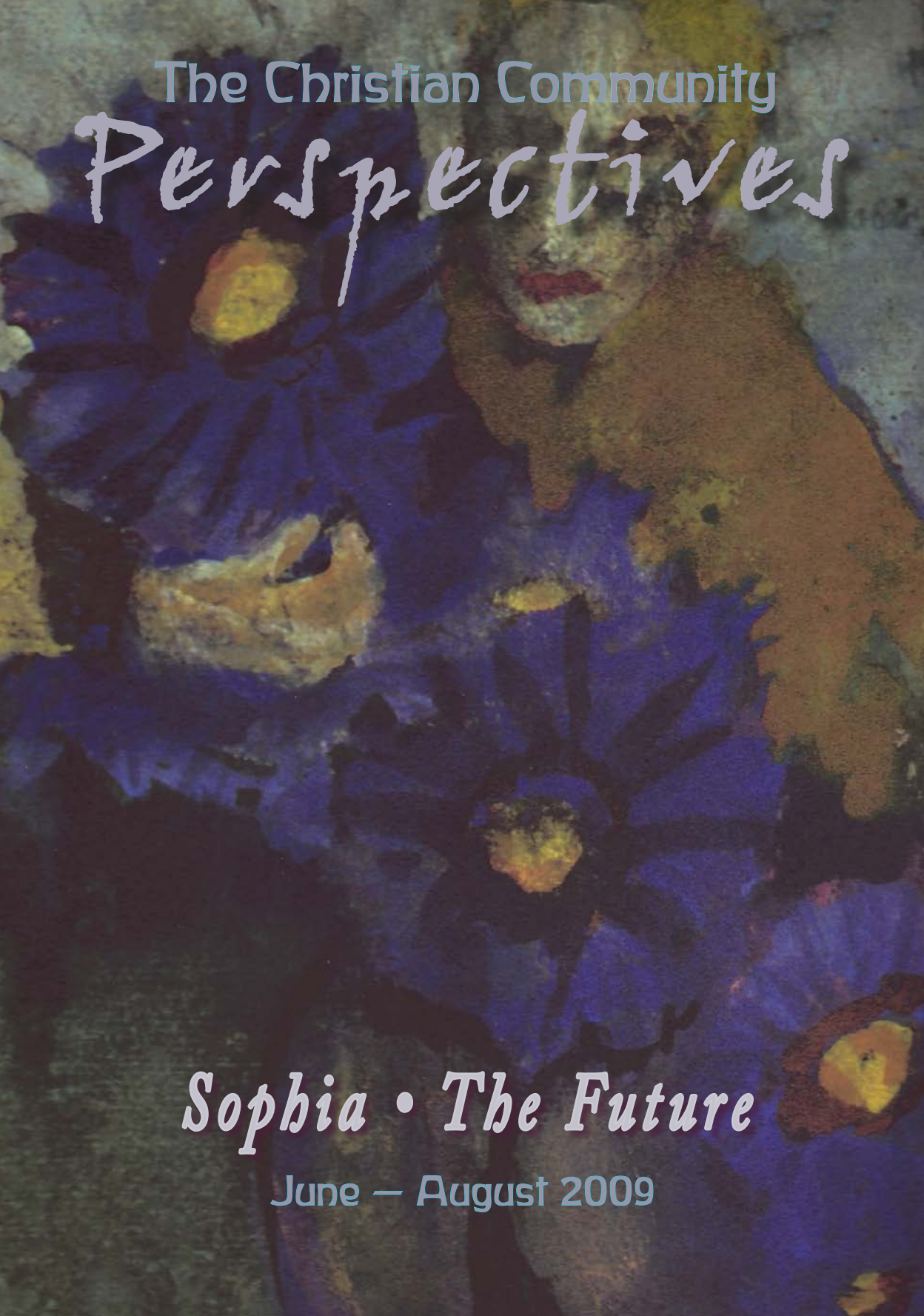
The Christian Community
Perspectives
Sophia • The Future
June – August 2009

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Editors:
Peter Howe, Rev. Tom Ravetz,

Deputy Editors:
Deborah Ravetz

Subscriptions & Advertisements:
Kevin Street Tel: 01384 443 268

All correspondence: Perspectives,
22 Baylie Street, Stourbridge DY8 1AZ
Tel: 01384 377 190
Fax: (UK only) 0871 242 9000 email:
editor@perspectives-magazine.co.uk
subs@perspectives-magazine.co.uk

Lay-Up: Christoph Hänni

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As for the future, your task is not to foresee it, but to enable it. Antoine de Saint-Exupery

There are two ways of looking at the future. It can seem to be a stranger, the thing we know far less than the past which we have experienced. On the other hand, it can seem to be the most familiar thing of all, because our future comes from what we have willed, even when we were not conscious of this willing. It was a decisive moment in the foundation of our Community when the founding priests realised that their task was not to join in the stream—the 'succession' that flows from the past, but to connect to a future succession—to the reality of Christ, as it breaks into our present.

There will be an international Whitsun Congress of The Christian Community in Bochum from 21st–25th May 2010, entitled *Future Now*!

Tom Ravetz

In search of the Divine Feminine
The re-emergence of Sophia in our times

Martin Samson

I believe that one of the most crucial tasks of Christian religious expression today is the quest to include the Divine Feminine once more. The popular appeal of Dan Brown's book, The Da Vinci Code shows that there is a yearning for a worthy and intellectually attractive renewal of the idea of the Divine Feminine. Christians over the last century have been awakening to the fact that Mary is more than just the mother of Jesus. Yet, at the same time we have to acknowledge the fact that the Divine Feminine has been denied, sidelined, suppressed and in a sense even killed or crucified by the Christian tradition over the last sixteen centuries.

Is there really only one male God? Where, in the life of The Christian Community do we address and pray to the Divine Feminine? This article intends to explore the context of the disappearance and re-emergence of the Divine Feminine within Christianity. I hope that it will generate a thought provoking and yet open space, for further discussion within our community, which I intend to continue in some articles to follow.

The disappearance of the Goddess

In many cultures the language, symbols and images used for the Divinity, or God, describe a co-creative relationship between the masculine and feminine aspects of being. In modern Paganism it is the Lord and Lady; Egyptians understood the relationship of Isis and Osiris to be the revelation of divine action on earth; in parts of Aboriginal Australia Baiame works together with the Sun Goddess Yhi in creation. Many cultures have a pantheon of Gods and Goddesses. Even in most monotheistic religions the feminine side of God remains robust in the devotional life of the culture and community. In China when Confucianism was establishing a male dominated official philosophical teaching, the Goddess of the West emerged amongst the devout as Kuan Yin, the Female

Martin Samson is a priest of The Christian Community working in the Adelaide Hills area, Australia.

Buddha of Compassion. Within some Christian traditions Mary has become, along with Christ, the focus of intercession with God. Even in the reigns of the monotheistic periods of Akhenaton in Egypt and Zarathustra in Persia the Goddess survived as Isis and Astarte. Yet, within Christianity as a whole, we tend to persist in saying there is only One God and attribute predominantly male characteristics to God's being.

The history of many cultures shows a rise in the patriarchal teachings within the ruling classes from around 600 BC. This includes Egypt, Israel, Persia, India and China. In Judeo-Christian history this moment is marked by the return of the Israelites from their captivity in Babylon. Once the Israelites returned to the Promised Land the Zadokite priesthood focused the nation's religious attention on Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the temple. Through the cultural influences in Egypt and Babylon the emerging Jewish nation had moved from being a polytheistic culture to a monotheistic one. The Jerusalem priesthood had gained an upper hand in establishing a single 'authentic' priesthood and over the next few hundred years began writing and editing the teachings of what became the Jewish tradition.

This traditional interpretation is still representative for many people in their rather unreflected understandings of what is portrayed in the Bible. The emerging insights from history and archaeology can prompt us to ask whether our God is a singular male God with three distinct male persons. Is there more to the story than what we have accustomed ourselves to in our understanding of the narrative? For example there is a story of King Saul who went to visit a woman who could see and divine Spirit when Samuel had died and the Lord was not speaking to him in dreams or through prophets. While this is not proof of the feminine aspect of God, what it does show is that the Israelites knew of more deities than Yahweh. Abraham went and honoured the high places of local deities, many of which were those of Goddesses, before establishing sanctuaries to Yahweh. In the early days of Israel Jerusalem was not the uncontested place of the Temple and the only high place of Yahweh. There were many sanctuaries to local deities and the Israelites were part of that religious culture to begin with.

Even the interpretation of the traditional struggle between Yahweh and Baal is changing in its perspective through the discovery of temples dedicated to 'Yahweh and his Ashera'. Ashera is the Palestinian/Canaanite name for Astarte and her consort was Baal. Many thinkers see the metaphors of battle in the Hebrew Bible describe the journey of Yahweh trying to usurp Baal's throne as Ashera's consort. In summary, it seems that the journey of the Israelites towards becoming the Jewish people began in a

polytheistic tradition when one deity, Yahweh, chose a folk with which to work and bring about a specific revelation of the human Self. Once the Israelites realized this they became what is known as henotheistic: they worshipped one particular god amongst all the gods. In times of struggle the Israelites returned to the indigenous gods such as the golden calf. Ultimately, their journey focused their devotion and spiritual aspiration towards the I-Am god Yahweh. These insights from archaeological and biblical scholarship show that outcomes of history that we may consider to be divinely mediated are by no means inevitable! Historical criticism gives us an opportunity to evaluate how personal destiny, cultural influences and choices people make are incorporated into the results of evolution. It further challenges us assess how our own choices in philosophy and life styles will write the history of our times.

Through the monotheistic philosophical influences in Egypt and Babylon mentioned above, this worship of one god among many became the conviction that there is only One God. The Jewish monotheistic philosophy of the Jerusalem priesthood was established and consequently enforced. Monotheism had become the dominant culture in the time of the life of Jesus Christ. This historical background throws light on his anger at the rigid, exclusive orthodoxy of the religious authorities.

Did Christ reclaim the Divine Feminine in his teachings? Much of the Hebrew Bible was only finally written down a short time before Christ was born. In fact some of the books of what is commonly still called the Old Testament were written in the first century after Christ. It is relatively easy to read passages of the Hebrew Bible and feel the philosophical understandings of the community that edited those passages.

In particular the question of the authorship of the books of Moses or the Pentateuch has come under scrutiny over the last three hundred years. At first it was presumed Moses wrote down the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, but later it became obvious that there were very different styles and sources in the narratives. The repetition of certain stories gave rise to the question of there possibly being more than one author. It has become common to think that the Pentateuch was finally edited drawing on four different sources, each with a very different cultural and philosophical emphasis. The oldest source (10th century BC) is known as the Yahwist or J source and can be seen in the use of the name Yahweh for God. Then in the 8th Century BC came the E source or Elohist writers who predominantly use the word Elohim for God. In the seventh century other authors and editors wrote the deutero-canonic texts and are known as the D source.

Finally one community, whose style some of the authors of the New Testament seem to have taken on, was the Jerusalem priesthood or 'P' source editors who in the 6th century BC wrote some passages that are critical for our understanding of the Divine Feminine: the creation story in the first chapter of Genesis being a central one. This particular understanding of the origins of the Bible texts opens up a different way of interpreting our doctrines derived from certain narratives. For example the understanding of the first creation story in Genesis 1, written by the priestly source gives a very different emphasis to our understanding of the Feminine side of God than the Yahwist narrative of the same event in Genesis 2. Although it may at first seem shocking to analyse the Bible in this way, we are in fact familiar with the idea that one story can be told in different ways by various authors when we read the four gospels. Here we know that each one is true, and that each opens a unique aspect of the truth for our consideration.

Created in the image of God

Verse 27 of Genesis 1 has three parts or cola: '(1) So God created humankind in his [*Sic.*] image; (2) in the image of God he [*Sic.*] created them; (3) male and female he [*Sic.*] created them' (RSV). This way of writing is a classic form of Hebrew poetic repetition designed to impress the hearer with the theology of the narrative. The first two cola repeat the same idea but are arranged in reverse, or chiastically. With the third cola there are two possibilities to read the parallelism of the added information. Each choice determines how the roles and relationships between men and women are interpreted, and subsequently the *Imago Dei* or what being created in the image of God might mean.

One way to interpret the ideas in the third part of the sentence is a progressively parallel development of ideas. This means the ideas of male and female are built onto or add to the ideas of the first two. They may not necessarily refer to the image of God, but only anticipate and pepare us for the next verse and the fertility procreative command for humanity. This choice is well substantiated by the sociological context of suspicion that the philosophies of the 'P' source (the Zadokite Priestly editors of Genesis 1) were not egalitarian and was thus unlikely to express a view that promoted equality between men and women in society. This choice in interpretation has also been the dominant choice within Christian doctrine between the times of Augustine and Calvin. We still live in the on-going social and spiritual repercussions for women in the wake of the teachings arising from reading the creation story in this way.

Another way to read third part of the sentence is synonymously parallel or straight parallelism, which leads to the realization that the reference to male and female does refer to the image of God. In this form of reading humans are called exclusively and distinctively to create out of and in the image of God. The connection of our gender to procreation we share with the whole of creation and it does not describe our specific task given in the creation story. The writer wants the reader to understand God's self as 'male and female alike'.

Which choice do we make as the reader of this information? How do we as modern Christians, within our own social critique on the role of women in society and their equal ability to fully image God, choose to hear this part of the narrative? It hopefully becomes clearer as to how critical it is for our own philosophical framework to make a stand one way or the other. A lot in our lives and how we live them depends on our conception of God in the light of this verse.

The resurrection of Sophia for the survival of Christianity

In esoteric and Gnostic teaching there is an understanding that the Divine works as a *syzygy*: two aspects that in conjunction or alignment with one another enable the other to be active agents in creation. A passive side enables the active. At times it is the feminine aspect that works in the passive enabling complementary role; at other times it is the masculine that acts as the passive role to support the feminine activity again. Neither part can be seen as the more important. Christ was in some ways 'passive' in death and resurrection, while the Sophian aspect, working through the women, was the active witnessing agent. Sophia played an enabling role in the emergence of the transformed, masculine I-Am force in the death and resurrection of Christ.

In the meantime Wisdom has died through humanity's history and been entombed in intellectual scientific, utilitarian philosophies and societal norms. As stated before, this suppression of the Divine Feminine took place in many cultures, not only within Christianity. Wisdom has to be crucified and resurrected through humanity. A new aspect of Wisdom can be added to Her being through human-wrought wisdom. The masculine side of God had to go through a process of death and resurrection at the hand of humanity, in the human being of Jesus Christ, facilitated by Sophia. Sophia experiences her death and resurrection through the I-Am of each individual human being learning to imbue Wisdom into creation in our thoughts, feelings, words and actions on the earth. The masculine I-Am

Self within each one of us is called actively to resurrect the Sophian Wisdom we have crucified.

A indication of this can be heard in the epistle on humanity which we hear in the Act of Consecration of Man in the times between the festivals. In these times we can allow the resounding spiritual content of each festival cycle to settle further into our humanity. In the third part of the epistle we hear of our working with the Holy or Healing Spirit. If we can experience the work of the I-Am in each human being, as Christ in us and through us, we can also begin to hear the inner dynamic of the epistle which draws us into the relationship of community of life between divinity and humanity. The ideas connected with 'our beholding' move from beholding the Spirit towards a calling to imbue the world around us with the spiritual substance of Spirit-filled human soul. The human activity of beholding acquires awareness that our Spirit-filled soul has an activity of awakening the Healing Spirit in all that we behold. This kind of active perceiving of the world allows creation to receive our human wisdom as a transformative deed born—resurrected of our consecrated humanity.

Stage scene, Emil Nolde

In further articles I hope to explore other aspects of the Divine Feminine as part of our renewal of religious practice.

Select further reading

John J. Collins: *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2004.

Michelle A. Gonzalez: *Created in God's Image: An introduction to Feminist Theological Anthropology*, Orbis Books: Maryknoll, New York,2007.

Martin Palmer, Jay Ramsay and Man-Ho Kwok: Kuan Yin: *Myths and Prophecies of the Chinese Goddess of Compassion*, Thorsons HarperCollins Publishers: London, 1995.

Rudolf Steiner: *The Goddess: From Natura to the Divine Sophia*, Rudolf Steiner Press: Forest Row, 2001.

Freedom Forgiveness Future

Cheryl Nekvapil

What are people around us saying about the future? What does each of us have to say about it? I've been listening with writing this article in mind and here is some of what I've heard and then thought myself.

'If you're writing about the future it has to be about time, about *chronos* and *kairos*' says a man in our congregation. When I look in a concordance these are not the only words in the Gospels translated as time from Greek; there are also *epi, ede, hemera, tote and hora*. And *mello* which is translated as *future* appears in Paul's letters but not in the Gospels.

Time has many shades of meaning and looking as a beginner at the Greek expressions highlights the differences of what we mean. We can fall asleep with our singular use of the word time in English. So what *kind* of time is found in *chronos and kairos*?

In Luke 21, *kairos* is used three times in the phrases: 'The *time* is near! Do not go after them' (21:8); '…until the *times* of the Gentiles are fulfilled' (21:24); Be alert at all *times* (21:36). A definition of *kairos* given by Lucia Wachsmuth[1] is that it speaks of the moment of ripeness, the moment when we reach for a fruit on the tree and as we touch it, it falls into our hand, a perfect moment of giving and receiving in ripe synchronicity. *Kairos* is also the *time* when Jesus went through the grainfields, and the *time* of harvest.[2]

'But the future has to be based in the past' reflect other congregation members in a study group discussion. Yes, but in what way is that the case? We can all look back at the *kairos* in our lives, those moments when our lives are blessed with fulfilment and we look to the future to that happening again to guide our direction and decisions.

'I have experienced that *kairos* three times in my life', said a woman without hesitation as we stopped to speak briefly in passing. 'When?' I asked. 'When each of my three children was born' was her answer. That answer and her spontaneity surprised me, but it is striking how the whole world receives when a child is born. The stars are shining in their place in the heavens for the *time* on earth when a human being takes up his/her destiny, and we bless that through Baptism.

'We can't make a decision fully, we can't act until it all comes together and we simply know what to do,' another woman wisely advises me. 'It just

happens when the time is right and we have to do our work and wait, we can't tell when it will be' emphasizing her experience. This is the kind of future experience in which we trust when we no longer see the way forward—*Be alert at all times*. We bless this waiting and wakefulness through Sacramental Consultation.

A light flashed on for me when I first came across the title of Bishop Tutu's book, 'No Future Without Forgiveness'. The book was worth buying for the title and having bought it, I was fully persuaded about the necessity of what he knew and practiced. His lesson was at the tip of many hopes when the events of September 11, 2001 blasted into our world. What kind of future would be plucked by our leaders, by us? Then there was a sense that the ripe possibilities were many, and the very different seeds of the future they carried could be chosen from the future rather than from the past. It was then that Bishop Tutu's vision was confirmed for me, how great our task is to live the future chosen in the ripeness of forgiveness, the act of the creative Spirit of our time. We bless the future choice and possibility in Confirmation.

Chronos is the time we describe in *chrono*logy, in sequence and measured by hour glasses, clocks, watches, digital devices, mobile phones—this is when we can talk about the past and the future historically, projecting back and forward. Almost daily people comment on: how '*time flies*'; the bus isn't on *time*'; 'what's the time?'; ' in x days', weeks', months', years' *time*'. What is this time that we live by and measure?

In John 14:9 'Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this *time,* Phillip, and you still do not know me?"' and the Greek word is *chronos.* Here there is urgency, preciousness about the *time* that we're given. So many breaths, so many heartbeats given for us to have time in which we can learn and experience and act. How much *time* have any of us got? Loss, getting old, illness, suffering, death can often shock us into an awareness of *chronos* being real in our earthly life, rather than an external driver, an external measurable flow happening around us. Death defies youth over this kind of life*time*. By anointing, we bless the *time* we have on earth in this life and look to the future of the soul beyond the temporal.

Now these shades of *time, chronos and kairos,* have their colour of course in our human being—in our present moment. Otto Scharmer in his book *Theory-U* goes into a vast exploration of presenting a process of how to be awake in the present so that we are 'presencing'. We have a base in the past, we exist in time, and we can discern the emerging future in choosing out of greater *freedom*, which possibilities we pluck.

Cheryl Nekvapil is a priest of The Christian Community in Canberra.

Recently our congregation did a deep dive into a 'U Process', facilitated by Martin Samson and Wendy Pryor[3]. We had to really find out what we, as a community, want and can aim to have as our own church building.

The first thing we were asked to observe was that our usual response to a challenge or problem is to 'download' a response or a solution. This downloading is highly subject to *chronos*, accumulated individual knowledge, and in a group, can be led and decided by some with the risk that members with another solution in mind are left high and dry, not owning the decision.

The next thing was to open our minds, our hearts and our will to exploring the question with an open soul. How can we do that and are we prepared to do that? Yes, we are prepared to do it for the sake of our future, even though it looks like it's going to quickly get uncomfortable and out of anyone's control—except hopefully the facilitators' guiding hand! We were asked to make public and for a while, suspend our judgements (closed mind), our cynicisms (closed hearts), and our fears (closed will). It was remarkable how free and safe we felt to put these out there and suspend them for a day. We were diving deep and we began to feel a *time change*, until we found ourselves present to each other and present to our question. We could feel the past as ground under our feet, we have *been together all this time* in establishing our congregation, now what do we know, what will we do? What is presenting itself to us, what are the possibilities visible as the emerging future? What choices will we make together, in openness from what we can all presence in the *kairos* moment we had intentionally invoked together?

After 12 hours together, and resurfacing from the deep dive through further process, we had a decision about which everyone felt a remarkable surge of enthusiasm and commitment. We were together having exposed our closedness, having let go, having given voice and a full exploration of minority voices. It felt so much more like forgiveness than a solution, it felt like we have a forward step that lives from the future.

During the workshop held and planned in *chronos*, the *kairos* symbol on our chasuble, the U, appeared as we celebrated The Act of Consecration of Man. Its existence then in the present in the Presence, the deep dive into our Human Being was the experience we were seeking to bring alive in our decision making. We bless our freedom to participate in the future through forgiveness—ever present *chronos and kairos*—by celebrating The Act of Consecration of Man.

1. Priest of The Christian community in Basel
2. Matthew 12:1, 13:30
3. Martin Samson is priest of The Christian community in Adelaide, and Wendy Pryor is a congregation member of the Adelaide community.

A Matter of Life and Death

Garry Brooking

What do you do when the storm hits? Whom do you turn to when your material or emotional existence is threatened? What is the place of religion and the arts at such times? The storm hit me in October 2008, when I was threatened with half-pay and possible future redundancy at a time when I was the sole breadwinner in my household. The threat was not immediately caused by the greatest financial collapse since the Great Crash of 1929, since my post of community drama lecturer was at risk owing to the effects of earlier financial stringencies. However, it was within that tempestuous climate that I experienced myself being considered as disposable as Boxer, the exploited workhorse in George Orwell's Animal Farm (1945), or the work-slaves in Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis* (1927), or of Charlie Chaplin's 'Little Tramp' in *Modern Times* (1935) who suffers a mental breakdown after being forced to work on an ever-accelerating production line and being force-fed by a machine. Nowadays in colleges teachers are told to adopt 'the business model' and are 'motivated' by targets instead of the vocational desire to serve the students. In college there was a large sign in the corridor aimed at the students and saying: 'YOU MATTER!' with smaller letters proclaiming their right to physical and spiritual well-being and equality of employment opportunities. With my sense of this institutional dystopia, the sign might as well have been 'Arbeit Macht Frei' or Dante's 'Abandon Hope All Ye Who Enter Here.' In distress one exaggerates, but suffering is still suffering.

I addressed the situation practically as best I could and with the help of the Trades Union and some of my colleagues, including managers, I salvaged my position at least for this year. However, the stress was such that I took a week off work, and saw two young doctors whom I had never met before. I showed the second doctor a poem I'd just written called 'A Case of Us and Them' which shifts from division to loving connection. His response was to ask me three questions: 'Have you heard of Hill House (a local psychiatric centre), Have you considered taking medication? Have you thought of killing yourself?' He was clearly following the current NHS risk assessment procedures. I told the doctor that I did not need any of these things.

I felt vulnerable. The adrenalin kept coming and my mind raced as I sought for meaning and for material survival. This

Garry Brooking is a member of the community in Stourbridge, an actor and teacher.

article is too short to name all the ways in which the voice of love came. One of the first was the radio voice of Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks who, at the feast of Tabernacles, spoke a parable in which a rich man's elegant tabernacle was blown away by the storm, but the poor man's hovel survived as it was attached by a cord to the Temple. At Advent I sang In Dulci Jubilo in the Community Choir and read that the early German Protestants regarded this old Catholic carol as being so beautiful in its truth that they included it in the Lutheran hymn book, and so it remains half in Latin and half in German or English. I realised that when I had left school in 1966, I was equipped for the world like a participant on Desert Island Discs with a copy of the Holy Bible in a gold box, and a Complete Works of Shakespeare with gold page edges. Now in the storm, I became aware of King Lear's fear of madness and revenge and of Prospero's shift towards forgiveness and concern for the future generation. I shifted inwardly from one to the other.

However, these two great works are nothing without people with whom I could share in speaking and listening and in creating community together. I found such spaces of support and renewal in my family, in The Christian Community and in The Magic of Life Theatre Company which I had recently been invited to join, whose aim is 'to weave gold out of our lives'. The other place of community was with my students who continually transcend any notion of disability or mental health issues. Together we created shows for Christmas with a new sense of vitality and respect for each other. We sang *You'll Never Walk Alone* and *Somewhere Over The Rainbow* feeling their full significance, and I saw that the story of Cinderella was about the joining of heart and will in Cinderella and her Prince to create loving community instead of the degenerative selfishness of the Ugly Sisters; and that *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) has the theme of the quest for human wholeness. Dorothy (whose name means 'gift of God') combines with Scarecrow, Tin Man and Lion (who represent thinking, feeling and willing) in a spirit of self-sacrifice to defeat the tyranny of the Wicked Witch of the West.

In October, I sat with my daughter looking at YouTube wondering whether there were contemporary musicians comparable to those who had guided my generation. She showed me One Republic, whose album *Dreaming Out Loud* contains lyrics of similar profundity to those of Bob Dylan who had guided my generation at a time of great uncertainty. In *I Say (all I need)* they sing of the 'lonely soul' and its need to trust in 'the air that I breathe'. It begins: 'Do you know where your heart is? Do you think you can find it?' In *Stop and Stare*, they sing of the soul who gets scared for

becoming what she cannot be. In all their songs there is an implicit call for reconnection with the spiritual realm. I also watched the video of Muse's *Knights of Cydonia*, a spoof drawn from Westerns, Sci-Fi and Martial Arts movies, whose mad hero and beloved heroine rescue each other (like Chaplin's Tramp and his girl) and together defeat the Ahrimanic metal robot and its human acolytes. Watching this at Diwali, I noticed the momentary red spot on the hero's forehead, and recognised that here was a six minute version of the *Ramayana* in which the combined will and love of Rama and Sita defeat the demon Ravana. Looking at YouTube today, I notice a respondent has written: 'Everybody wants to be a Knight of Cydonia'. Like the grail knights of old we might be somewhat confused and battered, but the future remains open in possibility wherever this spirit shines.

On Good Friday I watched Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's wonderful film *A Matter of Life and Death* again. I love this film, which was produced in the final months of World War Two, and given a Royal Film Performance on All Saints Day 1946. The date is highly significant, since the film's theme is that 'commingling of Heaven and Earth' which we celebrate at Easter. The film's opening sequence of a narrated journey down through the universe to this planet parallels that of the incarnating soul. Here, it leads to a burning Lancaster bomber above the North Sea on the night of 5 May 1945, where Peter Carter is reciting Renaissance poetry and speaking in cheerful anticipation of his approaching death to an American radio operator named June. However, his heavenly 'conductor' misses him in the sea-fog and so he lives, is washed ashore and meets June as she cycles home. They are already in love and Peter wins the right to a trial in 'heaven' since he claims that this new love has changed his destiny. Peter racks his brains for a defence counsel from among all the wisest men who have lived, but in the end this role falls to his friend Dr Reeves who is killed in an accident on his way to the hospital. Here Peter's brain operation (his visions, like Dorothy's, are caused by a bang on the head) coincides with his trial three days following his 'death', and the date on which the war ended in Europe. The film points to the spiritual earthly resurrection of post-war humanity.

Peter's only evidence is one of June's tears which is carried to heaven on a rose. Their love is proved by their mutual determination to die for each other when confronted by the court. June steps onto the moving stairway, and it jerks to a halt. Dr. Reeves triumphantly remarks, '...nothing is stronger than the law in the universe, but on Earth, nothing is stronger than love.' He argues: 'In this tear in this rose are love and truth and

friendship. Those qualities and those alone can build a new world today and must build a better world tomorrow.' In their manifesto for their film production company 'The Archers', the English Powell and the Hungarian Jewish Pressburger state: 'No artist believes in escapism. And we secretly believe that no audience does. We have proved … that they will pay to see the truth.' In the darkest days of World War Two their films showed the enduring qualities of human courage, love and community, and of the continuing golden thread of the human spirit which they believed was essential for reconstructing the future. In this film, Reeves diagnoses Peter's case while soldiers rehearse the Mechanicals' play within a play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, directed by the vicar. There was recognition then that the wellbeing of the future depended on a combination of material, artistic and spiritual nourishment. At the same time as the Government was planning the Welfare State it was also establishing the Arts Council. What we need most from both performing arts and religions today is that they tell the truth both of the reality of the situation, and of the inspiration which is needed whereby individuals can rebuild communities together. From Government we require material and organisational support. This is indeed a matter of life and death.

Couple and Sky, Emil Nolde

The Little Prince—a Children's Book? Part II

Hans-Bernd Neumann

Readers familiar with *The Little Prince* may have been puzzled by the word 'salty' in our first instalment of '*The Little Prince*—a Children's Book?'. A well-known English translation of *The Little Prince* reads: 'altogether pointed, and altogether harsh and forbidding'. In the original: 'Elle est toute sèche, et toute pointue et toute salée': (it is) utterly dry, and utterly jagged and utterly salty', thus introducing an allusion to 'salt of the earth' which it seems good to retain. *J.M.*

The Little Prince and Death

The Little Prince by Saint-Exupéry is the literary outcome of the author's encounter with Christ in the 20th Century, probably in the year 1935 in the Libyan desert*: this was our contention in the previous article. Several gestures of the little prince in words and pictures make the truth of this hypothesis likely: the little prince represents the Son of Man. If this idea is right, the little prince will also have a special relationship to death.

The story of the little prince opens with a death-motif. The very first picture shows a boa-constrictor choking to death a rather sad-looking animal, already turning blue. Then follows Drawing No. 1 (the hat that is not a hat), with the question to the world of the adults '… whether my drawing frightened them,' and Drawing No. 2 (the open hat that is now unmasked as a snake in the process of digesting a still living elephant). Saint-Exupéry reveals his fear of the snakes that bring death in the jungle. Perhaps in so doing he also reveals the existential fear (angst) inherent in life on the earth. The adults try to suppress this fear of death, which is why Saint-Exupéry is surprised that the little prince recognizes the snake in Drawing No.1 and also describes the danger quite soberly: 'A giant snake is very dangerous and an elephant takes up a great deal of space.' The author begins the book with the snake as the bringer of death. The same opening gesture is made at the arrival of the little prince upon the earth: here, before all else, he encounters the snake. And yet—how different is his relationship to this being from that of Saint-Exupéry!

The snake reveals itself to the little prince as a being with knowledge: '…you are innocent and pure, you come from a star!', as insightful—as wise, even: '…it is also lonely among men'; and it is capable of compassion: '…you move me to pity on this earth made of granite, you who are so weak.' And despite its tiny size it is powerful: 'Whomever I touch, I send back to the earth whence he came.'

When we consider the kind of ideas we usually associate with 'the snake', it is quite astonishing to see in how positive a light this being appears here. In a friendly and apparently easy-going way the little prince chats with the snake. It is only when we follow the conversation really carefully that we become aware that the little prince is anything but naïve—rather, he knows full well that this being can and must be the instrument of his death. The key is to be found in the first encounter between prince and snake, in the prince's

last sentence. He asks the snake why it always speaks in riddles. If we then look back to see where the snake has been speaking in riddles, we find that it is always when it was indicating its death-bringing power. The riddle of the snake is the death that it has the power to bring. And indeed more than that: it itself is death, for in answer to the prince's question 'Why do you always speak in riddles?', it replies: 'I solve them all.' And this is precisely what death can do. It can solve all the riddles that human beings encounter on the earth.

The first thing, then, that the little prince meets on earth is death; indeed, one might say that this is a basic gesture of all things earthly. Death is unknown in the heavenly worlds, it is only to be met with on earth. This is the great open secret of the Incarnation of Christ. Christ came to the earth in order, as a human being, to encounter death—and to overcome it. On Golgotha he won his first victory over death. Now it has become his friend. That is why the little prince does not fear death, though he is fearful of pain: 'You are sure it will not make me suffer too long?', he asks the snake at their second encounter. Its poison is good, we learn, and furthermore it can only bite once.

The little prince appears to Saint-Exupéry when the latter is in a life-threatening situation in the desert. He is in imminent danger of dying of thirst. It is as he is thus close to death that the little prince appears to him. Saint-Exupéry gains new eyes upon and for the earth and its secrets. And as, together with the little prince, he sets out to discover the well in the desert, he also comes to see the nature of death through new eyes. There are more important things than death in the earthly world: what is important is to find the well with living water. It is at this point at the very latest that it becomes clear to the reader that in terms of language and motifs *The Little Prince* has a very close affinity with the Gospel of John.

Saint-Exupéry learns, through a picture, that he himself does not have to die. But that is no longer so very important to him, for he has already found the water of life in the desert! Death no longer has any power over him—the snake only has poison for one bite. And so, when the time comes for the prince to leave the earth with the help of the snake, the danger of death is banished for Saint-Exupéry. He is able to repair the engine of his aeroplane—which, in effect, amounts to being rescued. The little prince leaves the earth again with the help of death. This is the moment in which the earthly life of Saint-Exupéry re-awakens. The apparent death of the little prince is the gate of life for the airman.

Apparent death? … Once again the naïve drawings by Saint-Exupéry are noteworthy. The last but one drawing shows the little prince from behind. He is depicted without the scarf which we have already previously identified as the symbol of life. In this drawing the little prince adopts a quite extraordinary stance. One cannot tell whether he is hovering, falling, sleeping or resting. The picture is not of a body subject to earthly gravity but of one that has its home in the lightness of the heavenly worlds. The bearing of this body reveals a lightness such as is otherwise best known from 'The Transfiguration of Christ' by Raphael.

Peace and lightness radiate forth from this picture of death—its imagery hints at

the words from the First Letter to the Corinthians (15:55): 'Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting?'

The Little Prince and the Rose

At this point the question arises: what does the *rose* symbolise, it being the actual motivational centre of the story? We have seen how his view of the world changes completely for Saint-Exupéry as a result of this meeting at the point of death; if we want to take these thoughts further, we can assume that the rose in *The Little Prince* is more than merely the image of Saint-Exupéry's love for his third wife Consuelo.**

On the little prince's planet various simple, pretty and harmless flowers grow. However, there is also the possibility that at any moment persistent growths may sprout from imperceptible seeds. They are of two kinds: one may turn out to be a rose, but might also be a baobab—as seedlings they are indistinguishable. But baobabs present an enormous danger to the planet, for they grow so big that they ultimately split the planet asunder. Therefore the planet must be checked over and cared for every day, and be cleared of the little baobab seedlings—unless, of course, one has a sheep!

Earlier, we indicated that Saint-Exupéry uses the image of the planet to indicate the human soul. There, too, are found the most varied growths and plant-forms that bloom and then fade again. But then there is also the possibility that soul-growths of a more permanent nature germinate—as, for instance, habits. If a habit becomes a peculiarity, a quirk, it can become so strong that it tears the soul apart. An *addiction* would be an example of such a destructive soul-growth. That is why it is important to take daily care of the planet, not only as regards the various 'plants' but also in respect of the 'volcanoes', that they burn evenly. Although this 'morning *toilette*' of the planet is a bit tedious, it is not strenuous. If the planet is cared for regularly in this way, then one day a sprig may also grow and develop into a rose.

In Christian tradition, the rose is linked with the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God on the earth. Those who would strive to let a rose blossom within their hearts must walk a strict, contemplative path. Not for nothing is this path called Rosicrucian in Christian esotericism, the path of the Rose Cross. Cross and rose are the symbols of the Incarnation of God and the secret of the overcoming of death—cross and rose as the symbols of the path of the heart.

On a first reading of *The Little Prince*, one is apt to overlook a pictorial detail supplied by Saint-Exupéry: the fact that the rose on the planet has four thorns. But the number four is totally atypical for plants of the rose family! If we want to assign a number to the rose in accordance with its form and structure, then we recognize from its leaves and shape that the number is Five—as it is for the human being also. The rose of the little prince has four thorns/claws, and it wonders which is the right way to arrange them so as to 'fend off tigers'; that only makes sense if each 'claw' points to one of the four cardinal points of the compass. On the 'thorn-level' the rose forms a cross, i.e. the rose with the four thorns in *The Little Prince* engenders the symbol of the rose-cross—that is to say: the rose that blooms on the

planet in *The Little Prince* bears a relationship to the mystery of the Rose Cross.

When the Rose Cross blossoms in the heart of a striving human being, the secret of the indwelling of Christ becomes living experience. In the innermost core of the soul the insight dawns: 'Not I, but Christ in me.' The rose with the cross symbolises the higher self, united with Christ, in the human being.

It is here that everything in *The Little Prince* comes together. The planet of the little prince is in reality not to be found outside Saint-Exupéry at all. It is the innermost chamber of his soul, the place in which the Christ-Ego dwells and where Saint-Exupéry's higher self blossoms. The little prince's journey through the different soul-planets is his encounter with all those strayings that Saint-Exupéry knows only too well. At the moment of mortal danger in the desert, the living Son of Man reveals himself as present in the heart of Saint-Exupéry. The Rose Cross blooming in secret is revealed to him.

What was the necessary condition for this revelation at such a threshold moment? Anyone who is familiar with the many other books written by Saint-Exupéry knows that he is not writing as an *adventurer* but as a *seeker*. All Saint-Exupéry's striving can be summed up in his own words: 'I am not looking for adventure. I seek Life!'* The children in the Sunday Service learn this mystery: the secret of encountering Christ lies in *seeking*. Saint-Exupéry trod the path of a Christ-seeker; it was this that enabled the Rose Cross to blossom within him.

Translated by Jon Madsen

* Saint-Exupéry: *Wind, Sand and Stars*
** Consuelo Saint-Exupéry: *The Rose of the Little Prince*

The Act of Consecration of Man and the Twelve Human Senses I

Hans Werner Schroeder

The impulse to publish the original German articles (Christengemeinschaft magazine 1993) in an English translation comes from the Devon congregation (S.W.England) who have been working with this theme during 2008. They have found it to be a very fruitful approach to deepening the experience of the central sacrament. Christopher Cooper undertook to abridge and edit the original twelve essays into four parts which will all appear in Perspectives.

The religious ritual takes place in the realm of our senses. It is accessible to all our twelve senses. One may question why we speak of twelve senses since scientists today only acknowledge five. The insight that we have a twelvefold sense activity comes to us from Rudolf Steiner's modern knowledge of the spirit, Anthroposophy. We will be basing what is to be said on this deepened knowledge of our human nature.

These insights can help us to feel that we encounter a deep wisdom in the struc-

tures our eyes, of our ears and of our other sense organs. We can then gain an inkling that we owe the construction of our bodies to the activity of spiritual beings. They have placed a bodily organism at our disposal which enables us to take in the great variety and richness of the world; in sound and light, in colour and in scent, in touching, tasting and even in our experience of the word, its meaning, and of the other human being. For all this we can feel deep gratitude.

As adults, much of our sense of life has got somewhat blunted. Rarely do we feel great reverence and wonder when we have a sense impression. So much has gone through our senses and often in such over-abundance that one such impression rarely makes a real mark. Whoever observes children can realise what a source of wonder, devotion and reverence their experience of the sense world is for them. An adult can gain a deeper relationship to this world if they can tune in to the child's world of experience.

Another world of experience where we can learn much is that of rituals. The twelve senses have not been formed by the highest spiritual beings just for us to perceive the world around us in a superficial way. Through consciously cultivating our perceptions, they can deepened almost without bounds. We are invited to such a deepening in the ritual.

It is possible to observe that our sense experiences are deepened and intensified when we approach a person with love and sympathy. Through this we can learn what great fields of experience are hidden in the world of the senses and how much there is to discover, if we cultivate particular attitudes of soul. Of course our senses of sight and hearing are the two that work in the foreground. However in the ritual, others become active. We hear words; our sense of the Word stirs. As we seek to understand the context these words stand in we activate our sense of Thought. Finally with our sense of Ego we can penetrate to the essential being of another.

In addition to the five senses, higher ones come into play. The sense of smell awakens as the incense spreads through the chapel. As we receive the communion our sense of taste is activated. We experience touch as the priest's fingers touch the side of our face. At the same time we receive an impression of warmth.

When we rise to our feet during the Gospel reading and when we make the signs of the cross as well as when we move to the altar for communion, two further senses become active; the sense of movement and the sense of balance. The final sense, the sense of life, will be described in a later article.

An overview of all twelve senses will show that there are three groups of four:

1. The ones that are more connected with activity within the body, the so-called 'lower senses':
   Touch Life Movement Balance
2. These senses that are more linked to soul experiences and which make us more aware of our surroundings:
   Smell Taste Sight Warmth
3. Those senses which are more concerned with spiritual activity and which link us with our fellow human beings; they can be called 'the higher senses':
   Hearing Word Thought Ego

Let us characterise how these senses work:

The Lower Senses

These help us to perceive our own bodily activity. This is perhaps not so obvious with the sense of touch and we will return to this later. The sense of life conveys our feelings of well-being or discomfort and these include feelings of hunger and thirst. The sense of our Movement tells us how our body (either as a whole or as its various parts) moves in space. The capacity for meaningful and purposeful movement is based in this sense. Physical skills including all sporting achievements would not be possible without this sense. The fourth sense in this group is the sense of Balance, which enables us to hold our own in space.

The Middle Senses

The soul has a greater involvement with these than with the last group. With the sense of smell, intensive memories can be awakened; this shows just how deeply this sense works into the depths of our soul's experiences. The same is true of the sense of taste; a nasty or repulsive taste can trigger off a powerful sense of loathing.

Our sight conveys to us both our most differentiated as well as our most conscious perceptions. No other human sense reveals such a wide spectrum of the world with such detail as our sense of sight. The way we perceive colours shows us how deeply involved our soul is in these processes. In contrast to this, the perception of our sense of warmth is far less differentiated. We mainly feel the difference in temperature between inside and outside. Our own inner warmth is never static and depending on the time of year the outside temperature is experienced very differently.

The Higher Senses

This group of four is characterised by their capacity to express something spiritual. The sense of hearing allows us to connect much more deeply with the world than with our eyes. Compare a visual impression of a person with what we get when we hear their voice. Closely allied to our hearing is the sense of word or language. Through this we perceive the modulations, the pitch of the voice and the quality of the sounds.

A person who had no sense of thought would hear the words but be unable to detect any thought content in them. This happens in certain illnesses. With this sense of thought we move closer towards an experience of the spirit.

The sense of ego is there to enable us to perceive the existence of another ego.

Ritual: a sense-perceptible reality

It is an essential element of the renewed sacramental life that the service affects all twelve senses directly. We need to learn to open our senses and to receive something of the workings of the spiritual world. In meditation, by contrast, a person retreats from sense experience; one excludes all sensory experience and concentrates only on what lives in the soul as thought and feelings.

The ritual is also different from prayer because it includes the qualities of the earthly world which is not the case in praying. Praying may include to a certain extent the higher senses of Hearing, Word, Thought and Ego-sense, but it excludes the middle and lower senses except if one folds one's hands, kneels or makes the sign of the cross, none of which is a constituent part of praying.

This is in no way to devalue meditation or prayer. However, the ritual opens up another possibility of lifting things which surround us in everyday life up to a higher level and joining them with the divine world. In Rudolf Steiner's own words 'one performs sense perceptible processes into which the spiritual can stream. The essential spiritual activity takes place in the ritual in a way the senses can perceive'.

Heightened awareness in the ritual

Taking part in a ritual requires of us that we have a heightened consciousness, one which however has nothing forced about it. This is achieved on the one hand by increased concentration and on the other by enhancing the activity of our senses. Of course problems can arise. I may come into the chapel with the full intention of taking part in the celebration in a worthy way, but after a short while my inner restlessness, lack of concentration and sleepiness make themselves felt. In encountering such problems, we encounter not just a personal problem but the fact that we live in a culture which leaves us little real peace but chases us from one stressful situation to another. To counter this tendency we can begin to unfold an inner peace in those shorter moments when we pray or meditate. Whoever achieves this on a regular basis will find it easier to concentrate in the service. We get help from our senses when we enter the chapel which breathes a mood of peace. The forms inside the chapel also encourage this same mood. Our eyes behold the altar with its restful, clear forms. It represents the grave of Christ which has become the table of sacrifice and the holy meal. 'The grave of the earth' is an archetypal image of eternal peace. The forms of the altar show something of this peace and reliability of our earthly ground.

People often remark that shortly before the beginning of the service a sense of peace enters. One can breathe in this peace. We can feel our way around the forms of the altar with our eyes. This kind of activity is quite the opposite to when we watch television or see a film. Here the eyes remain inwardly passive.

When we gaze at the altar, the object before us is perfectly at rest and our soul forces are not stimulated in any way. We can breathe in this peace and allow it to reach those layers of our soul where we feel peace. Whoever has experienced the sense of peace surrounding a person who has just died can recall this impression when gazing at the 'grave of Christ' which the altar represents.

One often hears the concern that it is very difficult to concentrate in the service from the first to the last word and that other thoughts tend to obtrude. It can be stressful to force oneself to concentrate. However, one may at times have other thoughts which are quite appropriate to the celebration, for instance thoughts about those who have died, about important decisions, about inner questions and problems. One draws such thoughts into the service and moves them on. Then one can turn to what is happening at the altar again with renewed attention. This allows for inner movement and a freer breathing.

We see not only forms around the altar, but many different colours; the altar frontal, the colours worn by the priest and the servers and the white of the cloth on the altar. Each colour speaks to our soul; the blue of Advent, the black of Passiontide

and the red of Easter. With the colour of each festival we experience a station on the path which Christ treads on his journey with humanity in its earthly destiny. Perhaps the easiest is the black which shows the pain and the passion of Christ.

This can be the next step after allowing the peace to stream into us.

We then allow ourselves to feel the qualities of the colours as they change from festival to festival. The black, for example, moves into the dramatic red of Easter and this remains for the 49 days until Whitsun. We experience the victory over death and the creative love which streams from the divine worlds towards man. The red then passes over into the white at Whitsun and St. John's, an image of the spirit light raying into the darkness of the earthly world. We also meet this white in the twelve days of Christmas together with the golden lettering of the words at the altar. Before Christmas, we enter the blue which deepens our preparation for the Christmas event. The four weeks of Epiphany bring the purple-red colour which warms the heart with new strength. The light of Christmas is now united with the forces of the human heart. The ninth Festival of the year is Michaelmas. Here we have the delicate peach blossom colour. This points to forces that we need to activate in ourselves if we are to be touched by the spiritual world. Christ in alliance with Michael beholds these delicate forces which lie there is the human being and which can open like a blossom to the spirit.

There are four times in the year between the main Festivals when the colour we see is lilac. This holds the red and the blue within it in a certain balance, embodying the qualities of active receptivity and receptive activity. This is exactly the soul mood we need if we are to experience religious forces at work in our soul. Rudolf Steiner pointed out that both these components are needed when we have passed through the gate of death. The colour lilac works as a gentle experience of this threshold. Something from the realm of death works into our experiencing of the service.

There is a third step that happens when the candles on the altar are lighted. We can take this in with heightened awareness. The forms of the altar mirror something of the eternal peace of the Father; all the colours at the altar help us to experience the Son accompanying humanity. Now the light of the world of the Spirit appears in the lighting of the seven candles. This is no arbitrary symbol. What our eyes perceive is the light of the spiritual world in all its presence. The appearance of the flame is a miracle—where does it come from and where does it disappear to? It is a phenomenon for the senses, indicating how the activity of the spirit is connected to our world

Crises in Midlife

Julian Sleigh

Dante opens his Divine Comedy with words of lament. He was at the midpoint of the walk through his life at thirty-five: he felt that he had strayed from his right path and was lost in a dark wood. Soon afterwards he found his guide, the poet Virgil and together they reach the portal of Hell. They saw on it an inscription that was full of menace: 'Abandon hope all ye who enter here!' An eye-opener, a challenge, a call to waken his soul to a new set of realities, the world of suffering due to the human potential for doing wrong.

We realize that this state of being thirty-five is indeed a door through which a person begins on his way to becoming a true individual: the quest begins to find one's Self. There is no need to abandon hope.

What happens to a person at about this age? The physical body reaches its highest development. It then gradually begins its decline. This change impacts on the soul life, the life of feeling. An existential moment is reached: Will the powers of the higher life manage to wrest the soul free? It has become closely intertwined with the physical body and has enjoyed the exhilaration of its unfolding and developing: the joy of youth. But at the down-turn of the physical forces the soul is challenged to free itself and draw strength, guidance and meaning from the person's higher being; in other words, from the Spirit. This constitutes a crisis in the full meaning of the word: in a time of decision, discernment, extra wakefulness, opportunity. The bleak question is put to the soul: will you become enslaved by the body or enlivened by the Spirit, your Spirit? In Dante's imagery, will you meet your Beatrice and follow her guidance into the realms of Paradise?

There follow two further challenging 'passages' that belong to the middle of our biography. The first of these is the upheaval brought about by the Second Moon Node at the age of thirty-seven, two months and twenty-two days. I shall not go into the astronomical and astrological phenomena of the Moon Nodes but rather share with you my own experience. It was right at my Second Moon Node that I went to Stuttgart to train for the priesthood: this meant leaving wife and family and a certain status in Camphill and to become a student in a language I hardly knew; but this opened the way to the deeply engaging, pioneering rest of my life. The Moon Node aspect was not part of my plan!

The Moon Nodes, especially the second one, open for a short time the chances or indeed the challenge to review and renew one's career and one's higher aims. Generally the new comes towards us and there is the impact of strong guidance. Sometimes one realises only later that an existential opportunity for change presented itself. Indeed the Second Moon Node can herald upheavals or breakdowns in a person's life, or else just come and go unnoticed.

* * *

The third crisis that can occur in midlife is at the age of forty-two. The seeds of this challenge are laid in infancy. From the time we become conscious of our surroundings we have learnt to adjust our

habits and attitudes in harmony with the influences of parents, siblings, school and environment, discerning what was expected of us. At times we may have rebelled and adopted another set of attitudes. But at midlife there can come into us from our higher being the feeling that there is more in us than our adjusted selves. The question arises from deep down (or high up: Who am I, then? Dimly or clearly one feels there is much more: there is a guiding force which needs to be expressed: not just one's true personality, but one's true individuality, one's eternal being, that spark of the divine which is in me, yes, my authentic egohood: that which lived before I was born and is destined for eternity.

This third awakening builds on the previous crises and stirs in a person as he or she advances through the forties, often at 42, but it can be later. This is what is referred to as a crisis, but can also be called the Middle Passage.

Rudolf Steiner leads us to recognise that a human being consists of Body, Soul and Spirit: that is to say that we each have our individual eternal higher being. This resides in the heavenly world but can be drawn upon by means of spiritual and religious activity. Much of what we can achieve spiritually is thanks to our own untiring effort, but the heavenly powers are there to help us to grow in goodness, truth and beauty. The crises that we encounter in our lifetime are indeed opportunities for us to grow on earth while we have the chance to bring forth what is dormant within us.

Reviews

The Mission of Joan of Arc
Joan Edmonds
Temple Lodge, 178 pp, paperback
£12.95
ISBN 9781902636979
Reviewed by Jane Sahin, Stourbridge

'I had a daughter…' These opening words were spoken on behalf of an elderly woman who appeared in the great cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris on the morning of 7th November 1455. Supported by her two sons, she approached the commissioners appointed by Pope Calixtus III, to present her petition for the formal request for the nullification of a sentence of heresy pronounced almost a quarter of a century before. The woman was Isabelle Romée, the mother of Joan of Arc.

Thus started the proceedings of the trial of rehabilitation, reversing the sentence of heresy, of Joan of Arc. In this unusual biography of one of the great personalities of European history, Joan Edmonds gives colour and depth to the life with the use of dialogue taken from court records and from personal testimonies. In addition to her own research, Joan Edmonds incorporates historical insights and documents, producing a biography that is far from being a compilation of information but is a truly inspiring story which engages the reader.

During her increasingly successful campaign to restore the king of France, of which it is said that even Napoleon marvelled at the strategies, her accusers gathered and the infamous trial drew near. Without any witness or support and after months of imprisonment devoid of light, warmth and sufficient food, this girl of 19 began her defence. Facing a tribunal of 44 assessors Joan was asked by Couchon, leader of proceedings and determined to find her guilty, to

swear to tell the truth on all that was asked, to which she replied, 'I don't know what you will ask, perhaps you will ask things I am not permitted to tell.'

During her life and more intensely during the trial, there appeared her clear-cut ability to distinguish what she was able to say and what—according to the Council of Saints with whom she conversed—she was not. She also showed the humility to say that there were things she did not know or could not even surmise. This openness towards the future amidst the accusations is encouraging to read.

It has been said that this way of thinking was first born in this soul and would be seen more and more in developing humanity, with the difference that they would gain their knowledge more from observation and experience than through visions, which was more possible in those times. This clear thinking is needed to enlighten what we find: to be truthful to ourselves rather than to surmise.

'Returning to the question of the Voice, Beaupère then asked Joan what happened when it came to her, to which she replied that the light came before the Voice, but as to what she then saw, she said, 'I am not going to tell you everything, for I have not permission…but I do say to you that it is a beautiful voice, righteous and worthy.' When Beaupère persisted in having a description, asking, 'Has it face and eyes?' Joan replied, 'You may not know that either,' adding, somewhat pointedly, 'There is a saying amongst little children that people are often hanged for telling the truth.'

Beaupère then returned to her statement about being able to act only if she were in the grace of God, and asked her, 'Do you know if you are in the grace of God?' This cunning question, which was intended to trap Joan, would have been impossible to answer even of someone well versed in theology. Not to be in a state of grace was to be in mortal sin; but because grace is the gift of God, no-one can say that one is in possession of it. Had Joan said Yes, she would be committing herself to heresy and presumption. Her sublime and immortal answer was, 'If I am not, may God put me there; if I am, may He keep me there.' In his testimony, Boisguillaume stated, 'Those who were interrogating her were stupefied.'

George Bernard Shaw expressed his conviction about the head of Joan of Arc in the preface to his play 'Saint Joan': 'A sculptor of her time in Orleans made a statue of a helmeted young woman with the face that is unique in art in point of not being an ideal… so uncommon as to be unlike any real woman one has ever seen. It is surmised that Joan served unconsciously as the sculptor's model. There is no proof of this; but these extraordinarily spaced eyes raise so powerfully the question, 'If this woman be not Joan, who is she?' that I dispense with further evidence, and challenge those who disagree with me to prove a negative.'

Free from Dogma

Tom Ravetz

Floris Books, 139 pp
Paperback £14.99
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Reviewed by Rev. Ian Michael Welch

Pioneering and wide-ranging in its scope, Tom Ravetz's new work, *Free from Dogma*, seeks to bring the theology and practice of The Christian Community into informed relationship with some of the principal themes of systematic theology. This juxtaposition sets up a constructive and helpful dialogue, yielding insights that are fruitful both for mainstream theology and for the self-understanding and praxis of The Christian Community. A central and evocative image for the book is that of the human soul as being like the prodigal son, who has undertaken a journey of becoming and loss,

prior to being reunited with his father in celebration and rejoicing. The parable speaks of the archetypal journey of the human soul from self-chosen exile and separateness back to reconciliation and communion with the Godhead. *Free from Dogma* shows how the ideal of communion lies at the heart of The Christian Community's endeavour, and seeks to vivify and elucidate this ideal with insights derived from the Church Fathers and such modern theologians as Jürgen Moltmann and John Hick.

The introductory section of the book helpfully reminds us of the prevailing cultural situation of modern and post-modern theology, caught between the Scylla of literalism and fundamentalism on the one hand, and the Charybdis of scepticism on the other. The latter trend is traced back to the foundational influence of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), whose seminal work, *The Christian Faith*, emphasized the humanity of Jesus, downplayed the significance of the Trinity and paved the way for a theology of subjective experience. There is, however, and herein lies a central contention of *Free from Dogma*, the possibility of charting a life-giving course between the two 'sea monsters'; this third way comes to focus and full expression through the liturgy of the Act of Consecration of Man. Whereas traditional liturgies focus on remembrance of Christ's words at the Last Supper, the Act of Consecration of Man charges participants to take the significance of the Communion meal into their thinking, so that it may become a living power in their inner life. This celebration of free encounter with the living being of Christ needs also, Tom Ravetz affirms, the support of an intellectual framework, so that participants can understand and make sense of their experience. It is this pioneering task that, with the aid of insights drawn from Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophy, *Free from Dogma* strives with considerable success to engage with and fulfil.

In grappling with this task, the first part of the book discusses some of the key themes of systematic theology: God and creation, the Trinity, the nature of Christ (Christology), the Holy Spirit, and the problem of evil and its redemption. This is a familiar list, with an understandable emphasis on the nature of the Godhead. Other such standard themes of systematics as scripture and tradition, the nature of revelation, what it means to be 'a church', and eschatology do not feature in this volume. In being thus selective, *Free from Dogma* keeps a sharp focus on the themes of community and communion. Furthermore, the book addresses themes that are central to all the principal Christian traditions, and this gives the resulting discussion a certain universality of relevance and appeal.

A selective approach to the themes and tasks of theology is in keeping with the book's lapidary and sometimes poetic style. Notable in this regard is the way in which powerful quotations or the author's recollection of important experiences are used to introduce each section of the book and to ground theological reflection in life experience. This engaging technique gives lifeblood to the book, ensuring that it never becomes overly abstract, dull or theoretical. A striking example of this approach is evident in the use of Elie Wiesel's description of a young boy's execution at Auschwitz to preface the discussion the problematic nature of God's presence and activity in the world. Well-chosen quotations such as this intensify and enliven the reader's engagement with the passages of critical reflection that follow. They ensure also that the discussion has an immediacy and relevance born of a refusal to duck life's difficult and painful experiences. This is by no means a theology of escapism, denial or false comfort. It is rather one that identifies a personal God suffering with His creatures and longing for communion and conversation with them; a theology that sees creation as being vivified

by the loving self-sacrifice of the creator; and one that emphasizes humanity's creative role in overcoming evil and striving in freedom to make God's Kingdom a reality.

This relational and dynamic view of the Godhead paves way for an understanding of the Trinity as a community of persons united in love and in their participation in the divine dance (perichoresis), which generously spills over into creative activity and invites us to participate in the eternal dance. The journey from separateness to community (and ideally, to higher communion) lies at the heart of human evolution, a process in which the becoming of a vulnerable God is caught up and fully involved. The book deftly weaves together concepts and pictures derived both from the Church Fathers and from modern 'process theology' to articulate a Trinitarian theology that supports the ideals of The Christian Community. This ideal eschews the rigid power structures and hierarchical church models that have so often grown out of images of God as distant monarch and arbitrary judge. The challenge for humanity is to create social structures that further human potential by reflecting the cooperation and self-giving love of the Trinity.

In arriving at such an ideal, *Free from Dogma* cuts a clear pathway through the abstruse byways of Trinitarian theology.

With similar clarity, the book gives a clear and helpful account of the principal arguments in the complex debate that raged amongst the Church Fathers about the Incarnation: that is, the way in which the union of human and divine natures in Jesus Christ might best be understood. This exposition paves the way for an understanding of the 'Son of Man' title of Christ as being expressive of the true or archetypal 'I' of humanity, in which the spirit is revealed. Such a view, that Christ unites with the spiritual part of our nature, the 'I' within us, points to an understanding that resolves the apparent dichotomy between the divine and human in Jesus Christ, since He is essentially as we are (and vice versa).

The combined insights of patristic theology and esoteric Christianity are shown here to have the capacity to take doctrine beyond abstraction into the realm of living experience. It is the working of the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier, that consecrates our humanity, and prepares the way for our vital experience of the Christ within. Further, the Spirit's sanctifying presence may also be discerned whenever we have some sense of transcending our 'everyday self' in worship, creative endeavour or human encounter. Paul's term *Koinonia* ('fellowship' or 'communion') is helpfully adduced to express the community of love sustained by the Holy Spirit in the life of the Trinity. This same outflowing Spirit of love animates all true expressions of Christian community in the human sphere, which may be seen as the first fruits of a new creation. This is especially so in The Act of Consecration, in which the Holy Spirit enables the flow of life between the Godhead and the congregation, interpenetrating the human and uniting it with the divine. The insights here are powerful and persuasive, a case in point being the book's synthesis of German idealist philosophy and modern systematic theology. In line with this synthesis, the Spirit's work is seen as extending far beyond Christian spirituality into the processes of evolution itself, drawing creatures and creation itself towards the fulfilment of a new creation and greater wholeness. For humanity the free and conscious path of becoming leads towards 'personhood, choice and creative, self-bestowing love' (p. 75).

The closing chapter of Part I makes it clear that any path to wholeness or community is fraught with hindrance and the opposition of the evil/adversary powers, which may nonetheless be seen through their activity as furthering the course of evolution. Struggle, either with the Luciferic forces that exploit our pride to make us deny the value

of earthly life, or with with the Ahrimanic forces that bind us too closely to materialism, can help to bring us to maturity. Following Rudolf Steiner, Ravetz also identifies a third, more terrible category of evil, which falls under the aegis of the being known as Sorat. This corrosive and radical power of evil seeks to exploit the demonic 'furnace of destruction' that lies latent within every human breast, to crush the spirit, and drive human beings to cynicism and despair. Only the wounded healer, Christ Himself, who has experienced the worst that this power might inflict through his deed of sacrifice on Golgotha, has the power to redeem the world and to strengthen the redemptive forces within us all.

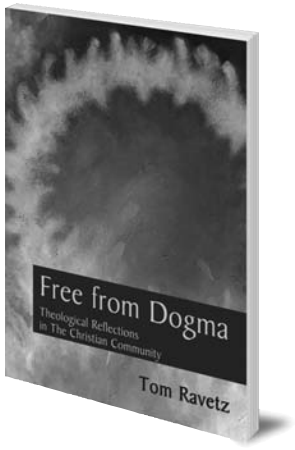
Part Two of '*Free from Dogma*' flows naturally from the theological foundation established in the first part of the book, exploring in more concrete terms how a Christocentric community reflects the Holy Spirit's interpenetrating power in its sacramental life. Christ in his Incarnation is seen as the 'Ursacrament' and archetype for all subsequent sacraments; the true icon who makes it possible for earthly forms to become windows on spiritual realities. Christ has this status by virtue of having overcome death through the reality of the Resurrection. We unite with His life-giving power not through our links with any particular denomination or confession, but through our bearing and deeds, and our openness to the possibility of Christ's Second Coming: his 'becoming present to us in a new way' (p. 93). This is truly a radical and liberating theology, because it stresses individual responsibility and freedom, emphasising the view that Christ's reality transcends all church traditions and outward religious forms.

Hence, the way into Christ's fellowship is to let go of status and self-righteousness and to embark on the risky journey towards the 'true self, which is capable of creative and self-giving love' (p. 100). Within The Christian Community the conversation that takes place within Sacramental Consultation helps the 'pilgrim' on this journey of becoming by providing a safe space within which burdensome thoughts may be offered and transformed. The book clearly outlines how in Sacramental Consultation the offering of thought and receiving of will may be seen as a metamorphosis of the sacrament of penance/reconciliation. Interesting parallels can be drawn here with how, outside The Christian Community, the Sacrament of Reconciliation has often become spiritual direction and/or pastoral counselling. Old-style confession can still be found, of course, but in many churches this has been transformed into conversational frameworks that put the onus on individual responsibility for finding one's true questions, and answers that may open us to Christ's healing power. Ideally, both Sacramental Consultation and the Sacrament of Reconciliation help us to identify the true self, the one who finds fulfilment in service and fellowship. A completely distinct element in The Christian Community's understanding of Sacramental Consultation may be identified in the acknowledgment that reincarnation is held to provide the context for the journey of human becoming. This radical idea (radical, that is, within Christianity) opens up a host of questions and perspectives. *Free from Dogma* adopts an enlightened approach to such questions, suggesting that deciding abstractly on the truth or falsehood of reincarnation might ultimately be less important than testing the moral usefulness of this idea on the path of spiritual development. This approach is much in keeping with the ethos of a book which eschews dogmatism, and it leaves ample scope for further discussion in the future.

In its revelation of the true self, Sacramental Consultation prepares human beings for service of the divine world in the Act of Consecration of Man, which holds central place within 'the organism of the seven sacraments in The Christian Com-

FREE FROM DOGMA

Theological Reflections in The Christian Community



TOM RAVETZ

The Christian Community differs from other churches in that it does not demand adherence to any creed or view of the world from its members. Nevertheless, spiritual, philosophical and religious questions arise, and by thinking about and discussing them, members can become part of the spiritual conversation that has been underway for the last 2000 years.

This is the first book to explore the theology of the Christian Community in a systematic way. In the first half, Tom Ravetz addresses questions about God, the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Holy Spirit and evil. In the second half, he traces humanity's journey from oneness, to multiplicity, and to a new oneness through community.

Rev. Tom Ravetz completed the training for the priesthood of the Christian Community in Stuttgart and studied theology at the University of Aberdeen. He has been involved in training priests in Germany, and works in the UK and Ireland.

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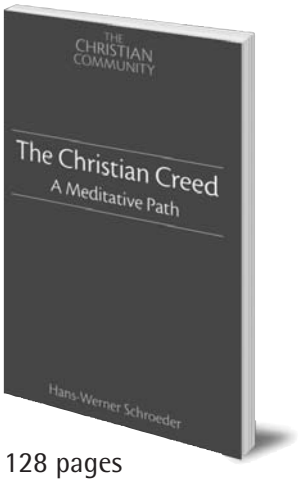

THE CHRISTIAN CREED

A Meditative Path

HANS-WERNER SCHROEDER

In the Eucharist service of the Christian Community, the Act of the Consecration of Man, a new form of the Creed, is read. Paradoxically, it does not begin with 'I believe,' but rather is something which can become a source of faith through understanding.

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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*, *Necessary Evil*, *The Trinity* and *The Healing Power of Prayer* (all Floris Books).

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munity' (122), and appropriately enough, central place within Part 2 of the book. The chapter on the Act of Consecration of Man explains how the soul preparation effected by Sacramental Consultation is brought to further completion in the Offertory of the Act of Consecration. Helpful parallels are drawn between the 'sin offering' and animal sacrifices as described in Leviticus1:1–9, and the confession and threefold offering of will, feeling and thought in the Act of Consecration, which are offered in 'a fire of love' (120) and taken up into Christ's self—offering and sacrifice, opening us to 'the *koinonia* of the Trinity' (118). Through the blessing of the Holy Spirit that streams down to us we link ourselves with Christ's deed of sacrifice, not in memorial or repetition, but as a timeless actuality that becomes ever more real in the transformation of the bread and wine into Christ's body and blood, and the further transformation that arises from taking these substances into ourselves. This chapter on the Act of Consecration deepens one's understanding of this central sacrament, and reveals how it creates the 'substance' that enables the power of blessing to flow through the organism of the other sacraments.

The remaining five sacraments are discussed with great concision, and this textual weighting reflects the reality that within The Christian Community the Act of Consecration lies at the heart of what it means to be in communion with Christ and the Trinity, and to reflect this in our community with each other and creation. This central focus on the Act of Consecration in Part 2 enhances the continuity of the book as a whole, with the first part exploring the theme of community within the Godhead and the second part elucidating how the human *koinonia* unites itself sacramentally with its divine archetype. The resulting discussion is lucid and well-informed, breathing life into some of the abstruse concepts and debates of Church Fathers and modern systematic theology, and showing how the insights derived from these sources can enliven our understanding both of spiritual communion and of Christian community in the broadest sense. This ground-breaking and accessible book will find a ready audience within The Christian Community, and with its depth of understanding and breadth of reference it merits an appreciative readership in the wider theological world.

Ian Welch is an Anglican Parish Priest in Mottingham, London, an ex-student of the Chrysalis Theatre School, and member of the Anthroposophical Society.

The Unknown in the Gospels and *The Book of Revelation*

Alfred Heidenreich

Floris Books, paperback, £9.99
ISBN: 9780863156984
ISBN: 9780863156991

Reviewed by Malcolm Allsop

Floris Rooks have re-published two classics of the literature of The Christian Community: Alfred Heidenreich's *The Unknown in the Gospels* and the *Book of Revelation*. Together with a handful of other titles (eg *Though You Die* by Stanley Drake, *The Seven Sacraments* by Evelyn Capel, *Verses and Meditations* by Adam Bittleston) they have built a cornerstone of The Christian Community work in Great Britain and well deserve to be made available again. These two lecture cycles carry the hallmark of the man who guided our movement here through its first pioneering years, and who was to die only a short time after they were held. (1969)

But, be warned when re-reading them—you could easily be late for work or your evening appointment! They have such a vitality, and are as profound as they are ac-

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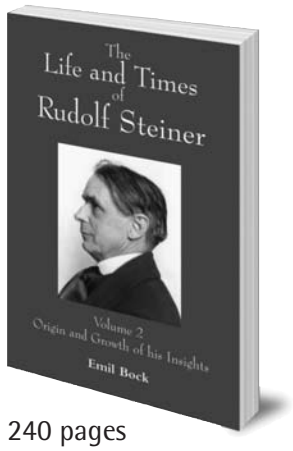

EMIL BOCK

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Emil Bock was one of the founders of the Christian Community, and led the movement from 1938 until his death in 1959.

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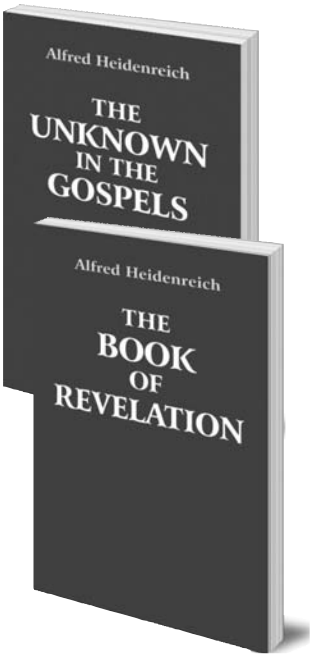
Alfred Heidenreich founded the Christian Community in the UK.
11 March 2009 was the 40th anniversary of his death.



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cessible. Heidenreich was (theologically) well-read without coming across like a dry scholar. He quotes Christopher Fry, William Blake and Coleridge with the pertinence and confidence that matches many a speaker originating from these shores, and he includes spiritual scientific research with an openness and warmth that is anything but off-putting (not so often the case in so-called secondary literature).

Time has moved on, however, of which these paperbacks—available through 'print on demand'—are a sign. A sign that much more could meanwhile be added, scribbled in the margins, cross-referenced to more recent developments. The Unknown in the Gospels was breaking ground for many with its tackling of the two Jesus Children subject matter (chapter 2). Much has been written,researched and collected in the intervening years, if we think of authors such as A. Wellburn, D. Ovason and B. Nesfield Cookson. Equally we can think of the large number of texts that were found, also around the time of the Dead Sea Scrolls (ch. 3) in Nag Hammadi, Egypt, which have only been collated, translated and published since Heidenreich gave his London lectures.

To add one example from 'Book of Revelation', chapter 5 where the subject of advances in medicine is touched on: Heidenreich quotes a report from a congress of biologists where the implications of genetics and influencing heredity are becoming a central topic of concern:

'According to the report we have not quite reached that stage yet, but we have made steps in that direction.And very rightly the Congress raised the question: Who will set the standard?'What would he be saying now, forty years on…?

For The Christian Community in Great Britain Alfred Heidenreich certainly 'set the standard', as many will still remember and as these two re-publications give ample witness. A word of thanks is due to his son, Michael, for encouraging this reprint.

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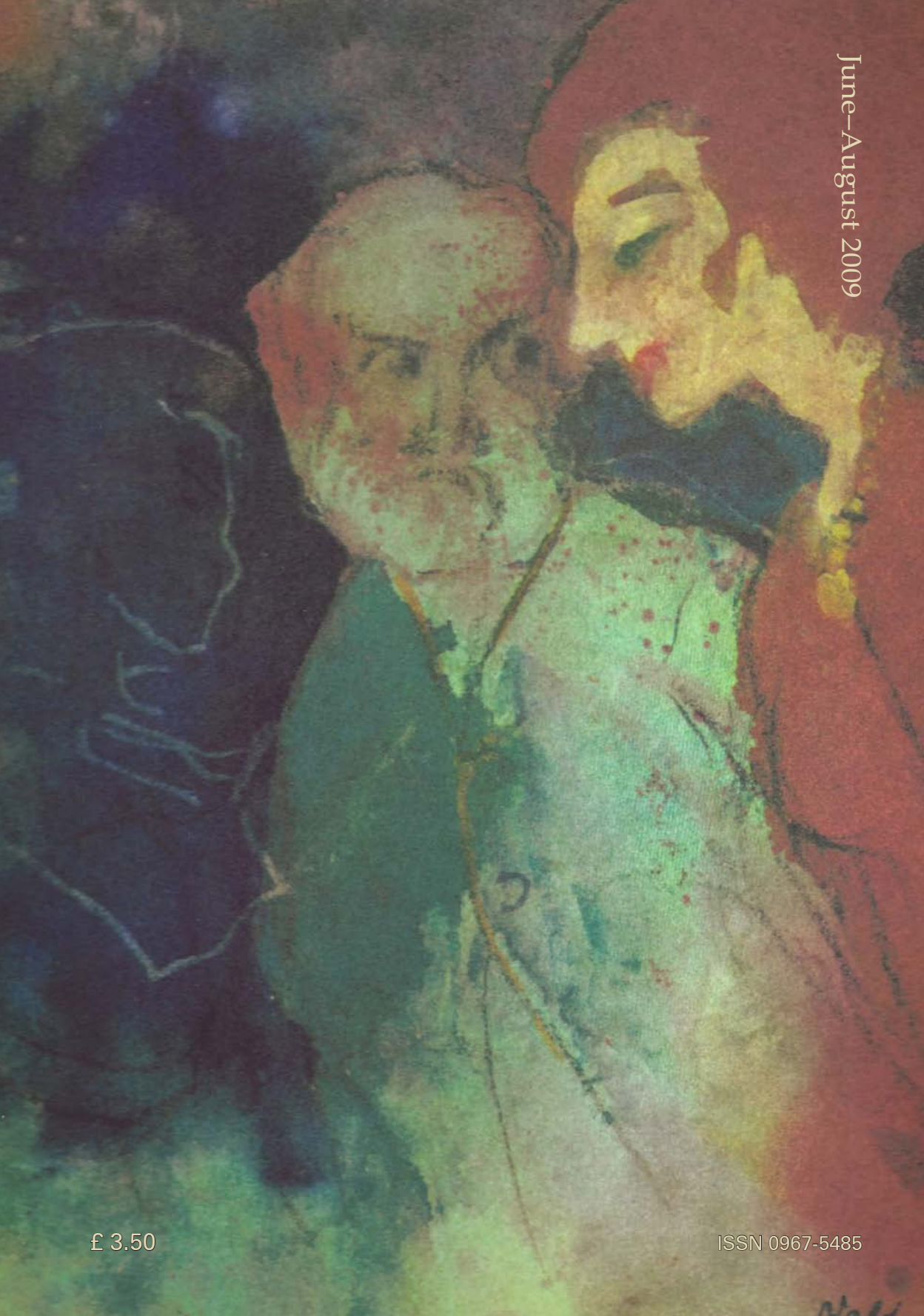

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