

The Christian Community

Movement for Religious Renewal

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Advent 2019

Edinburgh Congregation Newsletter

A new Earth and a new Heaven

In his eye-opening work, *The Decay of Lying*, Oscar Wilde is adamant that the task of the artist is to see the world anew. He goes so far as to say that merely representing creation as we all know it is a kind of hack-work. Rather we should find in ourselves the ability to create a new Earth. He points to Turner, saying that no-one had seen a sunset before Turner saw it with new eyes; no-one had seen a London fog before Whistler painted it. Does not Van Gogh enable us to see the play of light and shade in a way we would never have noticed? Michelangelo's David lifts our vision of the nobility of the human form, and in Rembrandt's late self-portraits, we find not only the vulnerability of old-age, but also a kind of heroism.

Nearer our own time Helena Scherfbeck's series of self-portraits from early adulthood right through to the hours before her death allows us to experience the process of incarnation. And Jacob Epstein's *Ecce Homo* placed beside his *Christ in Majesty* awakens one with a shock to the enormity of the transition from death to resurrection.

When we have taken these images into ourselves we begin to see and feel the world in a new light. We can be reminded of the words of the Gospel, “the eye is the light of the body”, which we could rephrase: “beholding is drenched with light”. This is compared with the “dull” eye of mere passive looking, which does nothing to bring about the new Earth.

Would it be going too far to say that in dismissing the reproduction of the world “as is”, Oscar Wilde is striking a blow for the light of the Spirit at work in creating a new Earth?

At the beginning of the Book of Revelation, St John is directed to look into the spiritual world and describe what he hears and sees. Rudolf Steiner describes how enormously difficult it is to put into words understandable to us, the beings of the spiritual world and their actions. In order to accomplish this, John becomes, as it were, an artist. He describes what he sees in mighty word pictures. Throughout the Book he is continuously urging us to keep our active, creative, light-filled eye open, not simply to skim over what is described. Again and again the instruction comes” “Lo!” or “Behold!”, along with “He who has an ear, let him hear.”

We are asked to take these great images into ourselves and to live with them. If we are dull-eyed theologians we attack the Book with our intellect and cast doubt on its place in the canon of the scriptures.

The Book of Revelation encompasses the range of human possibilities, from the most holy to the most vile. In order to absorb the whole Book, we have to acknowledge the whole of our humanity. Only by shying away from nothing is St John able to say in the end: “I saw a new Heaven and a new Earth.”

Bill Boyd

On the Programme

Advent ushers in the new Christian Year and we invite children up to Confirmation age (14 or 15) to take part on Sunday, December 1. Please let Peter Holman know if your child or children will be taking part. The same applies to the straw star-making on Friday 6, please let Catrina know, as spaces are limited. At the turn of the year, with the winter solstice on December 22, we will after the service mark a number of turnings as we approach the Holy Nights.

This year the main theme in the Holy Days and Nights of Christmas will be exploring different spaces in which mankind has worshipped over millennia. What are these spaces? What qualities does each offer? See the Programme for the six spaces we will speak about. The theme will be part of our current living with thoughts, visions, plans and anticipation of our new church. On December 8 at the Congregational Meeting there will be a chance to hear and speak about where we have got to with the process.

In the stars-for-next-year talk this Christmas on January 5, Christian Maclean will also speak about the travels of the largest and most distant of the classical planets, Jupiter and Saturn. The following week we will take up the theme of Prayer again from earlier this year and connect it with Epiphany.

Later in Epiphany there are two talks not to be missed. On January 24 Saraphir Qaa-Rishi will give us a Friday evening talk on how eurythmy can help our modern malaise of living under stress and life's challenges. As a trained eurythmist, Saraphir has done research into stress and resilience; she teaches and runs workshops on mindfulness, the mind-body connection and how her specially developed eurythmy exercises can connect us to ourselves, our surroundings and the unseen world of life forces that sustain us.

Her presentation will include an opportunity to practise some exercises that we can then take home and use.

On Sunday January 26 Dorothy and Colin Senior will share some of what they know of the life and work of John Petrie who was known to some of us and whose works of wood are to be found in and around Fountain House! John taught Colin to make wooden bowls at a very challenging time in Colin's life, and the learning of this skill, as well as the way John conveyed it, are an example of real healing.

Our thoughts are with the family of Connie (Constance) Cook, who died on 5 November and whose funeral in the chapel was a big event, rounding off not only Connie's 105 years, but her long-standing involvement in our congregation.

Finally, a year on from a fairly big change from our old weekday service time to 9:30, the pendulum will swing again a little to find a happy medium of a 10am start to all services. This will come into full effect from January, with the regular Thursday service on the 9th starting at 10am. All Christmas services will also be at 10am. There is a feeling of roundness and uniformity about this which is important. It will also be a help in the darker months to illuminate the altar space. And on this particular point, we trust you will enjoy the slightly greater degree of daylight that lights up the altar space and allows the colours there to shine out a little more; this has been achieved through the hanging of a new lace curtain on the window.

With warm wishes and a prayer for starlight blessings this Christmas,

Peter Holman