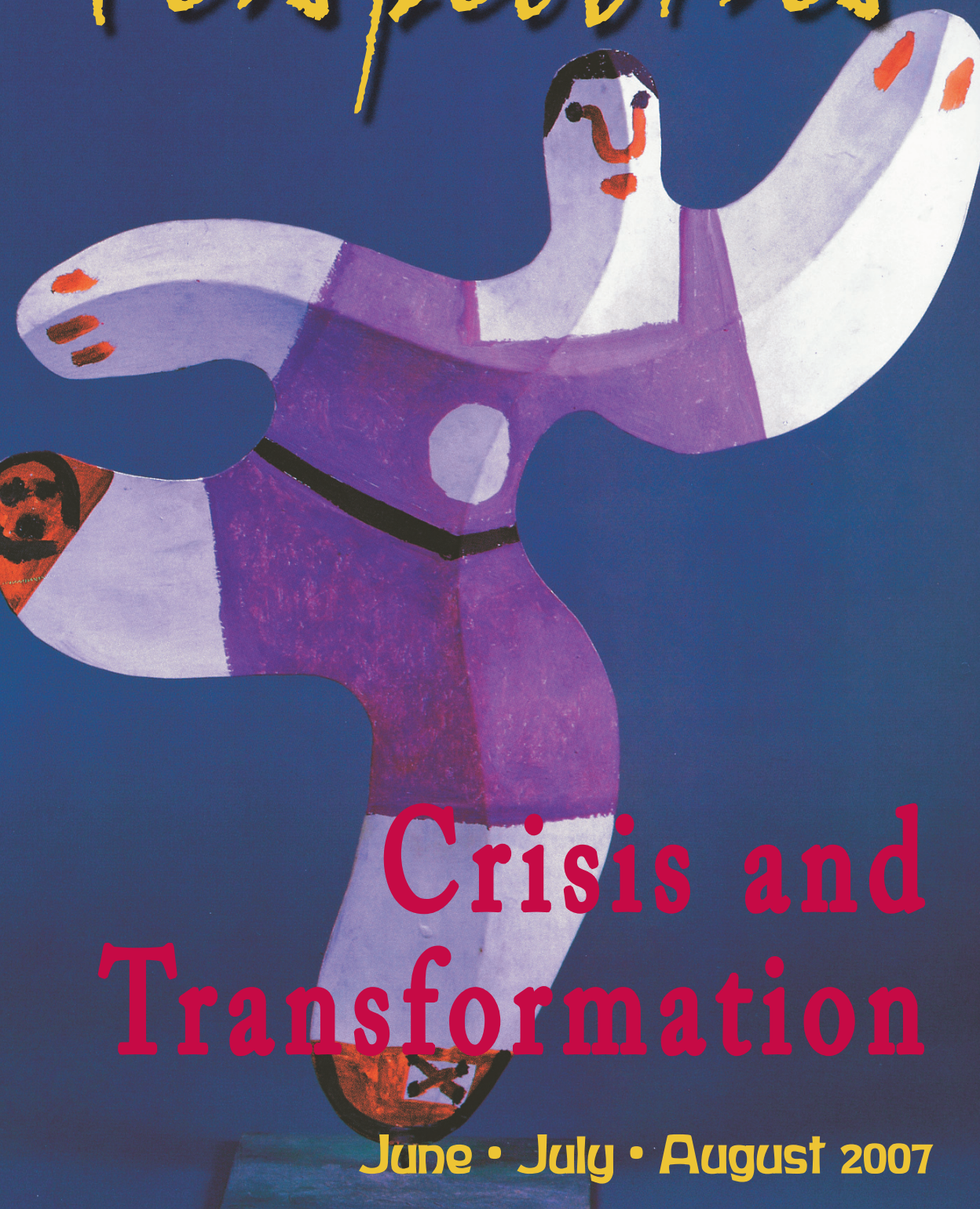


The Christian Community
Perspectives



**Crisis and
Transformation**

June • July • August 2007

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Cover picture: *Football Player* Pablo Picasso 1961

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To be human means to be in a constant state of growth and transformation. If we feel the weight of a judgment—whether it be held by another, or worse still, by ourselves—that denies that we can develop, we feel condemned. It was Viktor Frankl who taught that every situation has its ‘moment of freedom’; a possibility of transforming it, even if only by changing our attitude to it.

The Holy Spirit is at work in every process of change, of development and growth; drawing creation towards its fulfilment. To deny the possibility of change is to deny the Spirit; to embrace transformation is to live with its affirming, transforming, creative power. The articles in this issue, which take very different starting points, are affirmations of the endless possibilities that the Spirit has to bring about transformation. We hope that they give inspiration in the many different situations in which our readers find themselves.

TOM RAVETZ

The Prodigal Son

Eva Knausenberger

Once—in a far away country—there were three brothers.

The first brother went into the world. With him he took his inheritance. What was his inheritance? His father had endowed him with the great richness of being truly human.

The father loved his sons very much indeed and shared with them everything he owned. To another son he gave another inheritance of his wealth, while he kept the third son near him on his estate, where they could always work together.

The first brother, the one who had been endowed with being truly human, went into the world. He didn't actually know what it meant to be a human being; he didn't know how to go about being human, but he went into the world to find out.

The middle brother is the one who tells us this story. He is Christ. He also came to earth to learn what it means to be a human being in the body of Jesus of Nazareth. He is the brother of the 'prodigal son.'

Christ—unlike His brother—became a human being without leaving His Father's house. He makes this very clear to His disciples when He says: 'I and the Father are one. I love the Father and the Father loves me and I love you. If you dwell in my love I will dwell in you always and you will be in my love and the Father's love will be in us. There are many mansions in my Father's house.' Thus has He described His Father's house.

The first son had left his father's house and in his eagerness to learn about life and being human he forgot all about his father, his father's house and his brothers.

And indeed, he finds out what it means to be human and to live on the earth far away from home. At first he experiences much that is enjoyable. But soon he finds himself without true friends, beset by hunger, need and pain. He cannot find enough to eat or warm clothes to wear, and after a time

even his quest to be human is forgotten while he lives—nay, merely exists—in worse circumstances than the animals. Not even the husks of grain are given to him to nourish him.

When he is close to starvation, in the hour of his greatest need, he 'comes to himself'; he begins to think: 'What am I

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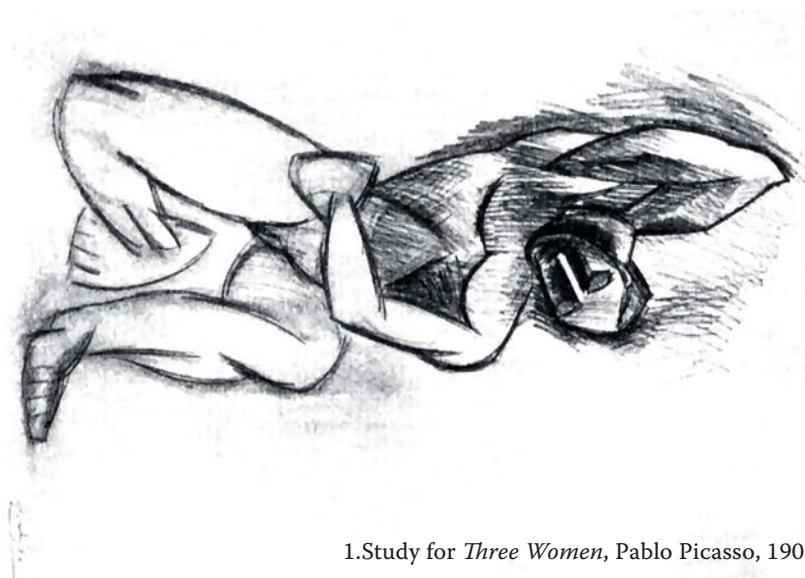
doing here in this pigsty? Unless I can find a way to get out of here I shall starve; I shall perish in the muck of the swine.'

With death staring him in the face, the gift of his father, his capacity to be human, comes to his mind, because it is a human gift to be able to think, to ask, to wonder, to remember, to lose and to find again. He remembers himself and the task he set out to fulfil. And as he does so, he remembers his father and the home he came from so long ago. The memory fills him with great remorse. He recalls the wonderful goodness and generosity of his father, even as he lives in abject poverty and deprivation. Suddenly he understands the waste of his life, the fact that he didn't cherish his inheritance and squandered it until nothing was left.

With death staring him in the face, the image of his father arises before him and he decides there and then to go home. 'I have failed dismally in my task,' he thinks. 'But even so there will be a place for me among my father's hired workers. He will not reject me even now.'

And so the son sets out, sad and dejected and yet full of hope to ask for his father's love and forgiveness.

And the promise of the Son who came to the earth to tell us this story is that when we take the path to love and forgiveness, conscious of our true humanity; when we tread the path to the Father, borne by our yearning for love, He will receive us. He will come to meet us. He will expect us and see us, even while we are still a long way off. He will rejoice and celebrate and receive us into His embrace again without conditions.



1. Study for *Three Women*, Pablo Picasso, 1908

Transformation in a human destiny

Lisa Devine

*For, after the gospels,
After the human and divine comedies,
After the one thousand and one nights,
After crime and punishment,
War and peace, pride and prejudice,
The sound and the fury,
Between good and evil,
Being and nothingness,
After the tempest, the trial,
And the wasteland,
After things have fallen apart,
After the hundred years of solitude,
And the remembrance of things past,
In the kingdom of this world,
We can still astonish the gods in humanity
And be the stuff of future legends,
If we but dare to be real,
And have the courage to see
That this is the time to dream
The best dream of them all.*

Excerpt from 'Mental Fight' by Ben Okri

The indigenous peoples of Australia sing and dance the stories of the Dreamtime when the world was created. With astonishment and wonder, human beings live into these stories of spirit beings such as the great Rainbow Serpent. If the poet Ben Okri is right, we live in the new dreamtime of creation. Now, however, we are the authors of the stories and it is the beings of the spiritual worlds who watch and listen with anticipation. What will the human being do now?

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A good story opens moments of possibility where the story could go this way or that or yet another. We are suspended in a space of potential until the moment of decision when the way

is decided and the story unfolds until the next moment of decision. These moments could also be called crises. The Chinese word for crises means opportunity and danger. How do we choose?

Sophie Delezio's story has touched many hearts and she has become a symbol of hope for many people. When she was two and a half years old, a car crashed into the childcare centre where Sophie was sleeping and she suffered horrific burns leading to the loss of both her feet and one hand. Then two and a half years later, she was hit by another car on a pedestrian crossing. She survived both accidents to become a strong-willed, happy child in what can be called a miracle, or, even two. Her face was untouched by the fire and her shining eyes radiate her spirit. Reading the accounts given by her family, friends, doctors, nurses and emergency workers, it becomes clear that this was indeed a miracle but of human proportions, one worthy of astonishing the Gods!

Every time the word miracle appears in Sophie's story it is laid at the feet of dedicated and inspired human beings making decisions and acting on them. One nurse describes an orchestral enterprise composed of the efforts of many people in concert with the intensive care specialist as conductor. 'We sat down as a team and we made the decision to do something out of the ordinary for this child' says Dr. Maitz. As her mother puts it they decided to 'look outside the square'. It was an impossible call. Would her life be worth living with these injuries, would the pain be unbearable? Would she thank them when she was twenty one, or curse them? There was no ethical manual for this one—or perhaps too many manuals! The medical team based their decision on the strength of the family and friendship support they could see around Sophie. More human beings!

As Dr. Jacobe tells it, this was not a miracle in the sense of divine intervention. In fact most of the accounts agree on this. There is no 'Deus ex Machina'—the 'god from the machine' that was wheeled on at the end of the Greek drama, to sort everything out—operating here. There was plenty of prayer but so often they did not know what to pray for, what would be best for Sophie. So they prayed for courage, faith, inspiration, those qualities of soul where the divine and human meet. This may not sound so remarkable but these qualities are not always available to us. One witness to the accident scenes describes her experience: 'I always thought if I was ever in a position to help I would put my life on the line but...' In the moments that make the difference, some could not find their place, could not respond. Their ability to choose was frozen. Not everyone was needed to rush into the burning building. Descriptions of the emergency and the journey of re-

covery make it clear that different people were needed for different actions, some deceptively simple yet essential like bringing meals to the hospital. Hearing the call and having the courage to act amid the uncertainty and pain are precious faculties which are worth praying for.

The struggle to find the relationship to God that would carry them through this was potent. As one surgeon asks: Why a miracle for this child from God and not the others on the ward? Jan Donohoo, one of the chaplains, entertains the idea that there might be a lesson in this but concludes that she does not believe in the kind of God that would do this to Sophie so that she could teach us a lesson. 'I have some questions for God about it all' she says, 'but I don't think I'm going to get any real answers this side of eternity:' so she prays that they will be able to call to and draw on God. To stay connected an African saying steadies her:

God is good all the time.

All the time God is good.

Sophie's story is written by many people. They were all in crisis, deciding and acting in situations where the rules and protocols and manuals are impotent. They all had to make a call with incomplete knowledge and values that pulled in different directions. They were all 'out there where the buses don't run' as a client of David Epston once put it. It is out of experience in these situations that a form of ethical practice known as narrative ethics has emerged. While not totally rejecting the consideration of ethical principles and rules, this approach acknowledges that every moral situation is unique and unrepeatable and cannot be fully captured by appealing to universal principles. The real life stories of the people concerned are valued and placed in the centre. The team that decided to 'look outside the square' for Sophie did this on the basis of her real parents and not theoretical ones.

This approach echoes that of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German pastor hanged in the last days of the Second World War for his part in a failed assassination plot against Hitler. For him there 'is no universal ethics' and 'every situation is unique.' He called on us to live as if everything depended on us, 'as if there were no God.' What he meant is not that there is no God but that God is not there to save us and fill in the gaps in our lives—to be wheeled on in a machine. He saw God as demanding responsibility and promising forgiveness and consolation for the mistakes made in the courageous ethical adventure of life and the ever present relationship with Christ as the source for free ethical decisions, for the new creation. The gaps in the story are for us.

The renowned ethicist Margaret Somerville writes that we need a language of moral imagination and moral intuition that gives us access to the ways of knowing we need for ethical decision making in keeping with our humanity. She sees this language as poetry. In the poetry of the stories of our lives lies a deeper wisdom that can guide us in the decisions and choices that shape our stories and the stories of those around us. It is not for no reason that so many prayers are poetic. Poetic language can take us into the realm of our soul where this divine wisdom can speak; where we find the courage to act 'outside the square' and let the spirit flow through us into the gaps in our stories. The Soweto poet Oswald Mtshali describes how it is when we don't do this.

Walls

*Man is
A great wall builder
The Berlin Wall
The Wailing Wall of Jerusalem
But the wall
Most impregnable
Has a moat
Flowing with fright
Around his heart

A wall without windows
For the spirit to breeze through

A wall
Without a door
For love to walk in*

OSWALD MTSHALI

The choice to open the window for the spirit and the door for love to walk in is ours.

One of the most precious parts of my work as a priest is to be present at the end of life when the final stories are told. There is not a person who has not astonished me. Often it is the most surprising corners of their life and in the seemingly ordinary that the exceptionality unveils itself. What follows is part of a eulogy by an adult daughter for her mother, a highly qualified doctor who had to work for years in a corner store before being able to work again as a doctor in her new country. Behind the counter



Man with Sheep, Pablo Picasso, Bronze 1943

her smile radiated the same optimism and dedication she later showed in her work with refugees.

I've always thought of my mother not as a person but more like a place. She radiated this oasis of calm, and tranquillity and love and warmth and to be in her presence you just breathed in that warmth, that calm where anything could be healed with a kiss. Any disaster could be solved with a smile and any sadness could be banished with a laugh. And I've realised that her spirit will live on because every person who was ever in her presence took away with them a little bit of compassion, and happiness and warmth and will share that with every other person that they meet.

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Paul's conception of Transformation

Rudolf Frieling

Transformation is an important theme in the life and work of St. Paul. The persecutor of Christians becomes a disciple, Saul becomes Paul. This is the background before which we need to read the letters of Paul about transformation, which are not academic theology but drawn from life. He tries to describe the indescribable by using concepts from the Greek language. Below we shall consider three of these concepts.

I

To Trans-Form

In order to illustrate the difference between the old and the new covenant Paul refers in the second letter to the Corinthians to the narrative in the Old Testament about the shining face of Moses. (Exodus 34:29–35). When Moses spent 40 days and 40 nights on Mount Sinai in meditation, the Lord spoke to him 'face to face, as a man speaks to his friend' (Exodus 33.11). The face of Moses grew luminous from the reflection of the divine light. As he returned from the mountain the Israelites were overwhelmed by the sight of Moses' shining face, so he covered it up.

Paul is reminded of this when he imagines mankind before meeting the Christ with a covered up face. This blindness originates from the heart, which is covered by a blanket. When someone finds Christ, the cover is removed; he experiences light entering his spirit, as Christ works together with the Holy Spirit who illuminates us. 'The Lord is the Spirit' (2 Cor. 3:17). The divine becomes visible. In the chapter 4 of the Second Letter to the Corinthians, Paul describes this process with the words: 'For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine in the darkness', who has shone in our hearts to give the light (photismos) of the knowledge (gnosis) of the glory (doxa) of God in the face of Christ' (4:6) Paul considers this awakening to Christ as equivalent to the 'Let there be light' of the first day of creation.

In connection with this Paul writes about the transformation of the Christian believer:

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was one of the
founders of
The Christian
Community.*

And we all, who with unveiled faces reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Cor. 3:18)

These words are laden with meaning. We need to take time and consider every single one. The sentence begins optimistically with 'we all', reminding us of Whitsun. That which was reserved for Moses alone in the old covenant will become accessible now to every Christian. *We* reflect—it is our own activity. The image of the mirror is not meant negatively—a mirror is glassy, cold, fuzzing and distorting—but positively, as when we think of the stormy, foaming sea becoming calm, and letting the stars reflect on its surface. We reflect the glory of God by actively calming our soul and awaiting expectantly His revelation. The mystic Gerhard Terstegen expressed this beautifully with yet a different image:

*Let your most beautiful light
Lord, touch my face
As the tender flowers willingly unfold
and keep still in the sun,
Let me quietly and joyfully
gather your rays
and allow you to be in me.*

We expose ourselves to the perfect example and give him the opportunity to work upon us. In the realms of nature, the divine archetypes work as law. The rose is not free to choose whether it wishes to become a rose. The rose archetype works upon the rose as a matter of course. This is different with us human beings. We can refuse to be formed by our creator, or we can open ourselves voluntarily to his influence.

'Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.' (2 Cor 3:17) Christ, whose face we can see with our enlightened heart, is the archetype of all archetypes. As the son born in eternity, He is the image of God. 'He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation.' (Col. 1:15) According to divine intention the human being was created in the image of God. (Gen. 1:26) The image creates. If you open your soul to an image, the image works upon your soul, forms your soul to be subtly similar to itself. 'We are changed into the same image.' For 'to change' Paul uses *metamorphhein*, 'to trans-form'.

Such a ‘trans-forming’ can come about only gradually. It is about a process, a development through stages: ‘we are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another’.

This points to a tender soul process, which does not depend on us having received an accurate, historical account of Christ’s life on earth—which indeed we do not have. However, through such intimate processes within our soul, we come to the realization that whoever opens his heart to the Gospels will recognize, at first perhaps dimly, but gradually more clearly, an image in front of his inner eye that every Christian ‘knows’ unmistakably.

II

Changing nature

Paul approaches the mystery of transformation from a different angle in his letter to the Philippians:

*But our commonwealth is in heaven,
and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ,
who will change our lowly body
to be like his glorious body,
by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself.*

This time Christ himself is the one who is active. We expect his reappearance from the heavens, where we have our original dwelling place. The word for transformation is this time *meta-schematizein*, trans-schematize. We need to understand the concept of *schema* properly. Paul uses it once before in the same letter to the Philippians, with regard to Christ Himself. ‘But emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the schema of men.’ (Phil. 2:7) The Latin translation uses for *schema* the word *habitus* (*habitu inventus ut homo*), *habitus* meaning ‘the way one is had’, as in ‘habit’. In English and French the words *habit*, *habitation* and *habitude* are derived from it. They way one ‘has oneself’ expresses itself in one’s habits. *Schema* as *habitus* is like the processes of life which are repeated. Only when the ‘life’ disappears from these life-processes and when they become empty, automatic mechanisms, do the words ‘scheme’ and ‘schematism’ attain their lifeless connotations. Here in the New Testament the word *schema* is full of life, a positive concept. Into our habit-life with its coming in and going out, its rhythms of breathing in and breathing out;

into the rhythms of the pulsating blood, the Christ enters and permeates them all with the life of heavenly rhythms.

*O contrite hearts, seek with your eyes
The visage of salvation;
Blissful in that gaze, arise,
Through glad regeneration.*

A rhythmically ordered life has always belonged to spiritual practice. The concept of religious practice contains the element of regular and repeated offering: the observance of regular prayer, morning and evening; the holy year with the celebration of religious services. All this enters the service of Christ who sends the rhythms of higher, heavenly life into the crude rhythms of our earthly physicality, right into the pulse and the rhythm of breathing.

III

In the 15th chapter of his first letter to the Corinthians Paul writes about the resurrection and leads to the question of transubstantiation. In this context he uses neither *meta-morphein*, nor *meta-schematizein*, but *al-lassein*, 'to make different'. Allassein describes an fundamental experience of perceiving amazed that something has changed totally. Metamorphosis and transformation have more of a thought component.

In the focus here is the transformation of matter as such. Paul directs the attention to the different nature of the 'flesh' (*sarx*) in human beings and animals.

*For not all flesh (sarx) is alike,
but there is one kind for men,
another for animals,
another for birds,
and another for fish.* 1 Cor. 15:39

This continues upwards with the differing composition of the heavenly bodies, where in place of the 'flesh' we find *doxa*, glory. The heavenly bodies differentiate through the auric light quality of their radiance.

*There is one glory of the sun,
and another glory of the moon,
and another glory of the stars;
for star differs from star in glory.* 1 Cor. 15:41

In between is the human being. Like the animal, he has a perishable physical body. In the future he will be blessed with a starlike, imperishable light body. This transition is possible only through death and the power of resurrection.

*Lo! I tell you a mystery.
We shall not all sleep,
but we shall all be changed,
in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,
at the last trumpet.
For the trumpet will sound,
and the dead will be raised imperishable,
and we shall be changed.* (1 Cor. 15:51–52)

The idea of the atom as finally indivisible leads to the boundaries of space and opens the view to something totally different, outside of space. In the same way, the twinkling of an eye leads to the boundary of the temporal and opens the vista onto something totally different, a realm beyond time. This transformation overcomes death as the ultimate enemy. 'Death is swallowed up in victory' (15:54) Swallowed up—in Greek 'drunk down,' *katapinein*, in the way the body absorbs a drink and digests it. In Latin: *absorpta est mors* death is absorbed. The same word is used in the second letter to the Corinthians (5:4) to describe the swallowing of the mortal by life. This nuance is very important. The experience of death is not simply abolished. It needs to be digested, reworked, transformed into higher life, so that the experience is deepened and enhanced owing to this absorption.

If we consider the three descriptions of the transformation from three different letters of Paul side by side, we notice the relationship of the Trinity. In the words about mirroring and transforming you feel the air of freedom of the Holy Spirit who works together with Christ. The words on the changing of the nature in the letter to the Philippians address particularly the activity of the reappearing Christ. In the chapter on the resurrection in the first letter to the Corinthians the contemplation concerns itself with the depth of alchemical transformation of matter. Here Paul uses the word 'mystery' (15:51) Matter is the real mystery, not the spirit. Spirit can be understood of itself. Matter remains dark until spirit can explain it and ultimately transfigure it. In matter, the spirit leaves itself behind, renounces itself. Paul looks ahead in this chapter on a far-away time of accomplishment, where the Son returns a transformed and renewed creation to the Father. (15:28) Paul's third description of transformation shows the working of the Christ being with the mystery of the Father.

Crisis as opportunity

On learning to love the questions

Deborah Ravetz

The media and the advertising industry tell the story of the good life. In this story, we pass seamlessly from a happy childhood in which we are loved and secure, we pass our exams, get good jobs and provide a living proof of the blessings of our upbringing. We in turn will marry and have happy children. And as we get older the cycle will begin again with our educated and well-adjusted children. How deeply does this story invade our inner world? How difficult is it to not feel that one has somehow failed if life has none of that simplicity and one is confronted instead with problems or crisis? The beguiling simplicity of this story means that pain and insecurity are signs of falling from grace; happiness and certainty are the norm. In the face of this powerful story, is there a way to understand our lives and to tell a truer and more complex one? Then we might at least begin to free ourselves from the dread and resistance that we seem doomed to feel in the face of pain.

I would like to tell this different story as I saw it unfold in someone's life. A young woman was living and working in a situation in which she was completely fulfilled. Through a series of events, she found herself in the midst of a crisis in which she lost her job and her reputation. Through

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losing these things she lost her home. From being safe and embedded in life she became no one. Only when she had lost everything did

she realize how much of her identity was tied up with those outer things.

Faced with this new self, she found that although she had not realized it when her life had been going well, there were people who were seen as winners and people who were seen as losers. Suddenly she was the thing that filled her with dread: she had become a loser. Not daring even to contemplate life in that role she set about trying to avoid this new and horrible situation by getting a new job and a new reputation, in order, she hoped, to wrench herself away from contamination by failure.

Whatever she tried to do to flee from failure had no effect. She had to realize that instead of avoiding the state she found herself in, she was going to have to discover its meaning. Two things happened. First, she sat down alone in a room and prepared herself consciously to dare to look failure in the face. Second, she found herself thinking about the picture of the Risen Christ painted by Grünewald. She had seen this picture in a book when she was a student. At that time she had seen herself as an atheist. However, this picture had made her realize that her reasons for rejecting Christianity as a teenager were groundless. It had told her that Christianity was about joy. From that moment in a simple way she began to feel that Christianity was a real power in the world. Now, years later, alone in her room, the picture came to mind again. She began to realize that she had seen it in isolation. Her Chris-

tianity accepted the resurrection but it had not included the giddy descent into shame and death of the Holy Week. Now she saw that the joy and radiant self-realization of Christ were impossible without His having gone down that path. She saw that the message of Christ operated on many levels, one of them being that a fully realized and integrated self was only possible through one's own dying and becoming.

From that moment she stopped trying to avoid her crisis. Instead she embraced it, not only as part of her life, but part of her life that was going to go on for a long time. She explained that she was to go on suffering the consequences of her crisis for many years but that because she had realized that she needed to own it in order to find her identity and her true task; it had stopped being alien and repellent to her. It became an integral part of her being human. One could say that she found that failure was as important, perhaps even more important, than success. It became a deep wish in her life to never to forget that.

What has this to do with having questions?

Crisis takes away certainty, crisis makes obsolete everything that we know and are; it turns our life into a question. All that we know, all that we are, gives us identity and gives us a place to call home. We long for something to remain constant in an uncertain world. Life does not allow us such illusions. It does not let us settle down; once we have built a home in our identity and our knowledge, we must remain prepared to dismantle our certainties and embark on a journey. Only so can we continually refine and heighten our sense of self and our understanding. The poet Keats describes life with all its joys

and sorrows in this spirit; he sees it as a kind of laboratory in which we become not safe and secure, or 'someone' in the world's sense, but that self towards which we truly aspire. This is the self that is at once completely itself and a part of God.

What we are, not what we appear to be, is in the last analysis our primary concern. To be true to this takes great courage. Friedrich Rittelmeyer describes such a challenge in his small autobiographical book, *Rudolf Steiner Enters my Life*:

When I was first reading Rudolf Steiner's works a faint voice would often whisper to me; only gradually did I become attentive to it. It said:

'If this man is right, you with all your knowledge—are just a pigmy! You may as well begin again, and even then you will never get to the point of proving these things to yourself with these higher organs that are promised! And so if you let any of these teachings get into you, you will start as a pupil again and remain one for the rest of your life. You will have to build up your spiritual outlook from its very foundations, at the moment when you thought you were standing as a teacher before men, and when moreover, they were looking for and needing you.'

We can perhaps imagine what it meant for the renowned preacher Friedrich Rittelmeyer to give up 'being someone' for an uncertain future. This is the nature of crisis: when we give up what we know we cannot know whether we will ever find security again. The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins describes his experience of crisis in the following way

*O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs
of fall frightful, sheer, no-man fathomed.*

*Hold them cheap may who ne'er
hung there.*

In crisis, we feel viscerally that we could fall forever into a bottomless darkness and never know the feeling of the ground beneath our feet again. I have described two examples of people responding positively and truthfully to crises. One found the meaning of suffering in her life. With this came an ability to live with it creatively. One, a more renowned person, became part of a movement for religious renewal. What is it like on the other hand when a person tries to avoid his or her growing points, pursuing instead the illusion of the 'good life'?

The writer Laurens van der Post describes the experience of hiding from crisis in his novel, *The Seed and the Sower*. The main character tries to avoid a moment of crisis. He believes he can do this with impunity. Instead his whole life is invaded by a sense of unease. He finds he is no longer able to be alone or to bear silence. He says,

*The only death the spirit recognises is
the denial of birth to that which strives
to be born; those realities in ourselves
that we have not allowed to live.*

It is true that there is no moment more fearful than the moment when we face a life- and self-changing truth. It seems however that to avoid such moments brings something fearful as well. Avoidance does not make us free of pain but rather brings us to a place where there is still pain, but it has become barren. This place is described by van der Post as having 'the subtle chill of nothingness.'

The story of the Holy Week ends not in death but in the resurrection. In Grünewald's picture Christ appears to us as joyful and as radiant as the sun. Light streams from him and affirms the world. This universal image has both a cosmic and a human dimension. As in the archetypal image of the holy week so too in a persons biography crisis ends not in death but new life. Every person has at their heart a fundamental will for the good, a will to give himself or herself to something worthwhile. The way of crisis, the hard way of failure and homelessness, is our schooling for this. We can find courage to go this hard way when we know that through it, we will not be obliterated, but rather find our true self, a self which is able to turn to the world and help in the labour of love.

Ordination in Stuttgart – Germany on March 3–4, 2007

Eva Knausenberger

Those ordained this year were:

From Germany:

Dorothee Jacobi

Monika Schneider-Tito Garzon

Sabine Layer

Christian Seiser

Andreas Laudert

Johann Schuur

From France:

Jean-Marie Falcone

From Hungary:

Imre Silye

From Georgia in Russia:

Irma Beridze

From Holland:

Marie-Helene van Tol-van Hagen

From the USA:

Marcus Knausenberger

On the evening before the first ordination Thomas Bonek [Prague] spoke on the topic: 'Being a priest; becoming a Christian.'

The elements and processes of being and becoming a priest were highlighted, as we were to witness them on the following day.

Angelobung is a vow the candidates make to the spiritual world in the circle of priests on the day before the ordination. It is a kind of code of ethics, delineating the personal journey with Christ, the Sacraments, with oneself and the community.

During the early part of the Ordination, a call goes out to the spiritual world to hinder the ordination of those unworthy. At significant stages during the course of the Act of Consecration of Man the candidates were given the stole to signify their priestly dignity; they proclaimed for the first time Gospel from the altar: 'In the beginning was the Word...'; they were given the chasuble, and with it the authority to celebrate the Act of Consecration as representatives of the Word; they were anointed with oil in three places, and finally they were affirmed by the priests present.

Thomas Bonek mentioned that, like all processes, this is a process of personal engagement now and in the future, an evolutionary process of becoming, whose orientation is towards the future.

The implication is that the future comes towards us and we go to meet it, en-

dowed with our humanity, as it evolved historically and is evolving in the light of present—Christ centred—awareness.

It occurred to me that the witnessing function of the physical and spiritual community present, the light of the risen Christ in our hearts and minds truly with us, all engendered a love-filled process of evolution and becoming as a heart-process.

Michael Debus spoke on the following evening on the topic:

'The working of the Time-Spirit, and the ordination of priests in the Christian Community.'

Michael Debus touched on the reasons for renewal of the church in light of the evolution of consciousness. He sketched the human path from the time of the early Christians through the Middle-Ages to the Reformation on the one hand and the evolutionary path of consciousness as the spiritual meaning of the process. We witness the process in the slogan of the French Revolution: liberty, equality, brotherhood; in the words from the American Constitution: 'All man are created equal and have an inalienable right to the pursuit of happiness' and in the German Constitution, which states: 'the dignity and integrity of the human being is inviolate'. In the course of time the human path has reached the gates to self-autonomy and the capacity to be free.

Michael Debus also pointed out that the dogmatization of the concept 'The Trinity' saved it from being lost altogether. With the advent of The Christian Community we have been endowed with the means to re-enliven knowledge of the trinitarian nature of the human being in freely experiencing 'Christ in us'.

Michael Debus's words helped us to understand the nature of the priesthood as a future-oriented task, when—following the path of being and acting in priestly fashion—human beings learn to accept the unique place every individual has in the present. It is the task of the priest to carry destinies, which he or she has not caused and cannot alter, yet with which he or she chooses to stand side by side in support of individual becoming.

The priestly person chooses to be supportive and non-judgmental, to be present without interference, to witness human being and becoming by being spiritually present in the light of Christ.

The community of central Stuttgart and the students of the Seminar carried the huge burden of finding accommodation

and of providing and abundance of refreshments and food for nearly 500 guests and of cleaning up afterwards. Our most heartfelt thanks go to them.

Many varied presentations by individuals and groups added to the festivity of the occasion; some were funny, some sober, but all helped to make this a very special event. During the Service a small orchestra played music especially composed for the ordination ceremony.

A friend afterwards wrote me the following words by Novalis:

Every-day life can be a priestly service, almost an ordained one. We have entered the process of caring for a sacred flame.... All evolution depends on the involvement and care we bring to it.



Figure, Pablo Picasso, Three views, wood, carved and painted; height 25 cm

Allah and Christ

Thoughts arising from a new book on Sekem, a very special initiative in the Egyptian desert.

Christopher Cooper

The religion of Islam has been under the spotlight for some time, often for negative reasons. Murder, cruelty and the oppression of women have all been justified by certain interpretations of the Koran and this works balefully into the lives of many thousands of people. So, where can one begin to see new shoots sprouting out of the Muslim faith which have any connection with the spiritual streams of our times?

Floris Books have recently published an intriguing book on a large-scale initiative right in the Egyptian desert, written by its founder Ibrahim Abouleish. Here we meet a modern man who skillfully combines the best of Islam with a profound understanding of Rudolf Steiner's spiritual science. This is no wishy-washy blending of the two producing a thin gruel, but a most impressive first in the world.

Rudolf Steiner is on record as saying that it would be a special moment when the first practising Muslim were to join the Anthroposophical Society. It appears that it did not happen in Steiner's lifetime. Whilst there may have been others before Abouleish joined, he is certainly the most significant figure to have lived in both these worlds without apparent contradiction.

His biography makes gripping reading. Born in a small town near the Nile delta he grows up in a harmonious Muslim family which is quite cultured. At about the age of 18 a vision of what he would

like to achieve in his own country begins to emerge in him. Out of deep caring for the many, many Egyptians whose lives appeared desolate after the upheavals and mistakes of the Colonel Nasser years, he longs to find ways of incarnating this vision. The young man described to it to his father in this way. 'When I get back (from my travels) I will build factories where people can work... and workshops for women and girls where they can make clothes and carpets... I will let the road from the station to the village be tarred and plant trees to the right and left of it... I will build a large theatre where renowned artists can give performances to people of my village... I will build a hospital which I will fill with specialists... I want to build schools for children from kindergarten to high school... so that this village can become a shining centre in Egypt.'

So writes the 18-year-old in 1955. Amazingly most of this vision has become a reality some 30 years later and is still growing after enormous trials of his courage, endurance and his deep altruism.

As one reads his life story it becomes clear which element of Islam feeds him and what flows from the Christ-centred teachings of Rudolf Steiner. He points in particular to the inspirations which the 99 names of Allah gave him. Each of these

*Christopher Cooper
is a member of The
Christian Community
in Devon.*

can become an education in itself. 'Allah is called the patient one: I will practice patience. He is the knowing one—I will become knowing... He is the strong one. He is the merciful one. He is the forgiving one.' One sees how this deeply moral stream of Islam flows into him and transforms his life; for instance he says he found he could forgive people instead of flying in a rage. It is significant that more than half of the 99 names (which are shown in full on page 38) could equally be applied to the being of Christ; (number 65 is 'the resurrector') the very existence of the concept of resurrection in Islam will come as a surprise to many who belong to Christian streams.

With a great wrench he decides to leave Egypt with his ideals and his vision at the tender age of 19 and he heads for Graz in Austria where he has one contact. Now he is in the midst of Catholic Europe and needing to learn a new language from scratch. With great determination he learns German and studies natural sciences in Graz and passes his exams with flying colours. He marries a German woman and they soon have two children (who were later to prove to be crucial to the achieving of their father's vision). How did he cope with the two religions, one from his home country and one from his adopted country?

During my stay in Europe I got to know the Christian religion and its teachings of the Trinity. This is unacceptable to Muslims... Allah forbids further gods beside him... I later discovered the qualities revealed by the idea of the Trinity in Allah's 99 names. The God Allah encompasses three qualitatively different areas with 33 names each.'

In these years in Austria 'I was a Muslim because of my upbringing; I didn't drink alcohol, did not eat pork and continued praying regularly. But in Graz I lived in a Catholic community and did not mind attending Catholic mass.' His wedding was conducted with a Catholic ceremony.

However at this point an important new motif begins to work within. 'I could live with both religions... but I wanted to achieve the state of being a "third" in religion too; to be able to live within both and through this transcend to a higher level of being.'

The crucial meeting which lifted him more onto this third level was with an old anthroposophist called Martha Werth. In 1972 she was a member of the audience listening intently to a talk being given by Dr Abouleish in the Tirol. The name of the town, St Johann, is probably no coincidence. It was here that Frau Werth linked him to a new spiritual stream. She invited him to visit her house and when he was settled she took a book of the bookshelf and showed it to him. It was Steiner's *Philosophy of Freedom*. She asked him to read a page and then said: 'can you recapitulate that?' He gave what he thought was an accurate version but then she turned to him in astonishment saying: 'But Dr Abouleish, what you said was not in the book at all!' This humiliating experience challenged him to work much more objectively with this book (which she gave him). He studied it with her three to four times a week. 'Then I developed a deep love towards this anthroposophy... humans and nature were revealed to me in a new light.' He was almost exactly 35 years old when this meeting took place.

Frau Werth travelled with him back to Egypt and revealed to him many of the

secrets of ancient Egyptian civilisation when they were in Karnak, the Valley of the kings, Luxor and the great museum in Cairo. It is as if an ancient destiny prepared perhaps some 4000 years ago blossomed fully in the 20th century.

Two years later Abouleish was able to start bringing his vision into reality quite a distance northeast of Cairo in a landscape that was stony wasteland. There was no running water, but as he stood there in the shimmering heat during the first visit, his inner eye saw wells, green plants, animals, compost heaps, houses, working people. He now knew this was the spot where it could all happen.

He got invaluable advice on biodynamic farming and began to do what most people, apart from his own family, thought was impossible. An oasis began to emerge. It is interesting to see how he used passages from the Koran to help workers appreciate the strange new methods. The Koran differentiates between two types of food—food which people are allowed to eat is called Halal and exquisite foods are called Tajeb. He showed how Allah expects people not just to care for the earth, but to heal the earth and all that has been destroyed. He succeeded in demonstrating how artificial fertilisers and pesticides destroy the earth gradually and rob people of vitamins and trace elements, whereas biodynamic food is Tajeb, exquisite.

The remainder of the book is a very moving description of how the full vision enters reality and how it is eventually (after many battles) accepted at the highest levels in Egypt. Several farms emerge all working biodynamically. A large school is created where the teachers work with the Waldorf curriculum, including eurythmy and all of

the other arts. A centre for caring for the handicapped is a further extension of the educational work. Muslim festivals are celebrated regularly but these can include classical music from Europe played by the Sekem orchestra. Several businesses flourish which feed their profits into the cultural life of the centre. Cotton, herbal teas and clothing are exported overseas. Medical work thrives too, so do the social attitudes of mutual tolerance and self-respect. At one point Abouleish speaks of an economy of love pervading the business aspects. The Christian Coptic children work well with the Muslim children in the school. The Coptic children clean the mosque on Fridays and the Muslim children decorate the Coptic chapel with flowers every Sunday. What an extraordinary example of new religious attitudes for which one would have to look far and wide in Britain.

At the very end Abouleish acknowledges his trust in Allah's leadership in the Sekem project. This is a point when many of us have to face prejudice if our thinking is not flexible enough. One can begin to feel that the traditional picture of Allah has begun to change. Something of a new force is appearing. 'Islam is approaching a time of fundamental change. The Islamic world and with it also Egypt is lacking something comparable to what Martin Luther achieved for the Christian culture. The whole destiny of the modern world appears to point towards this task. For the vast majority of the world Islam is a mystery in its meaning and its striving.'

Can it be that a religion born only six centuries after the turning point of time has the possibility of evolving and drawing in forces which flow from Christ? Can we begin to speak of the metamorpho-

sis of traditional Islam? Can one think of adding something to Rudolf Steiner's statement that Christianity began as a religion but is greater than all religions; namely, that Islam began as a religion but the best elements are capable of being absorbed into the true Christianity?

A lot of the future development of Islam will depend on distinguished figures such as Dr Abouleish, but also on a fresh

understanding of the best elements of the Koran which point to the future. Is it in fact time for a new English translation of the Koran with a commentary provided by someone working with the movement for religious renewal? This would be an important deed too.

Sekem: A Sustainable Community in the Egyptian Desert by Ibrahim Abouleish
Floris Books, £16.99

More Reviews

***Sky and Psyche
The Relationships between
Cosmos and Consciousness***
**Edited by Nicholas Campion and
Patrick Curry**
Floris Books £16.99

*Stars spoke once to us on earth
Their silence now is pain to us.
Out of this pain we utter now
Our speaking to the stars*

RUDOLF STEINER,
freely rendered by A.L.

This remarkable collection of 'papers', or lectures, was delivered at two conferences in Bath, May 1 and July 1–2, 2005 at the Bath University's Sophia Centre. They are more than lectures. As the reader I can feel myself being personally addressed by the various contributors speaking out of professional and life experience. With astounding confidence they are re-establishing a conscious, *new*, individual and communal relationship to all that is around us, speaking up to the stars, sun and moon, the universe. The first contribution is about 'Love and the Alchemical Saturn' by Liz Greene. She describes

to us the dying and becoming in our own Saturn-soul-substance. Saturn's agony and the bringing forth of the true spirit gold out of base matter. 'The secret life of statues' by Angela Voss forms the end. Statues, sculptures 'see us', channel the life of the cosmos, the gods to awaken us through beauty and they release in turn creative powers in us. Another lecture is by Cherry Gilchrist about shamanic rites, re-establishing the link between all life, heaven and earth attained through fully conscious participation of individuals. In this way, in Siberia, the dignity of the individual is being restored after being blotted out by communism. Noel Cobb in 'The soul of the sky' contrasts light and darkness, our love to the earth and the egotistical subjugation of space with the rockets etc. Our own sun, moon and stars, planets and fixed stars form the internal soul-world, shining out of the unconscious to light the way, into full awareness. The way out of separation from the original cosmic man into integration, cutting through layers of filth and poison surrounding us like a suffocating box. Christ is not mentioned by any of the lecturers but we can feel him

through these endeavours of soul lovers and soul carers. The 'star of all stars' is gently present as is the all embracing Sophia. This book could be a rare, nourishing wellspring for life, for the amateur and professional soul carer.

ANITA LARGE

The Trinity

Hans-Werner Schroeder

Floris Books 2007, £20.00

ISBN 9780863155796

...the meaning of the Trinity far surpasses the scope of religion. It is as much the central creed of Christianity as it is the light revealing hidden aspects of the world. p.97

This book by Hans-Werner Schroeder, a priest of The Christian Community, first published in German in 1986, has been translated into English and slightly abridged, by Eva Knausenberger. The original title *Dreieinigkeit und Dreifaltigkeit: vom Geheimnis der Trinität* translates as 'Three-in-One and One-in-Three: concerning the mystery of the Trinity'.

The book is in three parts. The first part explores and illustrates concepts of the Father-God, the Son-God and the Spirit-God, thus named, so at once presenting the concepts from a stated point of view. (Different beliefs about the Trinity are discussed later in the book.) The author's explorations incorporate many images from nature, and from common human experience; he also introduces several 'contemplations' to help one experience for oneself the reality and nature of the subject under discussion. This is practical and helpful: the reader is encouraged to approach the mystery of religion and religious experience also through their own meditation.

The second part, though short, is powerfully written, contained in a chapter called 'The Unity of the Trinity'. In it he speaks of how we arrive at belief, then how we might be able to move on from belief to knowing, as in our culture we do not naturally experience the spiritual world as a reality.

We have no way of understanding the resurrection of Christ, because there is no comparison. It is a singular, unique event without precedence. In order to even begin to understand the resurrection, we must find a bridge, a link to something we already know. p.89

The spirit in which the author explores his subject is one of gentle guidance, in pointing the reader in the direction of personal and shared experience, in creating or suggesting means by which the reader might create for themselves the bridges that make the link from the familiar knowledge/experience to the new.

The third part of the book, entitled 'Dogma and Insight' is concerned with first, the history of the concept of the Trinity, in which the author takes us through various dogmas and perceptions of the Trinity with reference to the writings of religious scholars through the ages. Then the author turns to the light thrown upon this concept by Rudolf Steiner, how for example he suggests it penetrates our entire world being, rather than resting within the confines of a 'religious' concept. Thirdly, in a chapter entitled 'Renewed Religion in the Light of the Trinity', he talks specifically about the Trinity in the context of The Christian Community and its sacraments. The book as a whole, but particularly this section, is a good companion or

even introduction to the Act of Consecration of Man, as he places his exposition of the Trinity in the context of the language used in the service.

In a classical reformulation of the Act of Consecration of Man, the renewed form of the Eucharist, has these words as three signs of the cross are made:

*The Father-God be in us
The Son-God create in us
The Spirit-God enlighten us.*

A more concise and exact description of the Trinity is hardly possible. It is a progression from the old set formula to a wording which holds greater depth and substance. p.137

The book is written in a warm, approachable style, with reference to our own human experience, to our experience of Nature, as well as to many Christian writers. It presents its subject in a way that breathes inspiration and life into one's previous perceptions. At the same time it has a breadth of historical reference, which makes it rich in material and inspiration for thought, and grounded in Christian scholarship. It is a rewarding read.

ROSEMARY MERRIMAN

Journal for the Renewal of Religion and Theology

As part of our web presence The Australian-New Zealand region have launched an open access journal called The Journal for the Renewal of Religion and Theology. www.renewtheology.org

The purpose of the journal is to provide a vehicle for scholarly, peer-reviewed pa-

pers to be published. We will have a particular emphasis upon an approach to religion and theology that seeks to be as inclusive as possible in its interdisciplinary area of enquiry. Papers will address the full spectrum of religion and theology—particularly those areas which are seldom heard. Similarly the journal will address not only monotheistic religions and spirituality, but also Eastern, indigenous, new religious movements, and other world views which may not be well represented in the mainstream of religious and theological study. We have attracted an international board of directors from both within the Christian Community (Roger Druitt, Tom Ravetz and Andrew Welburn); and various universities around the world, including people like Dr. Malidoma Some, Dr. Marie Turner and Dr. Neil Preston. Visit the website to find out who they, and the others, are.

The papers in the journal will address historical and contemporary phenomena as well as speculative essays about future religious expression, spirituality and theological understanding. The academic interests of the editorial board reflect these diverse positions.

Martin Samson, the priest in Adelaide, has conceived and initiated the journal, with assistance from Kevin Coffey in Auckland, who is responsible for managing the web site, as well as being a co-managing editor.

We ask you to take note, and pass the word around, that the possibility now exists for individuals to submit a paper that will be reviewed and, as it is a recognised journal, will be able to be seen as a published academic paper.

MARTIN SAMSON AND KEVIN COFFEY

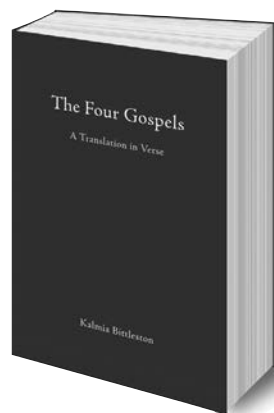
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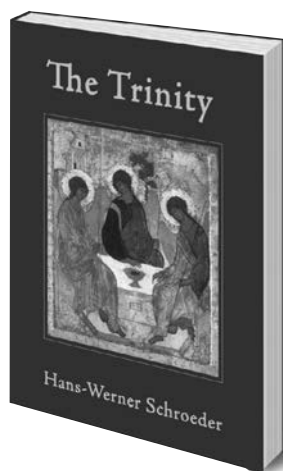


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Published January 2007

THE TRINITY

HANS-WERNER SCHROEDER

TRANSLATED BY EVA KNAUSENBERGER



Hans-Werner Schroeder here turns his considerable experience and wisdom to the issues surrounding the idea of God as three-in-one. He looks in turn at the Father-God, the Son-God and the Spirit-God, their theology and their characteristics before going on to examine the spiritual implications of the Trinity itself.

Hans-Werner Schroeder, born in 1931, is a priest of the Christian Community. He teaches at the seminary in Stuttgart and is the author of *The Cosmic Christ* and *Necessary Evil* (both Floris Books).

978-086315-579-6 hardback
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Apology


In the last issue (*Perspectives* March–May 2007) the last few lines of Patrick Kennedy's article on Pentecostalism were omitted. The lay-up technician is very sorry for this mistake and apologizes to our readers and the author.

Here once more the final paragraph of the article, this time in full:

In this sense, we can only wish for our movement what Jack Hayford's description of what the Holy Spirit filled life can offer: 'When searching souls seek, they find—and the diligent will never be satisfied to live at a superficial level of merely being 'religious'. Their answer to Jesus' call, 'Follow me', will take them beyond an encounter with His salvation at The Cross, to an encounter with the Holy Spirit in the Upper Room.'

CHRISTOPH HANNI

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LAZARUS, COME FORTH!

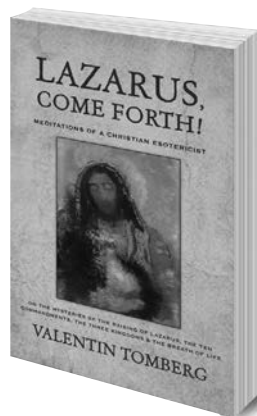
Meditations of a Christian Esotericist

VALENTIN TOMBERG

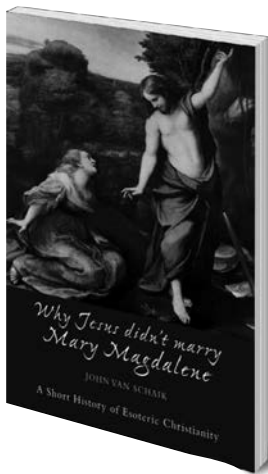
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT POWELL

This book is a classic of esoteric Christianity in which Tomberg reflects on the mysteries of humanity's covenant with God through history.

The book includes meditations on Creation, the Fall, the Old Testament Covenant and the Ten Commandments, before moving on to Christ's miracles, culminating in the raising of Lazarus as a symbol for humanity being raised from sleep and death to wakefulness and resurrection.



Lindisfarne Books
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WHY JESUS DIDN'T MARRY MARY MAGDALENE

A Short History of Esoteric Christianity

JOHN VAN SCHAIK

TRANSLATED BY GEORGE HALL

Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* draws on ideas from the history of Christianity and presents scenarios that the established Church has found difficult to quash. One such theory is that Jesus married Mary Magdalene – an idea that has caught the popular imagination worldwide.

Where the Church has tried simply to dismiss the question, this concise and fascinating book addresses it head-on and seriously considers all the evidence. John van Schaik uses his vast expertise and knowledge of esoteric Christianity to explore Christian history and the secret practices of the time of Jesus. To the likely disappointment of conspiracy theorists, he concludes firmly that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were not a couple.

This book is an antidote to the vague theories and fantastic claims that have long surrounded the question of the relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene.

978-086315-582-6
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If any of this appeals to you as a short-term opportunity or a long term commitment and you would like to discuss your aspirations and our opportunities - please contact

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Further information about Newton Dee Camp Hill Community is available at newtondee.org.uk

Newton Dee is a Camp Hill Community living and working with adults at risk.

THE CALYX...



... offers a welcoming and quiet place in which to shelter from a busy life, convalesce or simply have a break.

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June–August 2007