# The Christian Community Perspectives

Reenlivening the dying Earth

June-August 2006

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| Julian Sleigh   |     | Subscriptions & Advertisements:   |
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| Tom Ravetz  |     | <b>All correspondence:</b> Perspectives, 22 Baylie Street, Stourbridge DY8 1AZ  |
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# Perspectives

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Concern for the earth is growing on all sides. What can we do to help the environmental crisis? At first viewing, this may seem to be anything other than a religious question. In our age, human beings see a divide between what we do in church or in prayer, and what happens in the "real" world, which we can see with our senses. However, many people are realising that outer changes are not enough to avert the crisis. An inner change of values and orientation is needed if we as a culture are to put ourselves on the side of life, not death. Beyond this, however, even deeper questions need to be answered—questions that touch on the meaning of our existence on the earth. Such questions are best answered when practical life and spiritual insights come together. We hope that the articles in this issue of *Perspectives* serve this purpose.

#### A note on the layout of *Perspectives*

This issue sees the completion of our changes to the layout of *Perspectives*, which started with the redesign of the cover. We have also increased the number of pages in this issue. We are gaining new subscribers, but we always need to find more, and for this we depend on our readers—please recommend *Perspectives* to others who might be interested. Existing subscribers can also give a gift subscription to a new subscriber—see the subscription form at the back of the magazine.

Tom Rayetz

# The Earth—Body of Christ

#### Julian Sleigh

The very last word spoken by Christ before he ascended to Heaven, as recorded in the first chapter of the Acts, was the word 'EARTH'. Far from leaving the Earth, his mission accomplished, and returning to a distant Heaven, he deepened his connection to the Earth through his Ascension, by embracing the whole Earth with his cosmic love, and by having absorbed into himself the being of Jesus: the 40 days that followed the Resurrection were a process of renewal and transformation of Christ-Jesus. Christ had united with Jesus of Nazareth at the Baptism, and at the Resurrection a new process began: instead of the being of Jesus bearing the great Christ, now the Christ could take into himself the form and essence of Jesus. This process took 40 days. And then: expansion into and beyond the clouds, a renewal of the dwelling of the Christ-Jesus in the sphere of the heavens and a new relationship with the Earth, and thereby with human beings and all of nature living on Earth. Again, this is a process that is taking time. 'He will in time unite…' says our Creed. Christ promised to be with humanity

Julian Sleigh, who as priest and lenker helped to pioneer The Christian Community in South Africa, has written a brief biography entitled A Walk through my Life. It is available from Botton Bookshop, Botton Village, Danby, Whitby YO21 2NJ, England or direct from Julian at Camphill Village, P.O. Box 1451, Dassenberg 7350, South Africa. £6 post free.

till the end of time, and called on his disciples to be his witnesses 'to the ends of the Earth'.

So the risen Christ-Jesus now devotes his immense cosmic power, whose essence is the most refined form of love, to penetrating and transforming the Earth. He unites himself with the human beings and with the life-forces of the Earth. Thereby the Earth becomes his Body. From having been the Spirit of the Sun he became the Spirit of the Earth. His mission is to transform the Earth into the bearer of new forces that will radiate through the entire cosmos: the moral forces of freedom and love. He is working within human beings to enable them to carry out this mission with him.

This process is furthered in a direct way through the deeper working of the Transubstantiation in the Sacrament. In enacting the Act of Consecration, human beings co-operate with Christ's own offering in furthering his incarnation as the Body of the Earth.

# Reenlivening the dying earth

**Tom Ravetz** 

Even 20 years ago, it was possible to feel unquestioning faith in the resilience of nature. I remember reading about acid rain in the 1980s, and thinking, 'well at least the oceans can never be spoiled, whatever we do to the land'. Now of course we have heard about the residues of pesticides found in polar bears; the coke bottles in Antarctica. We know that there is nowhere on the earth that is beyond the reach of our pollutants, and of the changes we have made in the earth's atmosphere.

We make up our minds about what is true in the deepest level of our souls. There have been reports in the media about climate change for many years. Until recently it was possible to balance one party against another. Now, there is an overwhelming consensus that the climate has been severely unsettled by the activities of human beings over the last 200 years, although what this will mean precisely is a matter for debate. This consensus of experts has reached the deep layer of feeling within ordinary people, the layer in which they decide what is true. This was confirmed for me when my hairdresser told me she was glad the approaching catastrophes would probably not happen in her lifetime, or her daughter's. I asked what she felt about her granddaughter's life chances, and I told her about William McDonough, the great designer, whose maxim is 'designing for the grandchildren.' She was impressed by that, but still found it comforting to think that she won't be around.

The events of 2005 contributed a great deal to this acceptance of the reality of climate change as something that will have a profound effect on all of us. Hurricane Katrina—the product of incredibly complex systems of the interconnected currents of warm and cold air and water—showed that

we cannot compartmentalise the world. Wherever we are, our weather is shaped by events and human decisions that happen half way round the world. And the Asian Tsunami, although unconnected to climate change, was a vivid demonstration of the flimsiness of human constructions in the face of the devastating forces that can be unleashed by the natural world.

So as we start the new century and the new millennium, we are facing up to serious questions about the future of the natural world that sustains us. This is a very new situation.

Tom Ravetz is a priest of The Christian Community in Stourbridge, UK, and editor of Perspectives.

The fundamental attitude of humanity in the modern period is based on a feeling of independence from nature. Descartes expressed this in his famous separation of the world into res cogitans—the 'thinking thing' ie the human being, and res extensa, the non-thinking thing, that is, the world. Human beings with their minds are unitary and self-determining. Things in the world are made up of many parts and are determined from without. Descartes had a great problem in explaining how the body can be affected by the mind, if they are of such fundamentally different orders of being. The attitude that he expressed, however, was fundamental to the development of civilisation. From the time of the Renaissance, human beings have increasingly seen nature as something to be subjugated and exploited. The development of ever more powerful technologies, which has accelerated progressively, made this subjugation ever more complete. Now we are facing the realisation that our feeling of domination and independence from nature was in fact an illusion. Our status as dependent creatures is bearing in on us again. Some technological supremacists insist that we will be able to master any disaster that befalls us; however, along with growing scepticism about the ability of technology reliably to deliver on such promises, nobody seriously enjoys the prospect of living in a capsule on a life-support machine.

How are we to respond to this? Before asking what we *should* be thinking and feeling, or what action we should be taking, we might take stock of where we are now. It is very interesting to notice that the reactions of many people mirror the five stages of grieving that a dying patient experiences when informed of their terminal prognosis, which Elizabeth Kuebler-Ross identified. These are:

- **D**enial (this isn't *happening* to me!)
- **A**nger (why is this happening to *me*?)
- **B**argaining (I promise I'll be a better person *if...*)
- **D**epression (I don't *care* anymore)
- **A**cceptance (*I'm ready* for whatever comes)

If I look back on my reaction to the reports about climate change over the last decades, I have to acknowledge that my attitude was more or less one of denial. It was too frightening to think that the reports might be true, so it was easier to gamble on their being false. Many people feel such despair that they blank out the scale of the problem. There are particular aspects that pierce the defences. Each one of us probably has some area of the natural world about which they feel particularly concerned. For me it is

the rainforests. I have never visited a rainforest, but somehow their vital importance as lungs for the world, as stores of healing plants and as a supreme example of the generosity and abundance of nature has impressed itself on me. Occasionally I read a report about how much rainforest is destroyed every day, and often I find myself thinking: I can't think about that, I can't go there.

Now that I have started to let the crisis be real for myself, I can easily feel *angry* about the choices made by former generations that have led to this situation. The stage of *bargaining*, which Kuebler-Ross describes, perhaps corresponds to our belated attempts to live ecologically, to take the glass to the recycling depot, for example, feeling that if I do this then I don't need to feel it is all my fault. Then there is *depression*, a feeling of hopelessness. I am not sure how many people have yet achieved a true *acceptance* of the ecological crisis.

It is interesting to find this parallel between stages of grieving and our response to environmental crisis, because it makes it clear that we are responding to a death—the death of a beloved being, of the earth. In fact if we take the parallel exactly, we become aware that we are responding to the death of a part of our own self. This part is our bodies, which belong to the earth.

We know that to respond to things that worry us by blanking them out is unhealthy. In our personal lives, we try to look at uncomfortable thoughts, and go to the places that we want to hide from. We know that if we continually push them away, we will reduce our capacity for living fully. It is a great insight of the new wave of thinking about the ecological crisis that our culture cannot be healthy until we own our pain about what we are doing to the natural world, for two reasons. First, only then will we take whatever action is still possible. Second, and perhaps more important, authors such as Joanna Macy point out that we cannot turn in a holistic way to the earth and our responsibilities to it until we ourselves have become whole. We can't be whole until we acknowledge our despair about the destruction of what is dear to us.

One of the things that stop us from owning our pain is the feeling that the crisis is so huge we cannot encompass it. And it is indeed true that its roots are very deep—as deep as the roots of our culture. The modern capitalist world is based on the exploitation of natural resources which are transformed through manufacture and traded around the world. Through the transformation and trading, value is created, which is expressed in money, not in goods. The disposal of waste and the replenishment of resources

are not included in the picture of value and are not the responsibility of manufacturers. Here I have tried to put in neutral terms the market economic system. When we hear economists talking, we know that they use words in a particular way. However, if we let the words resound as we know them, we come closer to the true situation. *Exploitation* means



Herdsman, Samuel Palmer

abuse. Waste tells us that the process is careless. No responsibility tells us that the process is immoral. If we take something without thinking whether there will be any left for the next person; if we make a quick profit without thought of the mess we make; if we then walk away from the problem, we know that we are acting wrongly. Perhaps it is not surprising that ecologists have called our culture with its rapacity and carelessness a 'death culture.' Really to think this through means understanding the implications of our personal life-choices in a way that is often painful. We can review them and find places where we can reduce our cooperation with the death culture; however, we soon realise the futility of thinking we can remove ourselves from it and live a life in which we can fulfil the aims and ideals we

feel to be important. And at the end of such reflection, we might arrive at the question, what are we trying to save, and why? There was never a fixed state of the earth, which has been lost through our actions, and which was supposed to be preserved eternally. The earth has always been evolving and developing. How long will it be possible to save the state we know, and why should we use our energy for this?

#### A Christian perspective

In the religious world view, the fact of the dying earth can make us ask why the God of life creates a world which is subject to death—a 'dying earth-existence'. In asking this, we take in a far longer perspective than the ecological movement. All the mythologies of the world share a vision of an original paradise, a garden where there is no death. The descent from paradise is a transition into a world where death holds sway. With this transition goes an awakening. We know ourselves that pain makes us conscious; the pain of death makes us most conscious of all. It is only when we give something up that we realise what we have lost. So it seems that for the development of consciousness, a dying earth is necessary.

In the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15, the younger son experiences in the famine a reflection of his wasteful and destructive path. The experience of being close to death makes him wake up to his situation, and decide to be a contributor to the world of his father, from which he arrogantly took his share of the paternal 'substance'. The father's reaction

of extravagant welcome shows that the son's near-death experience has made him into a person. The path to true personhood lies through destruction. From a spiritual perspective we can see our present situation as the latest scene in the tremendously risky yet creative drama that started with the Fall of Man. The illusion of freedom from the world, even from the body; the ruthless exploitation of the substance given to us—all this has created the culture in which humanity can come to maturity.



Early Morning, Samuel Palmer

After receiving baptism in the Jordan, which made a ritual of the process of dying and coming to consciousness, the crowds asked John 'what then must we do?' We are in the midst of a kind of humanity-wide baptism. We have seen how the awareness brought about by the ecological movement can help us. We can learn to think ever-more inclusively. Our pain about the earth can be a good guide. If we find ourselves shrinking from some image of the destruction, or of the consequences of something we are doing, we might develop the habit of looking particularly closely. We can cooperate with the efforts to change the 'death culture' wherever we can.

However, the Christian task goes further than avoiding destruction, and than confronting what we fear, however vital these activities may be. It is summed up in some famous words of St. Paul. They present the picture of the 'dying earth', and its counterpart: resurrection. This begins in the 'sons of God'—that is, human beings who have achieved their divine destination, and continues with their work to liberate creation from the bondage of transitory beng—of death.

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to transitory being, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in the travail of delivery until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (Romans 8: 19-23)

It is remarkable that this aspect of Christ's healing work, the salvation of the earth, received hardly any attention in the first 20 centuries of the Christian church. Initially, Christians saw salvation in terms of Christ's struggle with the adversary forces. Later, images of the restoration of human beings' relationship with God became central—the ideas of justification and 'penal substitution'. Most recently, from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, salvation came to be seen as a more internal, personal matter: Christ lived a perfect human life which could inspire human beings to follow him. It is only from the 20<sup>th</sup> century that attention has begun to be focussed on what is usually called the 'cosmic' Christ—cosmic here meaning in and of the world. However, much of the emphasis here has been on the creation, not on the resurrection.

What then does it mean that the earth is to be reenlivened through human beings — to be released from its bondage to futility? It means far more than conserving nature. As those who are on the side of life, we will of course seek not to accelerate the dying of the earth. But reenlivening is more than conserving, or indeed recycling. It means bringing what has died to new life: to resurrection. And it is no coincidence that human beings, the heirs of freedom, the main actors in the risky drama of the dying earth, are the only ones who can bring new life to the earth. The Hassidic Jews believed that by our handling the earth with reverence and love, we release the forces that are trapped within matter—that sparks of the divine light can be freed to fly up to God again. We can experience something of this by noticing the difference it makes when our eyes are opened for the wealth of what we experience, for instance on a walk through a summer meadow with a friend who can show us how the different plants grow, where the water table is high or low, and so on. In seeing the world, we release the beings that have been trapped in too solid form in the dying earth. In taking earthly substance and transforming it into art, we also come close to the mystery of reenlivening. In the December-February issue of *Perspectives* this year, Deborah Ravetz wrote about the artist Dominique Mazeaud and her project to make exhibitions from garbage found in the Rio Grande River. In her diary, Mazeaud describes how her attitude gradually changed from a rather self-righteous environmentalism to something far more prayerful:

All alone in the river, I pray and pick up, pick up and pray. Who can I really talk to about what I see? I feel the pain quietly, knowing that I too must have been unconscious at one time.

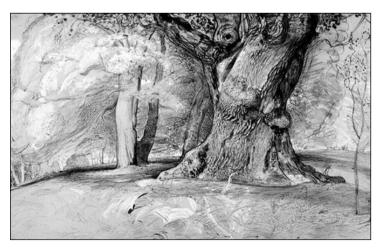
A friend compares Mazeaud's project with the story of Isis who must gather together the dismembered pieces of her murdered husband's body in

order to bring him back to life. What is important about the project is that it springs out of empathy with the earth. The longer Mazeaud continued with it, the more people she met and the more joined her in praying and gathering together the garbage so unconsciously thrown into the water.

*The Reenchantment of Art* Suzi Gablik Thames & Hudson, London and New York, 1991

Here, the work of a sincerely seeking artist becomes takes on a mythical, sacramental quality. Of course it is worthwhile removing the unloved refuse of human beings from the river, from a purely physical, environmental point of view. The action has a far deeper significance than that. It becomes a prophetic enactment of recreation, of the resurrection of the earth.

In the sacramental life itself, the body of the earth is permeated by the resurrection body. The substances of bread and wine stand for all earthly substance. When they are elevated and taken into the life of Christ, with them a part of the earth is brought to new life. When the congregation goes out into the world after having received communion, they bear the resurrected earth within them. We can imagine their footsteps leading away from the church, imprinting the ground with what they have received. Such an image makes it possible for us to reach the 5<sup>th</sup> stage of the grieving process, which Elizabeth Kuebler-Ross described: acceptance. This is no passive resignation; rather, we can accept the reality of the situation without flinching because we see its place in the development of the world. We see too where we can help to redeem it, letting its deeper meaning shine forth. We can accept the reality of the dying earth, because we know that we are engaged in its reenlivening.



Oak Tree and Beech, Lullingstone Park, Samuel Palmer

# Ecology, Compassion and the Future of the Earth

#### Bernard Jarman

Grasping what is meant by the statement 'the earth is the body of Christ' is no easy task since it relies on religious faith and a belief system based on Christianity. If however the death and resurrection of Christ 2000 years ago was the physical and spiritual event which changed the course of evolution, then it must be possible to think through and experience the consequences of what occurred. Instead of approaching this subject from a theological or religious point of view however, I would like to tackle it from quite another angle.

For the last few hundred years our planet has been considered to be a globe of rock rotating round the sun in a vast empty space. The earth has been thought of as a lifeless ball with a molten core. By some chance of evolution during the course of untold ages of time certain chemical substances close to its surface began to develop into the life forms we know today. Life is thus seen as a mere chance occurrence in a multi-million year process and therefore of no particular relevance to the greater scheme of things.

It is extraordinary that such a view of life, which in its ambition to provide a framework that explains everything, seems almost like a religious worldview, could have been believed at least superficially for so long. Right up until the 1960's this was how our earth was considered in orthodox science. Gradually however another perception began to take root in wider circles and the new science of ecology was born. Moving beyond the simplistic view of competition and survival of the fittest as the driving power of evolution, a web of interrelationships was discovered that exists between living organisms and with their surroundings. Perhaps a crucial turning point occurred when the first astronauts were able to look back at the earth from space and see with human eyes how precious and unique it is. Nothing in the vast enormity of space can be compared with the wonder and beauty of this one great jewel of creation.

The earth is today increasingly being seen as a whole interrelated living organism. Every part of the earth's geography is essential for the well being of the whole. The rain forest has been described as the lungs of the earth

and without the desert regions the rainfall patterns in the temperate zones would be very different. There is a fine balance between climate, vegetation and animal life across the world which is constantly adapting and readjusting itself. As a living entity, the earth has always been able to accommodate change but the current speed of change and scale of exploitation may be more than the earth can cope with.

A central principle of biodynamic farming is connected with understanding the living nature of the earth. However, it also goes beyond this. In addition to the world of living processes, it includes soul and spiritual aspects. 'A farm is true to its essential nature' said Rudolf Steiner in lecture II of the Agriculture Course 'if it is conceived of as a self-contained individuality'. This means on an agricultural level that all the compost and manures required for fertilising the soil as well as all the feedstuffs needed for cows, sheep, pigs etc. should ideally originate from the farm itself. A healthy farm should be able to produce everything it needs to support its own life. Anything bought in from outside is then used like a remedy to treat a farm organism which is not quite in balance. Although hard to achieve in an absolute sense this is the ideal towards which every biodynamic farmer aspires.

The importance of this for the whole well being of the farm can be appreciated by picturing to oneself some of the processes occurring on the farm over two, three or more years.

Imagine how throughout the summer a herd of cows is grazing on the farm's pastures and in the winter is feeding on the hay harvested from the farm's meadows. This means that in the course of one whole year the ani-

mals will have been eating vegetation growing on a large part of the farm's area. Inside the animal organism this plant material is digested, broken down and permeated by the cow's own inner activity or one might say by its astral or soul forces. What is not required by the animal for its own nourishment is then excreted and returned to the land as manure to feed the living organisms of the soil. This in turn stimulates the plants growing in it to develop in a strong and healthy way. What the animals have eaten, transformed and permeated with 'astral' qualities is given over to the earth. The plants thus enriched provide fodder and grazing for the cows in the following year and so the cycle continues. Gradually as the years go by soil, plant and animal adapt ever more closely to one another. The

Bernard Jarman is the Executive Director of the Biodynamic Agricultural Association and also works as gardener at Hawkwood College. He lives in Stroud and has a long connection with anthroposophy and the Camphill movement. quality of the grass in the fields begins to accord exactly with the nutritional needs of the livestock and the animals in their turn provide the soil with the specific quality of manure needed to enhance its vitality. This ever closer kinship between soil, plant and animal strengthens the immune system of the whole farm and leads to greater biodiversity and site adaptation.

Nor is the human being entirely outside this system for this individualisation of a piece of land is only possible through the intervention of Man. The farm individuality is a reflection of the human individuality directing it and is something unique to our age. In all previous ages mankind was led and guided from without. Now inner individual self-direction is called for. In the Christian world, Christ is acknowledged as the teacher of this individual path of love and responsibility.

Living with the thought that through the deed on Golgotha, Christ united himself with the earth, it follows that he has thereby become the spirit of the earth. If Christ is indeed the spirit of the earth, then everything we do with and to the planet is being done to His body. The body of Christ therefore must include everything which makes our physical existence on earth possible. It is up to us to either use or abuse it. We can work towards achieving well being and wholeness or we can work destructively.

In every small aspect of our lives today we are asked to become conscious of what effect our chosen lifestyles have upon the fabric of the earth. The use of a car and its effect on global warming is an obvious one. But our consciousness needs to extend right into every aspect of the way we spend our money too. Buying biodynamic food not only helps to ensure a healthier diet. It also helps maintain the livelihood of the farmers producing it and enables that area of farmland to be well cared for. Buying locally means that food miles are reduced and the local economy is supported while seeking out fair trade products means that producers in third world countries are receiving a fair price. These are just three of many possibilities for making positive consumer choices.

Our planet is threatened as never before. Forests and whole ecosystems are disappearing at an alarming rate, global warming has become a reality and the areas suitable for growing crops are rapidly shrinking. Yet humanity depends on this earth. We rely on her for food, clothing and shelter and yet all too often permit the acquisition of consumer goods and luxuries to take precedence.

In addition to our physical well being are needs which concern universal human values, our cultural inheritance and opportunities for individual empowerment. Seldom do we reflect on how much we owe to the earth

for the richness and diversity of human culture as it is expressed right across the planet. Our inheritance is born of the soil. Right up until the twentieth century civilisations evolved their unique characteristics on the basis of the particular geographical and soil conditions under which they lived. A culture can vary greatly depending on whether people live close to the sea, in the forest or on a continental plain. More subtle differences also play a part such as the quality of light, the nature of the geology or the play of the elements etc. Indigenous peoples retain such an intimate connection to their ancestral lands that their culture still lives and breathes with its spirit.

Sadly in our sophisticated, materialistic age, we have lost much of our connection to the earth. Human beings living and working in cities have lost their connection to those living and working in the countryside, land activity has been devalued and the human spirit impoverished.

It is five years now since the fear of Foot and Mouth Disease wrought havoc in the British countryside. It was a disaster from which the farming community has yet fully to recover. It was also unnecessary and it exemplified a massive disrespect for life. For largely economic reasons a state sponsored killing machine swept through the country. Nor is this an isolated phenomenon. The supposedly imminent bird flu epidemic could spark off another killing spree. Animals have become mere production machines and if they don't function as they should they are ruthlessly disposed of.

Plant life too is under attack through the use of extremely violent attempts to manipulate the genetic make up of our food plants. Genetic modification is not an exact science. For every successful gene transfer thousands of unsuccessful ones have to be discarded. The scientific case against GM crops is growing stronger by the day and trials repeatedly show that serious side effects can occur as a result of consuming food containing genetically modified material.

More recently there has been the tragic case of the drug test volunteers in London who became critically ill after being treated with a new drug despite its previous tests on animals having had no harmful effect. This drug was not an inorganic chemical compound, but a bio-medicine, a humanised protein genetically engineered to overcome rejection by the human organism! Like GM crops, GM medicines have unknown and potentially disastrous side effects for which unfortunately there is far less public awareness.

A few years ago a great manifesto for the earth was put together known as 'The Earth Charter'. It begins:

We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise. To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations.

A further paragraph reads:

The choice is ours: form a global partnership to care for Earth and one another or risk the destruction of ourselves and the diversity of life. Fundamental changes are needed in our values, institutions, and ways of living. We must realize that when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more. We have the knowledge and technology to provide for all and to reduce our impacts on the environment. The emergence of a global civil society is creating new opportunities to build a democratic and humane world. Our environmental, economic, political, social, and spiritual challenges are interconnected, and together we can forge inclusive solutions.'

The creation of this charter was the result of a worldwide working together of people deeply concerned about the future. It expresses an ethos of universal humanity. Perhaps this reflects the thought that for Christians the earth is the body of Christ.

Note:

The Biodynamic Agricultural Association in partnership with the Eden Project and the Soil Association is planning a conference on 'Land and Spirit' later in the year. The ideals expressed in the Earth Charter stand behind this proposed conference which will attempt to bridge the growing chasm that exists between human beings and the earth. The aim will be to reinforce the importance of land and farming for our culture, recognise its inherent spirit and wake up to our responsibilities as individuals towards the earth. The conference will be held at the Eden Project in Cornwall 10<sup>th</sup> –11<sup>th</sup> November 2006. More information about this is available from the

# A Life Stripped Bare

**Kevin Street** 

A few years ago, at the Annual Community Meeting held at West London, I remember, on some pretext, that I waxed lyrical that each centre of The Christian Community should, amongst other things, become a 'beacon of sustainable excellence.' I suppose that I had in mind that we should only buy Ecover cleaning products, and that we should compost our herbal tea bags. Such simplistic notions are well and truly laid to rest by Leo Hickman's book, 'A Life Stripped Bare', in which he chronicles a year spent trying to live in an ethical, concerned way, paying due regard to the environmental impact he has in his London home, together with his wife, and during the course of the year, his newly born daughter.

That Leo Hickman is a *Guardian* journalist might just place him in a different position from lesser mortals, and the fact that his attempts to tiptoe 'through the ethical minefield' attract the attentions of three invited 'ethical auditors' instil his attempts with a rigour that we might be tempted to ignore in our own strivings. The bulk of his book appeared as a weekly column, and so the myriad of letters quoted arose through his ongoing heart-baring as he attempts, with his somewhat sceptical partner, to do the 'right thing' for our beleaguered planet.

The three ethical auditors, who pop up frequently in his life a little like modern day versions of Macbeth's 'weird sisters', represent all that is vital in today's ethical consumer society. The first is a journalist from the bimonthly magazine *Ethical Consumer*, which aims to inform its readers about 'social and environmental impacts of products, and ethical records of companies that make them.' The second is the campaigns director of Friends of the

Earth, whilst the third is a council member of the Soil Association, and founder of the London chain of 'Planet Organic' shops. That the three frequently seem to disagree over just what is the 'right' way adds grist to the mill, together with Leo's partner, who at times is less than enthusiastic about his crusade to do the right thing for the planet.

All aspects of their life are scrutinised, from the moment of the inaugural lunch when the auditors visit, through to Leo's attempts to find out how he might help his local community. Food miles and food additives start to nudge their weekly Kevin Street
is a member of
The Christian
Community and
Subscriptions
Manager of
Perspectives

shopping as they try to buy local organic produce, baulking at the cost of organic bacon at £17.99 a kilo, as opposed to the 'normal' costing £ 3.23 a kilo. The contents of his dustbin are followed from the dust cart through to the landfill site, and a wormery is set up to take care of household waste. The family holiday is circumscribed by an attempt to eliminate air miles, and notions of eco-tourism are explored. Leo is questioned in a local chemist's shop when he tries to buy bicarbonate of soda in bulk in order to rationalise household cleaning (apparently, drug dealers use this to bulk out the substances they sell.) No corner of his life is left undisturbed—his choice of paint, his use of MDF, the clothes he buys, and the bank accounts he uses—all are placed under the magnifying glass of the three auditors, and generally found to be wanting.

At the end of the book, his greatest achievement is to have survived the year without car ownership, but much else seems to hang in the balance. And after reading the book, many of our questions remain unanswered. I felt a particular relevance for our task to become active in 're-enlivening the dying earth existence,' in something written by one of the many contributors to Hickman's weekly column:

'My essential point is that if you get the 'people thing' right—that is, if people feel truly valued and cared for, treated as precious and not themselves bought and sold as units of economic production—then the 'environment thing' resolves itself as a natural by product of people treating their surroundings well because they themselves are treated well.'

We know full well that if we boycott certain products, then those who are exploited in their production will suffer even more because what little they have will be taken from them. Ultimately, nothing more than a total shift in our consciousness and values will alter the ethical basis on which Western consumerism is based. Real education—that which is based on how we know the learning potential of each person can be maximised—is what is called for. This is an education that will take all that is known about the brain and its development with an emotionally strong heart, and will produce a generation that is able to think and feel in an ethical way out of its own being, not out of an externally imposed 'do good' regime.

Interestingly, a few weeks ago another 'Guardian' journalist, Julie Bindel, wrote under the title 'A diet of prejudice' about the stark choices facing families on tight budgets—processed cheese slices at 50p, or unpasteurised, organic goat's cheese at five times the price? She throws down the challenge to the Hickmans and all those who can afford the luxury of choice—

'Is the person who shops within a tight budget and buys cheap battery chicken a bad parent?'

Leo Hickman's book certainly makes worthwhile reading for anyone who feels uneasy about the way we consume, but it only scratches the surface. The biggest questions about how we might save and renew our earth existence are asked—and answered—elsewhere.

Leo Hickman, *A Life Stripped Bare*, Eden Project Books, 2005, ISBN 1 903 91960 6

the white flowers open early they bare their hearts before the leaves appear daring to give their beauty to the world as it is

and it is what carries us too into the fragility of our humanness

to explore
to go out to the outermost edge
and then come back again to find
a place where you feel you can do
what you came here to do

let us risk remembering this

and we would open and open and open to all that we are

LUCY TREVITT

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## **Ordination in Chicago**

#### Melissa Kay

For the first time in the United States and for only the second time on the continent of North America, the Ordination, the Act of Consecration of a Priest, was celebrated in Chicago on April 1, 2006 for Patrick Kennedy. Rev. Kennedy will now serve the congregation in Devon, Pennsylvania.

Ready to be ordained with a group of seven other individuals in Berlin, on the weekend March 11/12<sup>th</sup>, he was asked to step out of his group to allow friends and members in North America to witness this sacrament.

Approximately 200 friends, members

Melissa Kay is a member of the San Francisco congregation. and priests came together from across the continent and from

Germany in a mood of great anticipation, excitement and joy to participate in this event, which is of such deep significance for the Movement for Religious Renewal in North America and for the seminary in Chicago, now in its third year. No one who has begun his or her training in Chicago is so far ready for ordination. So it was significant for all who attended to witness the destination of priest training, now that we have a seminary in the English speaking world.

In addition to 20 North American priests, who held their spring synod the week before, five from Germany were also present: Rev. Vicke von Behr, the Erzoberlenker, who celebrated the ordination; Rev. Christward Kröner, representing the

Circle of Seven; Rev. Carola Gerhard, a director of the Stuttgart seminary, where Patrick studied; Rev. Rudolf Sudbrack of Bonn, where Patrick did his practical; and Rev. Inken Kölmel.

The community gathered in Chicago was prepared on Friday evening by Rev. Julia Polter, who described in a warm and sometimes personal way the paradoxical mood of courage and humility of one approaching priesthood, and by Rev. Richard Dancey, who outlined the sacrament itself as taking place in three stages of four steps each, all carried out within the context of the Act of Consecration of Man.

These stages follow a prayer that God will hinder anyone from taking up this task who is not yet ready, who is not worthy. In the first stage, the candidate receives the stole and, with it, the power to become a proclaimer of the Gospel. In the second, the candidate—having been asked if he feels the seriousness, the earnestness of this path of becoming, and having answered 'yes'—is anointed on his forehead, the backs of both hands, and on this head. and receives in chasuble, the vestment of the Act of Consecration of Man. The words spoken when the three crosses are made are then spoken by celebrant, candidate and server, and the response, 'yea, so be it,' by the celebrant, the server, and then by all the ordained priests together. The third and final stage, following the transubstantiation, is the 'sending forth' enacted through a laying on of hands by the celebrant on the head and over the heart of the one being ordained, who is

admonished that he is to do nothing without awareness of the presence of Christ. The celebrant then circles all the ordained priests, silently carrying the chalice and paten with the transformed substances around them. The process concludes with an address by the celebrant to the congregation who are asked to acknowledge as priest this one who has been so acknowledged by the spirit of our community, and a further warning that this ordination will have a real future only if the new priest works out of the Spirit of Christ and if all who acknowledge him follow him with help to do this.

For many who came, this was our first opportunity to experience the sacrament of ordination—the founding sacrament of the Movement for Religious Renewal, as was illuminated by Rev. von Behr in his address on Sunday morning. In group reflections on its after-image, following the ordination, people spoke of courage, tenderness, power, deep joy. Some smiled throughout, some wept, all felt the profound earnestness of the event. Many felt their relationship to The Christian Community and to their own destiny transformed as they witnessed the step by step consecration of this one individual, empowering him to fulfil the Act of Consecration of Man for and with all who acknowledge in freedom his priesthood, his consecration to this task.

Of special joy on this weekend was the presence of so many young people, further strengthening the sense of hope for the future of the Movement for Religious Renewal inspired by this event. A beautiful programme of artistic offerings concluded the program on Saturday, ending



Patrick Kennedy (right) after the Ordination with the choral singing of 'Harmony of the Stars' by some thirty former campers, youth conference participants, camp counsellors, friends and fellow students of Patrick. Indeed it did seem that the heavens opened on this weekend; may the joy within our hearts continue to ring.

Following the ordination festivities, the baptism of a young soul received into the Christ Community seemed a fitting closure for this weekend with one newborn extending a hand to another newborn.

Late Sunday evening heavy thunderstorms in and around Chicago led to some flight cancellations. One young person to whom this happened, returned to the church and said: I was the only happy person in a long line of very disgruntled travellers. It now allows me to do what I really wanted all along, to be present at Patrick's first celebration of the Act of Consecration of Man in the morning.

# Learning to perceive the supersensible Religious renewal in the age of dying churches

#### **Georg Dreissig**

## Between a science which discourages the asking of questions...

One can live quite well without answers, but one can't really live without questions. If we cannot find the questions that really touch our existence, the quality of our life, indeed even life itself is threatened. The most sophisticated intelligence is often coupled with the most naive ignorance. Given our need to know the exact basis for our decisions in most areas of life, it is astonishing that many people today do not try to gain even a rudimentary insight into life's most essential questions.

This can be seen most clearly in relation to death and dying. Medical science can draw upon a huge arsenal of equipment to fight against impending death, but it lacks understanding of what this fight is actually about, what death and dying really mean. We live with a science whose achievements and technical accomplishments prove to be extremely helpful in many areas of our lives. However, with the problems that press on us most painfully—destitution, illness and death, we are

Georg Dreissig
is a priest of
The Christian
Community in
Stuttgart, Germany,
and editor of
Die Christengemeinschaft.

left to our own devices. Science does not admit that it knows no answers to these questions; it simply denies that they are real questions. Science does not state: 'We don't know what death is,' but arrogantly declares: 'It does not make sense to ask this question.'

# ...and a church which weakens the power of faith

Once we notice this state of affairs, it is easy to find the place where the questions usually come to an end. It is that place where our normal process of knowing—of finding concepts for what we perceive—reaches its limits. Of course, this is the very place where it would be most important to continue with our questions, because only by continuing might we hope to widen our perception and understanding so that they reach into the worlds beyond this boundary.

This does not mean developing the otherworldliness of hippies and dreamers. It is an appeal to all people of our time to realize that a part of our self dwells in a world that is inaccessible to our senses. We won't be able to get to know our whole self if we allow our field of perception to be limited by intellectual prejudice.

The reason that human beings stop asking questions when they reach this threshold—the threshold where we have to create our own perceptions in addition to those given to us by nature—has to do with the attitude of the church to these profound questions. For centuries the church governed the relationship of the faithful here on earth to the kingdom of God. This was done with the sacra-

ments which, provided they were given in the right way, united the heavenly and the earthly worlds. It was not necessary for believers to understand how this worked.

Today we can see the results of this quite clearly in our natural assumption that there is a contradiction between 'knowing' and 'believing' 'Believing' has become synonymous with 'not knowing'. In our time nobody is interested in things that cannot be known, and rightly so. However, it can be demonstrated easily that the contradiction between knowledge and belief is only apparent. Somebody getting out of bed may say: 'I believe the sun is shining' before having a look out of the window. His 'belief' is a mild assumption of truth. Once he has confirmed to himself, by looking out of the window, that the sun indeed is shining, his belief will not disappear; on the contrary, it will become irreversible. Knowledge has given security to the belief.

Faith is by no means merely a weaker counterpart to knowledge. It is the fundamental power of the human soul to experience with complete certainty that its own existence is a part of divine creativity. Today, the secure foundations for life that really deserve the name 'faith' come from our knowledge, our urge to find out and to ask questions, which is always ready to revise its assumptions in the light of experience. The greatest problem of our time is that this urge to know has grown weak. Lack of orientation, insecurity and loss of meaning are the widespread and debilitating consequences.

We feel shocked to discover that many questions are not asked because the church reserved the right to give answers for so long. Now that the church is respected less and less as an institution, these questions too are dismissed with a strange logic that says: 'If I know that the church is irrelevant, I don't need to concern myself with the question of death any more.' Even if the churches are dying, the questions surely don't have to as well!

In fact, we might think that the opposite would be true: 'If I know that the church is irrelevant, should I not concern myself all the more with the problem of death and all the other questions of life, which were reserved for the church for so long?' The role of the church could then change as well. Its task should not be to provide answers, but rather to help individuals to find the right questions in their own search for answers, so that they lead their lives responsibly, trusting in God.

# The ministry of the priest and the priesthood of all believers

The Christian Community therefore has a new approach to the ministry. The sacraments are not held in order to give answers that come from a higher realm inaccessible to the congregation. They are no longer intended to relieve the individual of his or her responsibility; rather they seek to awaken a sense of responsibility, by offering new concepts for the mind and a new direction for the will to engage rightly in every situation in life.

This has significant consequences. The effectiveness of the sacraments is not limited to their being celebrated through a priest; it continues within each member of the congregation, in their questioning and searching. The sacrament is not only to affect them in a dreamy, unconscious way, but its effect continues into their conscious feeling of responsibility. This is where the much-quoted phrase 'the priesthood of all

believers' becomes reality. The christening of a child, the confirmation of a youth, or the marriage of a couple concern not only those in the centre of the sacramental act, but they bring form into the social circle around this centre, so that the sacramental blessing can become a reality. In other words, the participants carry the blessing received from the sacrament and take on the lay-priestly task and responsibility so that the blessing can continue to stream into the life of the child to be baptised, the confirmand, or the married couple.

The new impulse that The Christian Community has to bring into the stream of church history has not yet been sufficiently recognized. The old concepts and ideas of sacrament, church and priesthood are a hindrance in appreciating the revolutionary newness of its sacraments, and because of this we have as yet only made small beginnings in allowing their special blessing to flow into the world. We have not yet got very far on the path of developing the priesthood of all believers. We might wonder: Will we manage to take hold of the renewal that comes through The Christian Community, will we become open to the healing activity which streams from the sphere of Christ and wants to embrace us, which wants to bring healing beyond the sacraments right into a renewal of the social order? Or will these possibilities pass unnoticed and unused, because they could not be distinguished clearly enough from the forms that belonged to an earlier age?

# Changes in perception and forming of concepts

Anyone wants to find the best way of supporting the work with the renewed sacraments which is cultivated in The Christian Community might want to consider some of the preconditions.

First we need not only to recognize but also to accept our own initial blindness and deafness regarding the content of the services. Only if you know that you are not yet able to see all that there is to see, will you be open to developing your senses. Only if you know that you don't yet understand everything that happens and is said during the service will you make an effort to gain a deeper insight.

We are used to our senses functioning without any effort on our part. We see what we receive through them as 'reality'. When we approach the services, this attitude is inadequate. Here, what our senses perceive is only the starting point. We need to go beyond it into a realm that lies beyond the senses. In this realm we need to learn how to perceive a priest clothed in white garments not only with our eyes but with our soul, to give but one example. As long as we *only* perceive with our eyes, our ears, our noses, the reality of the service remains veiled.

How can we learn to perceive the colours, the sounds, the fragrances in such a way that our ordinary seeing, hearing and smelling expands into other realms? In the context of this article, we can only say: by asking questions and by being prepared to follow wherever the answers take us. Whoever submits to this process will notice that he or she gradually starts to gain new experiences.

In order to be able fully to partake in the sacraments one needs to observe a second precondition. It has to do with how we deal with the words which are spoken. These words are not intended to give us instruction, but they are intended to give direction

to our questioning listening. We should resist wanting to understand them quickly. We do not gain much by defining a phrase such as 'ground of the world' intellectually. Much rather, we can feel our way into its meaning, allowing its very unfamiliarity to help us to listen again and again to the world which opens up through the sacraments. If we are prepared to bear with our initial incomprehension, we will be able to listen without prejudice. The words do far more than transmit a fixed concept; they can become themselves a listening organ.

Those who succeed in this will realize how many phrases reveal more and more through repeated contemplation. They lead to a deeper understanding and a kind of 'tuning in'. When we control our urge immediately to find the relevant concept for every experience, we make space for a quiet empathy. In this space of empathy, as time goes on, we realize that the service is that which it seeks to communicate; it is not a question of 'finding out' what it means, but of letting it be what it is .

And finally we need to observe a third precondition for working with the renewed sacraments. We need to be aware that in the services there is nothing that seeks to influence the will of the participants unconsciously or magically, which would mean curtailing their freedom of action.

The feeling of being left free may be felt as one's relationship with the sacraments deepens. One starts to recognize in the words and actions of the celebrant one's own intentions and impulses of will. In everthing that eyes and ears take in, our innermost being—with all its shortcomings and with all its priestly sovereignty—is being revealed.

If we can free ourselves in our perception and thinking from what is familiar to us, and if we can feel the free space that is opened up through the services, we are ready not only to experience the forces of renewal which want to flow into the world through the sacraments, but to become active ourselves.

# An appeal to support an important initiative

#### Clifford Paterson

Quite a few years back I read an article by The Christian Community Priest Pearl Goodwin about the passion and resurrection—in it she described a new approach to Lent. Rather than the sacrifice of denial—one could sacrifice by giving something more—extending one's consciousness rather than depriving it. I like this idea and have been using it ever since.

Who would have thought that all these years ago that I would experience these

strong heart forces in the middle of Columbia (Columba—the white dove of peace)—a country renowned the world over for the dark forces that ripple out and contaminate the world!

My journalist friend Geoff Hill and I set out on an amazing adventure to drive two motor cycles along the Pan American Highway from Chile to Alaska—for three main reasons(apart from the obvious). Geoff would write the story daily for

a syndicate of newspapers and publish a book (his 4<sup>th</sup>) about the trip; I would have a short sabbatical from Camphill and Lyre projects, and we would raise funds for the charity organization *www.soschild-rensvillages* who provide community life and education for orphans worldwide—but especially here in South and central America.

Clifford Paterson is a member of The Christian Community in Mourne Grange, Ireland. I live and work in Camphill Community Mourne Grange, also a center for The Christian Community in Northern Ireland and at 49 years old

was wondering what this new threshold period would bring? This trip would possibly allow the next life phase to unfold.

Of course at this time many questions arise, including one's connection to Camphill, Anthroposophy and The Christian Community.

Just as I left for this trip a friend gave me this wonderful quotation: 'A journey is best measured in friends rather than miles'—how true that was to become!

As I sit here in the sanctum of the half-built anthroposophically designed Christian Community building in Cali, Columbia—6000 miles from home and surrounded by like minded souls—it awoke in me the strong feeling of karma and sense of belonging that I have experienced since becoming involved with anthroposophical initiatives. 'Mi Amigo' Geoff had fallen badly from his motor cycle about 60 miles into Columbia from the Ecuadorian border—not really a great thing to do considering all the stories we had been told time and time again about

Columbia-Mafia, kidnapping, robbers behind every banana tree! We were two solitary figures in the middle of the cloud forest in the Columbian Andes—one with a badly bruised body and broken motor cycle that was not traveling any further that day.

Instead of being robbed at gunpoint we were instantly surrounded by concerned, helpful drivers who stopped to offer assistance. Ten policemen with machine guns arrived on the scene, stopped the first empty truck that was going to Cali and loaded broken Geoff and broken bike into the back—and with the promise of payment of some kind, we set off for Cali, the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest city in Columbia which lay 6 hours away through looping, winding hairpin bends and some of the most exotic scenery in the world.

I followed on my motor cycle, worried about Geoff, yet luxuriating in the fact that he was alive and that I was passing tropical landscapes , huge waterfalls and cowboys waving as they rounded up their cattle for the night.

Darkness fell and driving in Columbia in the dark definitely is not recommended not for the faint hearted!

Before I left home two connections made in South America were, Jimena Lopez, an ex camphill co-worker from Lima, Peru and Emilia Hosmann, Christian Community Priest.—Cali, Columbia! Having spent 3 interesting days in Lima, and after visiting an amazing craft project in the slums there—we were now very grateful to have a contact in Columbia. Due to modern internet technology Emilia was expecting us that afternoon—of course the accident turned our world and schedule upside down! In darkest night, and weary with

travel, we arrived in the huge sprawling city of Cali—notorious for crime—to find our address did not correspond to Emilia's instructions of how to get there; plus the phone number we had was wrong! Stuck in this big city, at night, with an incredibly patient Columbian truck driver; we eventually found what was the wrong address—but was the previous headquarters of The Christian Community—so a man on the street told us!

This man on the street called his friend, whose wife just happened to have an old lyre—along with the correct telephone number for Emilia Hosmann and The Christian Community. Weary but grateful, we finally arrived at the door of this huge, Goetheanum style building, still under construction, to be met by a whole bunch of excited, understanding and helpful members of The Christian Community Cali, Columbia.

Back to the point of Lent and giving more of yourself:- Emilia Hosmann opened her heart to us, welcomed us with open arms despite the fact that we arrived in the middle of the night, in a truck with a broken motor cycle dripping oil everywhere and a wounded soul dripping blood everywhere. Challenging this day certainly had been—but we knew that the angels would watch over us this night—in Columbia.

The morning light grew stronger as did our appreciation and admiration for the work that is happening here. The spirit that lives in this place is overwhelming and I would recommend anyone to make a pilgrimage here. The initiative is truly a light in the darkness—and how it glows.

Emilia has an incredible energy, which sustains the work—at 60 years young no mean achievement. Alongside her the an-

throposophical impulse is mainly driven by the anthroposophical Architect, Enrique Castro, and his wife, Silvia and a small group of dedicated people.

The building itself was started in 2002 and could well be finished by 2007. Constructed on anthroposophical principles with materials 'típico' of the region, it is an engineer's and builder's nightmare. The basis for the structure is 7 years old mature bamboo poles (grown on Enrique's land) and wattle and daub walls made from a mixture of mud, straw, and only 5% cement. It is really two buildings which connect organically and are shared by the local anthroposophical initiative and The Christian Community—both which have many, many enthusiastic and dedicated members.

A group of faithful builders arrive daily at 7am and work until 5pm, stopping only for the compulsory siesta at noon. Enrique the architect overviews the work along with Emilia who has her apartment here in the Christian Community building; supported by local engineer Agustín Escandón, who has grown to love and appreciate the challenge of Anthroposophical design. Enrique founded his experience on designing and building the Cali Waldorf school (500 pupils)—which is another phenomenon of this city. Set in a verdant landscape, with views of the cordillera—I know many Waldorf teachers who would love to have an atmosphere like this to work in. Every detail has been carefully dedicated to the well-being and education of the children.

There exists a great family connection between the school, Christian Community and Anthroposophical impulse. The building already is alive with teacher's seminar, Eurythmy, study groups, lectures, music, singing, and three Services every week—plus children's service.

In the short time that I have had the privilege to be here I have witnessed the reality of Christian renewal, a resurrection and passion for the good amidst the chaos and dark forces of the drug capital of the world.

Something completely new and exciting is manifesting itself here; it is so far away from the influence and borders of the Old Testament ways—and yet the whole movement here is based on the very ideals and indications that Rudolf Steiner made manifest for interested peoples worldwide whatever their creed, blood or colour.

To wander round this glorious temple, built on 5 levels to anthroposophical design, constructed with huge geometrically formed bamboo pillars to create a living building is such an inspiration. I would like to appeal to anyone, anywhere who has Anthroposophy in their heart to support this light shining gloriously out of one of the darkest holes on earth today.

#### Please send your donation to:

Christian Community, Cali, Columbia c/o Emilia Hosmann, Carrera 41 # 7—10, Los Cámbulos, Cali, Valle, COLOMBIA, Tel fax. +572 551 3468, emiliahosmann@ telesat.com.co

# George Matheson: the blind seer of Scotland

#### **Alan Stott**

George MATHESON (1842–1906) is a writer who makes you think. His language, however, is conversational, not intellectually daunting yet demanding your strictest attention. Earlier in his career, this vibrant Scottish minister wrote philosophical, historical, and ethical theology. He entered into the debates of his day—notably concerning evolution and science—, and he contributed to journals like The Expositor and The Contemporary Review. Invited later to give the prestig-

Alan Stott is a member of The Christian Community in Stourbridge ious Gifford Lectures on natural (i.e., philosophical) theology, he declined for reasons of health. However, he had already delivered the equivalent in content with his second and most ambitious book. The two-volume Growth of the Spirit of Christianity (1877) is a philosophy of the history of the Church from 'the Dawn of the Christian Era to the Reformation. Matheson even wrote the history of Christianity as a novel, Ecclesia: an Autobiography (1896). This genial writer argued for the Spiritual Development of St Paul (1890), something that is commonly hardly considered. His later publications concentrated on positive, devotional material. This had begun with My Aspirations (1882) and Moments on the Mount.(1884), paragraph collections inspired from scripture, attempting to extend the techniques of Thomas à Kempis. Yet with his greatest book, Studies of the Portrait of Christ (2 vols.: 1899, 1900),

Matheson penetrates beyond both academic discourse and devotional literature. On the one hand, Matheson always wore his learning lightly; on the other hand—assimilating the approach of such successful, devotional writers as J.R. Macduff—Matheson never indulges. He attempts what the musicologist Alfred Einstein called a 'second na-

iveté'—a re-acquired innocence, the direct vision of a childlike soul.

Today Matheson is known especially for a fine and deservedly popular hymn, 'O Love that wilt not let me go, and for some biblical character-studies; reprints of devotional pieces, too, appear from time to time. His first, and even perhaps best, article appeared in November 1878, the year before he received his Doctorate of Divinity. It caused a stir at the time; here was a new voice: original, imaginative, and challenging. As a writer, Matheson's clarity is that of the artist. The clear-sighted, subversive poet ever was a challenge to the self-righteous. However that is, Matheson clearly wants his readers to see for themselves. His own insight is exceptional, which is precisely the dictionary definition of the word 'clairvoyance'.

Matheson is clear because his eye is single. His method in *Studies of the Portrait* of *Christ*, is to look at the Portrait that arises from interpreting the gospel-story entire, 'from the united impression produced upon the heart by these four delineations'. What he sees causes him often to question the assumption of his day and also of ours—in science as well as in religion. This



vision is expressed in the form of paraphrase, and also paradox—something that lies at the heart of Christianity, not merely of Hegelism (in *Aids to the Study of German Theology* [1874] Matheson already showed his genial mastery). In so doing, the Portrait speaks to us with an authenticity that is not 'of an age'. As many times as you return to the 50 chap-

ters, or meditations, comprising this text, it speaks to you afresh—not as the scribes and pharisees.

The genre of Studies... is 'semi-devotional, the author explains. Though faintly suggesting something 'neither fish nor fowl, the genre is really a new departure. For Matheson appeals to the heart and to the head. The author meditates without complexity; he expounds with beauty and authority. His voice challenges directly, intimately—yet his address, or homily, is given without moralising. Led by this poetic imagination, we are invited to accompany in detail the first and most profound sketch of the life of Christ. Paul (Phil 2) exactly describes the steps of the Incarnation. Jesus lives the life of the One for the many. 'There is nothing to my mind more certain than the *gradual* character of Christ's human foresight...The order of revelation was to be from above to below' (II 15). Here, from within, we accompany His inner process to become human, and—greatest paradox—at the same time the cosmic Christ: 'Jesus Himself declared that His right to sit on the throne of judgment was to rest upon the fact, not of His supernaturalness, but of His intense intimacy with the weakness of human nature: 'The Father hath given Him authority to execute judgment because he is the Son of *Man'* (I 316). Through Matheson's seership we are there at the well of Sychar, in the desert of Bethsaida; on the Phoenician shore and Mount Hermon; in Bethany, Gethsemane, and the Upper Room. In one devotional conclusion (I 309) this man of prayer asks, 'Reveal to me, as to Saul of Tarsus, that Thy glory begins by blinding the natural eye.' What begins in parable, in wonder, ends in revelation.

The reductionist tendency today to view Jesus as a first-century, deluded, Jewish artisan is far rather a twentieth- or twentyfirst-century caricature of an empirical view that is not taken far enough. The evidence is prejudged rather than interpreted. A true assimilation of the evidence, Matheson suggests, does not need to import other-worldy categories. Yet he insists: 'If you read truly the life of Jesus, you will interpret His every saying as a word of autobiography, and you will look to His past experience for the origin of that word' (II 21). In this way, Matheson's penetratingdevotional text belies in its simplicity. Noone flies so high on borrowed wings.

One artist with whom one might compare Matheson is Fra Angelico. This artist painted more publicly-appealing altar-pictures to be seen in the art galleries, but the series he painted for quiet meditation in the cells of San Marco, Florence, is unique in its profound simplicity. Another comparison might be the music of Bach. The player of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* enters the meditative conversation between the composer and his muse. Just as we, the audience, are allowed to overhear it, so Matheson's homely yet universal con-

versation similarly unfolds. The essence of Matheson's seership, however, might even best compare with Beethoven's. In the last piano sonatas and string quartets, the composer penetrates to the 'hidden song' (as Wilfrid Mellers called it). Beethoven heard deeper because he was deaf from early manhood; Matheson saw deeper because he was blind from early manhood. It is reported by his biographer (H. Macmillan) that Matheson was the life and soul of any meeting or party he attended. His laugh was loud and infectious. Through a strict daily routine and in particular the devotion of his sister, the life's work of this man must have achieved the maximum to be expected of anyone.

In Jesus 'the life of men becomes the life of Man' (II 29). The lessons in creativity like Christianity itself—are catching. Matheson speaks of the 'divine clairvoyance' and vision of Jesus (I 227; II 99, 152); insisting on the process of Incarnation, he points out that atonement is a gradual achievement (II 282); he mentions the inner eye (II 22, 297), the duplication of the resurrection body; he even hints at the rosy cross (II 300). We experience the joy of Jesus, the secret of the healings, and what a socalled miracle actually involves. 'Christianity, Matheson claims, 'is above all a medical movement.' The way is shown for 'the survival of the unfittest'. Like a tremendous symphony or music drama, with the Easter events Matheson's work builds to a climax of rare spiritual insight, expressed in his uniquely challenging style. The writer to the Hebrews mentions the 'strong sighs and tears' of Jesus in Gethsemane; it was His shrinking from the world's share in His death, His work of reconciliation. The world 'would decree the death of purity,

the death of holiness, the death of justice, the death of mercy, the death of Love!... The sting of death lay to Him in the fact that it was the world's effort to kill virtue, to obliterate goodness, to wipe out from the human heart the handwriting of the moral law' (II 243, 5). But, the Epistle to the Hebrews continues, 'He was heard in the thing He feared'. The inner victory of Gethsemane, achieved prior to the sacrifice of Calvary—for which 'greater love hath no man than this'—, enabled Him completely to meet man as man. 'The flower which Jesus wears on Easter Morning is not the flower of Eden but the flower of Gethsemane. Eden could never unite 'all nations': but Gethsemane can...' (II 355).

For some readers, Studies in the Portrait of Christ is their constant travelling companion. All necessary journeys become at the same time spiritual adventures of discovery, with shocks of surprise and of recognition; each holiday becomes a holyday. Perhaps for most it is a bedside reader for 'the quite hour,' or for Lenten reading. For one reader, Matheson's Studies... is the book he would instinctively clutch 'when vacating the house that was going up in smoke'. Matheson belongs to that small band of writers whose influence can last a lifetime. In this centenary year (2006), it is high time for a renewed recognition of an unjustly neglected leader in religious renewal of our time.

## Man and the Stars June–August 2006

#### Hazel Straker

June is a month of festivals. First the culmination of the Easter-Ascension process in Whitsun on 4th June. Moving before the horns of the Bull, the Sun irradiates the Full Moon at 18.03 on the 11th June as she moves before the Scorpion. Then on the 15th, 10 days after Whitsun is the festival of Corpus Christi. This is the third of the three special Thursdays; Maundy Thursday, the day of the Last Supper, Ascension, 10 days before Whitsun and now Corpus Christi Thursday 10 days after Whitsun. This festival was brought about through the vision of a nun who experienced the need for mankind to celebrate their recognition of the Earth becoming the Body of Christ, the transubstantiation. The Sun enters the Twins on the 20th and the next day at 12.26 passes his solstice point giving the longest day in the northern hemisphere and the shortest for dwellers in the south. Four days later, on the 24<sup>th</sup>, is St John's Day, celebrating the birth of John the Baptist and death of John the Divine. The following day the Moon overtakes the Sun at 16.05.

Venus is visible in the eastern morning sky before sunrise. She moves before the Ram, entering the region of the Bull, on June 19 and is passed by the waning Moon on the 23rd. Mercury moving before the-Bull and into the Twins at the end of the month is scarcely visible in the evening sky shortly after sundown.

Mars overtakes Saturn in the Crab on the 18<sup>th</sup> and both are passed by the waxing crescent Moon on the 28<sup>th</sup>, just visible in the evening western sky shortly after sunset. Jupiter shines brightly in the evening sky as he moves retrograde from the Scales towards Spica in the Virgin setting around midnight. The waxing Moon overtakes him on the 8<sup>th</sup>.

In July, Mercury, looping in the Crab/ Twins moves back to meet the Sun in inferior conjunction on the 18<sup>th</sup> just as the Sun enters the Crab. Full Moon is on the 11<sup>th</sup> at

Hazel Straker lives and works in Camphill Coleg Elidyr, Wales 3.02; New Moon at 4.31 on the 25<sup>th</sup>. The next Full Moon is on August 9 at 10.54 in Goat opposite Sat-

urn who met with the Sun on the 7th and therefore is not visible. The Sun enters the Lion on August 11 and meets with the Moon at 19.10 on the 23rd. Venus, still visible as morning star rises gradually nearer to sunrise. By the end of August she-moves into the Lion and meets with Saturn on the 26th, hardly visible in the eastern sky shortly before sunrise. Mars vanishes into the oncoming sunlight, entering the Virgin at the end of August. Saturn enters the region of the Lion as he did at the first Whitsun. Jupiter still shining brightly in the evening sky is passed by the waxing Moon on July 5 and August 2. The three outer planets are all retrograding; Uranus in Waterman, Neptune in Goat and Pluto in Scorpion.

In our age the Whitsun festival comes while the Sun shines down from the constellation of the Bull. Greek mythology represents this area with the image of the front part of a charging bull and ancient wisdom has long associated this group of stars with the larynx and the mysteries of the Word as expressed in the opening chapter of the John Gospel. With at least a yearly deepening of living through the Deeds of Christ from Easter to Whitsun

we can perhaps come a little closer to the experience of that Word resounding in us as with the disciples at that first Whitsun and later testified by Paul in his letter to the Galatians; 'I am crucified with Christ. So it is not I who live, but Christ lives in me' (2.20, Jon Madsen rendering). Can we make some small offering to meet the challenge of a World Whitsun?

Because Christ did His Deeds during the Three Years for the whole of mankind as well as well as for the spiritual world human witnesses were needed to recognise the beginning and end of that central point of evolution. John the Baptist proclaimed the Baptism in the Jordan when the cosmic Christ entered the bodily sheaths of Jesus of Nazareth and John the Divine was the only one of the disciples able to witness the Crucifixion. St Johns' Day recognises the birth of John the Baptist and the death of John the Divine. This is the only one of the main Christian festivals dedicated to two human beings therefore is it not required that a true celebration of it could only be out of a living experience of the Deeds of Christ on Earth? The challenge from the starry world comes from the Sun now moving before the constellation of the Twins. We live in a world filled with twin opposites; light/darkness, big/small, hot/ Cold, hate/love etc.. The Greek myth tells of the mortal and the immortal twin represented by the two main stars in that group, Castor and Pollux. Saturn announced the coming of the One who would bring the balance, shining down from the Twins at the Baptism in the Jordan. We as mankind have the privilege and responsibility of contributing, out of a free decision, to the ongoing work of Christ.

All times are given in GMT.

#### Reviews

# The Apocalypse of St. John Emil Bock

Floris Books, 208 pages, paperback £ 14.99 ISBN 0863155391

Review by Christopher Cooper

It is heartening to see a fresh edition of Bock's insightful book on the Apocalypse, some 66 years after it was first given as lectures amid the din of war in 1940/41. These were apocalyptic times and Bock's language has a compelling urgency and dynamic well fitted to the many themes he develops. The original manuscript was lost in the tumult of the latter war years and Bock himself had to endure a period of imprisonment under the Nazi regime after The Christian Community had been banned. It was only in 1951 that Bock set about rewriting it from memory. Since then it has stood as one of a line of monumental works revealing a renewed theology for our times.

To many people this last book of the bible presents a bewildering and confusing array of symbolic pictures which seem to defy real comprehension. Even Christian fundamentalists who study their Bible very carefully make heavy weather of it. It is only when one is led so skilfully by a writer of Bock's stature that the pictures become meaningful and reveal their secrets. Readers are offered many golden threads which can lead them through the Apocalypse of St. John, which is called the 'guidebook of advanced Christianity'. The great curtain which divided the earthly world of the senses from the heavenly spheres has now been drawn aside and the Book of Revelations can teach us to read in this opened worlds. We enter the world behind the curtain in stages. The first cycle still remains close to the earth (reflected in the seven Messages in chapters 1 and 2, where we meet seven archetypal congregations). We advance to the Seven Seals (in chapters 5-8) and then to the

Seven Trumpet Blasts (chapters 8–14) and finally to the Seven Vials of Wrath (chapters 15-18). Bock gives us a key which unlocks a crucial secret of these stages. They reveal three different levels of higher consciousness as Rudolf Steiner has described them. The Seals are connected with the Book: they open us to a higher imaginative consciousness which is filled with pictures. The level of inspiration in our consciousness reveals what intones and resounds in the higher worlds as the Seven Trumpets and their connection with the altar. The highest stage is reached in intuition when the human spirit merges with the essence of the realities. This is what is indicated by the outpoured vessels from within the temple.

Bock invites us to see how the prologue in chapter 1 and the epilogue in chapter 22 correspond, so that we can understand what mighty changes have happened in between. The prologue tells us: 'See, He comes in the realm of the clouds, where Christ is addressed in the third person. In the epilogue it is Christ Himself who says three times: 'See, I come quickly.' Everything is permeated by a divine urgency. Bock is at pains to correct some of the traditional mistranslations of key passages such as 'the time is at hand. It is better to render it as 'time presses' which captures something of the immense dynamic of Christ's involvement in earthly affairs. However, the epilogue breathes a deep sense of peace. The air is clean and purified. The great cleansing storms have passed and humanity has evolved to a new stage of being.

Bock helps us to make sense of the descriptions of the Son of Man in chapter 1. We learn to see the threefoldness of man raised to the highest level. The long white garment stretching to the feet shows the purity of willing; the golden gleam of the girdle round the breast reveals warmth and light of true feeling. The head of snow white

hair shows mature thinking illumined by wisdom. The second trinity of forces appears in the eves flaming with enthusiasm for higher knowledge, the feet glowing like brass which show a firm grip on the earth and then finally the voice sounding like the rushing of great waters. Here the power of speech has developed to the point that overtones of higher worlds can be heard. The final three attributes of spirit man according to Bock show how cosmic life forces are controlled. The Seven Stars in the right hand of the Son of Man, the two-edged sword and the countenance shining like the sun are described by Bock in a very convincing way, showing us that all these nine qualities are at the same time the ninefold image of ideal man.

After leading us into the mystery of the three, Bock takes us further into the mysteries of the seven; the seven Stars, Lamp Stands, Messages, Seals, Trumpets and Vials of Wrath. We learn to see how seven is the number of time as it moves forward in rhythmic cycles. For example the seven archetypal congregations are seen as reflecting qualities which appeared in earlier epochs of history, or in the case of the last two, are still to come.

There are not only the fine, positive qualities, but the shadows each great age casts for latter ages to confront and overcome.

As we read Bock's many comments and interpretations we are carried along by his wonderfully vivid and stimulating prose which has not a speck of academic dust on it. It has something of the majestic power of a Bruckner symphony, illuminating both the softer, more intimate moments as well as the mighty revelations of the aged seer of Patmos. One of the great climaxes of the book centres on the apocalyptic events beginning in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. Here Bock takes up crucial pieces of Steiner's own research which links chapters 12 and 13 with many an event in our modern world.

From 1879 the Archangel Michael begins a new period of rulership. It is he who van-

quishes the armies of the dragon and drives them down to the earth where the great battles continue. Although it is only at the sounding of the seventh trumpet in chapter 12 that the name Michael appears for the first time. Bock makes it clear that the whole of the Book of Revelation is a book of Michael. 'He moves through the whole book. He is the producer of the cosmic drama, its moving spirit.' Bock then eludicates the nature of both beasts very convincingly. The beast with seven heads and ten horns that emerges from the sea is a picture of the dangers in our emotional life where the passions, the vanity, the false pride and the lust for power lurk. The two headed one on the land masquerades as a lamb, yet in its steely malevolence it is really an image of materialism of our time. Bock, speaking prophetically over 50 years ago, sees a time coming soon when no-one who does not bear the mark of that beast may any longer buy or sell. Today we know that the technology of implanted microchips and sophisticated identity cards is already with us to make this possible. Bock not only tackles the mystery of the number of the beast, 666, but shows the human antidote to it. Instead of succumbing to the illusion of desperate hurry in which the land beast wishes to trap us, we can discover a new inner tranquillity. 'Through citizenship in the quiet kingdom of the spirit it is possible to escape the seduction' of such a beast. Despite the onslaught of evil, St. John's message for the future remains eminently positive.

The closing parts of the book lead into the mystery of the twelve, the number of spiritualised space. This is also a key to the humanity of the future gathered round the Christ. 12 x 12000 is the mathematical symbol of the 'community of all communities' of all those who have wedded matter to spirit in purity. They are contrasted with the community of Babylon, who have defiled the spirit with the untransformed bodily element. It may come as a shock to

some readers that the last judgement does not lie in a far distant future but has already begun in our days. The great division of humanity has begun, although those who are now sucked towards the realm of Babylon will still have lives to come in which they can strike out in new directions.

The culmination of the number twelve comes in the mighty pictures of the heavenly Jerusalem. The twelve has become the governing law of existence under the sign of the heavenly Jerusalem. There are twelve precious stones in the city wall's foundation, twelve gates of pearl, and the twelve foundations of the city with the names of the twelve apostles on them.

Bock leaves his readers with the resplendent description of the New Jerusalem after leading them on a journey which has taken them to the heights and the depths, the greatest terror and the greatest comfort and ultimately to the end of the Christfilled earth.

If Bock had only written this one book, it would have been sufficient to establish him as one of the greatest Christian thinkers of modern times.

#### Saint Paul Life, Epistles and Teaching Emil Bock

Floris Books 2005, £14.99 Review by Anna Phillips

The books by Emil Bock probably won't need any introduction to readers of Perspectives and members and friends of The Christian Community alike. He has written extensively on various personalities of the Old and New Testament, including books on the life of Jesus, thereby making that far away time, with its different way of life and consciousness, accessible to us here and now. Floris books are now republishing these 'tomes' in a paperback edition, making them more affordable though no

less impressive. The content has not been altered nor edited and remains as it was written in 1954. But because it was written more than 50 years ago, the research available to Bock is out of date to some extent for us now. The conclusions and intuitive assumptions that Bock draws, however, are imbued by his own Anthroposophical learning and insights which, though dating back even further in time, are of a spiritual nature and therefore timeless, holding an objective truth.

In 'Saint Paul' Emil Bock gives an account of the apostle who was more than an apostle. He compares him to Moses, who was more than a lawgiver, in that both were heralds of a new consciousness, the first to 'be' that new consciousness incarnated. Interestingly enough, Paul's mission is to preach that what was established through Moses is no longer valid since the Death and Resurrection of Christ. After two chapters on the background of Paul in society, amongst the other apostles and seeing him within contemporary theological debate, Bock goes on to describe and explain at length how Saul grew up as a Roman citizen, imbued with Greek learning and of Jewish upbringing, to become Paul, the apostle of nations, uniting Jewish Christians and Pagan Christians in to one Christian Community for the future.

He tells us about Saul's parental background, his spiritual home and his personal journeys before and after his persecutions of the Christians, where the stoning of St. Stephen was a turning point, making him still more wrathful and fanatical in his persecutions. Bock explains that this fanaticism to serve the Messiah in itself was not wrong, but that through his Jewish upbringing his vision had been directed in the wrong direction.

When Saul then experiences the life shattering event at Damascus, it is not a fundamental change in focus, but a change of direction. He is struck blind for three days, after which he emerges as Paul, no longer persecuting the Christians but steadily becoming their leader, meeting resistance from Iews as well as the original apostles. His revelation of the risen Christ opened his inner eye, which was an 'expanding and elevating transformation of his consciousness'. That moment is 'the halfway point between pre-Christian Mystery practise and pietism, between initiation and conversion. The Letters and Acts also stand between the four great gospels and the mighty spiritual revelations of John. They show the ongoing impregnation of humanity with the Christ forces through the pivotal experience of the first human being to have his consciousness changed that way.

After a period of three years in the desert of Arabia, experiencing the places where Moses developed nature free, moral-religious Judaism, Paul's apostolic travels begin. These journeys coincide with the geological area where the olive tree grows. The olive tree symbolises the transition of the Old Testament to the New, from the Mosaic Law to the new Messianic consciousness, of which Paul was the herald. The law of punishment and reward does not work any longer in reaching the inner core of the

Human Being. Interestingly, the west had prepared an ego form for the Christ message to be poured into and there Paul found a more readily available discipleship to bring these new teachings than in his native parts. Today's churches still work out of the principles of a consciousness based on law and guilt. Paul's work was for the future, from the principle of excarnating in ecstasy to incarnating through 'Christ in me', incorporating from without to within.

The second half of the book is taken up with Paul's letters and teachings, which are introduced by an analysis of how he wrote with a new language to suit the new consciousness.

The book is a great help in understanding the letters and Acts better. It is best read these at the same time as reading the book to get the full benefit of both. The last chapter, which goes into the concepts and ideas offered in the writings of Paul, his teachings, are valuable insights for our inner work and Christian meditation. They are divided into clear headings, to make it easy to 'dip into' them as required. Paul belongs to us more than any of the other apostles, he speaks to us now, teaches us now, if we are willing to hear.

#### **Outlook**

# A Subtle Beam of Light — A personal Account From Palestine *Kobi Tuch*

A narrow bumpy road took us uphill. Big holes in the middle of it, patches of concrete on top of crumbling asphalt and broken edges made it look like an abandoned track. Ancient olive trees were standing on either side like old and wrinkled men rooted to the earth, not daring to leave their homelands. A donkey's footprints on the dry, cracked soil were the only sign of life. He must have been walking there last year when the land was soggy. But no sign of his owner. Now everyone is on the other side of a fence, gone from their beloved land.

The narrow winding road came to an end without warning and we found ourselves on a wide black road, cutting the hill into two uneven halves. The smooth, high standard motorway looked a bit like a line of widows dressed in black. It came from nowhere but led us towards a strange gap in the electric fence. Concrete cubes, steel pillars, automatic gates and a noisy tumult of activity- one big muddle right in front of us. Coming closer, it looked more orderly: A line of Jewish cars crossing the border to Palestine without even being stopped

and a long queue of Arabs unloading their rusty old cars and taking clothes off for the security check. That mixture of chaos and order, life and things is called a checkpoint.

Young boys and girls were standing there, dressed in the uniforms of the Israeli army. They held guns and kept order. Any one of them could have been my child or one of my former students. They were checking, searching, getting angry and impatient. They were given that job without much of a choice. They knew why they were doing it; they knew they were protecting their country against suicide bombers, but slowly fear and pain was eating into their souls. Treating children and old people as if they were living bombs was something they could not deal with. Elderly ladies who might have been their grannies were standing there together with them, mingling with the crowds of people. These ladies were volunteers of an organization called 'Check-point Watch', and stood there to make sure that the human rights of the Palestinians were respected. They were supervising their grandchildren, so to speak, while the grandchildren were responsible for their security. There were three generations, two nations and one God, mixed together in that microcosm.

I was sitting in the car together with my Jewish friends who like me had decided to cross the fence and meet our enemies. Muhammad, a fellow Israeli Arab, was sitting next to me on the back seat. He was responsible for our security when we got to the West Bank. At that moment he bent down his head, not wanting to be noticed by the Israeli soldiers who stood at the check point. But we made a show of confidence as we went through, waving to the soldiers and pretending to be settlers who were going home. Contrary to appearance I could feel the anxiety churning in my stomach. If we had been stopped and questioned we could have been in big trouble.

We all felt a huge sense of relief after that threshold moment. Muhammad moved to the front seat and we hit the road to Jenin, the capital city of North Samaria and a stronghold of Palestinian resistance to the Israeli occupation. The motorway went through a wide valley. Both sides of the road were surprisingly green and intensively cultivated, but that road came to an end as suddenly as it had started. On our right we could see the last Jewish settlement and in front of us was a post with a big red sign: No Entrance for Israeli Citizens. From now on there were only unpaved and semi-paved roads and we had to take one of these side roads in order to avoid the Israeli Army's patrols.

We came into a rural area in which small villages were perfectly integrated with the surrounding landscape and where time had stopped. Almost no cars passed through the narrow unpaved streets and the wind brought only silence from the surrounding hills. A rooster ran across the street cackling and squawking, chased by a bare-footed boy who was trying to catch him and fetch him home. A door opened and we could look through a wall made of reused blocks. We saw the garden inside, bare and brown as the hills around, overgrazed by goats and donkeys. When you have no water to drink you can't spare any for watering your garden. An old man wearing a white Sharwal was walking aimlessly along the street.

He stopped for a moment as we passed, leaning on his stick and gazing into the distance. Time had no meaning for him any more.

We met our hosts at the entrance to their village, not far from the city of Kobi Tuch is a
Waldorf teacher
and a co-founder of
the Waldorf Upper
School
in Kibbutz Harduf.
He is currently teaching at the Waldorf
College Project
in Stroud, Gloucestershire.

Jenin. They were waiting for us patiently, knowing we might be late. We could have been stopped at the check-point or anywhere else along our way, asked about our destination and even been forced to leave the Palestinian territory. They were used to waiting, used to being patient and not worrying about how time passed. When we finally arrived they stood up and stepped forward as if waking from a dream. I saw their smiling faces and the welcoming gestures of their bodies and felt once more a great sense of relief. I sighed deeply, realizing how tense I had been up to that moment. We shook hands and embraced each other as if we had known one other for a long time. I felt a great sense of friendship, which overcame any potential suspicion or hostility.

They took us into their village, which was a labyrinth of stones and sand. Endless buildings and walls, separated from one another by sandy streets, all leading to the mosque and its pencil shaped minaret. They hardly said a word. The holes in the walls, the noise of old generators doing their best to make electricity, the grocers sitting in front of their empty shops, the half-naked children wandering around their households, spoke on their behalf. People were looking at us with astonishment. We were their next-door neighbours whom they hadn't met for over five years. They had begun to ask themselves if any ordinary Israeli citizens really did live on the other side of the fence, or only soldiers.

They walked with us along the main street and then turned into a side road, which led Os down to a small valley. It was surrounded by houses packed on top of each other, most of them half-built. There was an orchard of fig trees in the centre, stretching their leaves towards us like hands as we came along. Then we crossed to the other side of the valley where an unfinished building stood. Its walls were unplastered and the window openings were covered by plywood and old plastic shut-

ters. 'This is our Upper School for Girls', said one of our hosts proudly. 'The nearest school for them is beyond a walking distance and we could not afford any kind of transportation. So, we decided to open our own school. One of our village members agreed to lend his house and here we are in our self-made school. Please, come in and have a look. He knocked on a metal door and waited for an answer. No man is allowed to enter women's quarters without permission and must be accompanied by a lady. We heard steps on the stairs and then the. metallic sound of keys unlocking the door. An imposing old lady stood behind the open door. Although well wrapped in heavy styled fabrics we could see her surprise. She looked at us with her big eyes and invited us in. We stepped on to an unpaved floor painted red, and I felt like walking on a red carpet. A door was opened on our left and we were invited into the head teacher's room. The head teacher was a thin lady, but one sensed she was as firm as an old oak tree. I could sense the inconvenience which she was trying to hide. She was polite and quiet, but started to talk as soon as the Arabian coffee arrived. Her eyes were sparkling with anger as she talked and she didn't mind directing them to ours in a way that humbled us. She explained how she was trying to do her teaching in empty rooms, without any school facilities. 'There is no electricity in the village, therefore we can't operate any electric equipment. There is no glass in the windows, therefore we can't take the shutters down during summer time because it's too hot, nor during winter when it's too cold. There is no wood left in the village and no money to buy fuel, so we can't heat the rooms at all. She stood up before finishing the last sentence and took us on a tour of her school. There were five empty rooms spread on two floors. Only chairs were in the rooms, and silent teenage girls. They all stood up when we entered their

classrooms, and for us to sit down they had to give us their chairs and remain standing. As an experienced teacher I was wondering what sort of a learning process they could do in such an environment. The accusing spark in the headteacher's eves didn't fade, and I could feel more then a hint of mistrust and blame coming from them. In a few weeks time, when I visited this school again, this fine lady would say to me: 'I did not know that good Jewish people also existed'.

Then we sat down to talk while more people from the village joined us for the conversation. All the women left the room, except for the old lady who took us in. I felt something very confident and strong within her, and didn't even try to understand how she dared to stay on her own together with a group of men. We made a circle, introducing ourselves and then sharing our pains, fears, frustrations, anger, rage, accusations and expectations. We heard personal stories about death, injuries, humiliations, vandalism and poverty. We tried to be good listeners and to acknowledge what we heard, and yet balance that misery with the sufferings of the other side which we knew about. When it was the old lady's turn we didn't expect her to talk in front of men, but she decided to tell us her story. In a low but confident voice she introduced herself as Um Ali and told us that 11 years ago her husband was shot by Israeli soldiers at their house, in front of their seven children. Since then she has been through very hard times raising the children on her own, but as soon as her last child left home she decided to dedicate her life to the community. Since then Um Ali had gone to all the poor people of her village, helping the widows to raise their children and organizing workshops for women. Everything was done voluntarily. By the time we came to visit she was helping the Girls' School with cleaning, cooking and maintaining the fabric of the building and



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that is how she met us. As soon as she realized who we were she decided to join us, to tell her story, to express her compassion towards both sides and to pray together with us for peace. There was a big silence in the room after she has finish to talk. I bowed my head, not to be caught with my wet eves. After a while we said goodbye to our hosts and hit the bumpy road back to the other world, not before promising to keep in touch and do our best to help them. Muhammad was not sure that we would be able to make it over again. Only when we came out of the Palestinian territory would he admit how tense with worry he had been about our security.

That visit was the beginning of a year long journey and dialogue between Israeli-Jewish people, Israeli-Arabs and Palestinians. On a weekly basis we crossed the fence illegally and visited various places and people in the Jenin district on the north side of the West Bank. We were mainly listening to the stories told us by the Palestinians, trying to open our hearts to their pain and misery. From time to time we could help them by donating small amounts of money, clothes, footwear, medicines and equipment for kindergartens and schools. We were also trying to get permits for the Palestinians to cross the fence to the Israeli side for special medical treatment, and for meetings with various peace organizations. As time went on, more and more people from both sides joined our activities, donating their time, their good will and sometimes money. A gentle and subtle beam of light slowly entered our hearts. Some kind of hope which didn't come from politicians nor from the media, but from people with an enduring will to meet and listen to each other, to be human beings in the first place and only then Jews, Arabs, Israelis or Palestinians.

On June 19<sup>th</sup> 2005, as the preparations for the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and parts of the West Bank began, the Israeli Army sealed the check-points. It was no longer possible



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#### MYTH OF THE NATIVITY

The Virgin Birth Re-examined

#### ANDREW WELBURN

Lamech 'was afraid of him and fled and ... said: I have begotten a strange son; he is not like a human being, but like the children of the angels.'

(1 Enoch from the Dead Sea Scrolls)

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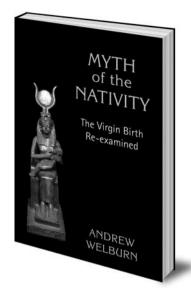
Welburn concludes that the Virgin Birth is part of a greater story, a synthesis of many traditions, and stands for, above all, a promise of spiritual rebirth.

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Andrew Welburn was a fellow of New College, Oxford and taught there until 2005. He is author of *The Beginnings of Christianity; The Mysteries: Rudolf Steiner's Writings on Spiritual Initiation;* and *Rudolf Steiner's Philosophy* (all Floris Books).



If you have difficulty obtaining this book from your local bookshop, you can order it direct from:

BookSource, 32 Finlas St, Glasgow G22 5DU, UK Tel: 0870-240 2182 Fax: 0141-557 0189 to get into the Jenin area and we had to stop most of our activities. Now, at Christmas 2005, the gates have not yet opened again. We keep in touch by phone with our friends on the other side of the fence, encouraging them as best we can not to give up. On top of their struggle with the Israeli occupation, they have an internal challenge to sort out. They need to support a moderate leader and to overcome the Palestinian fundamentalists who are threatening to destroy their nation from within. Meanwhile, we are there to support them, to stretch out our hands towards them through the holes in the fence, and to be honest with ourselves.

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#### WHO KILLED THE HOLY GHOST?

A Journalist Reports on the Holy Spirit

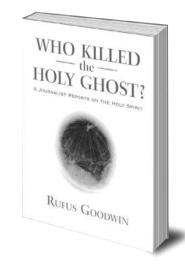
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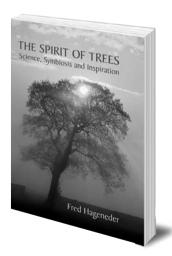
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Rufus Goodwin, who died aged 70 in July 2005, is the author of *Give Us This Day: The Story of Prayer* and *Dreamlife*.



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