

# Continuing The Journey

Exploring continuity and tension between the world and church



A happy new year to you, as we arrive in conference year, with only 5 months to go, it's not too late to book yourselves or invite friends. One of the delights of being part of the planning group is watching the way that conference organically evolves. In November we met with our speakers and began to play with our theme, discussing vulnerability; belonging; acceptance/denial, falling and awakening, sharing stories of our own experiences and our journeys through life. So conference is taking shape and promises to have its usual richness and diversity.

In this newsletter we will whet your appetite with an interview with Margaret, an invitation to be creatively playful in Jane's workshop and a book review. The book has a quote from GK Chesterton's autobiography that I love and will leave with you as something to contemplate: "At the back of our brains, so to speak, there is a forgotten blaze or burst of astonishment at our own existence. The object of the artistic or spiritual life is to dig for this sunrise of wonder"

**Kim Gooding, Chair of Conference.**



# An Interview with Margaret Barker

So we managed to grab a few minutes of Margaret's time to find out a little bit more about how she is reflecting on our theme for this years conference. 'Half way up the stairs: Innocence transfigured.'

*Why did you accept our invitation to conference?*

Because you are a fascinating group engaged in pioneering work, and I hoped to learn as well as contribute.

*What has your experience of conference been in the past?*

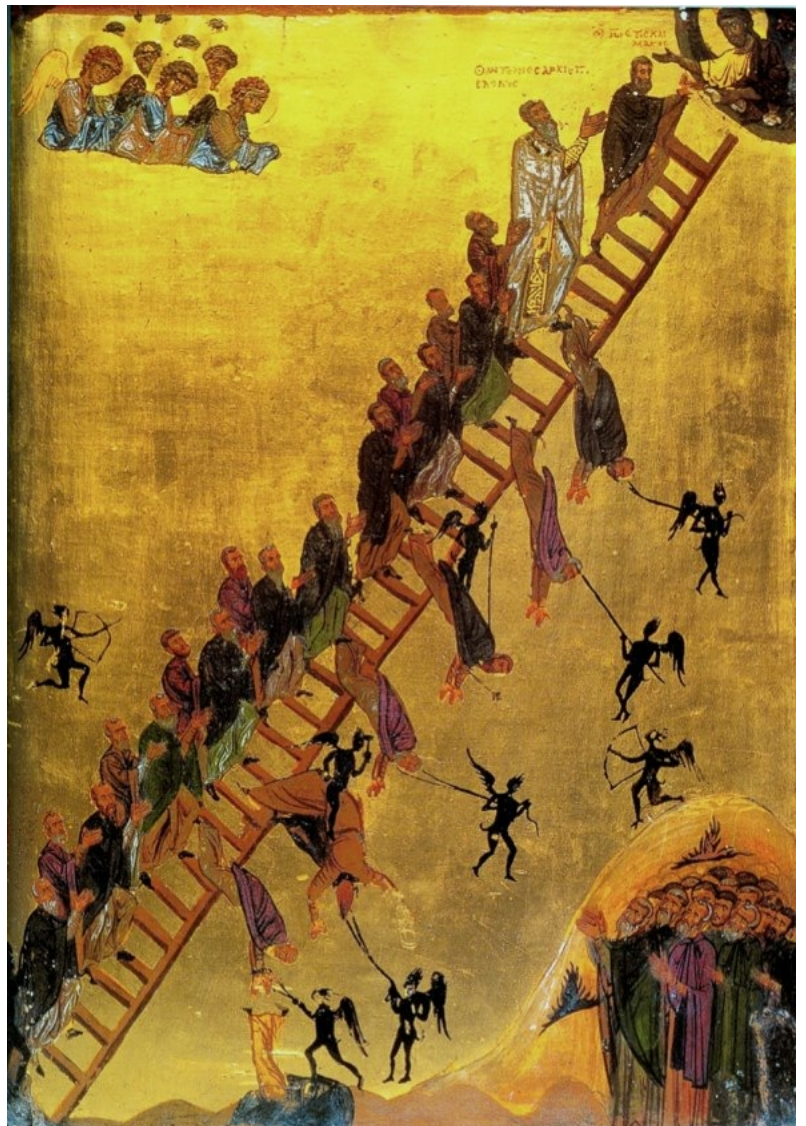
Interesting people, good conversation and a happy atmosphere.

*Halfway up the stairs, what first springs to mind?*

An ascent. For me, with my particular background in Hebrew mystical texts, the stairs represent the ascent to heaven. I think of the ikon at St Catherine's Sinai, where the stairs are a ladder up to heaven, with the faithful climbing up to the Lord who welcomes them at the top. There are nasty demons trying to pull people off the ladder, and angels who watch. The ikon is attributed to St John of Sinai, 12th century.

*Do you have an experience of sitting halfway up the stairs?*

I am not sure how far up the stairs I am- probably nowhere near half way - but I envisage my life-journey in terms of that ikon. .



*What would you like us to know about you before you come?*

**You can know anything you want. I am a mother and grandmother, I am a Methodist preacher, I worked for over 30 years as a volunteer with one of the first-founded women's refuges in the UK, I am a Biblical scholar and start work each day at 5am because it is quiet at that time. My great interest is vegetarian cooking, and I have, over many years, collected a library of cookery books. I also love needlework of all kinds: sewing, knitting and crochet.**

Margaret will be a plenary speaker and will also be bringing an exhibition to conference called, '*Linen in the Bible. An exhibition of words and images on the meaning of linen in the Bible*'.

## **Jane Franklin introduces the theme for her workshop...**

### ***Transformation: a work in progress***

Teddy bears are everywhere. From mascots on University Challenge; Films like Paddington 2; the ubiquitous teddy in a souvenir jumper from Charities and Stores and even the Houses of Parliament; on Birthday and Anniversary cards!

Our relationships with the Teddy can tell us a lot about our own vulnerabilities. Teddies can be a first sign of Unconditional Love, the Teddy will always love you whatever you do to it however badly you treat it, it sits ready to be cuddled, to be told secrets, to just express love.

For young children playing with Teddy can be just a joy but as adults we somehow lose that joy and become embarrassed. The difference between childish and childlike can sometimes be hard to define, Paul in the Scriptures calls us to put away childish things but Jesus in the Gospel says unless we become like a child we lose the Kingdom of Heaven. From the enthusiasm of trying anything as a 4 year old child, "Yes I can draw", "Yes I can sing", "Yes I can run faster than anybody else", to the middling enthusiasm of the teenager to the outright unenthusiasm of the adult, so much of the wonder and innocence of the child can be lost as we go through life.

How can we reclaim that childlikeness without becoming childish? Revisit the innocence of childhood without our losing the maturity and wisdom gained in adult living. Touching our vulnerabilities and finding strength in them rather than weakness and realising that Love is strong can be a liberating feeling. Of course sometimes teddies have been used in abusive situations and this just highlights vulnerabilities. So often because of one or two peoples abuse so much else of loving contact gets lost. Let us not lose the Love through fear. Spending time with teddies can be a liberating and transforming experience and a help in our own 'work in progress'.

Working with a Teddy Hug (the collective name for a group of teddy bears) in the workshop we will look at the difference between being Childlike and Childish and what our childhood toys can tell us about ourselves and our vulnerability before God. Your own "teddies" are welcome to join the Hug.



***Jane Franklin is a spiritual director, retreat leader and the coordinator of the listening service at St Andrew's Church in Holborn, London. She was a massage practitioner for 20 years, first coming to CTJ for 'Touch and Go', as well as a licensed lay minister (reader) in the Church of England. In recent years Jane has become part of the new monastic Celtic Community of Aidan and Hilda and experienced the Ignatian spiritual exercises in daily life which has had a profound effect on her life. Why teddies? "I have seen what the simple presence of a symbol of unconditional love can do for a person in helping them reconnect with the innocence of childhood"***

## Book review by Martine Bailey

*This Sunrise  
of Wonder*

LETTERS FOR THE JOURNEY



MICHAEL MAYNE

### **This Sunrise of Wonder; Letters for the Journey by Michael Mayne.**

“In a sense, our whole task in life... is to recover the vision splendid, to break out of the prison-house of the ego into a second childhood, into childhood transfigured. For whereas the innocence of our first childhood is immature... unacquainted with sorrow and evil, in our second childhood innocence is transfigured through responsibility and acquaintance with sorrow and evil.”

These two sentences by Donald Nicholl in ‘Holiness’ were the springboard for the title and content of our next conference. They were quoted by Michael Mayne in his book This Sunrise of Wonder, which I had read

some years ago. So I decided to read it again in preparation for the conference.

The book is a collection of some 23 letters and a prologue written for Michael Mayne’s grandchildren 22 years ago. They were very young at the time – one was 3! - So it would be some time before they would be able to make much of it. Hopefully they have read it by now, and got as much out of it as I and many others have.

It is a call not to arms but to wonder, not the quick glance and oh how lovely kind, but a deliberate paying attention to people, things, scenery. It requires mental focus, time, a willingness to see beyond what our eyes can see.

“There must be more than this.”

And the author takes us on a quest to find how down the ages humans have looked to creation, the arts and the role of the artists, in pictures, carvings, music, writings, in science, in others, in ourselves, in God to find meaning to our lives. As we learn to see, really see, paying respect to what we observe, we develop a sense of awe.

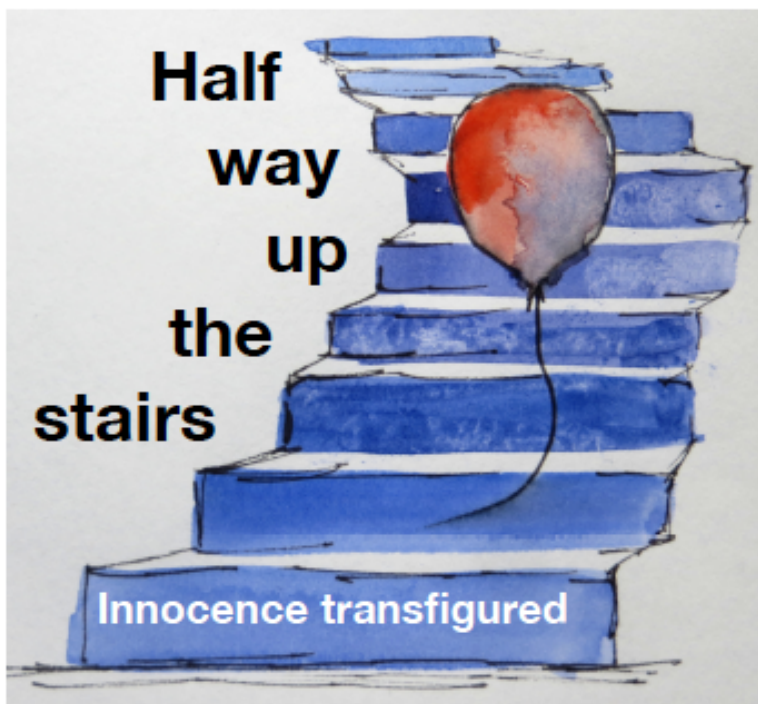
“ Wonder – is not precisely Knowing  
And not precisely Knowing not –  
A beautiful but bleak condition  
He has not lived who has not felt... “ Emily Dickinson

How we retrieve this rapt attention children give to ladybirds or soap bubbles without becoming childish? Is this search for the wonder of people and things an irrelevance in the world we live in? How do we keep suffering, pain, injustice in our consciousness as well as becoming wonder-ful people? When M Ignatieff joined The Observer, he said “ you need pity to have any passion in politics, but you need wonder too, simple wonder at the artistry of the most ordinary life” . Michael Mayne helps us to develop both, in a book which is packed with quotes - at least 65 writers quoted - and quite dense in parts (I struggled a bit with the more scientific bits). But the quest is more than worthwhile, and our conference aims to help us along the way.  
“Amazement is the thing. Not love, but the astonishment of loving” Alastair Reid in ‘Weathering’.

**This Sunrise of Wonder: Letters for the Journey by Michael Mayne.**

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**on 21st - 25th May**  
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