

The Christian Community

Perspectives

December/2016—February 2017



*Responding
to Fear and Terror*

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Cover picture: detail of an icon of the Panagia Glykophilousa, the sweetly kissing Virgin Mother. Possibly a Russian icon.

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The past can oppress us when we grow aware of mistakes we have made; things we have done that we regret. Or it can entice us into nostalgic dreams. The future can fill us with fear when we feel uncertain about what it will bring, or it can draw us into fantastical day-dreaming. All of these forces can be experienced as temptations to flee the present, the moment which is in fact all that we have. When we embrace the moment, the past becomes our foundation and we can sense the future approaching us as a gift. The present that can seem so fragile and fleeting becomes a source of strength and inspiration.

Every Act of Consecration joins past and future in a sacramental moment. In its still centre, we are connected to Christ's deed on Maundy Thursday, which inaugurated the healing stream in which we stand; we feel the seed of all future becoming of the earth coming to life in the bread and wine.

TOM RAVETZ

Fear and valour—The soul's magnitude and its shadow

Georg Dreissig

In the Beatitudes (Matthew, chapters 5–7), Christ speaks about the potential magnitude of the human soul: so all-encompassing that heaven and earth could find space to live and act within it.

However, we know how hard it is to open a shell once it has grown hard. It is painful. When we meet pressure from the outside which wants to keep the shell's form, we may feel like giving up on becoming great and wide.

But how might a being experience this in whose nature it is to become wide and great, but whose growth is hindered? It must feel pressured and threatened. We experience the burgeoning, germinating power of our soul, which has the power to transcend every limit, mostly just in the negative: in the feeling of being hindered—from within and from outside. This is the cause of fear.

Fear is a reality, even as hindrance is real. Something takes over the space where something else should be at work. And what is this something else? It is courage, or valour.

Perhaps the word valour evokes connotations of a medieval virtue which is now obsolete. However, the valour of knights was demonstrated in their ability to let their souls grow wide so that they could serve a higher reality. Being courageous, a soul can express its undistorted, true self and thus can reveal its true being.

The shadow of fear reveals a great light; it reveals, too, the modern soul which has begun to overcome hindrances and transcend its boundaries. In the process, the soul may feel its constrictions all the stronger and may feel pain. Behind the shadow of fear, however, we can sense the light of the human soul growing in courage.

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From: *Die Christengemeinschaft* March 2009
translated by Jens-Peter Linde

Our Times in our Kitchen

Jens-Peter Linde

There will be signs in sun, moon and stars; and on the earth trouble among nations and misunderstanding. The ocean of life will roar and the soul surf will toss weeping human beings into confusion and aimlessness, for the very powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

Luke 21:25–27

Recently we received a sign: My wife's handbag disappeared from the kitchen with her purse and all cards, some money, the keys and the diary. As this room has an outside door to the driveway we came to the conclusion that someone must have entered and taken it while we were on the patio hanging up the laundry.

Having lived there for many years she always had felt totally secure in the house in our small town. But as we had read in the papers that theft and petty crime had sharply risen in recent months, we feared that now our time's troubles had reached us too. So, after having searched the whole house several times over, we proceeded to have the credit and bank cards blocked and then we took the case to the police. All this took a precious Saturday afternoon and was very annoying.

Whilst driving over to her grandson's birthday supper that evening we discussed this shocking experience and felt that indeed, we had seen the terrorising happenings in the world from a relatively safe environment—and now the destabilising effect of affairs had reached us also. Would our response be a feeling of terror too? Would our 'soul-surf toss'?

Strangely enough, the very fact that we were now 'part of it,' even yet in a relatively benign way made us rather grateful! We felt that we had been taught a lesson: we should learn from the signs in this world to be prepared for anything to happen, and to take all experiences as something on our inner path towards 'salvation'. We should become able to create peace within and learn to have more empathy with victims all over the earth.

We had phoned the family with the news to apologise for our lateness, but it was great to feel quite composed when we arrived

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and to share the idea that we all are citizens of our world at this time. Then the worried state of the relatives could also be transformed and we could feel even more at peace than we might have with other troubles such as employment issues and sick children: peace welled not just within, but also around us.

Driving home we decided to buy some locks for the garden sheds, to keep the car for a few days parked away from the house until new locks could be installed, and not to leave handbags in view of outside windows. We had learned not to be afraid, but nevertheless, we still needed to learn to be prudent.

And then we came home and entered through the kitchen door—and there was the handbag, hanging in plain view over the back of a chair! It had been invisible to both of us while we searched for it and we did feel rather silly. But we also felt that we had learned what we had to learn, to meet the world as if it were our own destiny. Or, in the gesture of the Sacramental Consultation, we learned that what comes to us as impulses from the world, comes to us as divine guidance on our very own path of initiation.

And when we phoned her, the policewoman laughed and said that this happens all the time...



Prophet
(woodcut)
Emil Nolde

Advent—work in progress

Louise Madsen

Our Human Condition

An intriguing facet of our super-materialistic society—super in that it vehemently decries and bans even the merest hint of any source of human existence and action other than a material one, and wholly disregards whether the arguments in favour of that are reasonable or logical—is that the search for meaningfulness and purposefulness in our lives leads us in quite the opposite direction to that of materialism. In the industrialised world, the sheer magnitude of the physical advances made in our lives is astonishing; we are awash with material goods and equipment. But where outer, physical poverty has been abolished we now find, amidst all the discarded rubbish and, indeed, in all levels of society, an inner deprivation of soul and spirit: levels of depression, mental illness and lack of orientation hitherto not seen. The material world, taken on its own, has shown itself for what it really is: an empty, dead shell, providing mere illusions of stability and continuity. As the old certainties, encapsulated in outer forms and structures fall away, the quest is on to find other foundations, new grounds, on which to base our lives: to find what endures to give our lives purpose and meaning.

Although the soul is not recognised by conventional science as an entity in its own right, research and studies of the human psyche have revealed great amounts of knowledge. Some of this is to be taken seriously, some (the more popular versions) with a pinch (or two) of salt; generally our understanding and grasp of the world of the soul with its array of properties and characteristics has been advanced. Among a host of fascinating accounts in newspapers and books, it is worth noting that our capacity to think is being investigated seriously and thoroughly. It is not only thinking itself but both the inner and the outer context in which it takes place that is all-important. Environmental influences play almost as big a role as the activity itself. If they are adverse, they completely stifle and inhibit thinking. Listening with genuine interest, an open mind and attentively, with no feeling of superiority, creates the space into which another person's thinking can freely flow. In the thinkers themselves, fear and a feeling of being intimidated stifles any attempt at expressing what is trying to form itself in their mind, whereas their enthusiasm and confidence bolster creativity. The context within which thinking takes place is vital to the process

and greatly affects the content of the thoughts that emerge from it. In science this is still a taboo topic as the subject, the experimenter, is not permitted to be included as a legitimate part of the experiment: he is to be strictly excluded in order to preserve the impartial, objective character of the experiment itself.

The dawning recognition of the role and significance of the content of the soul as a key factor in what follows as outer activity can be developed much further. Today it is being used, by and large, as a means to an end: if I work on my inner attitude it will help me achieve greater efficiency in my workplace, improve my sporting achievements and so on. But a further step could be to accept my qualities of soul in their own right, as belonging to the entity 'soul'—not as some product of the body—and thereby give the soul its rightful place in my make-up.

Working thus with our inner life, with the inner man, takes us into new territory. It is not that it is really new, of course, as it has always been there but only now it is being investigated with our rational, scientifically schooled mind in terms that we can grasp and understand today. So, for example, the power of prayer has been shown to improve our mental and physical health and help the sick to get better more quickly. Cultivating a positive approach to the world, to a problem or a question, enables the world, in turn, to respond positively by indicating how a creative answer can be found. For our general health and wellbeing, changes in our lifestyle are urged upon us because they have been demonstrated to be much more effective than medicines or drugs.

The arena in which meaningful activity takes place has moved from the outer stage to an inner one, to inner-man. Outer-man, taken on his own, has proved himself to be an empty shell 'going nowhere.' In distinction to that, suffusing outer life with inner content gives it meaning and value; it changes it from being an empty performance into a fulfilling and satisfying experience.

How can we go on?

Gaining confidence and trust in the work being done in this sphere of man's life opens the way to further advances, for it is in the soul that the interplay of the visible world and the invisible world takes place. Recognising the significance of the functioning of our inner life for how we live and work in our outer world, be it privately, socially, politically, economically or, in our case, religiously, we are led to the conclusion that our inner-man needs, in turn, to be cared for, strengthened and replenished. The forces at work in our souls in this world are not self-sustaining, but they in turn require maintenance and replenishment.

Just as in the scientific world it will no longer do to persist with circular arguments used around, for instance, the subjects of the brain and consciousness

(does the mind determine the brain or the brain the mind?) or the determining power of genes (is it the genetic code itself or the influence of environmental factors on genes that alter their mode of expression?) so too in the realm of the soul it will not do to assume that its properties are present inherently as part and parcel of the basic make-up of the human being; that, for instance, our conscience simply belongs to it as one of its given attributes. Basically, we recognise that people are born with 'good' souls, that we inherently have a basic sense of morality, but that is because the soul is not of the body but is placed into it. To think, 'if only we could live by rational common sense, the ethical and moral world would sort itself out for the good of society' is a grave and hugely naïve illusion. Moral and ethical behaviours simply do not derive from the world of scientific exploration, however much it may be thought to be able, eventually, to uncover these secrets of the mind and heart. My brain is no more capable of distinguishing between good and evil than is my big toe; it is, nevertheless, an amazingly wonderful instrument for carrying out what the individual, to whom the brain belongs, wants to say, think, or do, whether it be good or bad. The forces of the soul, vulnerable and susceptible as they are to all manner of influence and subject to change, need nurturing and nourishing from the very beginning of life to prevent their corruption or their withering away like some dying plant.

We may like to think that we can live with some kind of 'secular ethics' that 'transcends religion' as the Dalai Lama suggests in many recent publications. Yet he recognises that the qualities he espouses are based on spiritual values; that they are based on other foundations than those provided by the world of matter. To recognise a world of spirit, in its own right, is then the logical continuation of this line of thought. And these spiritual forces are ever present and available for the soul to call upon. In our moments of quiet and meditation we draw on them. But, here again, these forces are not simply present of their own accord; as in the physical world, they each emanate from a given source. In the spiritual world, or, one can say, the spiritual dimension of our world, its forces and values originate from beings. The nature of this world is that of 'being', it is made up of beings. And it is the turning to these beings that makes up the religious life; it is what religious activity is all about. It is not a matter of subscribing to a particular religion or creed; it is the cultivation of an active role and nurturing a relationship between the soul and the spirit, the sphere of the divine. We are not asked to subscribe to a set of beliefs, but rather to find out what this so-called 'other' world is about, as it is, in fact, an integral part of our world. Thanks to the deep insights of philosophers and religious leaders

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over the centuries we have many writings such as the Bible that attest to this invisible aspect of our existence from which we can draw much knowledge, help and consolation.

The Advent Festival

If we now turn to the Movement for Religious Renewal, we see that it came into being at the time when the inner world of man was just beginning to be opened up to scientific investigation (Freud, Jung).

This Movement for Religious Renewal came into being not to be another religious body whose members give it their allegiance, but to provide an opportunity for religiously inclined people to find and cultivate their connection to the world of spirit through Christ, with and through the agency of the sacraments.

The Christian festivals are presented in the epistles, of which there is one for each festival season. They bear the same stamp of the spirit by which the Community came into existence. They are formulated in a way appropriate for our thinking today, referring as they do to what lives in our souls as we proceed through the events of the Christian year.

If we look at the Advent festival with which the Christian year begins, we have on the one hand, the reading from the Gospel (Luke 21:25–36), which is read throughout the festival period, and on the other, the words of the epistle. It has often been remarked that these two readings depict two markedly different aspects of this festival—and that it is not immediately evident how they can be reconciled. How can they both be expressing one and same event? It is not surprising that the festival shows us two different sides of its nature; one would, in fact, expect to see a number of ways in which we can view and experience it; they all convey different aspects of its fullness and richness. Yet this particular dissimilarity tells of a deeper twofoldness that grants us new insights into this remarkable event.

The contrast goes beyond being ‘two sides of the same coin.’ What we hear of in the Advent epistle is the inner side, or rather, the inner being of this event. The outer side or appearance of this event is what we hear of in the gospel reading, which tells of what is happening and will continue to happen in our world. The description of the inner side is new; it is a revelation given to us in the context of the Act of Consecration of Man.

Each epistle expresses something of the inner, higher nature of its respective festival, yet the Advent epistle stands apart in the way it leads into the most hidden and secret realms of the World-All. It is as if in this opening chapter of the Christian year, the heavenly world is seeking to impart a further dimen-

sion of its own life to humankind; as if it is saying, 'this is what you need to know in the present time.' Until recent times it was sufficient to observe and celebrate Advent and the other festivals in ways that have developed through the centuries. Today, however, these older forms no longer hold much, if any, relevance for us. The festivals will have to be approached on another level to live on in a meaningful way. That this is so is underscored by the revelation of their real nature, which speaks to our present day consciousness and allows them to become relevant to our daily lives.

As one might expect from the heralding of the Christian year, it opens with a pronouncement from above. As we find in the opening words of St. Mark's Gospel, 'The new word from the realm of the angels...', or in the Prologue of the Gospel of St. John, 'In the beginning was the Word...', here, too, we find such words, only now set into the context of our deeply musing souls. In the depths of the soul we hear the sounding of the very Ground of the World itself, as it speaks in the calm soul within the heart, filled with hope. The divine world speaking within the soul is a Word, a language, coming to us out of the future; it imparts an image of man as one who 'becomes', who is on a path of development. The divine world assures us, so to speak, that we are 'going somewhere' and it thereby imparts a strong sense of purpose. It is most remarkable that the epistle goes on to tell us that, within man in his becoming, another becoming takes place, that of the becoming of God within man. A most elevated and exalted vision! The promise of the advent of the Divine within man's being shows us the cosmic dimension of this annual festival. In a few short words it conveys the connection between man's existence and the purpose of Christian life. The inner heart of Advent is unveiled in a remarkable and magnificent way, and carries within it a vista of a World Advent extending into far future times, unfolding together with the continuing Christianising of humanity.

The epistle gives us an insight into a world of ongoing creation; a world of which we have only the dimmest awareness; in the peace and calm of our innermost soul-life the sound of its working is barely audible.

The gospel reading known as the little Apocalypse, which we hear throughout the whole time of Advent, tells us of how matters are, and will be, as the 'other', inner world, the spiritual world, which can be reached through the inner being of man, begins to make its presence felt in human souls. As a new blade of grass will lift up and crack the concrete or tarmac above it as it pushes its way up, so the outer crusts of our secular, materialistic, agnostic world are cracking and will crack and be thrust from one chaos into another as the advent of the invisible world becomes ever more pronounced and insistent.

Will She Say the Word
after 'Annunciation with Two Saints' by Simone Martini

MAUREEN TOLMAN FLANNERY

*Gabriel kneels before her with future on his tongue.
He is muse as her poem prepares itself.
He carries a peace branch offering,
wings poised for swift retreat.*

*Don't blame me, his eyes plead,
I am only the messenger,
while a dagger of words from his mouth to her ear
pierces the gold-leafed air.*

*The ribbon of destiny,
hers, ours, the earth's, stretches toward her.
Frown as she may, it will wrap around her,
grab her throat like a shepherd's staff and pull.*

*This Sienese artist has depicted a concave vessel,
the gesture of denial in Mary's torso that pulls away
from the angel's message as she might lean
into a narrow mountain road where solid ground drops off.*

*Mary has been reading, studying world wisdom.
Another future in mind, she holds a finger at her place,
hesitant to look away. As soon as this strange dream ends
she intends to take up the book where she left off.*

*Knowledge, less threatening, does not swell within you,
push your organs aside with its own intent.
She clasps the cloak at her breast with her other hand.
Beyond this moment, nothing will be the same.*

*Saints Margaret and Ansanus on the sides are no help,
blank eyes staring ahead. They acknowledge nothing,
nor would they prevent this terrible beauty from being born.
Expressions convey relief that they were not asked to bear it.*

*As she searches soul for her ability of response,
her whole being bends away from the poem that waits to enter.
Above them the dove, a shy suitor sending an emissary before him,
paces, fluttering.*

¹ The root of fear

Peter Skaller

The origin of fear

Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ He said, ‘I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself. And He said, ‘Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?’ (Gen 3:9–11). Later we read: Then the LORD God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever’— therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden...and...stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life.

Gen 3:22–24

Being afraid is the very first human emotion the Bible explicitly mentions. It appears immediately after the ‘Fall’ into the world of sense-experience is initiated by eating from the Tree of Knowledge. According to the Bible, fear appears to be joined with all that we experience in the earthly world. This description of fear is coupled with God’s asking ‘Where are you?’ as the first question put to the ‘fallen’ human being. Notice that the question is not answered. The man only says, ...*I hid myself*. It seems that this human being now does not know where or who he is and is thus afraid.²

The original fear accompanied hiding to avoid being ‘seen,’ that is, being known. That the way back into the garden was blocked leads us to consider that humanity’s state of being alienated from both its true being and the divine world around us arose out of divine intention. In addition, we also see that mortality arose.

Fear in today’s world

For the purpose of this article it is not necessary to discuss in detail the many fear-engendering phenomena in our world today. The media cover this thoroughly every day and we know them well from personal experience. A short list could include the abuses and injustices connected with ideological, political or religious fanaticism as expressed through nationalism, racism,

xenophobia, sexism, homophobia and the proliferation and use of weapons both in war and on our streets. Then there are the many terrible effects of corporate and individual greed such as environmental degradation and catastrophe, unemployment and/or meaningless and underpaid work. Poverty, hunger, loneliness, and inadequate medical care are all too prevalent, and of course there is also illness, pain, and death itself. Most of these have long been with humanity although today they seem to be pressing ever more intensely into human life.³

There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, [with human beings] fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world

Luke 21:25–26

We can readily identify ‘materialism’ as a common denominator under all these phenomena. But, ‘Modern materialism arose out of fear.’⁴ Furthermore, ‘Before birth, souls have a certain fear and anxiety about entering the world in which intelligence has such a propensity and leaning towards evil and which is caught in a descending development.’⁵

There are also well-known everyday psychological dynamics that are rooted in fear. A short list here could include the fears of making a mistake, of ridicule or rejection, of failure, and of lies being uncovered.

Rudolf Steiner stated that all we do in the western world is permeated by ‘fear mixed with hate.’ He says:

The signs of the times stand with menacing significance before us and their message is: Until now... [human beings]...were all secretly afraid of one another. Their fear was masked under all sorts of other feelings. But now we need an attitude of soul that will be able to embrace a world civilisation. We need a confidence which will be able to bring balance... The assumption today is that economic problems can be handled quite on their own account... [such as] how all the trading peoples on earth may have free access to market[s], and so on. But these problems will not be settled...until [we] become aware that all economic activities and [so-

cial] relations presuppose the trust of one [person] in another. In the future this trust will be attained only in a spiritual way.’⁶

We can ask whether the factors mentioned above are the true causes of pervasive fear, or whether an underlying, more fundamental, or ‘original’ fear is actually the source of dysfunctional, fear-and-hate engendering behaviour of people towards one another. We can also rightly ask if some of nature’s cataclysms and sufferings stem from this as well, e.g.

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But if you do not obey Me and do not carry out all these commandments... I, in turn, will do this to you...I will also make your sky like iron and your earth like bronze. Your strength will be spent uselessly, for your land will not yield its produce and the trees of the land will not yield their fruit.

Lev 14–20

The direct effects of human morality on nature are discussed in detail in other writings and will not be addressed here.⁷

The Fear of self-knowledge and of death

Rudolf Steiner describes in a number of lectures⁸ how, in the deep core of the human being, beneath everyday consciousness, there exists an oven of destruction' in which all of the matter we ingest, drink and breathe is rendered chaotic, materially obliterated, and spiritualized before being transmuted by spiritual forces into the substances of our physical body. Furthermore, in this zone, thoughts based only on sense impressions are also destroyed. All of this occurs *behind* the 'mirror' of our physical body which reflects back into consciousness the experiences we have in the sense-world and upon which our memories, thoughts, and feelings build what we call our 'self' or ego. Therefore this oven of destruction behind the mirror also nullifies our concepts of 'self' and thus we harbour an unconscious fear of looking behind the mirror and finding no one. The connection to the above description of the Fall is obvious.

In this process of spiritualization, which can also be called 'transubstantiation,' the spiritualization of our earthly self can take place insofar as we can begin consciously to penetrate the process. This was the original concept behind the sacrament of the Eucharist in which the transubstantiation, which occurs unconsciously deep within us, is placed before the senses so that we may begin to accompany it with our thinking. Christ's presence in this event was experienced as a fact and participants experienced Christ uniting with them in the Communion. As people lost the capacity to perceive spiritual events, intellectual discussions took place to try to decipher what was occurring. The Reformation and modern materialism actually grew out of the attempts to grasp transubstantiation, which was then deemed to be 'symbolic' In The Christian Community today the reality of spiritual transubstantiation through the working of Christ is set before us with the injunction, 'Take this into your thinking.' In this way we may make progress in building a spiritualized self that is united with Christ while also more and more infusing morality into the otherwise destructive processes occurring in the deep furnace within is. We do this so that *the Good may endure*.

Insofar as we are not conscious of this destructive core in us, its transubstantiating forces may leak upwards, and if left unchecked by morality, wreak havoc in the world. In the past, students in the mystery schools were trained to develop the courage to gaze consciously into this spiritual zone so that the forces of destruction could be mastered morally and true self-knowledge could be attained. Today, says Dr Steiner, we cover this up with all sorts of masks and only sense its presence unconsciously. The most powerful mask used today is the idea that there is nothing in the world that the senses cannot perceive. But our essential task is consciously and courageously to enter this furnace of destruction and to apply what we have freely gained as morality. Ego-consciousness and the chance to develop moral freedom can only develop as a consequence of the mirrored reflections of our sense experiences in the material world and therefore can only develop on the physical earth and in a physical body. We may consider this to be the divine purpose of the Fall, which was alluded to earlier.

But if this is so, then ‘where am I?’ and what happens to the self when the body dies? This is the legitimate anxiety and fear of souls on the earth, which is based on the accurate understanding of the inherent problem of wearing the mask of materialism. The solution to this quandary lies with gradually coming to understand and experience the mystery of Christ’s deed on Golgotha. Human beings could never take the earth-based I-consciousness with them over the threshold of death if they could not connect with the Christ in the sense of Paul’s words: ‘Not I but Christ in me.’ Christ is the being who makes it possible for the I to be taken across the portal of death.⁹ Thus, St. Paul can say, ‘O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’ (I Cor 15:55) This mystery is enacted before us and becomes accessible through the transubstantiation during the Eucharist sacrament.

Another source of being afraid to penetrate into the spiritual is because it is unknown. The comfortable sense-world is what we know and is, we imagine, ‘certain.’ But in the spiritual world ‘the comfortable solid floor is not there and one feels as though in an ocean of surging waves. One needs inner solidity to navigate through the spiritual world.’¹⁰

We may also sense, even if unconsciously, that penetrating into the spiritual world will involve loss, pain and suffering.

The spiritual researcher...must [also] possess the capacity for pain and suffering...You can understand why this is so when you simply imagine how the state of having spiritual sight is foreign to the usual situations on earth; basically it is as foreign to the soul as is our organism that has become ill and is in pain...one enters a world for which

*one is not yet organized...a world that cuts and burns. One must go through this...One must apply everything that the soul has developed and then however wait until...in moments of grace the spiritual facts come towards one.*¹¹

As has been said, the mirror, opaque for most of us, allows the development of the individuated ego and the possibility to determine moral action independently of the morality inherent among the guiding world-spirits. (This 'ego' is what is called our temporal being in The Christian Community's Act of Consecration of Man.) Thus, the destructive forces deep within us are 'good' as long as they remain corralled in their proper place. If we have not developed enough inner strength to face their presence and to freely reach into this zone with moral impulses, they can emerge as evil. 'Evil is nothing other than the chaos that is necessary within human beings, which has been projected outside of them.'¹²

To summarize to this point, the root fear of all fear is the unconscious or only somewhat conscious fear of the dissolution of the temporal 'I'. Overlaid on this root-fear are the fears of the unknown and of pain. Because we cannot see into the realm of death or into our inner furnace of destruction with everyday, sense-based consciousness, we are afraid of both death and of true self-knowledge.¹³ 'These fears are ultimately one and the same.' Our fear, as well as the mirror, is the result of the Fall. Through this we now have the capacity for 'knowledge of good and evil,' that is sense-based, logical thinking, but this knowledge is unable to reconcile its paradoxes and riddles, as we painfully know. St. Paul says, 'For now we see only enigmas in a mirror, but in the future we will see reality face to face. Now I know in fragments, but then I will know fully, just as I will be fully known.' (Author's rendering of 1 Cor 13:12)

So what can we do to develop fearlessness?

Below I present a brief list of practices towards mastering fear, along with a few comments. Courage is required in all cases. The common goal for all these practices is to gradually open the capacity and strength to experience the spiritual in the world and in oneself, and to be able to face and master the potentially world-destructive powers that lie within us consciously. It is far beyond the scope of this article to go into details about any of these suggestions. A few useful references are given. Please understand that based on the presumed readership of the *Perspectives* journal, and what I myself have chosen to work with, most of these suggestions are derived from the life of anthroposophy and the life of The Christian Community. Many other

valuable practices to help humanity deal with existential fear, both exoteric and esoteric, may be found in spiritual/religious traditions from around the world.

1. Practise contemplating the teachings of spiritual masters who share their observations and understanding of the spiritual world, death and the path to self-knowledge, always maintaining the faculty of sound reasoning to 'test' what is said.
 - a) For example, many are familiar with these lines by Rudolf Steiner:
[Knowing the spirit] can only be attained insofar as a person consciously looks to the realm that sustains us from behind the portal of death. We must eradicate the very root of fear and the terror over what presses towards human beings from out of the future. How a person today is brought to trembling and anxiety before what lies ahead in the future, and especially the hour of death! A person must acquire composure with respect to all feelings and perceptions regarding the future, and with complete equanimity readily meet whatever might come, thinking only that whatever comes does so through the supreme wisdom of world-guidance. (Author's literal translation)¹⁴
 - b) In another passage Dr. Steiner said:
Thus one must learn to be without desire regarding future events; to be become desireless and break the habitual anxiety and fear over future events. One must learn cold-bloodedly to say: You allow everything to come towards you, whatever may come, and not simply by saying this with dry, abstract concepts, but rather by making this into deep, inner feeling.¹⁵
2. Practise and experiment with the techniques of prayer and meditation as suggested by the great seers.
3. Practise acceptance and wonder over one's own biography and seek the meaning in both its joys and sorrows.
4. Practise wonder-filled observations of nature and use methods of thinking that allow intuiting spiritual processes at work in nature.¹⁶
5. Practise participation in the life of religious rituals, especially the Act of Consecration of Man in The Christian Community.
6. Practise offering service in the form of giving comfort to others, and also receiving it.
7. It is said that 'perfect love casts out fear'. (John 4:18) But love cannot be 'practised' or willed into being. It can only be born from above, through

Grace, when an opening has been created in a person who practices the above.

Ultimately the goal is to attain self-knowledge and world-knowledge through insight into, and a free experience of the Spirit, or as Paul said (see earlier), to fully know and be known. At the outset of this article, it was said that this would appear to be the current divine intention for earthly humanity.

- 1 Most of this article's content is based upon statements about fear that were made by Rudolf Steiner. Most of the translations of his remarks are my own. Bible passages are from the New American Standard Version, but in places indicated with [] I have substituted my own renderings. Quotations or paraphrases from Rudolf Steiner are referenced by the volume of the 'Gesamtausgabe' (GA) or collected works.
- 2 Jewish legend refers to 'naked' as the loss of the 'cloud of glory,' [the sheaths of auric light] that surrounded the human being before the Fall. (L. Ginzberg. *Legends of the Bible*, The Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia & Jerusalem, 1992, 647 pp.)
- 3 'the things which must...take place [with an ever-accelerating rate]...' (Rev 1:1)
- 4 GA 207, Sep 23, 1921
- 5 GA 125, Aug 16, 1919
- 6 GA 207, Sep 23, 1921
- 7 Skaller, P. 1998. *The Bible and Ecology*(I and II), in: *Perspectives*, 66:2 and 3. See also: D. Boyd. *Rolling Thunder*. Dell, NY. 1974, 273 pp.
- 8 GA 207, Sep 23, 1921 and GA 343, Sep 27, 1921 morning and afternoon, and Oct 6, 1921 afternoon.
- 9 GA 215, Sep 13, 1922
- 10 GA 329, Nov 6, 1919
- 11 GA 329, Nov 6, 1919
- 12 GA 207, 23 Sep, 1921
- 13 Did Lazarus die or 'only' enter the sleep of initiation? See John 11:1–44.
- 14 These lines are from the popular 'trust meditation' which can be found in various translations and versions that are in circulation. However, none of these versions stem directly from Rudolf Steiner. They were patched together and modified from various passages in his lectures and possibly even from elsewhere (Malcolm Gardner: anthropos-science@lists.reading.ac.uk, October 2001). The lines given here are my translation from a passage in Steiner's lecture 'Erkenntnis und Unsterblichkeit' (Bremen, Nov. 27, 1910) which can only be found in volume 98 of *Beiträge zur Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe* (<http://bdn-steiner.ru/cat/Beitrage/D98.pdf>).
- 15 GA 60, Oct 27, 1910.
- 16 E.g. P. Skaller, *Nature Contemplations through the Christian Year*, 2015, Floris, Edinburgh, 158 pp.; J. Bockemühl. *In Partnership with Nature*. Bio-Dynamic Literature, Wyoming RI. 84 pp.

Two sisters: fear and anxiety

Mechthild Quecke

Uninvited, suddenly they are there. Fear is the milder and more defined of the two and one only has to let go of her and then one is 'fear-less'. Anxiety is a different matter. One needs freedom to become 'anxiety-free'. Freedom is served by insight and insight needs thought. The demon Anxiety flees from thought but searches out the soul, sinking her claws into it, feeding on it and planting pictures in it. Such pictures become increasingly intense and persistent, ever elusive until at last through insight, farsightedness and overview she can be brought to a halt. Peace and order, the other two sisters, return, and the soul can comfortably feel itself at home in its own space.

Anxiety—Loss—Art

Johannes Reiner

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry was a pilot in the Second World War. In his book *Flight to Arras*¹ he describes his experiences and thoughts. He had volunteered as a pilot to defend France against the German invasion. He did not survive the war.

L'angoisse est due à la perte d'une identité—anxiety stems from the loss of one's real self. The fifth chapter of this moving book begins with this simple, clear definition of anxiety. It links anxiety to the actual Self, the 'I' of the human being. Whenever there is a loss, a reduction of 'being oneself', the abyss that is thereby created in one's make-up produces the constricting feeling of anxiety (Lat: angustus = narrow). And vice versa: if there is no split, the feeling of constriction cannot arise either. So we experience the state of being-in-oneself as inner wealth, as freedom and as joy.

We, fortunately, are not at war; not here in Germany, [or the Western world as a whole *trs.*] even though our soldiers fight, kill and die in foreign lands. We are spared threats to life, loss of livelihood, destruction and

helplessness as immediate, collective experience. Nonetheless, struggles are continuously taking place in and around us. That most precious part of ourselves, our 'I', is pursued by those destroyers who, like wolves in sheep's clothing, want to devour our inmost being. Drug cartels, the entertainment industry, greed, power-seeking and those Grey Gentlemen, the time thieves: they can quickly cause us to fall behind ourselves.

Unlike Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, we are not pilots in the Second World War. He created his images and thoughts by drawing upon his experiences. Our fears and anxieties today are of a different kind. He writes about the emptiness of time, of uncertainty, of getting into a state, of just waiting, of a faceless future. In these 'unlived conditions', as he called them, the actual personality is no longer nourished or earthed; rather, it is removed from me, it becomes estranged and ghostly. My real 'I' is no longer close to me, I become a stranger to myself and I am frightened by this stranger, who is actually me myself. An abyss, a cleft opens between that part of me which stayed behind and the part that is actually me myself. That causes anxiety. And we all live with anxiety.

Joseph Beuys was also a pilot in the war. He, too, was shot down. He survived. That was in 1944. Twelve years later he crashed again: that was an inner crash of the soul. Looking back on this inner struggle of life and death (depressive states of exhaustion is such a banal expression for that) Beuys, twenty four years later, said '...basically, something had to die...things in me had to turn round, a transformation had to take place, right into my physical constitution...that kind of crisis was a sign that either there is a loss of direction or that too many directions were being followed. It is a decisive challenge to cleanse some things and to arrive at new insights in a definite direction...focus points needed to be established.'²

So: loss of direction...trying out too many directions: here we sense anxiety arising. Cleansing...establishing focus points: here clarity and identity arise.

Transforming anxiety

What freed Saint-Exupéry from his anxiety, what are the 'new focus points' that Beuys speaks about? How can I close the cleft of the abyss from which anxiety wells up?

In Saint-Exupéry a strong self-imposed task dawns: 'I shall fight for Man.' That is how he ends the 27th chapter of his book. He formulates 'I' sentences: 'Je suis...I am...my actions create the future...je deviens aussi celui qui...I shall be one who...I am no more anxious than a ripe fruit.'

And Beuys? Listen to him: 'I had to mould everything into new concepts... so that I also had to become clear about the whole desperate situation of modern art, which also had been a reason for my crisis... So, that is where the first theoretical structures for the expansion of the concept of art to include the human being as a whole originated.' It is the germ of what later became: 'Everyone is an artist.' We have Beuys to thank for this expression.

Let us sum up: Anxiety stems from the loss of one's actual self—that is the definition. Everyone is an artist—that is the path. Are we clear about that? Every human being is an artist, therefore I, too, am an artist, a producer, a creator—not only a creature, down-trodden, a victim, a product. My very own Self does not live outside me, but in the centre of me. There it lives, works, grows, warms. Just the way it is. Beuys has his Self. Everyone has his own, just the way it is for him. I have mine, you have yours. I don't wait; I don't let others work upon me. I keep at it. When I allow others to work upon me I 'lose it'. I become a stranger to myself and—thanks to Antoine for these words—when I then meet myself, I become as frightened as I would be on meeting a ghost.

When I am overcome by anxiety I am caught. I easily lose the overview. Panic sets in. I must laboriously learn to differentiate between that which is not 'I' and that which is 'I'. Where do I go astray from myself and think that that is good for me? Where do I live in thoughts of tomorrow and yet linger on in yesterday, without the joy and thankfulness for today? Healing begins with the question: In what are you lacking? Is it one's summoned-up courage, striving, enduring, 'staying with it'? Is it the strength of hope, of trust, of being able to let go in a controlled way? Is it the power of warmth and love that fuses me together as a unity with myself? When I am in a tight spot I need all of these: I need courage, I need trust, I need love. When I am outside it I can look back and clarify, bring order and practise forgiving myself for having thus stayed behind me.

Anxiety can take on the dimension of a compelling illness. Finding a way out of this degree of anxiety is more than the liberating power of insight can give. Here reformation of the soul requires medical support, bodily reorganisation and individual attention.

These two articles were first published in Die Christengemeinschaft. Translations by Louise Madsen.

- 1 Antoine Saint Exupéry. *Flight to Arras*. Penguin Modern Classics 2000
Saint-Exupéry A de. *Pilote de guerre*. Gallimard, Paris 1942.
- 2 Adriani G. *Joseph Beuys*. Dumont, Cologne 1994.

London, Jerusalem, and the power of sacrament

Luke Barr

In his great and complex mythology, William Blake described the folk-spirit of the British Isles with the power of his imaginative thinking. The folk-spirit was called Albion. Like all folk-spirits, this entity loves and worships the Christ. Blake pictured this in the moving watercolour reproduced here.

But even though Albion is a great and mighty spirit, it is nonetheless still on its own path of evolution, and must suffer hindrances along the way.

The purposes of the folk spirit may be misunderstood or perverted by the human souls under its dominion. The folk spirit associated with the English language has a world destiny and must contribute something of the spirit to world evolution. This would primarily be a cultural contribution which might then have political and economic effects; not the other way round. Blake's sense of our world destiny is found in his poem *Jerusalem*. The English have a difficult destiny involving the 'dark satanic mills.' But within this disquieting picture, there is also the seed of the new Jerusalem. The poem's tone captures perfectly the mood of this quiet but complete spiritual triumph.



Albion, William Blake

It reveals that a mighty attitude of soul is coming into the world, for which English-speakers have a natural talent. It is an outlook on life that has recently gathered pace and is everywhere now prevalent. Rudolf Steiner termed it the 'Consciousness Soul'. It leads to the 'satanic mills' of industry and to social alienation. But within this terrifying loss of the old world, there is the seed for a new and better world. And Blake makes us aware that it will require something akin to a struggle ('mental fight') in Man, to overcome the satanic element in this attitude of soul. And so his poem is a Michaelic one, calling us to overcome the dragon with 'spear, bow and arrows, sword and chariots of fire'¹. The defeat of the dragon is commensurate to the building of Jerusalem.

This is the task of Albion, to build in men's minds and souls (this 'green and pleasant land'), the Kingdom of the Heavens, or, Jerusalem.

However, if this task is not taken up, then the folk demon accrues more power and masquerades as the folk spirit.

This folk demon also has a name. It is found in the famous collection of poems, *Songs of Experience*. The exoteric name of the demon is *London*. The city of London has been commandeered by it. This demonic spirit is one we can perhaps sense when we, like Blake, take a simple walk through our cities or towns. We can see the 'marks of weakness and woe' in 'every face that we meet'. We can see a people divorced from a sense of purpose and even sometimes a sense of reality. We may see many human souls reduced to becoming mere consumers. The weakness is a lack of true individuality; the woe is the suffering that proceeds from this.

The spirit of the city, the life-flowing Thames, is fully 'chartered' like the streets. The Thames can no longer act as the protective spirit and genius of the city. It has been polluted, and manipulated for egoistic commerce.

And to Blake's spirit-sensitive ears, every voice he hears is like a cry of one born into captivity. 'The mind forg'd manacles' is the unforgettable phrase that he creates. And it may put one instantly in mind of Rousseau's famous words to the 'brave new world' of eighteenth century Europe that 'Man is born free, and is everywhere in chains'; or of Plato's cave analogy; or of the moving picture of Marley and the dead spirits in *A Christmas Carol*.

It is just these 'mind forged manacles' that are the central problem of human souls. How can one become free of the shackles in one's own soul in order to unfold ever higher forms of love?

Blake cites further two great obstacles to freedom. The first is represented by the 'blackening church'. This is any outworn or false system of belief or ethical code. Such beliefs become an empty shell, and worse still, the 'blackening' temples of demons. The second is the 'palace' as a false illusion of glo-

ry. It is an earthly mockery of heavenly splendour. Its 'glory' lives from human blood ('the hapless soldiers'). For Blake, the unjust and murderous 'palace', and the hypocritical 'church' belong in the same hell together. They are the staunch pillars which maintain the demon, London.

Blake's terrible vision ends with the abuse of young girls used for prostitution, the perversion of love at its basest level. Ultimately, the child

appears, the outcome of such unions. And the crying child, the new-born spirit on earth, is 'blasted' and 'cursed' by the suffering mother.

Blake does not spare his audience. He wishes us to enter fully into the horror of what the demon produces. This 'entering into fully' is also an aspect of that attitude of soul which is the English genius. Blake wishes us to awaken to the horror of the folk demon, and to take up the spirit-arms mentioned at the end of his poem *Jerusalem*.

The picture that accompanies the poem *London* tells its own story. In it, a child (the future of the English spirit?) leads an old man (the past of this spirit?) on his last legs through the streets. They have come to a door. Light falls on them in this moment. Blake appears to have loved children dearly and to have reserved a special place for them in his mythology. Here, the child seems to lead the old man out of the labyrinthine streets, and to a door of new opportunities where light reigns.

This light may be found again in the accompanying *Songs of Innocence*. As many readers will know, the unsettling *Songs of Experience* are wedded to the gentle *Songs of Innocence*. Each poem in *Experience* seems to have a corresponding voice in *Innocence*.

We may sense that the poem *Holy Thursday* in *Innocence* moves somewhat towards redeeming London. And again, it is the spirit-being of the child which plays a decisive part for Blake's vision.

In *Holy Thursday*, Blake describes a procession of poor children from the charities through the streets of London. Despite the possibility of detecting irony (as Geoffrey Keynes has in his commentary²) in some phrases of the



London, William Blake

poem, one can transcend this and feel with Blake the spiritual joy of seeing his *Jerusalem* partly living itself out before his eyes.

The children, ‘these flowers of London town,’ are to him a ‘multitude of lambs’—that is, a gathering of spirit-beings so fresh and pure that their being reflects the Lamb’s spirit-world that they have just recently left behind them. Where the ‘chartered Thames’ can no longer be the good spirit of the city, these children ‘like Thames waters flow’ into the cathedral of St Paul’s. The children, as bearers of spirit-purity and innocence, have assumed the destiny of the true spirit of the city. They take on their shoulders the task of the city’s genius. They, instead of the commandeered Thames, flow through Blake’s mind’s eye as a life affirming principle. They are ‘beggars in the spirit.’

To my mind, Blake is transcending social critique in this poem. He is not being simply ironic. That tone does not belong to his *Innocence* poems. Rather, we are given a picture of what the urbanised human soul may become, in overcoming the folk demon of London. In the cathedral-church, the human soul raises its voice to heaven. The ‘blackening church’ is thereby redeemed and transformed. And this congregation’s voice is ‘like a mighty wind’: it is a Whitsun motif. It is an intimation of the spirit-nature of Man. Man, as he is to become, will be a Spirit-Child, the youngest of the ranks of Hierarchies. The spirit-world longs to receive this being, whom they are expecting to be born soon out of the womb of Earth.

One might say that London will be transformed to Albion when we learn to make our lives a living sacrament. For the grace of vision that Blake shares with us is predicated on the unmentioned bread and wine of Holy Thursday: that it is in fact the day that commemorates that which gives godhead once more to Man.

Blake is clear that we may succumb to the folk demon and its ‘mind forged manacles.’ But he also has faith in the mission of Albion; of entering fully into that which we experience, feel and think. And in doing so, consecrating it all. Then we are building Jerusalem among the dark satanic mills.

And so we will become that which we are intended to become: spirit-children. Then, like Blake’s orphans, we will be among the angels ‘seated in companies...with radiance all their own...the multitudes of lambs.’

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- 1 Readers will recognise the similarity between this and Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, which refers to the ‘panoply of God’. This reading is associated with Michaelmas tide.
- 2 Keynes has written an accompanying short text in the oft-used Oxford version of the *Songs of Innocence and Experience*.

Three women in the family tree of Jesus

Neville Adams

There are two family trees of Jesus in the New Testament, one in the Gospel of Luke and one in the Gospel of Matthew. Luke starts his family tree with Jesus and goes up through the generations to Adam 'who is of God.' Matthew on the other hand starts with Abraham and goes down through the generations to Joseph and Jesus. Both Gospels have the same names only from Abraham to David; both have Joseph and Jesus.

Only Matthew names three women in the first group of fourteen generations. The three who are named are: Tamara, Rahab and Ruth

Judah begat Perez and Zerach whose mother was Tamara; Salman begat Boas whose mother was Rahab, Boas begat Obed whose mother was Ruth.

Tamara means life and is also used for the date palm which is a symbol for grace and beauty.

Jacob had twelve sons, who are the founders of the twelve tribes of Israel. One of these is Judah. Judah has three sons. For the first-born, Er, he finds a wife among the Canaanites. Her name is Tamara. Er loses favour with God and dies without having conceived a child. Er means childless! It was the custom at that time that should a man die childless, his brother was to take the widow as wife in order to have children for the deceased brother. When Onan the younger brother has to take Tamara he does not want to fulfil this task of providing offspring for his brother and so he spills his seed on the ground. God is angry with him and so he too must die. Onan means sadness. The third son, Shelah should take the place of his deceased brother but he is too young. According to a legend Shua, the wife of Judah, hates Tamara and also does not want to give her youngest son to her lest he too should die. So Tamara is sent back to live with her mother. She is now a childless widow and it is a disgrace for her to be sent back to her mother. During an absence of Judah Shua arranges a Canaanite wife for Shelah.

It is said of Tamara that she had a prophetic gift and that she knew that she was to be a forebear of David. So she takes her destiny in her own hands. What takes place is not morally condemned in any way, neither in the Bible nor in the Jewish legends.

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Tamara and Judith, Rembrandt

The years had passed by and Shua had died. Judah made his way down to Timnar where the shearing shed stood. Tamara heard that he was going down and dressed herself as a harlot and lay in waiting till he should come down. When she saw him she offered him her services. At first he wanted to pass by but then an angel caused him to turn back and go to her. Her price was a male goat. It was a Semitic ritual that such a male goat be sacrificed to Astarte, the

Goddess of fertility. So she demanded of him a pledge to be sure of getting the payment. He then agreed to her demand that he give her the ring from his finger with the cord and the staff in his hand. Then he slept with her, not knowing who she was as her face was hidden under a veil. Judah later sent a friend to take the goat to the harlot but was unable to find her. The men of the village also said there was no prostitute there.

Tamara became pregnant and took off her veil and dressed again as a widow. After three months it was said to Judah that his daughter-in-law was guilty of prostitution and was pregnant.

He was angered and said that she should be brought out and burned. When she heard this she looked for the pledges. According to a legend she couldn't find them because the wicked angel Samael had hidden them. But then the Archangel Michael was sent to help her and she found them. When they brought her out she sent the pledges to Judah saying that she was pregnant by the man to whom they belonged. He should examine them carefully and see to whom they belonged. When he saw them he acknowledged that he was guilty because he had not given her his son Shelah. A legend tells that when he had spoken a voice out of heaven was heard, 'You are both innocent. That this happened was the will of God.'

Tamara gave birth to twins. Before they were born the hand of one of the twins came out and they tied a scarlet thread around his wrist. The hand withdrew and the other twin came out first. They called him Perez, which means 'broken out'. When the next one was born they called him Zerach which mean 'scarlet' or 'radiance', after the scarlet thread they had tied around his wrist before he was born.

Joshua, the son of Nun, was in command of the army of the Israelites to take the city of Jericho. He sent two men to spy out the land. Towards evening they approached a woman, Rahab, a prostitute, asking for a place to spend the night. She agreed to take them in.

In the meanwhile the King heard that there were spies in the city and that they had entered the house of Rahab. He sent messengers to her asking her to turn them over to the messengers. However Rahab hid the spies and told the messengers that they had indeed been there but before it was dark they had left the city by the gate. She did not however know where they were going. When she



Rahab and the spies, Frederick Richard Pickersgill

hid the two spies on the flat roof of her house, so a legend says, one of them, Phineas, said that he was a priest. That was like being an angel and if he wanted to be seen he would be seen; if not he would not be seen. So she hid only the other one, Caleb, under the bundles of flax. Before they were asleep Rahab went up to the roof and spoke to them, 'I know that the LORD has given you this land...for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.' A legend says that the Lord then spoke to the woman Rahab, 'You have spoken of me that I am a mighty God in Heaven and on the earth. You have spoken of things which you have not seen with your eyes. By your life the son of your son will arise and see things that no other Prophet before him has seen.'

Then Rahab spoke with the men and said that, as she had shown them kindness they too should show her kindness and they should spare her and all her family. They agreed to do so if they were all gathered in her house. Her house was in the city wall and so she could let them down from a window. At the window from which she let them down she tied a scarlet cord to signify which house was hers.

All those in Rahab's house were led out of the city which was then razed to the ground. 'Joshua spared the woman Rahab and all that was hers.'

Rahab means the 'broad one' or 'open'. It was said of her that there was no lord or aristocrat who had not visited her. Rahab is also mentioned in the New Testament:

By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.

Hebrews 11:31

You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way was not also Rahab, the harlot justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?

James 2:24–26

In Joshua, the son of Nun, Joseph, the son of Jacob, was reborn. And because he had refused to take the wife of his Lord Potiphar, Joshua should marry Rahab in whom the Egyptian woman came anew into the world.

Jewish legend

The story of Ruth takes up the whole of a small book in the Old Testament, the book of Ruth. It is one of the most beautiful stories of the Bible; the story of the friendship and love between two women: Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi.

Naomi and her husband Elimelech lived in Bethlehem. In a period of drought they left their home and went to live in the land of Moab. They had two sons, Mahlon and Kilion, who when they were old enough married Moabite women. Elimelech passed away and both of their sons also died. So Naomi was left with her two daughters in law. Then Naomi decided to return to her own people in the land of Judah. As they started out on their journey Naomi tried to persuade the two young women to return to their own families, re-marry and have children. The two protested with tears and wanted to go



Ruth gleaning, Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

with her. Again she told them to leave her and go to the homes of their mothers. Then Orpa, whose name means ‘the one who showed her neck’ turned back but Ruth, whose name means ‘beauty’ kissed her mother-in-law. Then Ruth said, ‘Where you go I also will go, where you will stay I also will stay. Your people shall be my people; your God shall be my God. Where you die there will I also die, where you will be buried, there will I also be buried. The Lord do this or that to me, only death shall part us.’

When the two women arrived in Bethlehem the people asked, 'Is this Naomi?' She answered, 'Do not call me Naomi, (which means 'lovely'), but rather call me Mara (which means 'bitter'), for the Almighty has given me great sadness.'

In Bethlehem, ('the house of bread') lived Boas an older widower who was wealthy and a relative of Elimelech. Naomi plans that he should marry Ruth. As a relative, the 'legal' basis is given for him to do so because it is necessary that offspring are brought into the world. This was called the guardian-redeemer of the family. Ruth is sent into Boas' fields during the harvest to glean. Boas notices Ruth and asks who she is. He is told that she is the Moabite woman who came back with Naomi. He then tells his harvesters that she must be left in peace and allowed to glean and that they should ensure that there is always enough left behind for her to glean. To Ruth he says that she should glean only from his fields.

After Ruth has told her mother all that had transpired, Naomi decides it is time to take action. She sends Ruth to Boas after she has dressed her and made her up, but Ruth would not be too much adorned so as not to draw the attention of the young men. Ruth comes to the threshing floor where Boas has laid himself to rest behind a bundle of corn. Whilst he is asleep, Ruth lies down at his feet and covers herself with a corner of his blanket. At midnight he wakes up and is shocked to discover her at his feet. He then asks who she is.

She answers that she is Ruth, the daughter-in-law of Naomi, his maid-servant. Then she asks him to cover her with the edge of his cloak. Ruth then lies at his feet and before it is light Boas empties six measures of barley into her shawl so she might not go back to Naomi empty handed. Boas then tells her that he is indeed a guardian-redeemer of the family but there is another who is more closely related. If he will not take her then Boas will marry her.

When the sun comes up Boas goes to the town gate and waits until the other guardian-redeemer came by. He then calls him and ten elders of the town as witnesses. When he hears that he should take Ruth, he declines. Then Boas agrees to marry Ruth. The men are glad for Boas and say to him: 'Through the offspring the Lord gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.' Ruth bears him a son named Obed (servant), the father of Jesse, the father of David.

The women say, 'To Naomi a son is born! Your daughter-in-law who loves you has given birth to him; she who is worth more than seven sons.'

These three women bring something very special into the blood-line of Jesus—independent, determined action in order to achieve their aims, and so to fulfil the will of God in preparing for the incarnation of the Logos.

The silent king

An Epiphany story

Michael Ronall

Long ago in a faraway land there lived a wise and kind king named Melchior. King Melchior stood tall, and was in the prime of his life. He wore a full beard that flowed down over a shirt spun of brilliant green silk embroidered with patterns of silver thread. A tunic of gold covered his breast, and silk trousers of flaming red billowed about his long legs. His sandals were of the softest leather, inlaid with precious jewels, and his cloak of purple velvet swirled about him wherever he would go.

In those days, noble men often wore necklaces and bracelets as well, and King Melchior carried around his great neck a chain woven of fine gold filaments, from which hung a pouch of frankincense that he would sacrifice on holy festivals, for he was a high priest as well as a king. On each wrist he wore filigreed silver loops that jingled wherever he would go. And jingle they would often, for King Melchior dearly loved to walk, and as he strode, he would swing his arms briskly back and forth, jingling as he went. All the folk of the realm knew when their king was approaching by the sound of his bracelets' silver song. And they would rejoice to hear it, for Melchior was a gentle ruler who knew

the hearts of his subjects and loved above all things to treat them well.

Each morning before taking up his royal duties, King Melchior would wander through the lush gardens

of his temple-palace, breathing in the air fragrant with the sweet scents of his many flowers and trees. And every day he would marvel at the splendor with which the world had been created, and he assumed his tasks enlivened and inspired by the scents of the blossoms and fruits of the season.

After his morning walk, Melchior would work through the day, tending to the affairs of his kingdom, settling disputes among his people, teaching them ways to improve their lives, and maintaining peaceful relations with the neighboring lands. In the evening he would ritually gather the other wise men of his court, and with them he would sit to chart the courses of the heavens, tracing the journeys of the stars and planets, marking this one's rise and that one's fall, and so learning to guide the destinies of his subjects.

When he strolled through the gardens in the morning, the king would tell the animals that gathered around and followed him what he had learned the evening before. For animals, although wiser in their own ways than human beings, cannot raise their heads to gaze at the stars, and so they must rely on kind men like King Melchior to speak to them of the broad world outside their ken. And Melchior, like the great Israelite King Solomon before him, could converse in the language of the animals; from him they learned about the many deeds of gods and men, as when a war would be approaching, so that they might prepare a safer place for their young, and when, as always happened, peace would return to the land, they might run free again.

*Michael Ronall,
member of the
congregation of
The Christian
Community in
Spring Valley,
USA.*

But, truth to tell, while King Melchior was a righteous ruler, he was a sad one as well. For he knew that his reign was ending, that the world was growing harsh, and that the good magic he had worked in the past was no longer as powerful as it once had been. Even among his own subjects there was now more strife than ever before. Good people were losing their natural feeling for one another, growing more selfish, and in many places men who might have known better became cruel when they gained power.

One night Melchior worked with his astronomers until daybreak, dismayed and perplexed by what he saw in the heavens. Far to the West, in the land of Judea, a wicked king named Herod was ruling, governing with such violent passions as the world had never known before. King Herod's heart was imprisoned by hatred, hatred vile enough to slaughter not only the armies of his enemies, nor even prisoners or slaves, but scores of innocent children, in order to ensure that none would grow up to take his throne. And Melchior could see that even with the aid of his own two strong and friendly neighboring kings, Caspar and Balthazar, all his magic would be powerless to prevent King Herod from carrying out his evil deeds.

But just as this monstrous calamity was to take place, a most wondrous event, the birth of a holy child, was also clearly marked in the heavens. Melchior and his astronomers could see that a boy was about to be born who would bring healing to nations torn by ignorance and strife, and indeed to all sufferers who turned to him for help. And thus was King Melchior at once both grieved and hopeful, for was it not plainly shown to the astronomers that the coming child would bring a gift to outshine all earthly wisdom, fading as it was in the twilight of the ancient world? Melchior knew that for his king-

dom, and in truth for all kingdoms of his time and into the future, such a gift was sorely needed to replace his own slowly ebbing strength.

And so it came to pass on the morning after seeing those events foretold in the skies—the terrible murder of the innocents, but also the redeeming birth of the holy child—that the great king was silent for the first time on his morning walk. The animals, who usually chattered in response when he told them the news that he brought from the heavens and the far reaches of the earth, were silent in return as they carefully watched the king moving before them, wordlessly stroking his long beard as he strode. The squirrels, the swallows, the grasshoppers, and the butterflies all listened quietly as the mighty sovereign gazed down upon the ground as he walked, letting ring into the morning stillness only the soft jingle of his bracelets as he wondered what to do.

For Melchior knew that his magic was coming to an end, that he would be the last of an ancient line of rulers who could speak to the animals in their own language, and that, though he were to govern as best he could, it would still not be sufficient. For even his most excellent astronomers were also growing feeble, their disciples no longer had a sense for the wisdom in the stars nor the interest to acquire it, and Melchior himself had no heir to take his place.

And now! A child who was himself born from the heavens! This was just what his kingdom needed—truly, what all the kingdoms of the world now needed. One who would require no teaching in the lore of the stars, for he would be born already radiant with celestial brightness, resplendent with luminous wisdom to pour into the weary earth. King Melchior could almost hear the boy's clear, young voice resounding in the Temple at Jerusalem with all the learning of the

aeons, astonishing the priests and sages there with his mysterious words, and, later in his life, bringing healing to the ill and wounded. He would enlighten those thirsting for knowledge, comfort those in pain, strengthen those who struggled under burdens. Melchior could see him teaching, healing, and finally giving his entire self in sacrifice as a lasting gift to the world and its inhabitants.

No being worthier of honor had ever appeared in Melchior's reign, neither on the earth nor in the heavens; none more deserving of veneration carried by the sacred smoke of his frankincense. In fact, King Melchior now knew that all his priestly offerings had been but preparations, a series of awakenings of the heart to prepare for this new king who would succeed him and all the kings before him, all the way back to King Solomon. And so Melchior felt compelled to set out on the long journey to greet his successor with fitting tribute. But if

he were to leave his kingdom in search of this wondrous child, how would his subjects fare without his guidance?

Thus the good king strolled through his gardens, surrounded by his devoted, faithful flock of animals, wondering whether to go out in search of the foretold miracle or stay to protect his realm. And though he said nothing as he walked, whenever he thought of setting forth to meet the child, Melchior could feel his heart lifting high into the morning air. Then, as if to meet the joy thus unfolding from his very centre, gradually there began to flow down into his whole being a warm and radiant light, filling him with resolve to transform the darkness and cold into which all the kingdoms of the earth were steadily falling. King Melchior could feel the rays of a new star shining out from the vast, dark folds of space, into an unknown, brightly promising future.

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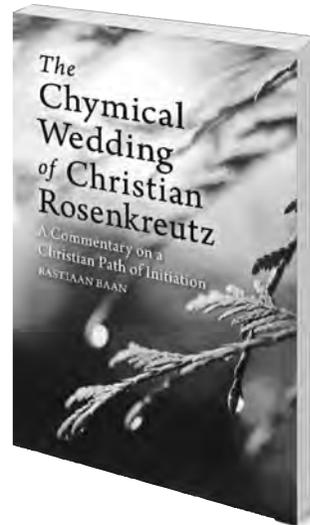
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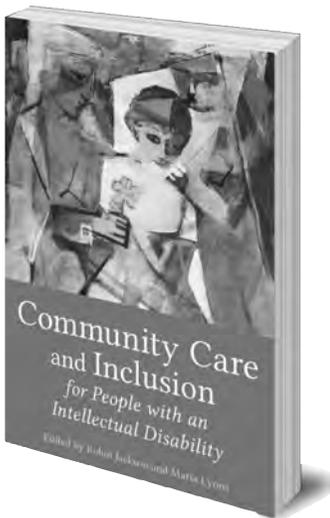
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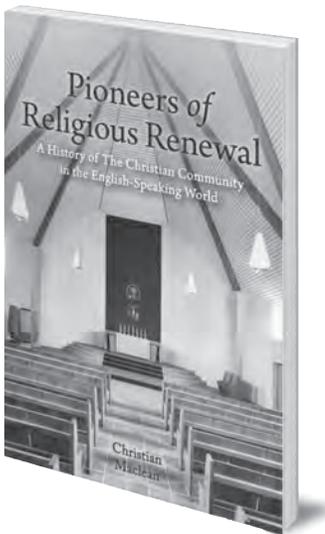
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Gospel Readings 2016–2017

Advent

Sunday, November 27.....Luke 21:25–36
Sunday, December 4.....Luke 21:25–36
Sunday, December 11.....Luke 21:25–36
Sunday, December 18.....Luke 21:25–36

Christmas

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

Epiphany

Friday, January 6.....Matthew 2:1–12
Sunday, January 8.....Matthew 2:1–12
Sunday, January 15.....Luke 2:41–52
Sunday, January 22.....John 2:1–11
Sunday, January 29.....Luke 5:17–26

Sunday, February 5.....John 5:1–18
Sunday, February 12.....Matthew 20:1–16
Sunday, February 19.....Luke 8:1–18
Sunday, February 26.....Luke 18:18–34
Sunday, March 5.....Matthew 4:1–11
Sunday, March 12.....Matthew 17:1–13

Passiontide

Sunday, March 19.....Luke 11:14–36
Sunday, March 26.....John 6:1–15
Sunday, April 2.....John 8:1–12

Holy Week

Sunday, April 9.....Matthew 21:1–11
Thursday, April 13.....Luke 23:13–32
Friday, April 14.....John 19:1–15
Saturday, April 15.....John 19:16–42

Easter

Sunday, April 16.....Mark 16:1–8
Sunday, April 23.....John 20:19–31
Sunday, April 30.....John 10:1–16
Sunday, May 7.....John 15:1–27
Sunday, May 14.....John 16:1–33
Sunday, May 21.....John 14:1–31

Ascension

Thursday, May 25.....John 16:24–33
Sunday, May 28.....John 16:24–33

Whitsun

Sunday, June 4.....John 14:23–31

Wednesday, June 7.....Romans 8:18–29
Sunday, June 11.....John 3:1–21
Sunday, June 18.....John 17:1–25

St Johns Tide

Saturday, June 24.....Mark 1:1–11
Sunday, June 25.....Mark 1:1–11
Sunday, July 2.....Matthew 3:1–12
Sunday, July 9.....John 1:19–28
Sunday, July 16.....Matthew 11:1–15

Sunday, July 23.....Mark 8:27–37
Sunday, July 30.....Matthew 7:1–14
Sunday, August 6.....Luke 15:11–32
Sunday, August 13.....Luke 9:1–17
Sunday, August 20.....Luke 18:35–43
Sunday, August 27.....Mark 7:31–37
Sunday, September 3.....Luke 10:1–20
Sunday, September 10.....Luke 17:5–24
Sunday, September 17...Matthew 6:19–34
Sunday, September 24.....Luke 7:11–17

Michaelmas

Friday, September 29.....Matthew 22:1–14
Sunday, October 1.....Matthew 22:1–14
Sunday, October 8.....Matthew 25:1–13
Sunday, October 15.....Revelation 12:1–12
Sunday, October 22.....Rev. 19:11–16

Sunday, October 29.....Revelation 1:10–20
Sunday, November 5.....Revelation 7:9–17
Sunday, November 12...Revelation 10:1–11
Sunday, November 19...Revelation 21:1–27

There is a basic annual pattern for these readings within which there can be local variations.

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