

The Christian Community

Perspectives

Advent
Christmas
Epiphany
2014-15



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front: Giotto di Bondone, detail from *The Birth of Jesus*,
Scrovegni Chapel in Padua

back: Panel from the Lateran; 6th–7th century; from Holy Land

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Perspectives

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Luke describes those who passed down the stories about Jesus as ‘servants of the Word’. This service is at the heart of Christian discipleship. Listening to the words of the service; deepening our experiences in study of the gospels, and of the Creed—these central activities unite us world-wide in our Community of Christians. Many who have trodden the Christian path experience the reality that Jesus refers to in the parable of the seed and the sower: the word of God is a seed, which has the power to germinate within our souls and become fruitful. Then we discover that the Word is not confined to things we call religious; we start to hear it resounding through all that we encounter.

In a movement with this essential task, the printed word also has a role. It can be a valuable addition for those who are able to attend services and events at a Christian Community congregation; for many of our subscribers, this is not easy, and *Perspectives* provides a link which might otherwise be lost. We also hope that *Perspectives* gives a window for newcomers and others who are interested in The Christian Community to see something of what informs our life and work.

A team of volunteers carries *Perspectives*, which is edited and printed in the UK. Tom Ravetz and Donna Simmons are the editors. Peter Howe, Deborah Ravetz and Kevin Street support them as the editorial team, helping find the themes for forthcoming issues. Christoph Hanni is in charge of production, and Gabriele Kuhn has just taken on managing subscriptions.

During a session of the annual meeting of The Christian Community in Great Britain, which took place in Edinburgh this year, we described our vision for *Perspectives* and asked for feedback and suggestions. We will be working with these in the coming months. We are always glad to hear comments, both positive and negative. Suggestions of themes for future issues are also welcome.

Our thanks go to Kevin Street for nine years of service in the role of subscriptions manager. The new contact details for subscriptions are listed inside the front cover.

The costs of printing and postage continue to increase. After a long time at the current price, we need to increase the cover price to reflect this. For the coming year, the price will increase to £3.75 a copy, or £15 for a year's subscription. Next year, it will go up to £4 per copy or £16 for a year. However, we are making a special offer for subscribers who wish to renew now for two years: they can do this for the price of £15. This offer will continue for all renewals up to November, 2015.

TOM RAVETZ

Two questions

Paul Newton

St Luke states in the preface to his gospel, addressed to Theophilus, friend of God, that his purpose in writing is to bring the friend of God to ‘certainty concerning the things you have been taught’ (i.e. concerning the gospel in the larger sense).

The two scenes that then follow involve two different people receiving surprising good news from an angel to which both of them respond with what sounds like pretty much the same question, ‘How can that be?’ But the quite different responses of the angel to the questions of Zechariah and Mary can lead us to see that they don’t really ask the same question at all.

When Gabriel tells Zechariah that his prayers have been answered and that his wife Elisabeth is going to give birth to a son (John the Baptist) he responds, ‘How shall I know this? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years.’ It seems like a fair question but Gabriel seems to chastise Zechariah for his lack of belief and strikes him dumb. So does the spiritual world expect unquestioning, blind faith from us?

In the next scene when Gabriel comes to Mary with the news that she will conceive and bear a son and she responds, ‘How shall this be seeing I know not a man?’ there is no chastisement.

Let’s think about this. Zechariah hears something amazing but Gabriel subsequently reveals that he does not believe what he hears. So his ‘How’ question is not really a question at all, or at least is not a genuine expression of his state of being. Questions are not an expression of either belief or disbelief but of uncertainty. We don’t, of course, know how Gabriel would have responded if Zechariah, instead of asking his fake question, had simply exclaimed, ‘But that’s impossible—I don’t believe it!’ but his authenticity would certainly have been healthier. In the light of this, the seeming punishment of being made to be silent for nine months was just what Zechariah needed to overcome the incongruence between his inner life and what he says. This can be understood as a first lesson on the path toward certainty in the sphere of knowledge.

And then Mary shows us a second step—the genuine question. We each have a set of concepts about reality that we feel we can trust: they work for us. But then something new comes along that doesn’t readily fit with our current understanding. How to deal with this? Mary’s openness of

soul neither believes blindly nor dismisses the amazing as impossible. She brings the new into relation with her knowledge of the world through the posing of a question.

If one were to try to express the range of meanings of the Greek word εὐαγγέλιον (normally translated as just ‘gospel’) in a single phrase one would perhaps call it the ‘good news from the realm of the angels.’ In the first two scenes of Luke’s gospel we are shown two ways of responding to gospel. Authenticity and genuine questioning seem to be key in bringing this good news into relation with everything that we think we understand about reality.

The map published with the article about Bethany in the June–August issue shows Bethabara too far to the North. It should, as the article stated, have been placed down near the mouth of the Jordan.

Darkness and the Nativity — a contemplation

Marcus Knausenberger

Many of the inner pictures connected with the birth of Christ, with the Nativity, that we carry in our imaginations place the light-filled Holy Family into a protective sheath of surrounding darkness. We can think of Rembrandt's *Nativity*, or of Ninetta Sombart's *Birth of Christ* and sense the sheltering quality that the darkness lends to the holy event of his birth. The Christ Child is received into the blanket of night and, in equal measure, the darkness of night has a role to play in the events surrounding Christ's birth.

We can thus begin to distinguish between different qualities of darkness. In Luke's account of the nativity, the shepherds who watched over their flocks by night receive the news of the revelation of Christ's birth under the envelope of night. The darkness surrounding them has the quality of a simple and pure piety. It is a pre-dawn, starless darkness which speaks to the natural religiosity that is the birthright of every child. It is pure, close to nature, and relatively unburdened with worldly concerns.

Looking at the events around Christ's birth described in the Gospel of Matthew on the other hand, reveals a quality of darkness that has become differentiated and worldly. Within the darkness surrounding the Three Kings, the starry firmament becomes visible. Looking up to the stars, the age-old wisdom of the heavenly bodies is reflected in and taken up by the kings, and they behold the Christ's descent into earthly matter in the star. Wisdom is born of experience, of entering painfully into the fullness and depth of a relationship to the earth. This quality of darkness in Matthew's gospel is of a very different quality than that in Luke. It is neither childlike, nor innocent, and it surrounds rulers of nations whose tasks are grounded in the affairs of the civilized world.

Between the reverence of the shepherds and that of the kings, we sense a continuum that begins with heart-felt innocence and moves seamlessly over time into reverence born of experience. The darkness of night in both accounts however, speaks of a depth of reverence that is needed in order to receive revelation. Reverence has a dark quality in that it calls forth an unknowing

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receptivity divorced from outcome, divorced from any preconception of that which might be given. The highest revelations of the spirit cannot be willed—only received, for their source is veiled to the human I. In the surrounding darkness into which the Christ Child is born, we hear choirs of angels. The darkness of night overflows with light of revelation. Out of this overflowing abundance surrounding the town of Bethlehem, the pregnant fullness of the spirit coalesces, concentrates mightily, and finally breaks through at one single point into the sense-world as earth receives the Holy Child.

We are left with the question: how can the sublime pictures of the nativity be reconciled with our crass and hectic lives? Where on our stricken earth is there room for a silent reverence so complete that it might receive the light of such revelation?

As we move forward and look into Christ's life as a human being of flesh and blood, we find that the pictures we carry within us at Christmastide are metamorphosed in the life of Christ Jesus. Following the accounts of the gospels with the question, 'Into what darkness is Christ received?' leads from the nativity into life. As Christ Jesus moves about the Holy Land with his disciples, he is not received by choirs of angels, nor by the sublime joy surrounding his birth, but by the dark depths of human suffering, by the cries of the sick, the lame, the possessed, the infirm—all those who, through the circumstances of their lives, have been cast out into the darkness. He is met by the malice of hardened thinking of religious authority. He is also met by a few who feel their human destiny within his, and become his disciples.

What was outer circumstance surrounding the nativity becomes inner drama in the life of Christ. Veiled in darkness, all of the drama surrounding the birth of Christ (the outer poverty of the Luke nativity, the dark treachery of King Herod's murderous rampage described by Matthew) becomes transposed onto the showplace of the human soul. As the spirit of Christ enters ever more deeply into relationship with human beings of flesh and blood, the drama surrounding his life and birth is rewritten. This new living gospel, announced by the old, is thus written into the soul of individual human beings.

The Twelve Holy Nights of Christmas is a time to turn inward, to look at the essential role that darkness plays in the unfolding of the human soul. Within it, hidden under the blanket of night, well out of sight from the world and often even from ourselves, the terrible drama of the human condition resounds with the choir of angels, and shines forth with the light of the starry firmament that announces Christ's birth.

The Christmas angel

Jaroslawa Black

This is how it was: Michal heard Christmas coming. If he hadn't heard it, he certainly would have slept through it entirely. He would have liked that. Just keeping his eyes closed. But he couldn't shut his ears.

It was already dark outside. However, Michal felt no trace of blissful hibernation. His hut was as cold as a mouse hole. The wind howled through the chimney and his stomach was rumbling. He felt no enthusiasm. Not for splitting wood, nor for cleaning the place up, nor for putting anything into the oven. What was it all for? He had no friends, nor did he belong to anybody. It did not bother him any longer. Christmas is for crowds of people, not for loners. Michal had had a dog, but it had died a few years ago. And now he was going to the dogs himself. That's what they say in the village. But where were the dogs? This he would have dearly liked to know. Nobody would tell him. They all pointed at their heads and said that he had lost his marbles. 'The loneliness in the mountains makes people lose it.' They say, 'He is as lonely as God's finger'. If they only would think an inch, they wouldn't talk such nonsense. Why should God's finger be alone? Has he not got a few of them, as we humans do? Michal's gnarly fingers were shaking, holding the thick glass of an empty bottle. He could still do one thing. Old Michal could make anything that lived or lay around into his elixir of life: alcohol; juniper berries, plums and walnuts; blueberries, blackberries and apples. This he needed to do to forget his aches and pains and his sorrow.

The singing was moving through the snowy mountains. Old tunes, made young again by children's voices, coming ever closer. Michal found nowhere to hide any longer. He put on his fur cap and stumbled in the darkness along the corridor to the larder. After much clattering about, he finally found another bottle and returned hastily to his room, where he put the bottle on the narrow oak table by the window.

The moon peeked out from behind a cloud and its light glittered on the bottom of the greenish glass. A crowd of children, wrapped up in fur, were going from house to house singing Christmas carols, their teeth chattering, filled with joyful anticipation of the Christmas gifts. Their coats of sheepskin, stitched with red and green thread, moved like clothes dangling from a washing line.

An older boy went ahead carrying the glistening star on a long pole. Behind him strode a strong lad with a big sack on his back filled with apples and nuts, poppy seed buns and gingerbread, dried mushrooms and apple pieces, along with beautifully wrapped almond pastries that were waiting for the children's little teeth. He carried the coins they received in a pouch on his belt. Two girls had angels' wings tied to their backs, made with wire and old bed sheets, decorated with glittering shards of old Christmas tree ornaments and tinfoil chocolate wrappers that were cut into small confetti.

*Heaven and earth today rejoooice,
good people all raise up your voooice.*

'Let's turn back,' said the older boy, 'there is hardly anyone living further along here.' 'No, not yet,' cried Hanka, whose red scarf almost covered her fur coat completely, a slightly warped tin halo dangling behind her head. 'We must still see old Michal, I've got something for him!' she shouted against the wind.

*Next ox and ass in stable low
Child Jesus before thee we bow
Trallalala trallallalla*

'You can sing your throat out in front of his door. He won't open it. But what do I care, tonight is Christmas, I'm ready for a miracle. Tonight even a donkey can sing a Christmas carol!' mumbled the star carrier.

'What have you got under your scarf?' asked Natska between the tra-las, her angel's wings quivering in the wind. Hanka only shook her halo and clasped her hands tighter around her secret. Michal's house was dark and the chimney was cold under the stars of this Christmas night. The children tarried and scraped around in the snow with their oversized felt boots. Nothing stirred behind the icy window panes. 'Perhaps he isn't even here,' grumbled a girl. This faint attempt however convinced noone. 'Where else would he be? He hasn't gone into the forest to bring presents to the wolves, has he?' whispered the star carrier, irritated. However, the choir completed the verses of their song in good faith.

*Christmas Angels sing glad tidings
Turn towards the dawn of day
Night soon away is fleeing
for Christ to us is born today.
Good neighbour folk in praise we sing
Open your door and let us in!*

'Open your door and let us in!' shouted Hanka one more time and the bell sounded three times, loud and urgent like the Amen at church. Out

of the dark sky swirled bright joy and dropped gently into the children's open eyes, onto their mittens and wings. Hanka knew that the moment had come. With all her courage she pushed open the low door. The hinges creaked threateningly, almost drowning out Michal's curses. 'Get out of here!' 'Uncle Michal,' whispered Hanka into the dark, and the secret under her coat started to tremble. 'Happy Christmas!'

For God's sake, how cold it was in there, and how miserable. Hanka lit the candle she had brought along and placed it near the fur cap that nearly covered a face buried deep in bluish hands. Then she tried to revive the stove. However, the old newspapers alone would not accomplish the feat. The treasurer put down his sack full of treasures, took the axe from the shelf and went behind the shed where he saw some wood lying about. The star carrier shook his head in disbelief. Was it possible to waste one's life like that and be so careless with one's property? However, he didn't say anything and went to fetch water at the pump with two big buckets. All the other carol singers made themselves useful, as soon as they realized that the fur cap at the table was no further danger. Soon the stove crackled and the smell of mushroom soup filled the house. A sausage was sizzling in the frying pan and there was a smell of honey, cloves and dried apples and prunes. Despite their wings the children danced about the room and after a little while Michal's old hovel was transformed. His head was still bent over the table and of his face they could not see a sliver.

'Now, as the room is tidy and ready for Christmas with the scent of pine branches, let us sing another song,' said Hanka solemnly. The children had actually grown quite tired and had lost their enthusiasm, but then they saw old Michal hunched behind the table. Like an old, beaten dog he seemed to be yearning for his demise. But the children knew today had the promise of a new beginning. Michal slowly straightened up and peered at the singers as if they were ghosts. 'Uncle Michal, here is a Christmas present for you,' said Hanka, when they finished their song. With that, she reached into her coat and brought out something soft, white and furry. 'It's a little dog!' cried Natska, who could not restrain herself. Hanka hesitated still a little and nobody noticed how much she struggled to keep the truth to herself—she had stolen the poor little thing away from the bitch in the stable. But was it not divine providence that she had heard her grandmother say that they would need to get rid of the puppies? And how she had had to think immediately of Michal, who surely could do with a little dog.

The children didn't hear a single word from Michal all evening. He sat there with a grimace on his face without stirring. Hanka placed the little



Giotto di Bondone, detail from *Joachim's Dream* (Sogno di Gioacchino)

dog into his open hands. The children retreated quietly to their cosy houses with their felt boots and angel wings and warmed themselves until they sank into blissful Christmas slumber.

On Christmas morning a kind soul from the village wanted to bring a bit of festive fare to the old man and was ever so surprised to see smoke swirling from the chimney and to hear a cheerful whistle from the window. When she entered the house she cried in surprise. 'Jesus-Maria! There are still miracles happening in our days! Have the angels been to see you, Michal?' 'Aye, they were angels indeed,' murmured the old man quietly. And like a confirmation a little whimper sounded from the direction of the stove. 'What have you got here?' asked the woman, quite amazed. 'A Christmas angel,' said he, and his crooked mouth stretched into a grin. The lop-eared bundle at the stove ventured some gentle yaps. Michal waited for the woman to smile, but she didn't. She had known him since they were both young. His stare was quite disquieting. One never knew what he was thinking. He was not like the others. She had eventually chosen a man with whom she felt safe. She was quite content with her life.

She put her little gift carefully on the table, tucked a strand of hair under her flowery headscarf, and left. Very slowly she trudged through the snow. Now and then a foot sank deep and she halted, looking towards the mountains. She was in no hurry. She could hear Christmas coming.

Walking with Christ

In the light of the Gospel of St Luke and St John

Selina Horn

The mighty events we thought we knew are made again new through the unique light that the Gospel of St Luke shines on them. In between the words and images that Luke gives, healing forces seem to flow, forces which bring about new ways of seeing and hearing. Luke who, according to the legends was a doctor, carer and healer conveys this in a unique way. We can gain a sense of the atmosphere that Luke experienced around Christ, a warming glow that spread consolation and soothing in every place that he walked through. A brief look at the other gospels brings out the qualities of Luke all the more strongly.

Through the Gospel according to St Mark we sense Christ's majesty and power. The Greek text prefixes the word 'houtos', which means 'suddenly' or 'immediately' before many descriptions. We are drawn into the unfolding of a mighty cosmic drama.

The Gospel of St Matthew leads us into the weaving of the ancient Jewish heritage. We are taken back to the spiritual tasks of Abraham, Moses and the Jewish people and we learn their suffering and thus redeeming hope in the expected Messiah. Within Matthew's words we can experience how the prophecies proclaiming Jesus had fallen on deaf ears. When their own Messiah stood before them, they had neither the eyes to see nor the ears to hear him.

- In the fresh breeze that moves within the Gospel according to St Luke, enlivening forces of warmth can stream health to the reader, to the *listener*, to the *beholder*. Through meditating on the gospels we can receive a new way of seeing. This spiritual seeing can become truly a *beholding*. We also receive restoration to our deaf ears; we learn to *harken*. Such words should not only belong to Shakespearean England. They indicate important soul abilities which are needed in our times. To behold is to surround some mystery with our devoted attention until it allows us to enter it and then

Selina is thirty years of age, grew up in Hebden Bridge, Yorkshire and is currently in her second year of study at Seminary of The Christian Community in Stuttgart Germany.

to experience it from within. We then embrace and hold what we have experienced, uniting with the mystery we contemplated. An example from the Gospel of St Luke itself could illustrate this further.

- Near the beginning of the gospel, Mary receives the message from Archangel Gabriel that she will give birth to a child. After asking how it should take place, she then gives her assent to the task assigned to her by saying not 'yes' but instead 'idou' which means 'Lo!' or 'Behold!'. She responds to the Archangel by asking him to *behold her as the handmaid of the Lord*. In other words she responds, 'Surround me with your loving attention and recognise in my spirit my willingness to give myself in service to God's will'. Instead of 'yes' she says 'behold in me what I will become...'
- This gospel is infused with the energy of restoration. What was lacking, separated or broken becomes whole through the rejuvenating love of Christ. His love—the highest love, 'agape'—makes all who come to him well, when it meets their willingness to be made whole. When love meets will, it can then become a true deed. That is why Christ asks those who seek healing from him what they desire or else he gives them some task in order to test their willingness.

It is especially touching to witness Christ's meeting with his future disciples. After the baptism in the wide Jordan River down in the valley, we are led with him into the dry desert and into days of fasting. Having witnessed his victory over the temptations we walk with him as he journeys north, upstream along the riverbank, until he reaches the expanse of the glistening lake of Galilee. He goes to the men who work on its waters. We can sense the soothing ripples of the lake's waves if we enter into the imaginations that are here laid out like mighty tapestries. He helps the men find fish and talks with them. In this light of a new morning it feels as if the events begin to 'gather' and culminate towards a new beginning. He who was alone now gathers many to live in freedom alongside him. We feel the disciples join alongside us now, for we have been following Christ since the beginning of the gospel, through the unique invitation Luke gives to us.

The Gospel of St John ends by the lakeside where the grieving apostles have been fishing through the night. It is again spring time, as it was when they first met him. They have returned to the old lives which they had before Jesus called them three years ago. They are attempting to live the

comforting rhythm of the fisherman's night on the lake. At dawn their nets are still empty. He waits at the shimmering shoreline, calling to his brothers once more and asking again if they have fish. Through his words they gather 153 fish. He calls from the realm of the living forces of the earth today, waiting to give of those forces of healing and health. He has prepared a fire for the disciples and Peter joyfully jumps into the water and swims towards the glowing flames for the reunion with his Master. The fire of His love awaits us too.

The Sun stands at the shore reflecting his rays in the lake of the disciples' being. The earth has received her new master and the warmth of his love will make her glow and burn as the new sun. In this shining of the Christ Sun the question as to whether we truly love Christ (and with a divine unconditional love) resounds in us too as he asks Peter three times by the shore. With these rich landscapes by the lake, the Gospel of St John draws to a conclusion with the lingering question as to if we are able to make Christ our beloved.

In the Gospel of St Luke we are not taken to the lakeside to meet the resurrected Christ but are led to meet him through walking on the land. We take the way to Emmaus, walking and discussing on a path west from Jerusalem. Here we accompany two disciples in heartfelt conversation. Walking seems to be particularly conducive to good conversation. The air is fresh, one pauses under the sky at moments to look at each other, perhaps to emphasise a point. There is also the walking on together in unspoken companionship during the comfortable silences. In this intimate way the two disciples conversed together until Christ came and spoke to them but *their eyes were held, so they did not recognise to him* (Luke 24:16) He explains all the mysteries of the Messiah to them by quickening their minds and hearts. Only later when they have invited him to eat with them, do their eyes 'open' when he blesses and then breaks the bread. In this moment they *behold* the Lord. He disappears. They immediately go to the disciples and tell them, and he appears again to them all. They are both *troubled and terrified* and so he calms them by calling on their ability to use their spiritual eyes: *Behold my hands and my feet for I AM, touch me and behold me...* (Luke 24:39). Luke began by describing for us how Mary asked the spiritual world to behold her as a servant of God. Could we make the same request to God in our own way, however small and individual it may be? Likewise at the end of Luke's gospel, we are asked to behold Christ so that he may quicken our hearts, open our minds and bless us with his peace.

The heart of the epistles

Part III

Cynthia Hindes

In The Christian Community there are nine festival seasons celebrated in the course of the year, three triads of three. Each festival has its own epistle. In addition, Passiontide has two, and the Christmas season has three, so there are twelve epistles. Further, there is a thirteenth, a Trinity epistle, for four times of the year between festivals. This Trinity epistle appears between Epiphany and Passiontide, between Pentecost and St. Johnstide, between St. Johnstide and Michaelmas, and between Michaelmas and Advent.

Advent

The first festival season in the liturgical year is Advent. It begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas, usually the last Sunday in November or the first in December. The deep blue colour of the vestments and altar frontal suggest the deep blue of the sky before dawn. It is a colour that inclines us to be soulful, contemplative, and open for a great event that is to come. Advent is the time of longing, of waiting in expectation of the Coming One. There is a mood of quiet. At the same time there is the suggestion of the broad expanses of space, as though we are listening for something as yet far away. The voice in which it is spoken is that of our own gathered and musing souls, addressing the Father and his Son.

The Advent epistle acknowledges that out of, and into the quiet, the divine speaks into the heart, into the inner place of the soul. It speaks into the human being's hoping heart. Hope is Advent's quality of the heart, a quality that is oriented toward the future. The heart is open in trust.

Gabriel Marcel said, 'Hope is the memory of the future.'¹ This statement is an amazing hint at the mystery of the double directional flows of time: something of the future has already flowed back toward us. On some deep level, we already know it—he is coming. Again! Martin Luther King, Jr. said, 'Our eternal message of hope is that dawn will come. Midnight is only a temporary development in the cycle of life's day.'²

The epistle also speaks of a feeling, sensing heart. In the darkness before dawn, we sense and feel that both the light and our own hearts are rising in anticipation. We hear the beating of the wings of hope. At Advent the heart senses and feels. We can begin to intuit the promise of healing that is ripening toward birth.

The whole mood of the Advent epistle is steeped in an evolution, a development. There is the quiet echoing of a key word: become. This is not a command, but rather an inspiration, a creative prompting, a quickening. It expresses not only God the Father, the God who is; it hints at the Son, the God who becomes—who even now becomes human. It hints at the birth of the Son who, as it says in the Creed, is born not only of the Father in eternity, but also as the son of Mary. In some of our congregations we sing a hymn of 'he who was, who is, and who is to come.'³ The God who spoke to Moses from the burning bush named himself, 'I AM who I AM', as it is often translated. Yet in the nature of the Hebrew language, this I AM does not convey a static sense of being; it is best translated as 'I will be whatever I will be.'⁴ It describes a creative flow.

This is the aspect of the God who gave up his omnipotence, his omniscience, in order to give human beings the freedom to choose. This is God the Son, emanating from the Father, who becomes human, so that human beings can find their way back into their true being. He is the Light who is bringing the dawn of a new day.

This all starts at Advent. In the beginning was the word; and that word is: become. Grow. Develop. It is the Father, speaking forth his son.

Christmas

The Christmas festival season spans the twelve days between the midnight moment that starts December 25 until January 5. Attending all three Christmas services, one has an experience of the threefold nature of the Christmas epistles. We hear of the birth of the grace-light at midnight, the power of the creating word at dawn, and the recognition of the potential of salvation in the later morning service, and in the rest of the twelve days of the season. In this threefold epistle resounds the meaning of the whole liturgical year. In the three gospel readings, we hear a passage from the beginning of all four gospels (Matthew 1), from the middle (Luke 2) and from the end, (John 21). The whole of Jesus' working on earth is foreshadowed. The three Christmas epistles also suggest the threefold nature of time: past, present and future.

Advent's promise of dawn begins to be fulfilled. The colours of the Christmas altar and vestments are white, the colour of light, the colour of the sky as it lightens before the sun rises. There is the first blush of pale lavender at the edges. The light inclines us to be joyful, radiant, and God-filled.

The mood of the first epistle at midnight is still tender, dreamlike, and intimate. It

speaks of a body-free experience of healing and grace. The communal voice speaks of a light that we see streaming, that we had previously sensed when in an open mood of prayer. There is a hovering quality of something which, although definite, is nevertheless hardly graspable. Heard at midnight, when we might normally already be asleep, the epistle suggests being awake in sleep state. It describes the perception of Christ's earthly appearing on earth. The mood is one of elevation and of wonder before the profound abundance of grace, of light and of healing that shine from his appearing. We recognize this in the communal heart when it is praying, that is, when the heart is open, and in a kind of conversation with the beings of the spiritual world. The plea that was the basis of the heart's hope at Advent is being answered—he has come, is come. Through his coming, we can see 'behind' him his father, our Father. This first epistle expresses the heart's quiet wonder at the magnitude of this event, this arrival.

The Christmas epistles are spoken in two parts. The second part is spoken toward the congregation. It is a kind of affirmation, a condensation of what has happened to us in wonder. It is the affirmation that Christ has indeed appeared. The 'has' suggests that this is not something which only happened once upon a time in the past. It has happened, and is happening just now as well. It affirms that his coming is for the sake of healing, not judgment.

The second epistle, heard at dawn, can be understood as our response to this event of his appearing. It is addressed to the Father, from the communal soul, acknowledg-

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ing our perception of Christ's approach. And it expresses a further opening of the heart, so that we can not only perceive, but also receive and take in Christ's power and strength, especially into the parts of our being that are creative of future: our speaking, our willing. Again the second part addressed toward the congregation resounds, affirming the healing purpose of his appearing.

The third epistle, heard later in the morning, sounds a more sober and realistic note. All is not only wonder and light. The light of his appearing reveals that there are shadows, places in our very constitution that are not operating in the light, parts of us that are deluded or preoccupied. The epistle notes that Christ has chosen an earthly body. This can be heard on several levels. Of course we are celebrating his choice of Jesus as the body in which he incarnated. And we may also know that by his death and ascension he has chosen the earth as his body as well; but at some point, the little word 'has' may suggest to us that he is still choosing an earthly body. Does he want to dwell in my body? Could it be the body of 'us', the communal body? This is an open question. God respects our freedom to choose. Human choice is the rule for the world of humans he created. Therefore he will not demand or insist; he will not overwhelm. He will only suggest, only hint. The realism is in the statement that he wants to dwell in the body in order to help us overcome the false light of delusion, and to overcome our addiction to, and our overvaluing of, sensory input, of knowledge based on the senses only. He is the light of truth, truth on all levels. He has come, he appears, out of compassion because he sees we need help in seeing truly, accurately and fully.

And again there sounds the affirmation that he has indeed appeared in order to bring healing.

With the third service comes the seasonal prayer inserted after the offering. In this prayer we join in the great song of offering of the nine choirs of angels. With Christ's appearing to us, we respond with our own voices of affirmation of God's healing power. We join the great macrocosmic angelic choir, a choir whose very singing pours forth substance, a substance which itself allows the light and love of the Father, the Ground of all Being, indeed the world itself, to manifest.

If you have ever sung in a choir, you know that all the voices are necessary. If any section or even an individual voice, is weak or missing, the whole song does not manifest as completely or beautifully as it could. But when all the voices sing, a real substance—we could even say a real being—is created. We human beings are the tenth voice. We can—we will—add depth and colour to the angelic choir, so that the song of creation is fuller and more complete and fulfilled. This is what God hoped for when he wrote the score. He is hoping we will want to add our voice to the heavenly choir. The inserted prayer will resound twelve times during the twelve days of the Christmas season. It is the prayer of our heart's deepest wish, that our sense of separateness be healed so that we may take our active and creative place in the great chain of being.

Epiphany

The Epiphany season starts on January 6, the day of the Three Kings, and covers the following four Sundays and weeks after them. These four-plus weeks mirror the four-plus weeks of Advent. Advent and Epiphany are

the bookends of Christmas. The colours on the altar deepen to a royal magenta. This red-violet of Epiphany helps elevate us toward kingliness, nobility, confidence and strength of heart.

The mood of the epistle, like that during Advent, recalls the widths of space out of which grace, imaged as a star, appears. This star's intimate connection to humanity is affirmed through the joining and fitting together of the disparate parts of the human being. The light of our spiritual thinking and the warmth of our hearts are fitted together. The voice of this epistle is at once objectively descriptive, and humbly responsive. We would align our communal will with the will of the Father. We would enter into the grace-light. It affirms our desire to align with the Father's will, through the guidance of the Christ star. The Act of Consecration of Man itself becomes the song we add to the angelic choir. Our contribution to the song consists in answering the call, responding to the announcement of the angels. They speak of a great 'principle singer' who would join with us, who will indeed sing prayer through us. He comes from without as world light, but would be active in us as the light generated by the praying heart. The mood of the heart is one of devoted prayer.

We sense the great tact of the beings of the divine world. The angels describe; they

do not command. Yet the description itself quite naturally elicits our response. Our heart's yearning prayer, that we be able to step into our proper place in the greater whole, is answered by the light that is itself generated in the heart when we pray. The star of grace shines into the heart that is open in prayer. The heart-light generated in prayer shows the way.

The inserted prayer also echoes this theme of call and response. It is as though the angelic voice speaks, expressing hope that seeking human beings will find the light of the grace-star, will take it into themselves where it will generate the warmth of love and the healing that Christ brings. The angels hope that the star of grace will warm and shine from within human hearts. It has become the advent hope of the angels.

Thus ends the first triad of three festivals. This first triad emphasizes the Father and his Son 'born in eternity', born eternally, once and ever again being born, in the world, and in us.

1 Gabriel Marcel, in 'Sketch of a Phenomenology and Physics of Hope' in *Homo Viator*

2 Martin Luther King, Jr, 'Love in Action', April 3, 1960, in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr*, vol VI, Carson Clayborne, ed. p. 502

3 Revelations 1:4

4 Rabbi Rami Shapiro, *The Angelic Way*, p. 48

Bringing myrrh to myrrh Part II

HD and the flowering Sophia

Michael Steward

While the last piece focussed on HD's (Hilda Doolittle, see *Perspectives* issue December 2013–February 2014) elucidation of the Christ, the Logos, this piece explores her perceptions of the Sophia, whom we might call Pro-logos ('her name is Proverb...'). The great courage of Mary at the Annunciation is to agree to receive the impress of the primal word into the crucible of her body and warm and cultivate and then express it into the world (the Enunciation). It is essential to note here that, although the pure 'pre-text' of the Christ being is that he is free to seek his own definition and articulation, he, nevertheless, remains held in the all-encompassing 'con-text' of the Sophia. Otherwise, the construction of the entire narrative comes unstitched (the great strapline of the Sophia is 'omni conjungo', meaning everything in all the worlds coheres in and through her). We see that when Jesus approaches the harrowingly narrow gateway of the crucifixion and all else is stripped and scourged away, it is the three Marys who remain to 'hold' the space around him. And then there is the compelling story of the

'myrrhbearers' (so revered in the Orthodox tradition), the three Marys who close the beautiful circle of his life by 'bringing myrrh to myrrh' again, in order to anoint him in the end just as he was in the beginning.

From beginning to end of her poetic output, HD attempts to voice her ecstatic and often difficult relationship with the mystery of this presence, both in her individual life and in the mythos of the world. This is noticeable not only in explicit references to the endlessly various forms of the sacred feminine, particularly the goddesses and heroines of Hellenic origin, but also in the beguiling presence of flowers which suffuses her poetry. Hence, the title of this piece. You can enter her oeuvre from any point and it is like walking through a portal into a garden saturated with botanic delights. For me, the flowers illustrated above are of especial significance as they portray the three major aspects of the Sophia (or, if you will, the personalities of the three Marys) and also equate to the three principal dynamics which Rudolf Steiner differentiates to describe our address to the world. So, we have the Lily Sophia, which denotes the fluted patterning of thinking and imagination; the Rose Sophia, which denotes the denser weave of feeling and connection; and the less well-known (...or less honoured, anyway) Amaranth Sophia, which denotes the resilient root-webbing of survival and willing and practical doing. That this triplicity is something of a universal in human culture is supported, for example, by the division of Lalita Devi, the Hindu Sophia, into the three major figures of Sarasvati (who represents the flowing of verse and melody); Lakshmi (the stable rhythm of 'heart and hearth'); and Durga (the drumbeat of power and action).

Michael Steward is an independent minister. His main work is helping carers respond to very 'damaged' children & young people.

I think it is interesting to pause here and explore these qualities a little further as the balance of attention given to these three women is often distorted. Following The Book of Revelation and some mediaeval depictions, we might portray them as the woman with the stars about her head; the woman with the sun in her heart; the woman with the moon beneath her feet. Virginia Sease reports that Dr Steiner commented how, in earlier modern history, there was excessive emphasis on the 'son emerging from the sun' and that the stellar aspect of the Sophia was neglected even, effectively, exiled. It seems to me that the quality equally in need now of redress and re-integration is that of the third figure, the variant we tend to fear and repress more often as not nice, not pretty. And not Soph-isticated. Perhaps, we can understand this as redolent of the tenebrous domain of the Black Madonna, or of the range of 'sins' allocated quite inappropriately to the Magdalene (who is the subject of the third and final part of this sequence of essays).

There is a simple Greek fable that later made its way into the Aesop collection which teases out and realigns the relationship between the two flowers, Rose and Amaranth. In it, an amaranth is planted next to a rose and speaks to her thus: 'What a lovely flower you are, Rose, a favourite alike with mortals and the gods; how I envy you your beauty and exquisite perfume!' The rose replies: 'Thank you, dear Amaranth, but I flourish only for a brief season; if no cruel hand pluck me from my stem, still I must meet an early doom; you, however, are immortal and never fade, but bloom always in eternal youth!' So, amaranth (the word derives from the Greek, 'amaranton', which means, 'never wilts') has that special quality of persever-

ance and determination, of living through all weathers and all challenges. In Ephesus, it was dedicated to Artemis and considered to have special healing properties. Note also that the core phoneme is 'mar', which connects it more profoundly with the salt/bitter strength and sheer capacity to endure of Mary/Sophia. I work with many female foster carers whose embodiment of this virtue is a priceless gift to the children placed with them.

Although she does not explicitly view the flower in this way, it is in an early poem entitled simply, 'Amaranth', that HD sets out her credo at its clearest and most fundamental –

*Turn if you will
from her path,
turn if you must from her feet,
turn away, silent,
find rest if you wish;*

*find quiet
where the fir-trees
press, as you
swaying lightly above earth.*

*Turn if you will from her path,
for one moment seek
a lesser beauty
and a lesser grace,
but you will find
no peace in the end
save in her presence.*

In the same poem, we learn that the touchstone of her manifesto is beauty, and the unrelenting quest to find it, for:...

*life is radiant,
life is made for beautiful love
and strange ecstasy,
strait, searing body and limbs...*

*go far, far from here
in your happiness,*

*take beauty for that is her wish:
her wish,
the radiant and shameless.*

And this imperative to go beyond ourselves in order to become more completely ourselves is developed in a poem of similar vintage, called, 'The Dancer':

*We are more than human,
following your flame,
O, woman;*

*We are more than fire,
following your controlled
vibrance;*

*we are more than ice,
listening to the slow
beat of our hearts,
like under-current of sap
in a flowering tree
covered with late snow;*

we are more than we know.

The certainty that seems implicit in these statements does not mean, of course, that the Sophia is easily knowable. In the same poem, HD attempts to delineate her presence thus:

*O, love in the circle
of opening,
of closing,
of opening;*

*you are every colour of butterfly,
now in a frail robe you are
a white butterfly;
burning with white fervour,
you are moonflower,
seen in water.*

However, she acknowledges the difficulty of 'capturing' such a vast and elusive presence

in another poem ('Hymen'), contemporaneous with these:

*Who can say if she is fair?
For her head is covered over
with her mantle,
white on white,
snow on whiter amaranth,
snow on hoar-frost,
snow on snow,
snow on whitest buds of myrrh.*

In yet another ('The Master'), she settles for this:

*She is a woman,
yet beyond woman,
yet in woman,
her feet the delicate pulse
of the narcissus bud,
pushing from earth...*

*O, God, what is it,
this flower
that in itself had power
over the whole earth?*

This enquiry climaxes right in the heart of HD's later masterpiece compiled during the Second World War ('The Trilogy') in the central section called, 'Tribute to the Angels', which is an extended meditation on the qualities of the seven archangels. As she muses on the presence of each angel and their relations to each other, she is surprised by a visitation she had not expected at all –

*I had been thinking of Gabriel,
of the moon-cycle, of the moon-shell,

of the moon-crescent
and the moon at full...*

*and I had intended to recall him
in the sequence of candle and fire...*

*how could I imagine
the Lady herself would come instead?*

Yet come she did. From a dream which HD realised, on awakening, was just a dream and also much more than a dream, her waking consciousness now had unclear boundaries (rather like in the famous Chinese poem where So-Shu dreams he is a butterfly and, on awakening, is not sure if he was a human being dreaming he was a butterfly or is now a butterfly dreaming he is human). The 'actuality', the evidence of her physical senses, was that there was no one else in the room, but the 'reality' did not accord with this...

*...yet in some very subtle way,
She was there more than ever
as if She had miraculously
related herself to time here...*

My experience of the blessing of this kind of feminine presence is that time is also different. One finds oneself in what seems a delicate suspension of ordinary space/time in which one dares not make the slightest movement or even take a heavy breath in case the fragile presence is dispelled, like an image shattered from the surface of still water. There is something of all the senses in this: a glimpse of golden colour or spiralling motion; a hint of lingering fragrance or angelic song; the gentlest brushing across skin. But all these impressions are too subtle or ephemeral to allow for a fixed image to materialise. One characterisation of the Sophia is that 'She is nowhere to be found and always with the people'. She is 'like' us and we are 'like' her so fundamentally, yet we can hardly even begin to speak what she is like. Her nature is so fluid (like that of her quicksilver sidekick, Hermes, whose presence is established from the start of this section of "The Trilogy") and entirely resistant to capture.

HD is wise to this. In reaching for her own understanding of this startling appearance, she considers firstly and at some length how the great artists have attempted to portray the Madonna, naming many of the most famous by Raphael and Botticelli (Our Lady of the Goldfinch, ...of the Candelabra, ...of the Pomegranate, and so on) —

*We have seen her, an empress,
magnificent in pomp and grace,*

*and we have seen her
with a single flower...*

*or we have seen her, a wisp of a girl
trapped in a golden halo...*

*We see her stare past a mirror
through an open window,*

*where boat follows slow
boat on the lagoon;
there are white flowers on the water.*

She adds:

*But none of these, none of these
suggest her as I saw her,*

*though we approach possibly
something of her cool beneficence*

*in the gracious friendliness
of the marble sea-maids in Venice...*

*or we acclaim her in the name
of another in Vienna...*

*Our Lady of the Snow.
The figure is not frightening: —*

*...she must have been pleased with us,
for she looked so kindly at us*

*under her drift of veils,
and she carried a book.*

However, the point for HD is that she did not fit any stereotype of girlish or maternal

passivity, nor is the book what we might assume it to be:

*...she carries a book but it is not
the tome of the ancient wisdom,
the pages, I imagine, are the blank pages
of the unwritten volume of the new...
...she is not shut up in a cave
like a Sibyl; she is not
imprisoned in leaden bars
in a coloured window;
she is Psyche, the butterfly,
out of the cocoon...*

This Madonna is self-sufficient and complete in herself, and HD concludes with this summary:

*...she is not-fear, she is not-war,
but she is no symbolic figure
of peace, charity, chastity, goodness,
faith, hope, reward...
I grant you her face was innocent
and immaculate and her veils
like the Lamb's Bride,
but the Lamb was not with her,
either as Bridegroom or Child;
her attention is undivided –
we are her bridegroom and lamb;
her book is our book; written
or unwritten, its pages will reveal...
the same—different—the same attributes,
different yet the same as before.*

These last paradoxical lines were clarified for me 30 years ago when I had the good fortune to meet and converse with a much-respected healer from the Cherokee Nation. The question addressed was: why are the traditional rituals for affirming young women as adults so different from those for young men? He replied that the purpose of the male rites was to become somebody different; the purpose of the female rites to become more profoundly the same, more truly and powerfully what one already is. So, through immersion in the wisdom-stream of the proto-feminine (what the poet, Ted Hughes, called 'the real river of souls'), HD is now able to handle more adeptly the integration of amaranth and rose and lily in her soul and bloom into a larger and more confident and, above all, more natural sense of herself.

This leads to a final declaration that is startling in its simplicity and determination:

*I go where I love and where I am loved,
into the snow;
I go to the things I love
with no thought of duty or pity;
I go where I belong..*

The sign of peace

Christopher Hudson

Why is the receiving of Communion in The Christian Community threefold? This is a question I have been pondering on and off for nearly thirty years as a member of The Christian Community. What follows are simply my own reflections. If anybody is able to amplify or even correct what I have written, nobody would be happier than I!

Holy Communion is generally received under the 'two kinds' of bread and wine. In The Christian Community we, of course, receive in addition to the bread and wine, the gesture which I would like to call the sign of peace. The priest forms his/her right hand into the blessing gesture and then places two fingers against the communicant's cheek while speaking the words, 'The peace be with you.'

As far as I am aware, this introduction of a third element in the receiving of Communion is an innovation. Innovation at this central point of the Eucharistic service seems to me, in liturgical terms, noteworthy to say the least.

The sign of peace itself is not new, of course. At the Catholic Mass, for example, just before the breaking of the bread, the celebrant utters the words, 'The Peace of the Lord be with you always' and then continues, 'Let us offer each other a sign of peace.'

At this point, the members of the congregation are invited to turn to those near to them and shake hands or embrace while saying to each other, 'Peace be with you.' Funnily enough, this moment in the Catholic

liturgy has been the focus of some controversy just recently. Some priests are of the opinion that the exchange of a sign of peace has been becoming a bit too boisterous, and that an unfitting element has been creeping in.

This moment in the Catholic Mass occurs after the Eucharistic Prayer (the consecration of the bread and wine) but before the priest's communion. It is preceded by the words, 'Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your apostles, my peace I give you.' It is a moment whose roots extend all the way back to Justin Martyr, the early Christian apologist (c.100–165 AD) who, in his First Apology spoke about how the custom for the early Christians was that, 'Having ended the prayers, we salute one another with a kiss.' (Chapter 65). There would then follow, he says, the consecration of the bread and wine, and distribution of Communion.

The place and character of the sign of peace in the Act of Consecration of Man are quite different. It is anticipated earlier in the ritual, too, but in quite different ways. Two occasions spring to mind. There is the reference to Christ who 'makes hearts to be at peace' It is anticipated too when we hear that Christ stands 'at peace with the world,' and that he gives us this peace. This form of words in the Act of Consecration of Man seems to me to represent quite an amplification of those quoted from the Catholic ritual, above. ('Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your apostles, my peace I give you.')

It is my feeling that the introduction of the sign of peace in the receiving of communion likewise amplifies, makes more

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complete or even makes new—the receiving of communion. The words, ‘The peace be with you,’ belong to the realm of the Risen One as described in the Gospel of St. John. These were, of course, the words with which Christ generally greeted his disciples when he appeared to them during the forty days after Easter Sunday. The introduction of this very phrase as a new, third element in the receiving of communion, seems to me to move the communion decisively from a remembering or commemoration of the Last Supper, into the future realm of continuing revelation. This is the mood of the forty days. It is the mood of the end of the whole of the four Gospels. It is the realm of future deeds and of the new will. ‘As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ (John 20:21) ‘Whoever takes me into himself will also be able to do the deeds that I do—and greater deeds he will do, because I go to the Father.’ (John 14:12) ‘Feed my sheep.’ (John 21:17)

In the Roman Catholic Mass, the consecration of the bread and wine are explicitly acts of commemoration. After the elevation of the host and after the elevation of the wine, the priest says, in the words of Christ at the Last Supper, ‘Do this in memory of me.’ This wording from the Mass (or wording very close to it) occurs, in many versions of the New Testament, at two points. Firstly in the Gospel of St. Luke (22:19) during his account of the Last Supper, and then again in 1 Corinthians 11: 24-25 where St. Paul is describing the Last Supper as an event that occurred in the recent past, to a wider audience. In Jon Madsen’s rendering of the New Testament, based to a significant extent as it is on the translation by Emil Bock, this phrase has quite a different nuance, however. In Madsen’s version, the phrase is translated on the first occasion (in St. Luke) as,

‘And always when you do this, make my Being come alive within you.’ In the second instance (in Corinthians), it becomes ‘From now on do this to make my Being present,’ and ‘Do this, whenever you drink from it, to make my Being present.’ No sense of commemoration of a past event is implied any more, but an impetus to present activity, to permitting Christ to become alive anew in our present field of action.

In his small book *The Eucharist*, (formerly published as *The Metamorphosis of the Eucharist*), Rudolf Frieling gives a brief history of the eucharist as an action that has evolved, and continues to evolve, in time:

From the beginning, the Eucharist was never a mere repetition of the Last Supper. The latter is like a seed which now begins growing. One cannot argue against the growing plant that it is different from the seed. There is identity, but there is also metamorphosis.

The receiving of communion achieves a further level of completeness in the new eucharistic service, the Act of Consecration of Man. What was for millennia a twofold action has assumed a third dimension through the addition of the sign of peace. I am convinced that we would not have been given the peace at this point in the Act of Consecration of Man if we were not going to be sure to need it in daily life. Marta Heimeran, in her fine booklet *Living with the Act of Consecration of Man*, which dates from 1958, touches on this thought already:

Partaking in the visible Communion is threefold—eating the Bread, drinking the Wine and being touched on the left cheek by the priest with the greeting of Peace. This blessing seals in the soul and spirit what has been planted in the body. Eternal medicine is given us; the Bread heals

especially the infirmities brought about by the past; the Wine gives strength for the future; the Blessing connects one directly to the Source of all Life.

I have referred back, at many points in this article, to earlier forms of ritual, in particular the Roman Catholic Mass. I recognise, however, that the Act of Consecration of Man, whilst it bears certain resemblances to earlier forms, represents at the same time something quite new, an altogether new start. This point is well made in the enduringly fresh *Growing Point* by Alfred Heidenreich: *The Communion service, the Act of Consecration of Man, bears in its structure and sequence a distinct resemblance to the Mass. Yet not only is its language the*

vernacular of our age, but every single detail is as fresh and new and as different as the fresh blossom of a new spring. Additions and accretions which were joined to the ritual body of the Mass in times of clouded vision have dropped away. The ritual has sprung again from its eternal source like a young reincarnation of its eternal self. It has gone through a metamorphosis caused by God himself.

In the end, the three- as opposed to twofoldness of the communion in the Act of Consecration of Man is not susceptible simply to analysis and explanation. It is to be understood, experienced and lived with as an integral feature of the new body of the communion service.

Obituary

Michael Tapp

1st April 1933 – 30th July 2014

Tom Ravetz

Michael was born in London, the only child of Olive and Arthur. During his childhood, he lived in many different places—dependent on his parents' work—so he attended several different schools, starting with a boarding school at the age of four. He remembered hearing that war had been declared in 1939 whilst away at an open-air boarding school. He also attended Michael Hall in Forest Row for a few years. Later he requested to return there, entering Class 9.

He spent Class 12 in Stuttgart, where Michael Heidenreich was a school-mate. This brought about his first meeting with Alfred Heidenreich, who took both boys out once when he was visiting his son. After completing his schooling in Brighton, Michael studied early modern history at University College, London. He had a fine intellect and could have embraced a career in academia.

Whilst he was in London he discovered the church in Glenilla Road that Dr Heiden-

reich had built. He became a keen member of Dr Heidenreich's youth group, and attended youth conferences in the community's conference centre in Keswick. His former teachers in Michael Hall had hoped that he might become a teacher, and Michael had also considered this path. Dr Heidenreich suggested the priesthood. Michael later told friends in Australia that he had taken the decision to train for the priesthood because there was a greater need for priests than there was for teachers. There is a perhaps apocryphal tale that even then, Dr Heidenreich saw a potential lenker in this young man.

Michael met his wife, Elisabeth, in Stuttgart, where she was also attending the Seminary. He was ordained in 1959. He was sent first to Stourbridge, where he worked with Oliver Matthews. They visited Gloucester from Stourbridge. In 1961, Elisabeth and he married and they moved to Bristol in 1962. The Act of Consecration was celebrated there fortnightly, alternating with Gloucester. Michael led the building project of the new church in Stroud, where the family, now with two young children, Veronica and Jonathan, moved in 1968.

In 1972, they moved to Forest Row, where Michael was asked to help in the British priests' training at Shalesbrook. He went to Stuttgart for a few months to observe the preparation for the Ordination, which he then took on in Britain. Michael had always been involved in the administration of the affairs of The Christian Community, and when Oliver Matthews took on all the responsibilities of regional lenker after Dr Heidenreich's death in 1969, Michael assisted him. In 1974, he was asked to become lenker. This was no easy task, as he

was young for this office, and it took time for the older generation of priests to accept him. It was the time of drawing together in the region what had been started in the enthusiasm of the early years. Some painful choices had to be made, for example the closing of Woodford House, the conference centre in Keswick, and consolidating the places where priests were engaged, to harbour limited resources. Michael laid the foundations for more transparent working amongst the priests, and also for the structure of The Christian Community as we have it today, as a charitable company limited by guarantee.

Michael ran youth camps throughout the sixties, and he continued this into the seventies, as it was hard to find other colleagues to take this task on. He also became the editor of the *Threshing Floor*, the community's journal.

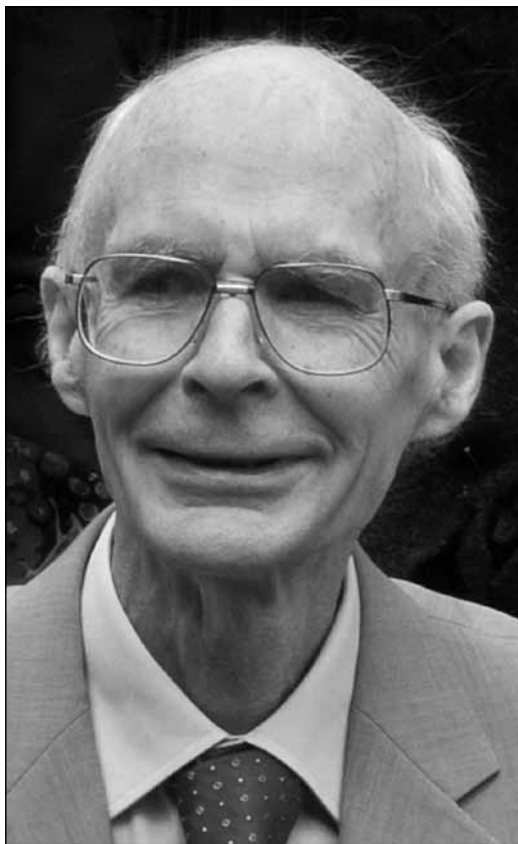
In 1979, the family moved to London. Also that year, Michael volunteered to take over the visits to Christian Community groups in Australia and New Zealand, which Eileen Hersey had been doing. For his first trip, Elisabeth came with him, and they took three months to travel via America, returning via South Africa.

On the first Sunday in Advent, 1988, Michael founded The Christian Community in Australia, staying for a few months in Sydney. In 1989, he and Elisabeth moved to New Zealand so that he could become lenker for this new region. The years building up the Community in Australia and New Zealand were happy ones. The directness and spontaneity of the people helped Michael to overcome his reserve. As lenker, he travelled frequently between New Zealand and Australia.

In 2001, he and Elisabeth returned to Stroud in the UK, together with his mother, Olive, who had been with them in New Zealand. Here he retired from his duties as lenker. One great achievement in that time was bringing order into the Community's Archive and Michael's historical knowledge and systematic and painstaking qualities stood him in good stead.

In 2009, he celebrated 50 years of priesthood. Then, in 2011, there was a great community celebration of Michael and Elisabeth's golden wedding anniversary. It was becoming apparent that Michael was losing full command of his faculties, but he had prepared a speech which he gave with great aplomb. After that, his decline continued and eventually he moved into a nursing home as he was suffering from mild dementia. It was possible to hold a conversation with him, although he seemed at times to float in and out of focus. Some of the cares and concerns from his time as lenker returned to plague him in these years. However, he could reflect on what was happening to him, and something quite new appeared: a beatific smile, with a hint of resignation—'look at silly old me, what am I getting confused about'—and a deep acknowledgment of the other. Michael always said a gracious thank you at the end of a visit. After his death, the shell of confusion and anxiety fell away, and it was possible to perceive his true being.

Michael had a penetrating intellect with a deep understanding of history and theology. These gifts were apparent in the many talks and lectures he gave, and in the articles he wrote in *Perspectives*. A collection of his writings on St Paul was edited and published



by Floris Books in 2012. He had the capacity to see what was needed in a situation, and also to see the potential for growth and progress, which he gladly supported. He gave of his time and energy selflessly, both in the tasks he took on and in the many moves that he undertook. From an early age, he was responsible and mature beyond his years. As a young man he had been fiery and outgoing and competitive in sport. During the priests' training, he went through a change. Those who met him as a young priest remembered his earnestness. Michael's devotion to the task of priest and later lenker was always apparent. He had great dignity and clarity, whilst also being kind and supportive.

The Asclepion of Pergamon

*Asclepius, God of healing,
He healed us,
Murmuring his soothing lays*

*We were healed as we walked
on the stones of the Sacred Way,
we were healed by the bees that
gathered in the great old pine tree,
we were healed as we sang Deep Peace
in the apse of the temple,
we were healed by the speaking of
‘They told me, Heraclitus, they told me you were dead,
They brought me bitter news to hear, and bitter tears to shed.’*

*Healing was ours who spoke and sang and danced
Cum decore, cum amore,
cum splendore, cum ardore,
cum vigore, cum calore,
voce cantate melodica.*

*And healing was ours who bathed our feet
in the gushing water of the holy basin,
who walked on watered shingle
in the shallow stone bath,
who walked down the dark avenue
of the underground passageway,
ancient stone by stone
to the round room where they slept,
the sick of ancient time.*

*Asclepius, God of healing,
He healed us,
Murmuring his soothing lays*

19 Oct 2013
VANESSA UNDERWOOD

Review

Ernest Simba

Catherine Cowell

Hawkwood Books, £6.99

for ten years and older

Reviewed by Ayesha Keller

Catherine Cowell has written an enchanting children's novel called *Ernest Simba*.

The book flows and has a magical atmosphere which takes us straight into the kingdom of childhood.

The story concerns the adventures of a disabled orphan who is accompanied by a shape-changing lizard and a magic cloth that becomes a flying carpet. The child enters a kind of reverie which takes him far from home. On his journey he meets other children who, with the help of Ernest's companion and his special powers, are able to overcome and withstand great dangers, eventually even overcoming terrible illness.

Knowing what we know about East Africa as adults, it is interesting how the story tackles the real struggles of Africa in a way that is suitable for children. There is something loving and touching about this tale and the way that death is dealt with is especially sensitive.

At the beginning of the book there is a short introduction in which the author describes her work in an orphanage in Africa and how she actually met Ernest there. When she left the orphanage she vowed to write a story about the child she had met. Perhaps this is why the story has such a beautiful atmosphere. One senses it has sprung not only out of the imagination but also out of love. My after-image of this story is of having been led into a special world.

Temple Lodge Club a quiet oasis in the middle of London



Temple Lodge—a Georgian Listed Building in the middle of Hammersmith—was once the home of the artist *Sir Frank Brangwyn*. Whilst his studio has been converted into a chapel with a **vegetarian restaurant** on its former mezzanine floor, the house itself is given over to accommodating bed and breakfast visitors. They come from four corners of the world to enjoy the *quietness and tranquillity* of the house. Many have described it as a really peaceful haven, despite being a stone's throw from the centre of Hammersmith and its busy traffic interchange. The absence of a television in the house and rooms *adds to this atmosphere*.

There is a quiet secluded garden. Most rooms look out over this large and **sheltered garden**. Two rooms look out over the front courtyard and garden.

Upon becoming members of the **Temple Lodge Club** (£1.00 annual membership) visitors seeking Bed & Breakfast accommodation may share in all the facilities the house has to offer.

Breakfast is served in the ground floor Dining Room looking out over

the quiet, secluded garden. A library provides a space for relaxation or quiet reading. All the rooms are well appointed and comfortably furnished, the two double rooms being deluxe rooms.

All prices include breakfast and are per room:

- Single room from £64 per night, with/without shower and second companion bed;
- Twin-bedded room from £88 per night.
- Deluxe double room from £102 per night (£75 for single occupancy)
- All rooms have hot and cold water.

For any further information or to make a booking, contact:



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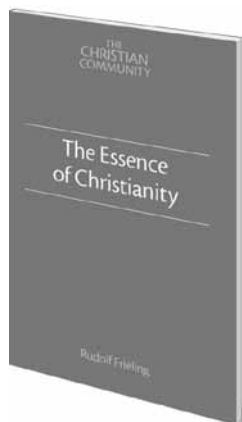
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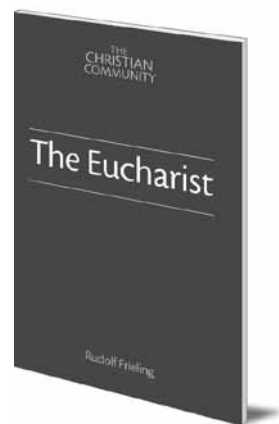
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Gospel Readings 2014–2015

Advent

Sunday, November 30..... Luke 21:25–36
Sunday, December 7..... Luke 21:25–36
Sunday, December 14..... Luke 21:25–36
Sunday, December 21..... Luke 21:25–36

Christmas

Thursday, December 25
Midnight Matthew 1:1–25
Dawn..... Luke 2:1–20
Morning John 21:15–25

Epiphany

Tuesday, January 6..... Matthew 2:1–12
Sunday, January 11..... Matthew 2:1–12
Sunday, January 18..... Luke 2:41–52
Sunday, January 25..... John 2:1–11
Sunday, February 1..... Luke 13:10–17

Sunday, February 8.... Matthew 20:1–16
Sunday, February 15 Luke 8:4–15
Sunday, February 22 Matthew 4:1–11
Sunday, March 1..... Matthew 17:1–13

Passiontide

Sunday, March 8..... Luke 11:14–36
Sunday, March 15..... John 6:1–15
Sunday, March 22..... John 8:1–12

Holy Week

Sunday, March 29..... Matthew 21:1–11
Thursday, April 2..... Luke 23:13–32
Friday, April 3..... John 19:1–15
Saturday, April 4..... John 19:16–42

Easter

Sunday, April 5..... Mark 16:1–8
Sunday, April 12..... John 20:19–31
Sunday, April 19..... John 10:1–16
Sunday, April 26..... John 15:1–27
Sunday, May 3..... John 16:1–33
Sunday, May 10..... John 14:1–31

Ascension

Thursday, May 14 John 16:24–33
Sunday, May 17 John 16:24–33

Whitsun

Sunday, May 24..... John 14:23–31

Wednesday, May 27 1 Cor. 13
Sunday, May 31..... John 3:1–21
Sunday, June 7 John 4:1–26
Sunday, June 14..... John 11:1–16
Sunday, June 21..... John 11:17–44

St. Johnstide

Wednesday, June 24 John 1:19–34
Sunday, June 28..... John 1:19–34
Sunday, July 5 John 3:22–36
Sunday, July 12 Matthew 11:7–15
Sunday, July 19 Matthew 14:1–12

Sunday, July 26 Mark 8:27–37
Sunday, August 2 Matthew 7:1–14
Sunday, August 9 Luke 15:11–32
Sunday, August 16..... Luke 9:1–17
Sunday, August 23..... Luke 18:35–43
Sunday, August 30..... Mark 7:31–37
Sunday, September 6 Luke 10:1–20
Sunday, September 13 Luke 17:5–24
Sunday, September 20 Matt. 6:19–34
Sunday, September 27 Luke 7:11–17

Michaelmas

Tuesday, September 29.... Matthew 22:1–14
Sunday, October 4..... Matthew 22:1–14
Sunday, October 11..... Matthew 25:1–16
Sunday, October 18..... Revelation 12
Sunday, October 25..... Rev. 19: 11–16

Sunday, November 1..... Rev. 1:10–20
Sunday, November 8..... Rev. 3:7–13
Sunday, November 15 Revelation 5
Sunday, November 22 Revelation 22

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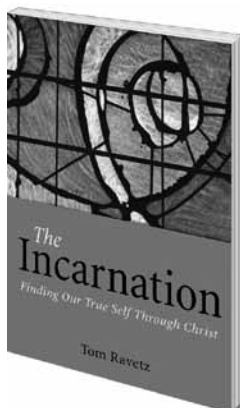
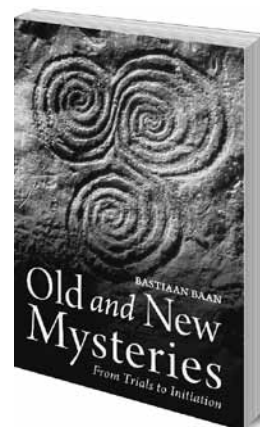
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