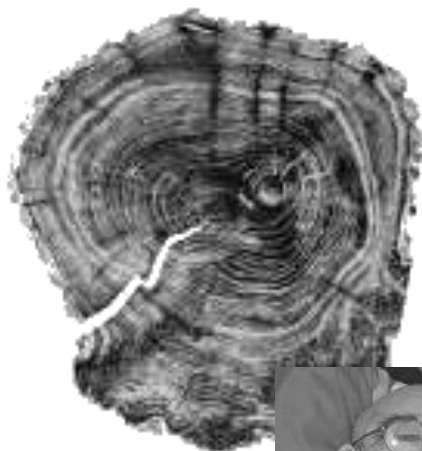


Beliefs

Free to Believe



Summer 2014

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COVER

The tree stump with its annual lines, its fissures and ‘eyes’, is a traditional symbol of ageing, of both vulnerability and strength, and of death. The other picture is of Ichabod Smith, a ‘death dummy’, designed and lovingly built by Angie McLachlan (see page 7), to help her train people in death care. Ichabod is unique: he has his own distinctive character (he even has his own Facebook page!) With interactive bodily functions, Ichabod assists Angie in training carers in practical ways, and helps facilitate conversations about dying and death.

If Kahlil Gibran is right – that “death belongs to life as birth does: the walk is in the raising of the foot as in the laying of it down”, then we should be talking about dying and death more frequently and with less anxiety than we seem to do in society as a whole, or even within the Christian churches. Instead we find resistance – a fear, an often elaborate denial of death. We think it depressing or morbid to talk about our mortality.

I am writing this editorial during Dying Matters Awareness Week (12-18 May) - and research commissioned by this admirable organization shows that only 36% of British adults say they have written a will, only 29% have let someone know of their wishes concerning their funeral, and a mere 6% have written anything down about their end-of-life care.. (When – four or five years ago - I asked for a letter on this matter to be put on file in my GP surgery, the locum doctor was clearly taken aback, and said he’d never had such a request before!)

Around 50% of Britons have some kind of belief about life after death. It would be interesting to know if there is less fear/reluctance about discussing death amongst those who sustain a belief in an ongoing life than amongst those who reckon that ‘this is it: this life is all there is’.

But I know a good few people who profess belief in resurrection, yet who cannot bring themselves to discuss death with their nearest and dearest, even when their nearest and dearest have indicated that this would alleviate (rather than cause) distress and anxiety. When we say we are ‘protecting’ others by our silence, perhaps we are actually trying to protect ourselves.

Every single one of us is going to die: would it not be sensible, and even stimulating, to share our thoughts, ideas and wishes about this reality with others?

So – I am going to be unapologetic about this issue of our magazine!

However, I am conscious that there will be among the readership those who have been recently bereaved, and perhaps some who have lately received a diagnosis of a terminal illness. To any such, I offer my sincere sympathies; I alert you to the fact that this whole issue of *Briefing* is devoted to issues around dying and death - with some wonderings and affirmations about ongoing life. You may decide to postpone reading this issue at the present time. But I dare hope you will find here - not a reinforcing of your sadness - but understanding, support, comfort and maybe some pointers to practical help.

I am grateful to familiar Free to Believe contributors for their various thoughtful perspectives on the topic of death. And I'd like to offer particular thanks to two guest writers who are experts in the field of caring for the dying and the newly-deceased – Felicity Warner and Angie McLachlan – who have given their time to write, very movingly, about their day-to-day engagement with death (I happen to know that they're both big on living, too: their work enhances their appreciation of life, and other people's appreciation of them!) I am confident you will find their articles extremely interesting. Please see inside of back cover for further details about Felicity and Angie.

It would be good if this issue of *Briefing* encouraged you to do something you might have been putting off; if – having read it – you take one small (or further) step towards befriending death. For death is part of our experience of life a very significant and unavoidable part.



Why does the thought of dying still frighten us so much, and why is it that this taboo and fear seems to be increasing?

This question puzzled me when I worked as a health journalist and was engaged in writing a series of articles about six young women with terminal breast cancer. They hoped that by telling their stories, their experiences would be able to help others who might find themselves in the same harrowing situation.

Most of them were very ill, but were still determined to live for the moment and make the most of what time they had left. The interviews often lasted for several hours; there would be breaks while we waited for their painkillers to work and, while we waited, we chatted. I remember several of them saying they felt immense relief in being able to talk to someone who wasn't squeamish, or afraid to mention the D word... It seemed that everyone around them was in death denial, and this had led to their becoming isolated and lonely, and in the terrible situation of having to pretend that they would get better even though in their hearts they knew that they wouldn't.

They were all comforted by the fact that I clearly wasn't scared of talking to them about dying. This was because in my own life I had lost two very close family members. This had happened when I was in my teens and at a particularly vulnerable stage in my life.

The first was my grandmother, with whom I had lived since the age of six after my parents divorced. The second was my stepfather, who died suddenly, and at a very young age, from a fatal heart attack. The shock and turbulence stemming from both these events led me, after much soul-searching, towards a highly focused spiritual and healing path that helped me to create a personal philosophy about life and death, as well as to develop a set of skills in dealing with trauma. These skills, for me, are still evolving.

The greatest privilege of all came when three of the six young women asked me to be at their death and to help ease them along by singing and giving them healing, even when they were unconscious.

After this I started volunteering at a local hospice and sat with many people who had no friends or family to be with them at the end.

It was during this time I began to understand that dying is a fascinating and complex process involving mind, body and soul.

This hospice volunteering period was my hands-on initiation into the spiritual work of helping the dying. And this became a very rich time of spiritual ripening for me.

As I sat with countless people at the end of life, my understanding of this great mystery grew.

Over many years these are the insights that ring true for me....

Death is an illusion

The body dies but the soul doesn't

There is survival of consciousness

Dying is a complex process involving mind body and soul

Dying is a process of shedding and releasing- each shift enables a different set of experiences to be resolved

We expect fear, pain and sadness, but there is often a soul blossoming, a quickening a transformation and a sense of grace

When we make friends with death we are shown how to live.

As a Soul Midwife, my role is to support people and their families in order for the person to experience a gentle and dignified death.

Soul Midwives are completely non-denominational and work with the beliefs (or none) of the people we are alongside. We use gentle methods such as working with massage, meditation, visualizations, music, etc., to help address fear, anxiety and pain both physical and spiritual.

Many people don't think about their own death until they are faced with it; and this can often be too late to put plans into place, meaning that their options and choices may be more restricted. A good death, as far as a soul midwife is concerned, is also helping someone to achieve the sort of death that they want.

For instance, most people would say that they would like to die at home with their loved ones around them and their cat on the end of the bed; but in order to do this, necessary plans will need to be drawn up in advance. The majority of people, nearly 70% still die in hospital.



When we start talking about good deaths, all sorts of other ideas arise: not only where, but who may be present in the room; favourite music to be played; certain oils that may be used to soothe and comfort; candle light; the reading of poems and prayers, etc.

A good death is certainly one where fear has been minimized and a gentle passing assured.

A good soul midwife knows how to comfort and help the dying person by anticipating how and what the person is feeling on all levels: physical, mental and spiritual, supporting the family gently, and acting as a wise and tranquil companion and sensible caretaker.

A good death can also be a profoundly healing experience, not just for the person in transition, but also their loved ones, their friends and in turn the wider community.

If we have enough time, we will try to create a death plan, a sort of flexible map of what they would like to have happen.

It's our task to help them achieve this, but also to be mindful enough to suggest subtle changes if things aren't going to plan. We are advocates as well as spiritual companions.

This gives an idea of what we do on a practical level. But this is only half the story. As "soul" midwives we are very engaged with supporting the journey of the soul at all levels of the process.

As the physical body diminishes in every way and the essential physiological functions decline, we're able to observe a point where the soul starts to emerge and eventually – in terms of energy - to become stronger than the physical body. This dynamic is like a quickening. A skilled soul midwife can sense this shift. A well-supported death enables the shift from the physical to the non-physical to become a seamless flow.

I am constantly inspired by the miracles I see. Having been with hundreds of ordinary people who have crossed the sacred threshold, I am no longer afraid of death. Death doesn't exist. It really is just a shift of energy from the physical to the non physical.

Facilitating a good death requires working with LOVE, total impeccability, ensuring that our own dramas and agendas are kept out of the process. We must resist the temptation to wade in and try to "fix or rescue".

Our role is simply to support the journey.



For twenty three years now my life has been inspired, motivated and informed by death. The death of my mother was at the beginning – when I was catapulted suddenly into the spheres of Her Majesty’s Coroner and the funeral director. This event proved to be more catalyst than cataclysm, as it pointed me into a life work – more than that, a *ministry* revolving around death that continues to unfold - sometimes in unlikely directions. Death in many aspects has become the area of my work, both practically and quasi-academically; and over the years, my experiences and qualifications have informed a personal outlook, or overview, that has dying, death, funeral-ritual and faith rhetoric as an unfolding and flexible arc of knowledge and a continuum of discovery and learning.

Since mother died, I have acquired an Honours degree in Death, Loss and Palliative Care; a Masters in Religion: The Rhetoric and Rituals of Death, and the chance to study for a PhD in death-related coping strategies. I am a qualified embalmer who for many years has looked after many friends and family members. In fact, I have been in and around the funeral business in one capacity or another, ever since my mother’s death.

More recently I have been involved in the interpretation of death, through my work within Red Plait Interpretation LLP . This has enabled me to get out there and talk about death-care with a wider audience – the ‘*living-and-well*’ as I term them. I aim to facilitate conversations surrounding the ‘what if...’ questions that are so easy to shy away from in today’s busy society. After all, it’s when we are living and well that we can imaginatively engage with the concept of

death. When death occurs, often the emotional vastness of its reality plunges us into dealing purely with funeral-related practicalities.

However, death is part of all our lives, not just as an isolated incident within our own sphere of family or friends, or more remotely observed on the T.V. news. Engagement with the fact that we will all die may be where inspiration and potentially healing strength are found, and life-enhancing spiritual growth and meaning gained. We could ask and wonder what death means, or why it happens, and what we would do in the event of a terminal diagnosis, or of disaster. We could ask who are we as individuals in the face of death? What would we want to happen when we die? What constitutes life, and what is the contrast between life and death; where might we go after death?

These are epic questions, both philosophical and practical, to grapple with and meditate upon – and we may think about them in many different ways: no one answer fits all and no answer is right or wrong for everyone. Faith (beliefs of any kind) may play a part in the dialogue, but also may not. However these are the kind of questions that humankind has been asking since time and consciousness dawned; and, significantly in Western society - as we have become people with longevity and good healthcare on our side - the kinds of questions we seem often to have sidestepped or avoided. Death is often seen as a taboo subject.

The promises of life after death – redemption, resurrection or heaven - are found not only in the Christian Gospels but in other faith groups' sacred texts, and point us to the human search for something above or beyond the physical on earth, to something far bigger than ourselves.

In my own journey of discovery, and in addition to my other work, I am an ordained priest within the Liberal Catholic Church International and have a ministry dedicated to death-work... This personal ministry isn't necessarily a funeral ministry (although I do get asked to take funerals); it is more an acknowledgement by my

Bishop of the spectrum of my involvement and engagement within the many aspects of death, and caring for the dead, both physically and spiritually – and of my role as a facilitator for the living in their quest for deeper, more meaningful, lives, in the face of death.

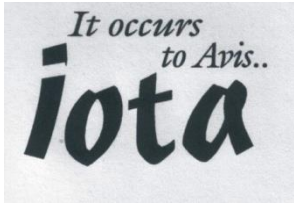
So, I am comfortable with death, comfortable with talking about death, comfortable with caring for dead people, comfortable with my own mortality, comfortable in my own faith and hope - that death is a doorway into an eternal relationship with God. My comfort is simply my own story; I believe that my experiences may only truly be beneficial if I can pass them on – to extend my life as a place of compassion, a ministry of sharing and caring, to acknowledge and listen; to be alongside others in their pain and confusion, their grief, their intense shock, and to be within the loss that can come for those who might face news of sudden or tragic death, or of a terminal diagnosis.

We are all living with death; dying matters* - it really does and so, most importantly, does living really well in the face of it. I believe spirituality is something far beyond the realms of a single religious doctrine or rhetoric; however, I have observed that the *'hope'* that an embodied and practiced faith imparts may be beneficial in the face of death.

Death is mysterious, often sudden and untimely; but I am banking on Jesus having prepared a room for me when my time comes!

*Dying Matters: see www.dyingmatters.org

Red Plait Interpretation: see www.redplaitinterpretation.com



Self-Assessment?

Chris Avis

How do you feel about your death? Recently someone told me that as he grows older he thinks about death more and worries about it less. Although society has moved on from some of the earlier taboos surrounding our mortality, euphemisms still abound, especially in Christian circles. Some faiths maintain a comforting belief in some form of 'heaven' after death, but many folk view death in negative terms of defeat, failure and loss. The ultimate goal of the medical profession to save a life can sometimes, with the best of intentions, result in extreme measures being taken to maintain life signs in someone who longs desperately for the release of death.

A recent fascinating book by Penny Sartori PhD RGN, called *The Wisdom of Near-Death Experiences* (ISBN-13 9781780285658), was prompted by the author's experience of twenty years nursing dying people in intensive care, where she became interested in Near-Death Experiences (NDEs) and undertook the UK's first long-term prospective study. She currently teaches two courses she has written entitled 'Death and Dying as Spiritual Transformation' and 'Science, Spirituality and Health' at Swansea University.



Ms Sartori's concern is not to prove the existence or otherwise of any 'afterlife' but to use people's experience of NDEs to better understand the process of dying and thus enhance the care of terminally ill patients. Even so, many of the remarkable NDEs related to her in the course of her research certainly seem to contradict the proponents of 'this is all there is'.

One surprising NDE is reported by Dr Eben Alexander, who is a neurosurgeon and thus not easily convinced by such fanciful notions. He is one of the few in the medical profession who has not been afraid to talk publicly of his own NDE experience, as a result of which he is now convinced that the current belief that consciousness is created by the brain is incorrect.

Most who experience an NDE find that they 'return' with positively changed attitudes to living (sometimes dramatically so) and no longer have any fear of death. Many believe their 'postponement' has occurred because there are still purposes waiting to be fulfilled in their earthly lives; it is 'not their time' yet.

The popular notion that as we die 'our life flashes past us' is sometimes confirmed by an NDE, often with the awareness of a non-judgemental presence and/or an intense, loving light. This is not a biblical sheep and goats moment but the time to review past events in our life and form our own judgements. This scenario has long occurred to me as the most likely and powerful form of divine 'judgement', with no access to earth-bound excuses or justifications – just a necessary, naked self-assessment of our past life and behaviour, made within an all-embracing environment of unconditional love. For me, that prospect is simultaneously reassuring and scary; and way deeper than any farmyard metaphor.

After 'judgement', then what? Our earthly experiences of the inhuman cruelty of others often lead us to desire the punishment of those involved (we're only human, after all ...), preferably in this life, but the next will do if necessary. Will all earthly inhumanities be suitably dealt with after death – ours included?

I find a degree of reassurance by extending the famous quote of Martin Luther King Jr by one word: “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice, *forever.*”

Ms Sartori’s book has a powerful relevance to how we should be living our lives and learning better treatment of the dying. There is a quote which begins the book and now most fittingly ends this earth-bound effusion: –

“Everyone knows they’re going to die but nobody believes it. If we did, we would do things differently Learn how to die and you learn how to live.” Morrie Schwartz

P.S. Check out the late Morrie Schwartz online, (video interviews on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dcnL2o385Gw> (this is the first of a number of interviews, all of which are available on youtube); plus Mitch Albom’s book ‘Tuesdays with Morrie’, made into a 1995 film with Jack Lemmon.



“He’s not in there! Oh, wait - he’s changed his status to ‘risen’ ”

[Used with thanks to Alex Baker, <http://cakeordeathcartoon.wordpress.com/>]

Judging Justice: A Speculation

Chris Avis

"To justice bends the moral arc",
Said Martin Luther King,
Addressing those whose skin was dark,
Who lived with suffering.

Now I today, whose skin is white,
Still hunger for that day,
While humans hurt and nations fight
Far from compassion's way.

A humanly constructed Lord
Has said, "I will repay,"
But evils rage across the board
While many victims pay.

Where is that moral arc, indeed,
Among inflicted hurts?
Will all who sin without due heed
Receive their just desserts?

Or does the realm of justice dwell
Beyond what we conceive?
Are images of heaven and hell
Simplistic and naïve?

Could Love intense lie at the heart
Of all there is to see –
The Love where justice plays its part
When life has ceased to be?

A love so deep, so warm, so kind,
It shames the smallest sins
And each our own conclusions find
When life's review begins.

No judgement seat, no fiery strife,
No pearly gate or ghoul;
Just, how much justice through *my* life
Came from the Golden Rule?

The Poetry of Death

Martin Camroux

So far as we know, Jesus never wrote a poem. But much of his teaching consists of poetic images - the kingdom of God is like a wedding feast or the kingdom of God is like a man who found a beautiful pearl or the kingdom of God is like a party. Such images can be more powerful than formal teaching. That's why the church needs poetry. Poetry gives us another way of seeing the world. And in the end, that's exactly what Jesus was trying to do; he was trying to give people another way of imagining their lives.

When it comes to facing death I find poetry hugely helpful. As a minister I had much to do with death. Looking out of her window of her home at Amherst, Emily Dickinson saw this link between the minister and death:

*There's been a death in the opposite house
As lately as today.
I know it by the numb look
Such houses have always.*

*The minister goes stiffly in
As if the house were his.*

“In the midst of life, we are in death” - so the old prayer book puts it - and the reality is as inescapable as the words are beautiful. Dr Johnson observed that the prospect of death wonderfully concentrates the mind. And certainly scripture will not allow us to forget it even if we could. “All mortal flesh”, says the prophet, “is as grass and all the glory man would gain is as the grass and flowers”.



Edna St. Vincent Millay has it right:

*And you as well must die, beloved dust,
And all your beauty stand you in no stead;
This flawless, vital hand, this perfect head,
This body of flame and steel, before the gust
Of Death, or under his autumnal frost,
Shall be as any leaf, be no less dead.*

Shakespeare puts it more concisely. "And time, that gave, doth now his gift confound".

The loss that death brings can be devastating. So Ben Jonson, when his son Benjamin died at age seven, wrote:

*Farewell, thou child of my right hand, and joy;
My sinne was too much hope of thee, lov'd boy*

I think it is the words "Lov'd boy" that nearly moves me to tears each time I read it.

But death is far from all loss. Life has a natural rhythm which includes an end, and endless life would be a curse not a blessing. Finally, our lives are measured by their quality, not their duration. Sometimes as Emily Dickinson said:

*By a departing light
We see acuter quite
Than by a wick that stays.
There's something in the flight
That clarifies the sight
And decks the rays.*

Beyond death it is impossible to see anything at all. For Philip Larkin this means despair:

*The sure extinction that we travel to
And shall be lost in always. Not to be here,
Not to be anywhere,
And soon; nothing more terrible, nothing more true.*

For the Christian, however, the perspective is different, as you see if you visit Dean Alford's grave in Canterbury, with its inscription: "The inn of a traveller on his road to Jerusalem". So Gerald Manley Hopkins:

*Across my foundering deck shone
A beacon, an eternal beam. Flesh fade, and mortal trash
Fall to the residuary worm; world's wildfire, leave but ash:
In a flash, at a trumpet crash,
I am all at once what Christ is, since he was what I am, and
This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood, immortal
diamond,
Is immortal diamond.*

At Easter the world is bathed in light, the tomb is empty and Christ alive and therefore my life cannot be the same. It may be the tomb is poetry rather than history, an expression of faith rather than the cause of it, but if so it is true poetry, life-changing imagery.

*Death and darkness get you packing,
Nothing now to man is lacking ... (Henry Vaughan).*

I think of a poem by Mary Oliver in which she imagines death as a great white owl, swooping down upon an animal on a white snowy day, and imagines that maybe our dying is like being surrounded by a great, natural, all-encompassing light:

*so I thought:
maybe death isn't darkness, after all,
but so much light wrapping itself around us —

as soft as feathers —*

It's a marvellous image. It catches the hope I live with as does Robert Herrick:

*O years! and age! farewell:
Behold I go,
Where I do know
Infinity to dwell.*

Quite what this means it is impossible to say, except that as Emily Dickinson says:

*“Hope” is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all.*

Editor's note: I'm sure readers will be glad to know that Martin Camroux, co-founder of Free to Believe, has recently gained his PhD: the subject of his thesis is “Ecumenical Church Renewal: the example of the United Reformed Church.”

Congratulations, Martin!



So many of us wrestle with one thing or another. Certainly Jesus did, and certainly our ministers do. I well remember the story of Jacob wrestling with God throughout one night. Not long ago I was wrestling. As I was recovering from my heart operation, at the very moment that I started to become conscious and realise that I was still alive, I had a fleeting vision of blackness; absolute, total, solid, indescribable *shiny* blackness; and I felt that there was nothing out there after all. And then I had the horror of ‘coming to’ after my operation with huge

tubes down my throat and difficulty with breathing and pain and so on. A couple of days later I heard on the hospital radio news that a woman in Italy, who had been in a coma for sixteen years had finally died. And I thought “what’s the difference between dreamless unconsciousness and death; how do you pass that line, when do you see that ‘light’ that people talk about?” So for four or five months I struggled with this. It was such a basic, bottom-line thing. It occurs to me now that then I was struggling with God.

Eventually I talked myself around, and stopped struggling and know that I *have* to believe. I am not lost. Then I came across words of Paul to the Romans:

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

That’s faith.

And it wouldn’t be a “faith” if it were all cast iron solid.

Belief in Life After Death in Borneo and in the UK

Peter Varney

Recently, I have been enquiring into afterlife beliefs amongst indigenous people in Borneo, and I sense that there is equal uncertainty and variety amongst us in Britain.

Quakers express ‘thanksgiving for the grace of God shown in someone’s life’, and often do this at a Meeting for Worship after their death. In other churches funerals seem to have become largely times to remember the deceased, often without much Christian or spiritual input. In contrast a requiem mass primarily commends the soul of the departed into God's keeping and traditionally does not include eulogies about the person. My suggestion is that there is little teaching amongst Quakers, or in any of our churches, about life after death. If we have a preaching ministry how often does life after death form part of it?

A few years ago Antony Freeman, a member of the Sea of Faith, gave a series of three talks on the development of Christian attitudes to life after death, entitled ‘Whatever Next?’, which are particularly helpful as we consider this whole subject.

Just as in Britain, when Celtic and earlier beliefs were incorporated into the Christianity brought from Rome, so in Borneo traditional religious ideas were used by western missionaries as they developed their teaching. I needed to decide, as I engaged in writing up my research amongst the Iban of Borneo, to focus on one part of their belief system. It seemed that the beliefs in the afterlife held by our contemporaries there would be of interest also to those living in the west. The Iban have blended and incorporated Christian and

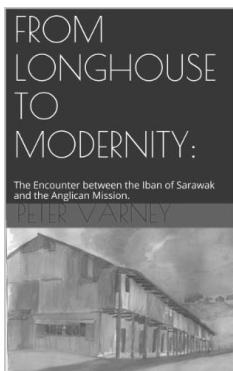
traditional beliefs to create their own eschatological framework. Many Christian informants have no clear knowledge of what is a Christian or a traditional Iban belief. They might hold both together or believe neither.

My first encounter with the Iban in 1958 was during my RAF national service on the island of Labuan, then in the colony of North Borneo. I experienced longhouse life, sitting under heads taken by my headhunter hosts little more than a decade earlier during the Japanese occupation of their country. A decade later I returned to Sarawak, after ordination in the Anglican Church, to work in an Iban parish and as chaplain in the teachers' college. Since then I have continued my research by regular visits, and this is my summary:

- the journey to the next world is difficult but the Christian journey after death is assured.
- the next world is an existence like this world.
- the spirits in the next world communicate with the living, in dreams and other ways.
- Christians and non-Christians alike go to the next world when they die; there is no separate heaven or hell.
- Christians go to paradise or to heaven, which are different from the traditional belief in the next world.
- the next world is a place of transition.
- after death we wait for judgement and for the "Second Coming" of Christ.
- our souls or spirits live on after death, we trust in God's mercy and the hope of eternal life.

I've written this up more fully in a book, *From Longhouse to Modernity: The Encounter between the Iban of Sarawak and the Anglican Mission*, available as Kindle download; and I'd like to write a little more about how 'soul' and 'spirit' are understood. Many of my informants quoted the text "in my Father's house there are many mansions" as they acknowledged the diversity of beliefs held by Christians about the afterlife. Both the early missionaries

and later indigenous church leaders have given little explanation about the meanings of “soul” and “spirit”. As a result questions about what makes up the human mind, consciousness or self-



awareness, how this might relate to “soul” and be different from “spirit,” and how they connect to the afterlife are unanswered. Alongside this belief in *antu*, ghosts, remains widespread, as so do some of the heads still hanging in the longhouses. The heads are still given offerings of food as a sign of respect for the spirits, which some believe still occupy them.

My research shows that the Iban have retained a lively sense of the spiritual as permeating the whole of their life. The 2010 census identified 76% of Sarawak’s Iban as Christian; it affirms how Iban modernity has embraced the ideas that have come both through missionary education and through indigenous church leadership.

Peter Varney is a Quaker, Anglican priest and a member of the FTB Committee and would welcome readers’ responses: varney@waitrose.com.

A Graceful Death, Antonia Rolls’ exhibition of her paintings of the final weeks of her partner’s life (plus poetry, interviews, film, and music) helps facilitate conversations about death and grief: read more at <http://dyingmatters.org/blog/graceful-death-art-dying>

Bald Statements/Good Grief, an exhibition of sculptures by Jean Parker, also facilitates important conversations about loss, grief and change: google Jean Parker, sculptor. The exhibition can be booked.

For interest: **Mortality** is a quarterly magazine which can be read online: the latest edition is at <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/13576275.2014.904848>

Very much alive!

Free to Believe National Conference



Carla Grosch-Miller (worship leader), John Dominic Crossan (speaker), Sarah Crossan, (Dom's wife, creator of beautiful videos to accompany the talks), Linda Harrison (conference organiser).

Rarely are seasoned Free To Believe conference goers shaken by new ideas, but this 2014 event with John Dominic Crossan stimulated much new thinking and debate about the Christmas and Easter stories.

‘The Challenge of Christmas and the Meaning of Easter’ is an invitation into the ‘matrix’ to experience overtures and other surprises. Four audio CDs include the talks and Q&A sessions, plus worship extracts led by Carla Grosch-Miller and Dom's sermon during the closing worship.

All discs are boxed, tracked and indexed for speedy access to any section. Total cost including postage is £12.00. Order from Chris Avis, 37 Clifton Road, Exeter EX1 2BN, with cheque payable to C. Avis, or more speedily via Paypal, paying to chris.avis1@tiscali.co.uk

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Our Guest Contributors

Felicity Warner is the founder of the Soul Midwives Movement which is changing the face of holistic care of the dying in the UK and also abroad. She runs the Soul Midwives School in Dorset and teaches people from all around the world her gentle methods of help for the dying. Soul Midwives are non medical, spiritual and holistic companions to the dying.

Felicity's website is www.soulmidwives.co.uk, and she is the author of three books:- *Gentle Dying*, *A Safe Journey Home*, and *The Soul Midwives' Handbook*.

Angie McLachlan is a thanatologist, with an MA in Religion: The Rhetoric and Rituals of Death; she holds a BA in Death, Loss and Palliative Care. She is a qualified embalmer, and a French-polisher. She has recently been ordained a priest in the Liberal Catholic Church, and is also an artist and maker. Creator of Ichabod Smith (front cover), she is now working to make a female dummy, Ichabel. She is a partner in Red Plait Interpretation: www.redplaitinterpretation.com

Thank you to **Alex Baker** for his permission to use his great cartoon, which appears on page 12:

<http://cakeordeathcartoon.wordpress.com/>

Contributions for the Autumn Briefing are invited for consideration by 15 September 2014.

Please send these to the NEW EDITOR: David Lawrence, 19 Quest Hills Rd, Malvern WR14 1RJ
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