

# Can a labyrinth walking be used for divination? A phenomenological study of walking the Abingdon Labyrinth.

*by Kathy Greethurst*

This is an auto-ethnographic study of walking the Abingdon Labyrinth which is located in St Michael and All Angel's Church in Abingdon, Oxfordshire, England. It was built in 2008 and is based on an illustration in an 11th century manuscript. I begin by explaining how a labyrinth differs from a maze and describe a range of perspectives from labyrinth enthusiasts and opponents. I explore secondary sources to demonstrate that Abingdon Labyrinth is a sacred space with the potential for divination. I present my own phenomenological account of walking the Abingdon Labyrinth twice in December 2014 and reveal my four powerful divinatory experiences, which according to Mircea Eliade constitute hierophany, and two interesting synchronicities. These were achieved using my natural talents of 'essential divination' and proved to be examples of divination working as a result of what Patrick Curry identifies as 'enchantment.'

## Introduction

The aim of this research project is to explore whether a labyrinth can be used for divination - by establishing whether it is a sacred space, whether it has the potential for divination and whether divination occurs when I walk the Abingdon Labyrinth in St Michael and All Angel's Church, Abingdon, Oxfordshire on 9th and 16th December 2014 as part of the church's Advent celebrations.<sup>1</sup>

Barbara Tedlock asserts that 'all people in all times and places have practised divination as a way of exploring the unknown, making decisions, solving problems and diagnosing ailments' and identifies the labyrinth as one of

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<sup>1</sup> St Michael and All Angel's Church, Abingdon, Oxfordshire website - <http://www.stmichaels-abingdon.org.uk/> (accessed 6 January 2015).

hundreds of forms of divination.<sup>2</sup> Helen Curry claims that there is currently a revival in labyrinth walking - with more than a million people walking the one thousand plus labyrinths in the United States.<sup>3</sup> The World-wide Labyrinth Locator, an online database of 4600 labyrinths in 75+ countries, shows that 72% of the constructed labyrinths in England (with a date) have been built or restored since 2000, which appears to support her claim.<sup>4</sup> One of these is the six-path, seven-wall Abingdon Labyrinth, constructed by the Labyrinth Builders in 2008 from an illustration in Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* produced in the early 11<sup>th</sup> century at Abingdon Abbey.<sup>5</sup>

## Methodology

My main primary source is the Abingdon Labyrinth and my phenomenological experience walking it with the intention, as Christopher Tilley suggests, of understanding and connecting with it through ordinary human embodied experience.<sup>6</sup> I recorded my experiences in a journal. My other primary

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<sup>2</sup> Barbara Tedlock, 'Theorizing Divinatory Acts: The Integrative Discourse of Dream Oracles' in Patrick Curry (ed.), *Divination: Perspectives for a New Millennium*, (Farnham, England and Burlington, USA: Ashgate, 2010), [hereafter, Patrick Curry, *Divination*], pp. 11-18. Note: I am using Patrick Curry's and Helen's Curry's full names to differentiate them throughout.

<sup>3</sup> Helen Curry, *The Way of the Labyrinth: A Powerful Meditation for Everyday Life*, (New York: Penguin Compass, 2000), [hereafter, Helen Curry, *The Way*], p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> This 72% equates to 76 of the 106 of labyrinths in England with a construction or restoration date on The Labyrinth Society/Veriditas, World-wide Labyrinth Locator - [http://labyrinthlocator.com/locate-a-labyrinth?country=England&simple\\_results=no&action=locate&offset=120](http://labyrinthlocator.com/locate-a-labyrinth?country=England&simple_results=no&action=locate&offset=120) (accessed 7 January 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, Cambridge University Library; the Labyrinth Society/Veriditas, World-wide Labyrinth Locator - [http://labyrinthlocator.com/locate-a-labyrinth?country=England&simple\\_results=no&action=locate&offset=120](http://labyrinthlocator.com/locate-a-labyrinth?country=England&simple_results=no&action=locate&offset=120) (accessed 7 January 2015); *The Abingdon Blog*, 'St Michael's Transformed' on 13 December 2008 - [http://www.abingdonblog.co.uk/2008\\_12\\_07\\_archive.html](http://www.abingdonblog.co.uk/2008_12_07_archive.html) (accessed 30 December 2014); *The Labyrinth Builders*, 'The Abingdon Labyrinth' - [http://www.labyrinthbuilders.co.uk/our\\_portfolio/abingdon.html](http://www.labyrinthbuilders.co.uk/our_portfolio/abingdon.html) (accessed 30 December 2014); St Helen's Church (sister church to St Michael and All Angel's in Abingdon), 'Spiritual Sidebar' - <http://sfhelenabingdon.cloudaccess.net/spiritual-formation-growth/90-spiritual-sidebar.html> (accessed 30 December 2014) and Jeff Saward in a leaflet on the Abingdon Labyrinth accompanying a private email to Kathy Greethurst dated 31 December 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Christopher Tilley, *Landscape: Places, Paths and Monuments* (Oxford: Berg, 1994), [hereafter, Tilley, *Landscape*], pp. 13-14.

sources are popular works by labyrinth experts.<sup>7</sup> I had planned to use Helen Curry's 5-stage process for labyrinth walking – preparing to walk, on the way in, at the centre, on the way out and after the walk – as a framework to prepare for and reflect on my experience.<sup>8</sup> I found that its use was limited and it distracted me while walking the labyrinth and so I abandoned it. Instead, I focused on the theories and ideas of Mircea Eliade, Emile Durkheim, Aristotle, Patrick Curry, Tilley, David Abrams, Anthony Thorley (with Celia Gunn and with Chantal Allison, Petra Stapp and John Wadsworth) and Lauren Artress to inform my research.<sup>9</sup>

My study is autoethnographic, which Kim Ethrington describes as part of the 'autobiographical genre of writing.'<sup>10</sup> According to both Russell McCutcheon and David Hufford, it is subjective because I have made the choices about what to

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<sup>7</sup> Lauren Artress, *Walking a Sacred Path: Rediscovering the Labyrinth as a Sacred Tool*, (New York: Riverhead Books, 1995), [hereafter, Artress, *Sacred Path*]; Janet Bord, *Mazes and Labyrinths of the World*, (London: Latimer New Dimensions Ltd, 1976), [hereafter, Bord, *Mazes*]; Helen Curry, *The Way*; Adrian Fisher, *Mazes and Labyrinths*, Oxford: Shire Publications, 2012 [2004, 2008, 2011], [hereafter, Fisher, *Mazes*]; Jürgen Hohmuth, *Labyrinths and Mazes*, (Munich, London, New York: Prestel Verlag, 2000), [hereafter, Hohmuth, *Labyrinths*]; Herman Kern, *Through the Labyrinth*, (Munich, London, New York: Prestel Verlag, 2000), [hereafter, Kern, *Labyrinth*]; Sig Lonegren, *Labyrinths, Ancient Myths and Modern Uses*, Glastonbury, Gothic Image Publications, 2007 [1991, 1996, 2001], [hereafter, Lonegren, *Labyrinths*]; Helen Raphael Sands, *Walking the Healing Labyrinth*, London: Gaia Books, 2005 [2001], [hereafter, Sands, *Walking*]; Virginia Westbury, *Labyrinths: Ancient Paths of Wisdom and Peace*, (London: Aurum Press 2001), [hereafter, Westbury, *Labyrinths*].

<sup>8</sup> Helen Curry, *The Way*, pp. 38-99.

<sup>9</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, New York: Harcourt Brace, 1959, [hereafter, Eliade, *Sacred*]; Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 1982, [hereafter, Durkheim, *Elementary*]; Aristotle, *Physics Book IV, Part 4* [hereafter, Aristotle, *Physics*]; Patrick Curry, *Divination*, Patrick Curry, 'Enchantment in Tolkein and Middle Earth' in Stratford Caldecott and Thomas Honegger (eds.), *Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings: Sources of Inspiration* (Zurich: Walking Tree Books, 2008), [hereafter, Patrick Curry, 'Tolkein']; Tilley, *Landscape*; David Abrams, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, New York: First Vintage Books, 1997 [1996], [hereafter, Abrams, *Spell*]; Anthony Thorley and Celia Gunn, *Sacred Sites, An Overview: Report for the Gaia Foundation, 2007*, The Gaia Foundation, 2008 [2007], [hereafter, Thorley, *Overview*]; Anthony Thorley, Chantal Allison, Petra Stapp and John Wadsworth, 'Clarifying Divinatory Dialogue: A Proposal for a Distinction between Practitioner Divination and Essential Divination' [hereafter, Thorley, 'Divinatory'] in Curry, *Divination*; and Artress, *Sacred Path*.

<sup>10</sup> Kim Etherington, *Becoming a Reflexive Researcher: Using Our Selves in Research*, (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2004), [hereafter, Etherington, *Reflexive*], pp. 139-140.

research and how to approach it.<sup>11</sup> Recognising that research boundaries can become blurred, I have tried to be self-reflexive - which Charlotte Aull Davies defines as 'turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference.'<sup>12</sup> My research is influenced by my personal spiritual beliefs in the existence of the divine, angels and spirit guides; the connectedness of everything in the cosmos; the everlasting nature of the soul; and reincarnation. Although brought up as a Christian, I rejected it as my religion in my late teens. After about twenty years without spiritual focus, I became involved in the New Age movement and neo-paganism. I currently describe myself as 'spiritual' and 'following my own path.' I am a 'believer' in the divinatory nature of labyrinth walking based on my previous 'more than human' experiences walking the labyrinth at the Brahma Kumaris Global Retreat Centre in Nuneham Courtney, Oxfordshire approximately twenty times.<sup>13</sup> As Edmund Husserl recommends, I have attempted to bracket these previous walks during my research.<sup>14</sup> Although, I have been anxious about revealing my spiritual beliefs and private experiences and like Etherington, have found that increasing self-reflexivity feels like 'coming out,' I share my story, as Helen Curry recommends, to enhance my personal learning.<sup>15</sup>

### What is a Labyrinth?

In the past, the words 'labyrinth' and 'maze' have been used interchangeably but nowadays, it is generally accepted that the word 'labyrinth' describes unicursal constructs with a single path to the centre whereas 'maze' refers to multicursal constructs with many paths and dead ends to create choice and confusion.<sup>16</sup> Commentators generally agree that the origins of the labyrinth are unknown and speculate that labyrinths have existed for over 2,500 years, identifying petroglyphs, images on clay tablets, coins and pottery, and classical

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<sup>11</sup> Russell T. McCutcheon (ed.), *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: a Reader*, (London: Cassell 1999), [hereafter McCutcheon, *Insider/Outsider*], p. 10 and David J. Hufford, 'The Scholarly Voice and the Personal Voice: Reflexivity in Belief Studies' in McCutcheon, *Insider/Outsider*, p. 294.

<sup>12</sup> Charlotte Aull Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography: A Guide to Researching Selves and Others*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1999) pp. 3-5.

<sup>13</sup> Brahma Kumaris Global Retreat Centre, Nuneham Courtney, Oxfordshire - <http://www.globalretreatcentre.org/> (accessed 9 January 2015).

<sup>14</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. W R Boyce Gibson, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), p. 57 and Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2000), p. 78.

<sup>15</sup> Etherington, *Reflexive*, p. 19 and Helen Curry, *The Way*, p. 95.

<sup>16</sup> Bord, *Mazes*, pp. 9-10 and 15-36; Helen Curry, *The Way*; Fisher, *Mazes*, p. 4; Hohmuth, *Labyrinths*, p.8; Kern, *Labyrinth*, p.23; Lonegren, *Labyrinths*, p. 15; Sands, *Walking*, p. 24; Westbury, *Labyrinths*, p. 8.



literary references to labyrinths – for example, Ariadne’s labyrinthine ‘dancing place’ in Homer’s *Iliad* and Ovid’s ‘Ariadne and The Minotaur’ myth in his *Metamorphoses* - as evidence to establish this timeline for early labyrinths.<sup>17</sup>

Individual accounts of labyrinth walking vary. Helen Curry says that her first labyrinth walk was ‘life-changing.’<sup>18</sup> David Willis McCullough has never experienced ‘... a Saul-on-the-road-to-Damascus revelation...’ but has recalled good/bad memories and gained ‘a sense of moving through a design as old as the human imagination...’<sup>19</sup> One woman reports that when her husband walked a

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<sup>17</sup> Bord, *Mazes*, pp. 9-10 and 15-36; Helen Curry, *The Way*, pp.9 and 21-23; Homer, *Chapman’s Homer: The Iliad, Volume 1*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998, [1956], eighteenth book, line, line 536, p. 387; Kern, *Labyrinth*, pp. 23 and 67-75; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, London: Penguin, 2004, pp. 301-303; Jeff Saward, ‘Foreward’ in Lonegren, *Labyrinths*, p. 1; Virginia Westbury, *Labyrinths: Ancient Paths of Wisdom and Peace*, (London: Aurum Press), 2001, pp. 23-29.

<sup>18</sup> Helen Curry, *The Way*, p. 9.

<sup>19</sup> David Willis McCullough, *The Unending Mystery: A Journey Through Labyrinths*, New York: Anchor Books, 2005 [2004], p. 6.

labyrinth 'all he could think about was what ...to have for lunch!'<sup>20</sup> Opposition to labyrinth walking is voiced by fundamentalist Christians like Mike Oppenheimer who argues that the Bible shows that prayer, not labyrinth walking, is the only true way to God and Greg Griffin who condemns it as a pagan 'heresy that precedes apostasy' and challenges the commercial activities of American labyrinth walking proponents.<sup>21</sup>

### The Abingdon Labyrinth as sacred space

Eliade sees sacred space as non-homogeneous and argues that 'in the sacred enclosure, communications with the gods is made possible.'<sup>22</sup> Durkheim regards the sacred as 'set apart' and 'forbidden' which applies to the Abingdon Labyrinth because it is a human construct in a church, 'set apart' from the secular landscape surrounding it – which appears to align with Aristotle's idea of place - as a container with 'boundaries [that] are coincident with the bounded.'<sup>23</sup> It is forbidden because access is limited to church opening times and when the chairs are not covering it.

Martin Gray identifies labyrinths as sacred spaces and the American NGO, Sacred Sites International regards them as sacred sites to be protected, which are both viewpoints supported by Thorley and Gunn.<sup>24</sup> Thorley and Gunn have produced nineteen characteristics to define a sacred site - the Abingdon Labyrinth meets six of them (see Appendix 2) and falls within their operational definition of sacred space as 'a place in a landscape, occasionally over or under water, which is especially revered by a people, culture or culture as a focus for spiritual belief and practice or likely religious observance.'<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Guest BBB, 'Gender Differences, Readers Respond: Experiences Walking the Labyrinth, Holistic Healing,' About.com – <http://healing.about.com/u/ua/labyrinths/walking-labyrinths.htm> (accessed 26 December 2014).

<sup>21</sup> Mike Oppenheimer, 'Enter the Labyrinth', Let Us Reason Ministries - <http://www.letusreason.org/Nam30.htm> (accessed 26 December 2014) and Greg Griffin, 'Stand Firm is Ten Years Old Today,' Stand Firm in Faith - <http://www.standfirminfaith.com/?/sf/page/31207> (accessed 26 December 2014).

<sup>22</sup> Eliade, *Sacred*, pp. 20 and 26.

<sup>23</sup> Durkheim, *Elementary*, p. 129 cited in Thorley, *Overview*, p. 31 and Aristotle, *Physics* on the Internet Classics Archive - <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/physics.4.iv.html> (accessed 4 January 2015).

<sup>24</sup> Martin Gray, *Sacred Earth: Places of Peace and Power*, (New York: Sterling, 2011), p. 11; Sacred Sites International Foundation website - <http://www.sacred-sites.org/about-us/> (accessed 26 December 2014); and Thorley, *Overview*, p. 101.

<sup>25</sup> Thorley, *Overview*, pp. 76-77.

## Does the Abingdon Labyrinth have the potential for divination?

Although P J Heather acknowledges universal interest in divination, Patrick Curry reports limited academic focus on the subject.<sup>26</sup> Thorley highlights a useful, general definition from Carmen Blacker and Michael Loewe - 'By divination we mean the attempt to elicit from some higher power or supernatural being the answers to questions beyond the range of ordinary human understanding.'<sup>27</sup> Patrick Curry rightly broadens his definition beyond 'answers to questions' to expound divination as a continuous conversation with 'with more-than-human agents.'<sup>28</sup> Eliade proffers that a sacred space naturally manifests a hierophany which results in 'a break in the homogeneity of space... [and] a revelation of an absolute reality, opposed to the nonreality of the vast surrounding space.'<sup>29</sup> Thorley and Gunn confirm hierophany as 'an expression of the divine.'<sup>30</sup> Thorley, Chantal Allison, Petra Stapp and John Wadsworth identify two types of divination – one conducted by specialist practitioners (like shamans) and the other, 'essential divination' which happens for ordinary people using their natural divinatory instincts everyday 'as part of their psychology and culture' and which can be developed and refined to achieve 'practitioner' level.<sup>31</sup> In his research, John W. Rhodes shows that labyrinth walking can result in greater calmness and/or reduced stress and bring about positive 'state of mind' responses that can increase an individual's openness to their 'intuition, hunches, "inner voice" and other insights.'<sup>32</sup> Lonegren upholds labyrinths as places of 'emotion, intuition and spirit' where it is possible to contact 'non-physical realms.'<sup>33</sup> These claims suggest that there is the potential for divination in the sacred space of the Abingdon Labyrinth.

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<sup>26</sup> P.J. Heather, 'Divination', *Folklore* 65, number 1 (1954), p. 10 and Patrick Curry, *Divination*, p. 4.

<sup>27</sup> Anthony Thorley, 'Perceptions of Divination in the Astrological Consultation: A Pilot Study,' *Correlation* 24 (2), 2006/7, p. 6 and Carmen Blacker and Michael Loewe, *Oracles and Divination*, Boulder: Shambhala 1981, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> Thorley, 'Divinatory,' p. 253.

<sup>29</sup> Eliade, *Sacred*, p. 21.

<sup>30</sup> Eliade, *Sacred*, p. 21 and Thorley, *Overview*, p. 31.

<sup>31</sup> Thorley, 'Divinatory in Curry, *Divination*, pp. 254, 255 and 261.

<sup>32</sup> John W Rhodes, 'Commonly Reported Effects of Labyrinth Walking,' *Labyrinth Pathways*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, June 2008, The Labyrinth Society website [hereafter, Rhodes, *Effects*] - <https://zdi1.zd-cms.com/cms/res/files/382/Commonly-Reported-Effects-of-Labyrinth-Walking-Labyrinth-Pathways-July-2008-3.pdf> (accessed 26 December 2014).

<sup>33</sup> Lonegren, *Labyrinths*, p.7

## My phenomenological experience walking the Abingdon Labyrinth

During my two Abingdon Labyrinth walks, I felt a connection with the divine on four occasions, which constituted what Eliade describes as a hierophany and Patrick Curry calls a conversation with 'more than human agents.'<sup>34</sup> The first time was during my first inward walk when I questioned my right, as a non-Christian, to be in a church and my 'not belonging' issues surfaced. I arrived at the centre, 'faced the altar and was overpowered by a great sense of wisdom - "we are all just travelers trying to find our way in a challenging world. No one way is right or wrong. Our journeys are just different."' <sup>35</sup> This confirmed to me, as Helen Curry and Lauren Artress claim, that the centre is a place that represents the divine.<sup>36</sup> It



felt like being in the 'holy of holies,' the place which Eliade posits as the 'imago mundi,' 'the true world' and quoting Flavius Josphesus's symbolism of the Jerusalem Temple, equates with heaven.<sup>37</sup>

My second hierophany was towards the end of my first walk when, not wanting it to end, I felt 'the labyrinth tug at my ankle to stay within its boundary'

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<sup>34</sup> Eliade, *Sacred*, p. 21 and Patrick Curry, *Divination*, opening statement on an unnumbered page.

<sup>35</sup> Author's journal.

<sup>36</sup> Lauren Artress, 'Q and A with Lauren,' *Veriditas*, Volume 1, number 2, Summer 1996, p. 18 and Helen Curry, *The Way*, p. 71.

<sup>37</sup> Eliade, *Sacred*, pp. 42-43.



and I asked myself whether ‘the labyrinth [is] alive?’<sup>38</sup> This is the kind of ‘embodied’ experience that Tilley proffers and which David Abrams describes as ‘participation of the senses’ in a mutual experience such that we – the labyrinth and I - became connected and attuned to each other in ‘reciprocity’ and shows that ‘... each place has its own mind, its own psyche’ - thereby being a ‘more-than-human’ world.<sup>39</sup> An interesting synchronicity is that the prayer card given to guide me during my second walk by the lady church warden organising the Advent walks contained Mary Oliver’s poem, ‘The Journey’ which includes the words ‘and you felt a tug at your ankles.’<sup>40</sup> Another synchronicity is that, in my journal, I describe the ‘wild wind’ and the wind whistling around the church’s rafters on the dark December evening of my first walk and in her poem, Oliver depicts life as a ‘wild night’ and how ‘the wind pried /with its stiff fingers/ at the very foundations /though their melancholy /was terrible.’<sup>41</sup>

My third hierophany was during the inward walk of my second visit when, annoyed and upset that the meditation subject was ‘journeying’ through life because I did not want to dwell on my mainly unhappy past, I invoked Archangel Michael and felt the warmth of an angelic presence supporting me.<sup>42</sup> I misremembered Jesus’s words, ‘I am the way, the truth and the life’ as ‘I am the way, the truth and the light’ and in my memory, filled the events and places of my past with golden light and cried as I walked.<sup>43</sup>

My fourth hierophany occurred during the return walk of my second visit when the Abingdon Labyrinth called me to return and walk monthly at the church’s Silent Reflections events and the Chartres Labyrinth called me to walk there.<sup>44</sup> Afterwards, ‘I felt very positive, fulfilled, connected with the Cosmos and the divine’ and not surprised that there is a labyrinth revival with many people wanting to experience labyrinth magic.<sup>45</sup> My experiences resulted from what Thorley et al present as ‘essential divination’ performed by me, an ordinary

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<sup>38</sup> Eliade, *Sacred*, p. 21.

<sup>39</sup> Tilley, *Landscape*, pp. 13-14 and Abrams, *Spell*, pp. 50-53 and 262.

<sup>40</sup> Mary Oliver, ‘The Journey’ in *New and Selected Poems, Volume One*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1992 [hereafter, Oliver, ‘Journey’] on Mary Oliver website - <http://maryoliver.beacon.org/2009/11/new-and-selected-one/> (accessed 27 December 2014).

<sup>41</sup> Oliver, *Journey* .

<sup>42</sup> Eliade, *Sacred*, p. 11 .

<sup>43</sup> St John 14:6 in Authorized King James Version, *The Holy Bible*, London: Collins, 1958, [hereafter, Authorized King James Version], p. 107 .

<sup>44</sup> St Michael and All Angel’s Church, *Silent Reflections* leaflet - events are ‘open to anyone, who wants to come and see’ on the final Tuesday of every month (except December) and include group prayers/ meditations, shared silences and labyrinth walks.

<sup>45</sup> Author’s journal.

person with no special skills except my 'natural divinatory instincts,' past labyrinth walking experiences and openness to the divine.<sup>46</sup>

The totality of my Abingdon Labyrinth walking experiences accords with Patrick Curry's view of divination working as a result of 'enchantment, the direct experience of a meaningful world.'<sup>47</sup> Combining ideas from Max Weber's disenchantment and Tolkien's Faërie world, his three part theory of enchantment includes Tolkien's concept of a 'secondary world' and the 'realization of imagined wonder.'<sup>48</sup> On my first visit, I felt that I had been transported into a Tolkien-type 'secondary world' when I entered St Michael and All Angel's Church and 'was immediately enveloped in the church's calm and prayerful atmosphere - so palpable that it brought tears to my eyes. In front of me was a beautiful labyrinth tiled into the church's floor. I was enchanted.'<sup>49</sup> Walking the Abingdon Labyrinth had a powerful sensory impact on me and Patrick Curry's enchantment characteristics of 'indispensably existential wonder;' 'ineffable' and 'mysterious,' 'embodied' and 'very precisely situated;' 'participatory' (like 'finding oneself within a song'); and unified, complete and infinite' are perfect descriptors for my Abingdon Labyrinth experiences.<sup>50</sup>

It has been a challenge to reveal my spiritual beliefs and personal vulnerabilities while walking the Abingdon Labyrinth – but I have faced my fears that such experiences may be interpreted as 'crazy' or discounted because they are not 'scientific.' As Helen Curry suggested, sharing my story has helped me with my personal growth and made me a stronger person.<sup>51</sup>

### Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the Abingdon Labyrinth is a sacred space with the potential for divinatory experiences - which I realised during my two labyrinth walks on 9 and 16 December 2014. As a sacred space, it exemplifies Durkheim's concept of the sacred being 'set apart' and 'forbidden,' Eliade's proposition that sacred space is not homogenous and Aristotle's idea of place as a container.<sup>52</sup> It meets six of Thorley and Gunn's eighteen criteria that define a

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<sup>46</sup> Thorley, 'Divinatory' in Curry, *Divination*, pp. 254-255.

<sup>47</sup> Patrick Curry, 'Tolkien', p. 99 and on Patrick Curry website - <http://www.patrickcurry.co.uk/papers.htm> (accessed 3 January 2015).

<sup>48</sup> Patrick Curry, 'Tolkien,' pp.99.

<sup>49</sup> Author's journal

<sup>50</sup> Patrick Curry, 'Tolkien,' pp. 99-100 and on Patrick Curry's website, pp. 1-2 - <http://www.patrickcurry.co.uk/papers.htm> (accessed 3 January 2015).

<sup>51</sup> Helen Curry, *The Way*, p. 95.

<sup>52</sup> Durkheim, *Elementary*, p. 129 cited in Thorley, *Overview*, p. 31; Eliade, *Sacred*, pp. 20 and Aristotle, *Physics* on the Internet Classics Archive - <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/physics.4.iv.html> (accessed 4 January 2015).

sacred site and falls within their operational definition.<sup>53</sup> As a sacred space, it has divinatory potential because, as Eliade's asserts, sacred space manifests hierophany.<sup>54</sup> In his research, Rhodes confirms that labyrinth walking can lead to calmness and positive 'state of mind' responses that can increase divinatory insights.<sup>55</sup> During my two labyrinth walks, I had four divinatory experiences which align with Eliade's concept of hierophany and what Patrick Curry calls a conversation with 'more than human agents.'<sup>56</sup> I also had two experiences of synchronicity and experienced the centre of the labyrinth as Eliade's 'holy of holies.'<sup>57</sup> These experiences amount to the kind of embodied encounters proffered by Tilley and Abrams's sense of 'participation of the senses' and 'reciprocity.'<sup>58</sup> My experiences were achieved through what Thorley et al have identified as concept of 'essential divination' in which an ordinary person (that is, me) can connect with the divine using their 'natural divinatory instincts.'<sup>59</sup> My total experience is best described by Patrick Curry's theory of divination working as a result of 'enchantment' with the Abingdon Labyrinth in St Michael and All Angel's church representing a Tolkein-type 'secondary world' and his enchantment characteristics perfectly depicting my Abingdon Labyrinth walking experiences.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Thorley, *Overview*, pp. 76-77.

<sup>54</sup> Eliade, *Sacred*, p. 21.

<sup>55</sup> Rhodes, *Effects*.

<sup>56</sup> Eliade, *Sacred*, p. 21 and Patrick Curry, *Divination*, opening statement on an unnumbered page.

<sup>57</sup> Eliade, *Sacred*, pp. 42-43.

<sup>58</sup> Tilley, *Landscape*, pp. 13-14 and Abrams, *Spell*, pp. 50-53 and 262.

<sup>59</sup> Thorley, 'Divinatory in Curry, *Divination*, pp. 254, 255 and 261.

<sup>60</sup> Patrick Curry, 'Tolkein,' pp. 99-100 and on Patrick Curry's website, pp. 1-2 - <http://www.patrickcurry.co.uk/papers.htm> (accessed 3 January 2015).

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