

The Christian Community

MOVEMENT FOR RELIGIOUS RENEWAL

Forest Row Congregation

Newsletter for Sunday, 14th June, 2020

Letter

Nature - and culture's - open secret

Luke Barr

We have now entered the period between festivals, where we adopt the lilac colour. This time 'between' is called Trinity, and the prayer at beginning and end of the service is the Trinity prayer. This prayer, which so unusually describes the three aspects of the Divine, says that the Healing Spirit receives our knowing into itself, into its very life.

This is striking. What is the 'knowing' that this prayer reveals? What is this 'knowing' that lives in the Spirit?

The life of the spirit receives our knowing - is this life then affected by how we know, what we know, when we know something (prematurely, or too late)? Is its life affected by our motives of why we want to know something? Does our knowing affect the Healing Spirit - as much as it clearly affects the natural world?

I have been deeply vexed during this crisis by the contradictory nature of our scientific 'knowledge'. I have seen knowledge based on numbers, or statistics. Can one really know anything of value (pertaining to matters of life and death - which are ultimately spiritual matters) based on numbers and probability? What sort of spirit is at home in such a realm? Can one conduct a truly human life on such assumptions?

During this crisis, I have experienced knowledge as something in perpetual conflict with itself. One piece of information seems to contradict another. This leads to people taking certain pieces of information ('knowledge') and finding it polarises them against other contradictory viewpoints and information. I have seen everywhere opinion dressed up as knowledge. I have seen this tendency at work in others, and in myself too.

One can be thankful for such 'revelations'. What do they tell us?

Perhaps that we are on the verge of outgrowing a certain outmoded form of knowing which destroys our world, our nature, and our relationships with each other.

What is happening at The Christian Community?

All public events have been cancelled because of the new Coronavirus. However, as of Monday, 15th June, we are permitted to open the church for private prayer. In the coming week the church will be open on Thursday, 18th from 3pm-5pm and Friday, 19th from 10am til noon. The priests are celebrating the Act of Consecration of Man at 9am on Thursdays and Fridays and 10am on Sundays. Please join us in spirit. The priests are available by phone or email for pastoral conversations or to give advice about where to find practical help. We are sending out this weekly newsletter with spiritual guidance and study material. For more information about The Christian Community, please see thechristiancommunity.co.uk

Is our current form of 'knowing', a dead 'knowing'? Is this why we fear death so much, because our 'knowing' is swimming about in a sea of pale, dull and dead consciousness the whole time, and we fear some kind of eternal form of this manifestation of our own blandly dead consciousness?

What is the real illness here? This crisis seems to have been above all other things, a crisis of epistemology.

I ask myself - forgive me if this sounds solipsistic, but I have to start with myself - if I can change my knowing in a way helpful to the (healing) Spirit? Can I make my 'knowing' more alive, more living like nature is?

It seems to me that all that we need to know is openly 'hidden' in nature. We need only engage with these life forces more - rather than with our own issues and opinions. The living thinking, the living consciousness which may ensue, quickly and easily outgrows these.

One can do this by engaging with nature 'with willing devotion'. We are then not onlookers to nature, forever locked out of her secret living ways. Care and attention and the cultivation of a loving, responsible gaze, would nourish the noble affections within us toward nature. And, I believe, gradually, we would develop a living thinking and a living perception which would unite us in accord with nature. Nature could then bless us, just as our purer consciousness would bless nature.

Our consciousness, or 'knowing' could become a form of blessing. What a lovely thought!

And by corollary, I believe that we bring healing forces to the world when engaging with a 'cultural' version of nature, the sacraments - the healing medicine for ourselves and for the world.

The sacraments: a cultural version of nature? Before I entered the seminary for the priesthood, I spent hours walking in nature every day for years. When I moved to the big city of Hamburg for the seminary, I missed nature terribly. Until gradually, I experienced the Act of Consecration to be having the same effect on me as my daily encounters with nature had had. In the sacrament, I was 'walking' through, and encountering reality in a different, even enhanced way.

Perhaps such conscious engagements with nature and culture will help the 'healing God' to increasingly manifest in our earthly world, to heal not so much the effects of a virus, but to heal the true sickness: the way we speak and relate to each other; how we think about our own biographical problems; how we see the world; what we understand to be 'science' in the true sense of the word.

The 'healing God' is the God who 'receives our knowing into his life'. It is a receiving gesture, feminine in archetype. If we offer the right sort of thinking, the right sort of 'knowing' (which is far more than thinking alone), then I believe that the Spirit can reciprocate the gift and begin to shine through the world and fill all the ways of our human soul with its living substance.

Homily

Tom Ravetz

The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me." Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote— Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael

asked. "Come and see," said Philip. When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit." "How do you know me?" Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you." Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel." Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that." He then added, "Amen, amen, I say to you, you will see 'heaven open, and the

angels of God ascending and descending on' the Son of Man.'"

John 1:43-51

Our eyes are not adapted to see human beings whole. We see them as individual, solitary creatures, when in fact they are surrounded by hosts of angelic beings. Sometimes, in moments of crisis, after illness, or before a great decision, we sense the helping presence of a being who sees our lives whole, helping us to see how everything that we experience – both our joys and challenges – gives us opportunities to develop our capacity to become true selves who give themselves in creative love. This being is our angel.

When we read the biographies of the great figures of history, we can experience what happens when human beings make themselves available for the archangel, the guiding spirit of their people. They might be leaders in times of national crisis, or people whose suffering has led them to see what is needed for the further development of their people. Such a person was Frederick Douglass, who was born a slave in the USA in the early nineteenth century and became a campaigner for the abolition of slavery.

On his travels in Europe, Douglass recognised that it was not enough to campaign against slavery in America: the condition of the poor in Ireland, and of women in all the countries he visited, moved him so deeply that he had to speak about these issues too.

When someone rises above the level of their personal concerns and connects them to the whole of humanity, we can sense that they have reached the level of the Time Spirit. This spirit helps us to work for the great forward-moving aims of humanity which are often achieved in bitter struggle.

In these days, we are witnessing how those angelic beings whose concern is human destinies and human affairs are working together. In the responses to the public health crisis and now in the wave of concern about the destinies of the victims of systemic oppression, we can sense how human beings are joining in the work of angelic beings to further the ends of true progress.

Beyond the sphere of the angelic beings who guide human affairs, there are the spirits who are at work

in creation. When human beings align themselves to the purposes of creation, they allow those mighty spirits to work through them. On a level yet deeper and also higher are the spirits who sustain Being itself. Their whole being is taken up in the love of God and they let this love stream down through all the beings beneath them.

What we sense when we feel the gaze of our angel faithfully conveys the purposes of these loftiest beings: our lives, our history and our world all exist to create the opportunity for creatures to advance towards true selfhood, giving themselves in creative, self-forgetting love.

The vision that Jesus promises to Nathaniel is at once a distant prophecy and affirmation of what wants to be true for every human being. What we witness in the gospels is a life lived in alignment with the creative purpose of creation. This is our prototype and guide. When we meet each other as those who are striving for such alignment, we make it more likely that we will be able to achieve it, if only for moments.

Living with the Act of Consecration (12)

Tom Ravetz

Over the past twelve weeks, I have adapted excerpts from my book about the Act of Consecration of Man for our Newsletter. The book was due to come out in Floris Books this spring and is now scheduled for August. For most of these weeks I have, like many of my readers, been unable to attend the service, as my household needs to be 'shielded' as far as possible. Like many of us, I have felt the absence of the physical, embodied sacramental life keenly and I have also felt ever more aware of how meeting each other 'in the flesh', as we say, is an irreplaceable experience. What we have done quietly at home was not a substitute for gathering at the altar; it was nourished by our memories of when we could attend, and we are still living in the anticipation of the services to come. In this special space in time, we are able to reflect on what the service means to us. As the final contribution in this series, I would like to turn to the title of our service, its unusual name: Act of Consecration of Man.

To consecrate means to make sacred or to dedicate to a higher purpose. In the ancient world, holy things had to be kept apart through a kind of ritual hygiene. Something of this lives on in us when we wait for a special occasion before we open a gift, or when we reserve the use of a certain room for special purposes. In the New Testament, however, a great change takes place: what is holy is now able to transform what is impure. Jesus embodied this new attitude towards holiness. He sought the society of ritually impure people, touched lepers and allowed himself to be touched by the sick. This went against the holiness laws of the Jewish religion. He explains this by saying:

Not that which goes into the mouth makes the human being unclean; no, that which comes out of the mouth makes them unclean. (Matt. 15:11)

Although it is important to cultivate a kind of tact when dealing with holy things, the tendency is clear: what has been made holy is not fragile and in need of protection. It has the power to transform the world.

Paul addresses the early Christians as the 'holy ones' or 'saints'. The first Christians experienced a consecration of their humanity through their encounter with Jesus Christ in their Baptism and in the Eucharist. When we celebrate the Act of Consecration, we can have the same experience. This does not mean that we receive a status that separates us from the world. On the contrary, the Act of Consecration of Man connects us with the world in a deeper way, as becomes apparent in the Communion. The holiness we receive in the Act of Consecration of Man becomes real when we dedicate ourselves to the purpose of making the world more holy.

The name of our service places it within the framework of the history of salvation. For the sake of their journey towards self-giving, creative love chosen in freedom, human beings had to experience a world of separation. They lost the holiness of the origin in this exile. Christ becomes human in order to consecrate the human being, to reconnect the human to its divine purpose once again. In this sense, the incarnation of Christ itself was the original Act of Consecration of Man.

Violin Marathon

Angela Campbell's violin marathon has raised over £2550 for our church funds.

A huge thank you to Angela and all who supported this fundraising initiative!

If you're feeling left out because you didn't hear about it in time, you can find all the details and make a donation here

(<http://www.thechristiancommunity.co.uk/2020/05/01/violin/>) .

Supporting us

The Christian Community is funded by contributions by members and friends. In this time of crisis, when the priests' work is needed more than ever, we are facing a fall in our income through reduced collections and fundraising events.

If you are able, please consider taking out a standing order or increasing your existing one.