meditation exercise that could be undertaken in free time. I decided on a simple labyrinth. Armed with a basic labyrinth design obtained from the internet, I persuaded the occupant of the local farm house to mow the labyrinth pattern into the paddock with a ride-on mower. With the paths almost a metre wide, and with about a metre between tracks, the labyrinth covered a fair amount of ground. (For those concerned that I may have been cutting down valuable grass, the paddock was - at the time - home only to an ostrich of unquenchable curiosity.) The youth who attended the camp spurned my labyrinthine labour of love, sadly. Only one girl wandered around it. The others seemed to think it a bit strange. And the constant attention of the ostrich was certainly a deterrent to allowing one's concentration to centre elsewhere.

Christmas came and went. As a family we decamped from Christchurch and journeyed to North Canterbury to spend our summer holiday at the same farm. The labyrinth was still well-defined, as can be seen in the accompanying photo. Once again, though, the labyrinth was largely spurned. I undertook a meditative walk in it every second day, with the curious ostrich often in disconcerting attendance. (The ostrich subsequently became quite aggressive, and had to be shifted. This was an exercise, and took a considerable amount of time and effort. I now consider myself to belong to the distinguished Order of Ostrich Shifters. The episode made for a good sermon illustration.) I enjoyed the opportunity for the structured meditation alongside the other more usual summer recreational pursuits. The labyrinth made the summer one to remember. I think I'll try to repeat the exercise. Who knows, perhaps others may join in my creative strangeness and be meditatively blessed.

CREATIVE PRAYER PLACE by Fran Francis

Terry sank to the floor with his head in his hands and sobbed, crying "You have no idea how difficult this was."

What task would reduce a mature and reserved man to this state and in front of others? Rob picked up the loaf and tore it in two. He turned to the men sitting on either side of him and handed each of them a chunk as he spoke of Jesus doing the same with his disciples. In handing out pieces torn from the loaf, "This is my body" he found himself suddenly choked with powerful emotion for all to see. In his everyday life Terry works in his own computer publishing business. Building primitive Roman torture instruments isn't something he has specialized in, although he does like to build. Rob is about to graduate as a primary school teacher. Neither of these men are artists or, for that matter, theologians. They are simply believers who were allowed to use their imagination.

Last year we held our first 24-7 prayer event and the creation and arrangement of rooms and spaces was an important aspect of it. The impact of those elements was surprising and significant right from the outset. I had asked Terry to build us a cross to form a focal point of a corner of a larger space. His 'moment' happened just after we had manhandled it into the room and I was telling him (brightly) what a great job he had done. His collapse onto the floor was completely unexpected but in the light of what he went on to explain to us hardly surprising at all.

He had determined to make a realistic cross. None of this tanalized and nicely-sanded 4x2 or commercially-milled timber. Terry wanted rough lumber for it to look authentic. In searching for authenticity in his task, God took him on a journey of suffering and exposed him to aspects of the passion of Jesus that he had never encountered before. Terry told us, "He showed me that it was such an insult to put Jesus on something so shabby. Jesus was a carpenter! He knew how to make something good and here, he ended his life on something knocked together out of rough wood." Not only that but Terry found as he built the cross that lifting the hammer to drive the nails home became almost emotionally and physically unbearable but he persevered because he wanted to bring the cross to us. It took him days to finish the task.

Recently we have given various people in church leadership or in training for leadership the opportunity to lead us in Communion. As a non-liturgical movement there is scope for us to approach this in different ways and Rob's approach was to draw from Leonardo da Vinci's 'Last Supper'. He set a long table at the front of the hall and placed chairs behind the table. He had invited twelve men to sit at the table, on either side of him. He deliberately chose a "wide mix of men and those who aren't usually at the front." He wanted ordinary men, not those who might be perceived as 'elders'.

In discussing creativity and spirituality it is easy to feel nervous and worry about arty stuff distracting from the seriousness of the message, or that anything that stirs our emotions is risky and to be avoided. However, as emotional and creative beings we run the alternative risk of being mechanical and sterile if there isn't opportunity to feel and make.

The experience of the Prayer House has taught us a lot in terms of the warm relationship between spirituality and creativity. The commercial space we rented for eight days became what Celtic Christians would have called a 'thin place'. Every hour of every day and night for eight days there were people praying and worshipping; making music of their own or playing worship recordings, painting, drawing, writing, lighting candles, washing hands, taking Communion, lying on their faces or slumped in beanbags and the presence of God filled the house.

The central room had the cross in the corner, a huge graffiti wall, maps of NZ and the world and a New Zealand flag, various styles of worship cds, and there was a 'Wailing Wall' composed of prayers scribbled on post-it notes. We had a small room off this large one which simply had a cross on the wall and a mat on the floor - a space devoid of distraction which, from the first moment had an atmosphere of reverence and God's immanence.

This place started out as an empty canvas and by the end of the week it had come to life. Entering it was like walking around inside the beating heart of our people. Their fears, praises, desires, vocations, sins, disappointments and all were laid out in a myriad of ways.

In order to have this kind of participation it is necessary for people to feel safe and that it isn't some kind of art competition. "Oh, that is so good! I wish I could paint, draw, write, sing, dance, whittle....like you." It's not about that. It is merely a form of communication and a simple prayer written

on a yellow post-it note carries as much weight with God as the gorgeous painting or the silent lighting of a candle. God sees the heart. Most people do not regard themselves as artists and they are right. They also do not seek to draw attention to themselves but they have things they care deeply about and finding ways to express them is something we can provide.

Post-modern believers and churches trying to do something fresh have wrestled with the tension between the need for expression and the need for form. Our experience is that 'alternative services' quickly become tired and people seek more and more extreme alternatives which means fewer and fewer people relate to what is happening. Inaccessibility is not the gospel. Creativity should serve our spirituality, bringing the freedom and joy that are the hallmarks of the friends of Jesus.

CONTEMPLATIVE COLLAGE by Sheila Pritchard

(Picture used with permission)

A collage is essentially a selection of pictures or words usually gleaned from magazines, old calendars, cards or newspapers. These are arranged on a blank page or piece of cardboard and glued down. It's as easy as that! You may well ask: "How can that be contemplative?" Fair question read on!

Collage is about letting the truth be revealed. Sometimes it is hard to stand back from our own life and see it from a more objective perspective. Collage is a contemplative way to allow this to happen. Both conscious and unconscious aspects of life find their way into the collage and remain there for ongoing discernment.

To use collage as a contemplative discernment tool allow a good chunk of relaxed, uninterrupted time. Have all the equipment at hand. Begin with a few moments of prayerful centering then browse through the magazines, cards, calendars etc. Tear or cut out pictures or words that somehow "grab" you. Don't analyse or censor your choices. Next survey what has "chosen you" and do a bit of sifting and sorting. Play around with layering the pictures (and maybe words) on the page. Keep adding, discarding and arranging until you feel satisfied. Then glue it all down.

The collage that has emerged will reflect back to you some aspects of yourself that may be well known to you and some that may surprise you. Some clear insights will emerge immediately. However, some choices on the page may reveal their truth only over time. Sit with the collage and open yourself to the wisdom of your spirit and God's Spirit. Come back to it from time to time and see if new layers of insight unfold.

Someone I know who often uses collage as a way of praying looked back months later on a collage which featured blue tea towels drying in the sun in a lovely garden. It had not made sense at the time but now it fitted with a growing sense that God was calling her to take pleasure in the simple things of life and let go the feeling that this wasn't enough.

Collage is a way of getting under the radar. In our very wordy world most of us try to "figure things out" cognitively and logically. Even our prayer can be couched in language we "know" is the way to pray. The well travelled tracks of theological language and concepts can make it hard for any new creative revelation to break through. Collage is one way to "get under the radar" of our left brain control and allow the right brain to show us things for which we may not previously have allowed space. Just as the symbols in dreams reveal more than we consciously "knew", so the pictures in collage serve as symbolic messengers.

In one retreat where collage was used as the way to spend a contemplative morning one person reported that she couldn't get away from choosing faces all kinds of faces, happy and sad, old and young, faces from many cultures. Her prayerful reflection on her finished collage was that her heart's desire was to take the risk of working with people rather than in the safe, behind the scenes job she currently held.

Collage is art for non-artists! Most of us agree that artistic expression plumbs the depths of the creative spirit within us. But some of us feel "artistically challenged"! Take heart! Collage is the perfect way to create a beautiful finished product without using a paintbrush or a pen! This will happen whatever is your initial motivation for making a collage. But you may want to have a specific idea, scripture or concept in mind and create an intentional collage to convey its meaning. Suppose for instance that you are pondering what it really means to "Be still and know that I am God" (Ps 46:10). Try holding that phrase in mind as you sift through your resources and select pictures and words that exemplify that attitude. The finished collage can be a visual invitation continuing to call you to stillness.

Communal collage. Collage can be used as a group activity for a home group, youth group or interactive retreat. Give a focus appropriate to the occasion maybe a short scripture or the theme you want to highlight. Let everyone have a set period of time to browse and choose items that they think fit the theme. Provide a very large piece of blank card or paper so all can gather round. Then have a time of organised chaos as everyone sticks their contributions down. Now let everyone walk round the group collage to take in the various viewpoints before sitting down to discuss what has emerged.

Practical hints.

- Keep all those glossy newsletters, papers, missionary magazines, old calendars etc. It is amazing what we normally throw away that has great collage potential!
- Equipment: Scissors and glue sticks for everyone. Sheets of paper or card (card is best) of A3 or A1 size. Anything smaller is very limiting.
- If doing collage in a retreat or group setting be prepared for a glorious mess to clear away at the end! But spreading things out and cutting, tearing and discarding are all part of the fun.
- A collage you want to keep for future display or reflection can be laminated quite cheaply.
- Taking a digital photo of a collage is a good idea if you want a copy small enough to put in your journal.

WHILE MAKING A COLLAGE by Angelika Halstead

A theme emerged,
A topic was found.
The pictures in a magazine
Became personal messages,
Intended for a different purpose
Now an expression of my heart.

Joy versus Happiness

This deep joy, gladness, delight, pleasure
That can be found in every little moment.

Happiness is fleeting,
Joy is lasting.
Happiness relies on circumstances,
Health, prosperity, recognition,
Joy rises above all of these

And goes beyond.
Joy is a decision, a way of life.

Rejoice
Rejoice in
Rejoice in the Lord
Rejoice in the Lord always
And again I say REJOICE!

Joy of life,
A gift to behold,
A treasure to embrace and celebrate.

Joy comes by going deeper,
Adding meaning,
Seeing, truly seeing,
Wondering,
Being fully alive to the present moment,
Not running ahead or staying behind.

Joy is a stance,
A posture, an attitude,
A quality and way of life.

Joy alone,
Joy with God,
Joy with people,
Joy.

Joy in silence
Joy in busyness
Joy.

Fullness, abundance Joy,
Fulfillment, satisfaction Joy.

I hear a voice saying:
"You are my joy and my delight".

Joy, more than happiness,
Joy is eternal,
Joy is deep,
Joy as an ever present invitation.

Joy is strength,
Quiet beauty,
Centeredness,
Awareness.

Joy in weakness,
Joy in suffering,
Unfettered joy.

In your presence is fullness of joys. (Psalm 16:11)
Rejoice my heart, rejoice!

CREATIVE DOODLING by Andrew Dunn

"O Lord, you have seduced me and I have been seduced". This intriguing verse from Jeremiah 20:7 (J.B.) is used as a connecting refrain between segments of the profound film *Into Great Silence*, a 2 hour 40 min. documentary filmed recently in a Carthusian monastery in Germany. With no commentary and little conversation it invites us into the life and devotion of 15 monks filmed over four seasons of the year. The words appear on the screen in German, French and English from time to time, interspersed with other Scripture verses of the call to discipleship.

Is it theology? Is it doctrine? Or is it spirituality? The theatre was silent, hardly a sound, and certainly no munching of popcorn or scrunching of wrappings. Now and then a little laughter as the monks played one day on the snowy slopes and then back to deep respectful silence. If what was going on in me was anything to go by I would say that a theological dialogue was taking place, especially around the radical call to follow Jesus. Who could make that demand of us, and why? There was some solid doctrinal thinking as well - who would dare to seduce us so completely? Who is it that is worthy to be named "Lord" and expects to be receptively heard? And yet the whole experience was very invitational of obedience, stretching of our lifetime's "Yes", very satisfying to feel called again and our devotion received, and that's prayer and spirituality.

The monks weren't showmen or putting on a performance as a money raiser or promotion. The film producer had approached them with his request to film their lifestyle and they had responded that perhaps in 10 to 12 years they might be ready for such a thing. Sixteen years later they contacted him and said they were ready! It took 12 months just to get the film "in the can" and now it's being screened in film festivals around the world. It has all the appeal of *The March of The Penguins* but its attraction is more than that - it explores a way of doing the faith in such radical fashion that one is taken back to the time when one first believed, first set out on the journey of faith with such simplicity, faith and devotion. That was a time of discovering words about God, of doing theology, finding God in every part of life and thought, of believing the simple verities, finding they stood up to the challenges of education and church life, of journeying spiritually beyond anything yet experienced. Yet they couldn't be separated out into different disciplines, as it were; they were part of the whole experience of going with God, of believing and resting in God's love and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the presence of the Holy Spirit, praying, communing and seeing answers everywhere.

The academic disciplines of theology, doctrine and spirituality can be worked on separately, and fruitfully. Each has its own divisions and sub-disciplines that know no end!¹ And rightly so. However, they may be merely academic disciplines, empty of depth and encounter but rich in material to squabble and divide over. More fruitful personally are experiences of God, what Paul Hawker calls secret affairs of the soul² which encourage us onwards in our exploration of God's stooping to us in love. No wonder that one of the most fruitful questions in spiritual direction is about the signs of grace in life a person can see!

I have two favourite ikons at the moment. Christ Pantokrator, from St Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai, is a coloured painting of Jesus as Lord of all things holding a book of the Scriptures while he gazes penetratingly into my soul. I can't escape those eyes! The other is a copy of Andrew Rublev's

Trinity icon of 1425AD. It uses the encounter in Genesis 18 between the three visitors and Sarah and Abraham to draw the viewer into the encircling love of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There's a filled chalice on the table round which they sit with an open way to the table that invites the pray-er to join them.³

The ikon "writers" bring their deep grasp of things spiritual to light with theological statements, as in Christ Pantokrator: Christ the living Word is lord of all (Cf. Coloss. 1:15ff). As disciples of Christ, learners in his school of faith, we are invited to engage with this astonishing idea, that he is to be met in all the circumstances and experiences of life. It's from the rich theology of this Colossian passage (among others) that we come to understand that Christ is in all things, holding everything in creation together.

Andrew Rublev uses more doctrinal and mystical statements laid out clearly (and beautifully) with paint and ink on wood. God has three ways of being God's self, Trinity, yet is to be met in mystery and a sense of surprise and delight; Eucharist is central to our nourishment and celebration; the love of God invites us, draws us into union with Them; lively faith leads us into the circle of God's love in Christ; Christian discipleship is not only following Christ (which can be at a distance) but joining the circle of grace, taking our place at the table! It sounds like a credal statement, doesn't it, and of course it's all true and depicts simply and clearly the engagements of faith. The reality for the viewer is about personal things of faith and trust on life's journey, not simply doctrinal belief or the dogmas of the Christian way, rich and necessary thought they be!

So the three go hand in hand. Spirituality needs the vigorous discussions of theology to keep it engaged in real things in the here and now and the impact of them on faith, and indeed faith on them. It is the lively searching for and experience of the truths behind the statements we make about our faith. No wonder some writers speak about "spiritual theology". Spirituality keeps doctrine alert to new truths breaking forth from God's Word and in turn needs those truths to save it, to save us from individualism and flights of fancy that take us down paths that lead to nowhere in particular, or indeed that lead to dangerous places. Theology (words about God) needs doctrine (literally "the teaching") to give it an anchor point in the distilled wisdom of our faith, a marker in the realm of discussion and debate that goes on in our thinking about our faith, and has done over two millennia and more. Both are enlivened by the rich meaning of all this and the ways they feed and nourish devotion, growth on the pilgrimage from our beginnings to our ending, from here to Eternity.

1 A quick reference to this wide range is in the Wikipedia articles Theology, Doctrine, Spirituality.

2 Paul Hawker, *Secret Affairs of the Soul: Ordinary people's extraordinary experiences of the sacred*. Northstone. 2000.

3 Henri Nouwen. *Behold the Beauty of the Lord. Praying with Icons*. Ave Maria Press. 1987.

BOOK REVIEW

Faith Evolving: A Patchwork Journey
Trish McBride
Wellington. Patricia McBride. 2005.

Reviewed by Ann Gilroy

How do we describe coherently for others what to expect, anticipate and prepare for in the processes of 'growing up' or 'maturing' in faith and relationship with God? How do we decide what is important, what might be breakthrough or watershed events or moments that need attention, when passing our experience on to others? Over the Christian centuries many have endeavoured to provide 'frameworks' for others' benefit, often offering reflections of their own journey in faith. For example, Gregory of Nyssa allegorized Moses' steady climb up Mount Sinai into the apophatic darkness of encounter with the Divine as the life journey of the monk zealously committed to understanding the relationship of self and the Divine. Centuries later Teresa of Avila wrote of the gradual, yet inexplicably unique, transformation of contemplative nuns committed intensely to relationship with God. While she imaged the process in many ways, such as four methods of watering a garden or the transformation of the silk worm from worm to moth, Teresa's most extended work details the experience as engaging with God at the heart of seven 'mansions' or 'dwellings'. Then there is James Fowler's contemporary research which maps the process to a mature faith as akin to developmental 'stages', each building on and developing out of the experiences and reflection of the previous. One might see Trish's book, *Faith Evolving: A Patchwork Journey*, standing somewhere within this 'tradition' of enabling others to understand their journey better through the careful mapping of significance in her journey. Trish has taken from her writing storehouse, pieces old and new, laying them out to show a longitudinal study of her "God-journey".

At the same time, *Faith Evolving* is a work of home-spun theology. It is a work of 'faith seeking understanding' in a woman's context where realities, dreams and hopes have arisen, been shattered, lost and begun again from the ashes. Read from either the perspective of a spiritual journey or as contextual theology, *Faith Evolving* offers real food for thought. Already readers are sharing that this book speaks of and to their own experience of spiritual growth.

The book itself is beautifully produced. The stylized patchwork and stitching on the cover continues as a motif through the pages. The approximately one hundred pieces of writing poetry, articles and reflections are grouped in three chronological and 'spiritual stages' sections. A patch-pocket commentary provides the context for each piece of writing and a connecting link from piece to piece.

The early writings grouped in the section, 'Clothes-line Theology 1974-86', outline spirituality as idealistic, conforming to the Christian tradition, enthusiastic and committed. The middle section, 'After That 1987-1994' documents spiritual growth through painful questioning, experiences of commitment and alienation with Church, engagement in chaplaincy, critical encounter and conscientious, courageous exploration. The latest writings grouped as 'Turangawaewae 1995-2005' more than hint at a spirituality that is increasingly integrating all aspects of self, relationships with God, others and the world. Trish's comments point to changing generosity in relationship with God: "...one of my favourite images of God is as 'Elephant', specifically the one the blind men fought over in the folk-story, each insisting that his description was the only accurate one! My images of God do not need to threaten or disprove anyone else's!" (McBride, 2005, 75).

I said that *Faith Evolving* stands in the tradition of guidance for spiritual journeying. The significance of this book is that it opens up the journey of a woman whose lifestyle, family life, work and relationships resonate with what many of us face also in New Zealand. This makes the work so much more contextual and potentially valuable for us than even those other great writings by Teresa or Gregory.

RESOURCES

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION RESEARCH PAPER

GOD IS IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD. Bruce Maden
Equipping community to become 'aware of their awarenesses'. Spiritual direction, a practice uniquely equipped to infuse community development. See the [Research Paper page](#) on this website.

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John Skinner. *Sounding the Silence.* Gracewing Publishing. 2004 pp120. \$28.50
Inspired by the Carthusian traditions of silent prayer.

Benedicta Ward and Ralph Waller. *Joy of Heaven Springs of Christian Spirituality.* SPCK 2003. pp146.

PERIODICALS ON CREATIVITY

Weavings. *A Journal of the Christian Spiritual Life.* March/April 2002. "Creativity" An Upper Room.

Reality. Number 63. June July 2004. "Creativity".

PRAYER AIDS

A Finger Labyrinth 340mm in diameter lets your fingers do the walking! Available from Creative Wood Studio, P.O. Box 29567, Fendalton, Christchurch NZ. Ph. 03 351 5778.

Ribbonwood Contemplative Calendar 2007.

Each month contains a new image fine coloured pencil drawings with a meditative theme. Free standing or wall hanging. Details at www.ribbonwoodcalender.co.nz

Ceramic Sculptures by Paddy Bourke. See example in the "Creation" wall plaque as the centre-spread in this Refresh. Ph. 09 624-2153. 25 Eason Rd, Hillsborough, Auckland.

WEBSITES

Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Creativity

Susan Fuller's Creative Work Group. www.creativeworkgroups.com

Creativity Portal: www.creativity-portal.com

The Creativity Force: www.creativityforce.com

Emergent Kiwi: www.emergentkiwi.org.nz

Male Spirituality: www.malespirituality.org Richard Rohr's website.

Male spirituality and the movies: www.malespirituality.org/movies.htm
Recommendations from Richard Rohr.

OUT OF THE BLUE

A film review by Aynsley Mackie

Quiet little Aramoana, a seaside village at the mouth of the Otago harbour is an assortment of cribs and retirement homes with a mixture of families, alternate lifestyles, and retirees. The events which happened that day 'out of the blue' changed forever the lives of all the inhabitants.

The film opens with a spectacular sunrise over a calm peaceful sea. The next 24 hours are followed moment by moment as the events of the day are worked out. Producer Sarkies uses the rhythm of the tides, the sunrise and sunset to give the viewer a sense of the movement of time. Even the washing hung out on the clothesline later in the day gives added poignancy to the story especially when we see it next morning still hanging there as Helen is escorted away by the Police.

The picture we gain of David Gray is picked up from comments made by neighbours.

Very isolated, reclusive, no longer a friend and workmate and very hostile towards both people and dogs. Sarkies uses flash backs to reveal the hidden anxieties of Gray and to build a growing tension around him. It appeared to be an incident at the Bank which pushed Gray over into the cold blooded slaughter which followed.

When the bus arrives back from the school run the children quickly scattered home, then down to the beach. All so peaceful and normal. Then Gray felt that his property was invaded and he became the executioner.

Quiet little Aramoana simply did not know what had hit it. No one knew how to cope with such violence. Even the police, when finally called, seemed to be right out of their depth. As the story unfolded some wonderful acts of heroism and indomitable courage were seen. The elderly Helen, going for help for an injured neighbour, literally crawling along a ditch, not once but twice. Then her long wait through the night wondering where Gray was. The watching and waiting, ticking clocks and ringing phones, the muzzled dog and the fractious baby all added to the tension for the viewer.

With daylight the end came speedily for Gray, but for the village of Aramoana it was only the beginning of understanding the enormity of the tragedy and mourning the 13 who died.

As a film it's a very creative way of dealing with one of New Zealand's most horrific tragedies.

SGM NEWS Andrew Pritchard (SGM Convenor)

The first draft of our 2007 programme is with the printer for setting and layout as I write this column for Refresh. I am encouraged as I have read through the range of events being offered in 2007. There is a growing geographical spread of events available throughout the country and a wonderful diversity in the types of event offered, all with the common factor of supporting growth in contemplative spirituality. There are quiet days with a creative variety of themes; retreats of various durations (2-7 day), silent, semi-silent and non-silent, directed and guided, residential and retreat in daily life/week of guided prayer formats; prayer and meditation workshops; workshops for personal development and for on-going development for spiritual directors; most events are 'open' but there are some that cater for particular sub-groups. Talk about creativity (as this issue of Refresh does so well) ... the 2007 Programme is an example of creativity in action!

I am not only encouraged by what the 2007 Programme represents, I am inspired when I think of the people who enable all this to be offered. Protestants and Catholics, people from many denominations and religious congregations and from none. Laity and clergy, women and men, young and old. People who lead and facilitate events, people who host or hostess, registrars, administrators, prayers and givers and of course people who are committed to growing spiritually, who see value in what is offered and participate.

Before this reaches your letterboxes another group of people will have completed the two-year Spiritual Directors Formation Programme. The final workshop of the programme is a two-day national residential event that begins with a focus on creativity in spiritual direction, facilitates reflection on what has been gained throughout the two years and faces the participants outward to extend their experience and to continue formation and professional development.

Interviews are being completed, letters of acceptance sent and arrangements being made for the new intake of participants for the Programme for 2007/8. At the time of writing the intake will be one of our larger ones with over 25 expected to commence in 2007.

Core supporters of all that Spiritual Growth Ministries does are our Workgroup Members and staff, Carole Hunt and Sue Pickering, who cheerfully and efficiently carry out their tasks as Administrator and Formation Programme Coordinator respectively. Andrew Dunn and his editorial group do a superb job in continuing to produce inspiring editions of Refresh every six months. We are indebted too to people who assist with the Formation Programme, advisory group members, workshop leaders, markers and supervisors.

Beyond and above all of this ...
Thanks be to God!

CONTRIBUTORS

Jo Anastasiadis is a wife, mother and part-time student doing SGM's Spiritual Director's Formation course. She enjoys the outdoors and lives in Wellington.

Nancy Clark of Hamilton, now in her eighties, enjoys three days a week helping in a school with remedial and catch-up work as well as preparation, home, church and garden.

Susannah Connolly is of Ngapuhi and Irish descent. She lectures in spiritual formation and counselling at BCNZ, Henderson, and is an artist, counsellor and spiritual director.

Joy Cowley, wife, mother, grandmother, great grandmother, daughter of God and writer.

Warren Deason is pastor as Albany Presbyterian Church and is a film buff.

Ann Gilroy is a lecturer in the School of Theology at the University of Auckland and works in the area of spirituality and theology. Her current research is on the spirituality of children.

John Ferguson makes signage and is a sculptor living in Dairy Flat, north of Auckland.

Fran Francis is a pastor at the Vineyard Church, Birkenhead, and is training in spiritual direction.

John Franklin is a spiritual director, ministry supervisor, preacher, eucharistic celebrant, university researcher, husband, father, friend, gardener and musician.

Paul Fromont lives in Cambridge, Waikato.
His blog with Alan Jamieson is at <http://prodigal.typepad.com>

Angelika Halstead lectures in English and Teacher Education at Unitec, Auckland. She's a spiritual director and is married with one daughter.

Barrie Herrold is a budding poet and actor from Waiuku working in Auckland.

Bruce Maden leads Te Aroha Noa Community Services, a community development organisation in Palmerston North's western suburbs. His diverse interests include spiritual direction, counselling, adult education, research, community development and most things outside the square!

Len Hjalmarson of Kelowa, British Columbia is a writer which he sees as part of his spiritual formation. He is regional representative for Resonate, a network of Canadians striving to love God and neighbour in a changing culture.

Tracey Hunt is an administrator for BCNZ and International Student Ministries in Palmerston North. In between work and study she grabs what opportunities she can to go for walks, daydream and express the ideas that come pouring in.

Marcelle Pilkinton is a breadmaker whose book Take Our Bread has gone through five editions and has followed her around the world in various ministry and mission enterprises. She now lives in Waikanae Beach.

Sheila Pritchard continues to enjoy a self-employed lifestyle offering spiritual direction, supervision and retreats, with seminars and some teaching, and enjoys walking North Shore's beaches.

Margaret Smith lives on a farm at Hororata, is a member of the Third Order of the Society of St Francis, an Anglican priest and spiritual director currently in Intentional Transition Ministry.

Adrienne Thompson is a spiritual director, writer and editor living in Wellington and includes herself with Central Baptist Church and Spirited Exchanges, supporting church leavers.

Raewyn Whaley is an artist living in Mt Albert, who enjoys being part of a Mt Eden home-based Church.

Jeff Whittaker is a spiritual director and supervisor and trainer on SGM's Spiritual Director Formation Programme, pastors Bryndwr Baptist Church in Christchurch and lectures in Christian Spirituality.

Paul Windsor is Principal of Carey Baptist College in Penrose, Auckland, is married to Barbara, has five children and writes a blog at www.carey.ac.nz/pauls_blog/

CREATIVE EXTRAS

My best work is when intuition and conscious choice come together successfully.

*Len Castle,
New Zealand Potter.*

There are two kinds of photographers: those who compose pictures and those who take them. The former work in studios. For the latter, the studio is the world ... For them, the ordinary doesn't exist: every thing in life is a source of nourishment.

Ernst Haas - The NZ Photographer's Mail Issue 159, Nov, 2006. 13.

THE POWER OF IMAGINATION TO EVOKE ALTERNATIVE WORLDS

Len Hjalmarson

Imagination is more important than knowledge. *Albert Einstein*

Contemplation is to see and hear from the heart. It takes us beyond sense perception. It is to relate to things as they are. Contemplative seeing is not selective, not processed by the brain, nor conditioned by previously held concepts and attitudes. It constitutes a whole way of life.

Bede Griffiths

So what would I say to you?

To those who are itching to have a go, "Play!" Get out your wax crayons, your pastels, your paints, your angle grinder and enjoy. Go cook a meal, dig your garden, sing, dance. Weld metal, glue stones, take photos, weave grasses, quilt, cross-stitch, make cards. Design websites, write stories, tell stories, arrange flowers. And as you do, be aware of Creator God, who created you. Allow your spiritual journey to come through in what you do, let your work be a prayer, a blessing to others. Enjoy!

Lynne Taylor. Reality June/July 2004. 28

INSPIRATION

This is the way it should be
Like a river accelerating over rapids
Spilling over water falls
Be ready to catch what you can
Flowing through body and soul
Books fill with an open heart
What do you believe
Don't be content to let the river run free
The floodgates open
For but a short while
Do you have a bucket or an ocean

Barrie Herrold

Singers and dancers
alike say,
"All my springs are in you"

Psalm 87:7. A Psalm of joy in living in Zion.

We look at this Son and see the God who cannot be seen. We look at this Son and see God's original purpose in everything created. For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible, rank after rank after rank of angels, everything got started in him and finds its purpose in him. He was there before any of it came into existence and holds it all together right up to this moment. And when it comes to the church, he organizes and holds it together, like a head does a body.

He is supreme in the beginning and leading the resurrection parade he is supreme in the end. From beginning to end he's there, towering far above everything, everyone. So spacious is he, so roomy, that everything of God finds its proper place in him without crowding. Not only that, but all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe people and things, animals and atoms get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the Cross.

St Paul's Letter to the Colossians 1:15-20. The Message.

My mission is to see the creative heart of all human beings fully expressed in the world. I expect I won't reach them all, but even as my circle of influence continues to expand I am filled with gratitude when I know I've inspired just one.

Susan Fuller. www.creativeworkgroups.com

At the funeral of the sage Rabbi Moshe, Rabbi Mendel asked one of his disciples: "What was most important to your teacher?" the disciple replied, "Whatever he happened to be doing at the moment."

Hasidic Wisdom

When asked to write a paragraph for Life magazine on 'the meaning of life' someone wrote,

We are here to abet Creation and to witness it, to notice each thing so each thing gets noticed ... so that Creation need not play to an empty house."