



The Christian Community

Perspectives

March—May 2018

What is truth?

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Alexej von Jawlensky, *Meditation*, unknown date

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Alexej von Jawlensky, *Meditation*, 1936

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What is truth?

Truth has been in the news recently. Not so long ago, for many people, the news was the truth. However, recent social and political developments have shaken the simple faith in truth as it is presented to us by outer authorities. ‘Fake news’ was adopted as the phrase of the year for 2017 by Collins, the publishers of a major English dictionary. We have entered a period reminiscent of earlier ages, when campaigning rhetoric and polemics masqueraded as neutral reportage. Along with the fragmentation of the media, this has led to the situation in which many people inhabit a bubble of like-minded opinion, in which their certainty of the truth rests on their never being exposed to other views. It is possible to evaluate this situation in different ways: we may bemoan the loss of certainty, whilst at the same time rejoicing that the market place of ideas, even if it becomes rather raucous at times, challenges us to go on a journey towards individual responsibility.

On a deeper level, these developments are not surprising, given the doubt that has been expressed for some time about what truth is, and indeed whether it even exists. Some philosophers point out that adding ‘...is true’ to a statement such as ‘2 plus 2 equals 4’ adds nothing to the statement. Others point out that claims of exclusive access to the truth are problematic. Some philosophers say that such truth-claims are inherently aggressive and may ultimately be the cause of war. The philosophical movements of the later twentieth century that are now grouped together under the heading of postmodernism focussed their attention on how truth is constructed; how it can be used to oppress and tyrannise and how it behoves free human beings constantly to question their own and others’ assumptions and prejudices.

Does this mean that truth must give way to mere subjectivity? When Pilate asks the question, ‘What is truth?’, should we see him as a pioneer of the postmodern,

bravely rejecting the idea that there is an objective truth waiting to be discovered? Perhaps Pilate's words resound so strongly through the ages precisely because we are on a journey from an older certainty about the one truth to a new destination where we recognise that truth is apprehended in as many facets as the colours refracted by a prism. Perhaps we are striving for an attitude to truth which does not try to obliterate the truth of others, but to grow fascinated by it and discover a multiplicity of portals that lead to an ever greater fullness of understanding. One of the more thoughtful explanations of the political and social upheavals of recent years sees their cause in a response by the excluded and left-behind who feel that their experience has been drowned out by the narrative of the so-called elites.

Ultimately, the question of truth rests on our confidence in the reality of the spirit. If the spiritual world is the source and image of our earthly experience, then this is where truth resides. Such confidence does not need to be bolstered by the false certainty of an exclusive claim on the truth; rather, it accepts humbly that seeking the truth entails a commitment to a path. Pilate's question has a counterpart in the sixth 'I am' saying of Christ: 'I am the way, the truth and the life.' The promise of the Resurrection is that our paths towards truth will find their completion not in the possession of a static truth, but in community with the being of truth.

TOM RAVETZ

What is truth?

Mathijs van Alstein

And heaved and heaved, still unrestingly heaved the black sea, as if its vast tides were a conscience.

HERMAN MELVILLE, *MOBY DICK*

The altar is a mysterious place. It renders its mysteries only slowly and in stillness. This is why the altar wants to be visited more than once. The religious experience is nourished by its repetition. Religiousness therefore roots in the essence of all things: the sun rises more than one morning; we get to know the seasons through their returning; day and night live by their alternation. The altar gathers the pathways and orbits out of which all repetition can unfold. We come to the altar, leave, and come back. This breathing of coming and going, of appearing and disappearing, gives life not only to the human but also to the divine being. In the interplay of giving and receiving, of concealing and revealing, the divine can mirror itself in the human. For what does it mean to be human? The human being shows and hides itself at the same time. We stand in the world. We live and work in it, experiencing joy and sorrow. That part of us is visible. Another part of us, though, cannot be found in this world. It remains invisible. It withdraws itself. It is there and it asserts itself, but remains removed nevertheless. This is our spiritual being. We carry this secret part of ourselves to the altar in the Act of Consecration of Man. In doing so, the altar becomes an image of our own being: it is both visible and veiled. It waits and is patient. It grants the fullness of its secrets only to those who return. Faith, Goethe said, is love for the invisible. It is an openness for the secret, a willingness to be addressed. This willingness to receive a revealing word, a blessing gesture, or the silence in between them, is a condition for experiencing the elusive thing that we call truth. For truth is not the mere establishing of a fact. It is not the rendering of a correct assessment or the verification of certain circumstances. Truth is much more than that. 'The truth is not a fixed system of concepts that can manifest itself in only one way, but is a living ocean in which the spirit of man lives, and that can bring forth waves of the most different kind at its surface.'¹ (Rudolf Steiner)

The notion that truth is not correctness but a deep, moving force with a surface and hidden depths, opens up new possibilities of

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thought. The German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) was able to delve into these possibilities with pertinent skill. Versed in Greek, he let the original words speak for themselves. Truth is called *aletheia* in Greek. This sparked the imagination of Heidegger. Because for the good listener this means, that according to the Greek, truth meant bringing something or someone out into the open. The word *aletheia* is a compound of the word *Lethe* and its negation, *a*. In Greek mythology the *Lethe* is the river that brings forgetfulness. In that respect it is the counterpart of the River *Styx*, that brings remembrance. Just before a human being is born, he or she wades through the River *Lethe*. Human beings forget the life they led before they were born. The part of ourselves that we forget about when we enter this world is the part we leave behind. It is the part of us that remains hidden, sheltered in the spirit. When we die, we remember who we are. Dying is disclosing. We are reunited with our essence, our eternal being, and we awaken. This awakening is brought by wading through the River *Styx*. When truth is called *aletheia*, the word itself thus indicates that truth shreds all veils of ignorance. *Aletheia* means the vindication of what was left behind. It means the opening up of what was closed at birth. The truthful person or truthful event is therefore he or that which stands in the unconcealment (*Unverborgenheit*) of things. For Heidegger it became a matter of great importance not just to grasp this intellectually. He wanted to live this to the fullest of all extents. This he did in thought. It became clear to him that truth is less like a field of stones and more like water. He crossed and followed the *Lethe* and the ocean of Being opened up to him.

In the meditation he gave at the Christmas conference of 1923, Rudolf Steiner spoke of *das Geistesmeereswesen*, the spirit's ocean being. In this ocean, man lives with his limbs, reaching into the sphere of the Father-God. A remarkable reversal of elements takes place for the one who takes this meditation to heart. Nothing is dry anymore. When we walk, we actually start to swim. The water of life surrounds us, unbeknown to us, but by waking up from the sleep of mundane life, by acquiring arcane knowledge, it flows anew. In its more solid version, the *Lethe* is also referred to as a threshold. Can we come to terms with the fact that our deepest self, our true being, is only to be found beyond the threshold? Can we elevate ourselves to what remains unborn at our birth and what proves to be immortal at our death? Do we have what it takes to reunite with the hidden part of ourselves? '*I gaze into the darkness*', Rudolf Steiner wrote in a meditation.

*I gaze into the darkness:
therein arises light,
living light.*

*Who is this light in the darkness?
It is me, myself, in my reality.
This reality of the I
does not enter my earthly existence.
I am but the image of it.
But I will find it again,
when I enter,
fulfilled by goodwill for the spirit,
the gates of death.'*²

This meditation, in all its compactness, reveals that truth is not to be found in light, or at least not at first, but in darkness. In order to find our true self, in order to break free from the banks of Lethe, we have to bear and endure and gaze in the darkness. Only by night do the stars appear. Death has to become a friend before the light can truly become ours. There is no short cut to heaven. In the Old Testament it is above all Jonah who knows this. Jonah is swallowed by the whale. He is dragged into the depths of the ocean. There he will encounter what he tried to evade, the abyss. He rides not on the back but in the belly of his beast of burden. The whale, we know, is capable of diving thousands meter. This grand, plump creature descends where no man can follow. In silent massiveness it glides through the waters. The surface is only vaguely remembered as something of another world when this colossus embarks on its journeys. Hallways of space are in awe of what passes through. A dark way is being paved. The sun may shine, but not here. All rays of light are rebuked. An opaque density seems to extend itself; a sullen silence resonates. Into these ungodly surroundings, Jonah is cast, and who knows whether he will make it out alive. Then he does. When he reaches the surface not only of the ocean but also of his ordeal, he knows what the depths of darkness require. He is akin to his vessel now. The whale can dive relentlessly only because he takes something with him on the way down: his specific way of breathing. The whale inhales and exhales through the blowhole on its back. The whale's body is opened not to the depths but to the heights. This delicate spot is its connection to the upper worlds, also in the deep. Jonah can emulate this now. He has touched upon the sphere of the Father, the ground of all existence, the deepest of all worlds, but *das Geistesmeereswesen*, the living ocean of the spirit, does not overwhelm him anymore. He has opened up to what resides above him. He is brought out in the open. He has found himself. His words ring true.

In Heidegger's thought these religious undertones were never far away. In the book that established his reputation as the most prolific thinker of

his century, *Being and Time*, he talks about man's fall into this world. The human existence, or *Dasein* as he calls it, is thrown into the world. By being thrown, it finds itself in a state of forlornness. Being born is being cast into deep waters. Becoming an adult is finding exactly this out. Our true self is just a distant memory in all this darkness—if it even is a memory at all. This is how things are. In order to live, in order to be born, we have to forget where we came from. The truth is a secret we initially don't even know about. We are a mirror image, nothing more, when we first start to face ourselves. Being thrown into the world is to be shrouded in nothing but the appearance of a self. That is the inevitability of incarnation. It brings us at odds with our own being, though. A subtle insincerity takes hold of us from the very beginning. Heidegger has a name for this charade. He calls it living according to the way *they* live. 'They' are all the others that hamper our relationship with the truth, but not as a force outside of us, something foreign to us, but as something that is at play within us. 'The They' (*das Man*) is that in us, which impels us to evade ourselves. It is what keeps us from disclosing ourselves to others and to ourselves. In beautiful elaborations, Heidegger describes how *Dasein* tends to be not itself, and how it prefers to be the image that others project on it. We don't live authentic lives: 'Everyone is the other, and no one is himself.'³ In that respect we are all stuck in 'the They'. Is there a way out of this? There is. But it comes at a price. It is to oppose conformity, abandon all levelling and averageness, and not accommodate to others anymore. This shocking act sets us free in unexpected ways. We discover the world once more. What was far away, is now drawn near. We connect to ourselves. 'If *Dasein* explicitly discovers the world and brings it near, if it discloses its authentic being to itself, this discovering of 'world' and disclosing of *Dasein* always comes about by clearing away coverings and obscurities, by breaking up the disguises with which *Dasein* cuts itself off from itself.'⁴—This owning up to our true selves brings us into a realm where things can unfold unequivocally. This is what the Greek called *aletheia*. It is the kind of breakthrough that only comes with perseverance. For it becomes clear that once we cross the Lethe backwards, once we cross the threshold to find our unborn self, it is not just we who are cast in a different light. The whole world appears anew. All things concealed break open. Truth is laid out before us, in plain sight. This is something we are not inclined to appreciate. Like Jonah, we tend to run from ourselves. We are so accustomed to the dark that the light becomes an unwelcome guest. If we rise to the occasion, though, and remember who we were, our deepest being emerges. Past lifetimes enter the fray. Our horizon expands. In struggling with our true being, we only find more complexities, but ones

that redeem us as well. The ancient mysteries become new ones. The key here, now as it was then, is courage in self-knowledge—the willingness to reveal, consistent and inconsiderately.

This dismissal of all disingenuous imitating brings us into an open space that Heidegger called a clearing (*Lichtung*). In a remarkable feat of thought, Heidegger now treads hardly discovered grounds. For the clearing is not only what opens up when human beings are honest with themselves; it is also the mysterious place where gods appear and disappear. The clearing is the locus of truth. It is the venue of thought (*‘der Ort des Denkens’*), the boundless expanse where the divine and the demonic meet. It is in this magnificent unfolding of events that all decisions of destiny are made. The crux here is that when the human being reunites with its hidden self, it encounters more than just itself. In entering the clearing, in engaging with the unconcealed, we get the premonition of a vast array of beings, benign and malign, that intersect with us, also when we are not aware of it. By gazing into the darkness, by coping with the black sea that hides the beast, we stumble upon a conscience that is both our own and not our own: we plunge into the deep and merge with it. Our true being approaches us. We feel ourselves and something that widely exceeds ourselves. A whispered prayer removes all doubt. We know now how much we had forgotten that the gods are near.

This activity of thought and contemplation is not easily accomplished. It requires patience and faith, and the loyal practice we call repetition. This is the tender discipline we happily engage in. We know where to go. The altar is a mysterious place. It is a clearing in a world of untruth, a place for the honest. The altar delivers on its promises. In laying our secrets at its feet, time and time again, we ascend and open up. Memory is brought back. Sunless existence is no more. We rise through the waters, sensing the heaving, still unrestingly heaving waves above us. We close in on ourselves. Our blowhole reaches for the sky, we break through the surface—and breathe.

1. GA 6 *Goethes Weltanschauung*, Kapitel 1, Persönlichkeit und Weltanschauung.
2. ‘Ich schaue in die Finsternis:/ In ihr entsteht Licht,/ Lebendes Licht./ Wer ist dies Licht in der Finsternis?/ Ich bin es selbst in meiner Wirklichkeit./ Diese Wirklichkeit des Ich/ Tritt nicht ein in mein Erdendasein./ Ich bin nur Bild davon./ Ich werde es aber wiederfinden,/ Wenn ich,/ Guten willens für den Geist,/ Durch des Todes Pforte gegangen.’ Rudolf Steiner, GA 245 *Anweisungen für eine esoterische Schulung*, p.76.
3. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, State University of New York Press, Albany, p.120.
4. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, State University of New York Press, Albany, p.121.

What is truth?

Luke Barr

I remember reading many years ago a magazine interview with a former mobster. 'Always tell the truth,' he sagaciously remarked. 'It's so much easier to remember.'

Getting one's alibi right as the main reason for telling the truth, is a highly dubious motivation! But perhaps now, as never before, the nature of truth is under scrutiny. Today, we hear much about the so-called *post-truth* era that we live in. The *Oxford Dictionary* defines this term as 'circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief'.

We have long been accustomed to the mendacity of those in the public eye, particularly in politics. Amused, our media have reported on civil servants who have been 'economical with the truth'. The assertion early in 2017 by the US President's Senior Aid that their White House Press Secretary had been dealing in 'alternative facts' (i.e. lies) barely raised an eyebrow. Recent well-documented cover-ups and scandals in such fundamental institutions of society as the Houses of Parliament and the BBC prepare the ground of the human soul for feelings of deep mistrust, cynicism, and resignation.

Perhaps it is inevitable that in the evolution of consciousness, truth will become subject to question in the popular mind. This is of course, a good thing. We are now entering a time when we must, out of our own independent activity, begin the arduous task of understanding what we mean by truth. This is a momentous opportunity in our evolution. It seems as if the spiritual world accepts that we have now 'come of age' and can authentically ask, 'What is truth?'

When we look at the evolution of a word like truth, we are given insight into the evolving of human consciousness. Early civilisations had no need for the word. Truth was the light that they saw by, the air that they breathed. The need for truth arises only when human consciousness has evolved far enough to stand in a distanced relationship to the world. It is the beginning of a free independent relationship, but it comes at a cost. With freedom comes the capacity to lie.

By the time we come to the 8th century BC, the leading cultures of the world, through this distancing capacity, have developed the ability consciously to recall and remember. Hellenic society, the cradle of our present civilisation, called truth by the Greek word, *aletheia*. This word contains a

picture. It indicated that one overcame the River of Forgetfulness, *Lethe*, that one had crossed in order to be born. On incarnating into earthly existence, one forgot the glorious eternal forms and verities of one's heavenly existence. Truth was the means of remembering where one had come from. So, truth was essentially a religious concept, looking backwards to one's origins.

Then came the time when truth was forcibly incarnated into the world, becoming the tool of a very earthly church. Truth became petrified into dogma, which one had merely to subscribe to, without excessive reflection. Then, truth was snatched from the church and became the possession of reason and materialistic science. Truth became equivalent to hard fact. But we have found that the more we exalt facts, the more truth eludes us. Truth is now in a new stage of its biography, ultimately looking *forwards*. It seems to be at the threshold of a change.

With this new stage, and the opportunity in our evolution that it presents, comes inevitably the challenge of uncertainty, doubt and sloth. For we may resign ourselves to a philosophical relativism, in which truth ceases to exist. We may give up on truth, and ascribe it to humanity's childish naivety. Perhaps we will feel that we have left behind the paradise of a world-view that believed in truth. We might then enter a 'brave new world' of personal satisfaction in which one's own personal truth or opinion is the only thing of importance. Or we may be swallowed up by the nightmare of Orwell's vision of a spirit-less Hell on Earth, *1984*, in which truth is of no consequence.

Truth is really a sign of our humanity. It is one of the signatures of our essentially spiritual nature that we can *play with* truth. We stand above it: we can manipulate it; we can dissemble. In this respect, we are 'like unto God, knowing Good and Evil,' as the serpent tells the paradisiacal soul in the garden (Genesis 3:5). But we can also live *in* the light of truth. To live in truth is to become transparent. There is a painting, newly attributed to Leonardo da Vinci, in which he portrays the Christ as *Salvator Mundi*—the saviour of the world. In the picture, he holds an apparently glass globe, a transparent world, no longer opaque, but clear and pure.

But, we must begin to ask, like Pilate, 'What is truth?' (John 18:38). It seems to be a question that the jaded and earth-oriented Pilate and the power of the Roman Empire have no real interest in answering. Indeed, it seems as if Pilate does not wait for an answer. But shortly afterwards, he seems to vaguely recognise Jesus; he has a presentiment that this mere man is greater than his superficial appearance, and he tries to have Him released (19:11–12) only to find that circumstances have moved beyond his control, and even that of the might of the Roman Empire.

This all happens swiftly. Today, we are also posing the question: ‘What is truth?’ We must be careful that circumstances do not move swiftly beyond the point where we can still act. For when we question truth, all sorts of adversarial forces will take their cue and try cleverly to extinguish its existence.

Truth is that slight flame that hovers above our heads, as it is pictured in the Whitsun event (Acts 2:3). It is the token of the Spirit of Truth (John 16:13—one of the designated names for the Holy Spirit). Truth is something *holy*. It is as yet delicate and incipient in the human being. Like the candle flame, it may easily be extinguished. But it is the guarantor of our future existence, for ‘the preservation of our life destined for eternity’.

It would be helpful if we were able to feel our way once more into the holiness of truth. The fact that we already possess a presentiment of this gives rise to our feelings of pain and dismay when we hear of contempt for truth in our public institutions. We feel that something holy has been sullied. We also feel uncomfortable when we ourselves are not entirely transparent, difficult though it may be.

The world as it is today—the complex webs of organisation and information that keep it together—seems a long way from the transparency aspired to in Leonardo’s *Salvator Mundi*. But truth can only really begin in each individual, and in their work upon themselves to become transparent.

To commit to truth, however uncomfortable it may be, and to making ourselves transparent, is the foundation for striving for freedom ‘You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.’ John 8:32. The word ‘free’ here is unique. It is the Greek word *eleutheron*. This word is only used in the Gospels in this passage, nowhere else. Thereafter, it is used sparingly, four times by St. Paul. It is a word from the ancient mysteries, a word that could hardly be grasped by the Hellenic mind, when even the enlightened and democratic Polis and Plato’s Republic was predicated upon slavery and rule of law. Indeed, before alluding to the Spirit of Truth, Jesus says, ‘I still have much to tell you, but you cannot bear it now...the Spirit of Truth will guide you into all the truth.’ (John 16:12–13). Freedom could not be understood at that time. We have only come a little further in our understanding now.

But this holy word, freedom, can begin to unfold its wings under the aegis of the Spirit of Truth, which guides us now.

Will we continue to speak resignedly of post-truth? Surely the day is not far off when the popular media will lazily speak of a *post-freedom* society? It will be a day when our spiritual status as potentially free beings will be very much endangered; but it may also be when our march towards spiritual freedom truly gathers pace.

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An unfolding life

Exploring truth in the context of a therapeutic relationship

Jane Chase

Don Draper, protagonist in the recent TV series, *Mad Men*, says in a rare moment of vulnerability that he is 'scratching at the surface of his life, trying to get in'. Outwardly he is successful and highly functioning, but inwardly he is lost. So much of him is hidden from the world and pushed aside within him: those parts of himself that he finds undesirable. This results in him engaging in distractive, addictive and compulsive behaviour. When we marginalise vulnerable aspects of ourselves, we often function much better, more successfully and efficiently, as is the case for Don Draper. Creating a functioning life around us in this way may have once been critical for our emotional and even physical survival during times of psychological stress. However, over time, if these hidden aspects remain tucked away from our consciousness, we are in danger of living a half life once we are in fact safe and stable. The put-aside parts of ourselves can become fertile ground for symptoms of anxiety and depression to take root. In Don Draper's case, it is clear that traumatic and painful experiences from his past were being covered up, which resulted in him living a number of half lives and a web of lies. As well as obvious historical issues such as trauma, our biographies can face us with more subtle experiences that are harder to define. The question: 'Where am I highly functioning?' can be a tool for self-diagnosis, through which we can discover what drives us and we can ask ourselves whether these drives derive from fear, pain or guilt—or any number of other emotions. What deepest parts of ourselves might these drives be covering up? We can assess whether we feel safe enough and whether we have the courage to be truthful with ourselves about this.

If we wish to do more than merely scratch the surface of our lives, we need to question, explore and digest our life experiences, asking the question: 'Am I being true both to myself and with those around me?' Integrating and understanding our life experiences does not only serve personal development; as tucked away parts of us become available we can access more creativity and choices in our work and our relationships, stepping into life and being more present and purposeful.

Striving to remain true at all times means that we have to be prepared to change and flex as we are receptive, open and permeable

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to what is happening around us. Actively searching for genuine responses to what we are experiencing creates a fertile and creative exchange, where we can be open enough to let the world work upon us, and experience the world as a safe enough place so that we can work upon the world. Because of this deep interrelatedness, what we experience changes and shifts as we are open-hearted together and we can begin to feel ourselves differently. In this relatedness, our feelings about something today may be different to how we feel about it next week. With this subjective experience, we strive to sense what is true, with a deep longing that the truth we find will somehow fit and support the truth of others so that we can serve each other's growth.

Disconnection happens when we haven't worked through and made meaning of the events of our life. Then, undigested experiences remain stuck as we fall into routine behaviours that rob us of a relationship to the whole of ourselves. Engaging in counselling or psychotherapy opens up a space to take risks in uncharted inner worlds and meet these unfamiliar regions. The listening, compassionate and authentic quality of the counsellor can (when there is a good 'fit' between counsellor and client) create a liberated context for the client to allow for the disconnected and hidden-away parts to become visible, known and remembered. The relationship becomes a safe space in which the client can welcome parts of themselves that have been suppressed, oppressed and forgotten. Here our task together is not to determine the objective, conclusive truth of a situation or an event from life, but rather to cultivate a deeply subjective sense for the client's truth through deeper knowing and remembering. Thus we reclaim the parts of ourselves that we had to put away in difficult times and connect to what we truly feel. When we make this space to allow for this deeper knowing and engage with it honestly, we can feel liberated, validated and freer with how we choose to go forward.

As a counsellor in the room with a client, I seek to cultivate active listening, which means that our relationship is also about my experiences. Part of the counsellor's task is to uphold a sense of safety for the steps that are taken into this place of not knowing. I am challenged equally for my responses to be truthful, authentic and honest and I am searching for myself alongside the client in order to be most fully present. As I take in the client's story—digest it, grapple with it—I listen to my own feeling for the truth of what is being shared. It is a place of meeting in which we come to an essence of what is being experienced through the reflective presence of the other. Finding this truth is a humbling experience, and in the emerging process of mutual striving, the client gradually orientates to their own truth and comes to a knitted together sense of rightness: this is so—this is how it is.

Many clients arrive at counselling looking for ways to cope with and overcome distress and discomfort. Such was the case with Angela (not her real name) who described the feeling of being hollowed-out and living in an empty shell, very much like the fictional character of Don. She experienced an overwhelming sense of loneliness, despite the fact that she had a meaningful job, a partner and child. In our work together she acknowledged that she had felt like this since she was a teenager; this had given rise to a feeling of separateness. This grew into a feeling that she was trapped, unable to cross the bridge from her inner experience to the outer world. Despite being loved by her family, Angela had a growing sense of not being understood by the people around her. In response, over many years, she had grown less and less able to express herself. The turning point came when her son was born and feelings arose that wouldn't go away. She realised that something had awoken in her and she recognised that she needed something more. The loneliness and inability to express herself grew impossible to manage and she found herself crying daily, having acute feelings of panic and a continuous exhausted low mood. This is when she started coming to see me, because life was no longer bearable.

Our work together was about creating a safe enough place for Angela to think and feel freely and to become aware of what she felt, and then to find the confidence that her experiences were real and valid. Over our months together Angela wrestled to connect to herself –to find a foothold for a place inside herself that was secure, that could give her a feeling of trusting the truth of her experience. The journey inwards was into alien territory—a domain she was so unfamiliar with that it was terrifying to her. Yet she knew that she needed to be in this place if she were to find the voice of her truth. Only through this would she finally experience a coherent and assured sense of herself which she so desperately needed in order to feel at home in herself.

Over time, as Angela began to give herself permission to feel what she was feeling, her anxiety symptoms began to reduce, and she was able to express the deeper feelings of what she needed and wanted. It was a big risk for her to express herself: giving voice to her needs threatened her connection with her family. In this period of our work together she grew into standing firm in the feeling that valuing herself was more important than seeking approval from those closest to her. Her friends played an important role in this as well; as she grew confident in revealing herself to them they were able to support her with how she has felt and to mirror her experiences positively. This has been an essential part of helping Angela to come to terms with her inner reality in a meaningful and coherent way.

What had been missing in Angela's life when she was growing up was having her experiences validated. She recognised that she had chosen a partner who struggled with expressing himself and who wasn't able to reach towards her in a meaningful way. Without validation and an experience of being understood and valued for who she was, she found it nearly impossible to privilege her own feelings.

It was slow and steady work for Angela to rebuild and reclaim a sense of herself, that over many years had been ignored and put aside. As she experienced safety and containment in the counselling process, she began to connect to herself. At last, she gained a sense of feeling that she had choices, which allowed her to feel secure in herself. She had spent many years not knowing that she was denying her feelings; now she was able to wake up to this fact. So often we are given opportunities to wake up and be honest with ourselves, but inner barriers such as fear and doubt prevent a self-reflection from happening. We remain trapped in the safety of what is known and familiar, often putting our needs aside in order to maintain familiar connection. Getting in touch with the truth of our experiences can challenge the status quo, as maintaining existing conditions might be necessary for emotional (and sometimes physical) survival. The barriers, defences and resistances play an important function in protecting the deepest parts of our self and we cannot bypass them easily. They need to be attended to sensitively as the insights gained through seeing past them can become fruitful only in the right conditions. Biography work wisely understands the patterns and archetypes that belong to growth and change, recognising that life is a continual, unfolding journey with each phase of life naturally allowing us to meet different themes and questions. Our daily challenge is to take note of what happens when we feel the creeping shadows of the hidden, avoidant parts within us. We need to assess whether we are ready to move beyond them with a brave and shaking heart. Then, we can be receptive to the voice of truth; we meet the unfamiliar with the confidence of our deepest knowing, trusting it will serve a new growth.

Finding your Truth through the Sacramental Consultation

Douglas Thackray

Those who follow the events of Holy Week are drawn into the foreboding drama which is expressed in the Gospel of John, where the anxieties and questions that the disciples had concerning their future are highlighted. Jesus had to guide them on the narrow path between alerting them to his coming death on the one hand, and on the other assuring them that they would not be abandoned.

At the Last Supper, Christ told the disciples that he would send them the Spirit of Truth to be with them always. He also referred to the Spirit of Truth as the Comforter, that is to say the one who stands as the mediator between their spiritual striving and the events of the external world in which they lived.

Leaving the disciples, we may ask how the Comforter works in our lives. We should not conclude from the above that the Comforter will protect us from all harm, for his way of working defies all definition and on occasion he even seems to contradict his very name. Take, for example, when he acts as a catalyst for change, bringing pain and insecurity. In these circumstances we are right to question our conscience to see where we have deviated from being true to ourselves. Only if our conscience is an expression of our true being can we be authentic.

What do we mean by this term, our 'true being'? This includes our personality, character, beliefs, values and aims; what transcends all of these is our spiritual identity, sometimes called our 'higher self'. The higher self is the inspirational aspect of our character and its evolving force. St Paul shares his insight that this evolving force leads us to 'become a new being' through Christ. In the Prologue of St John we hear that those who believe in Jesus Christ are born of the Spirit; this means that they have become sons of God. This implies that those who have faith can be touched by the grace of the divine. St Paul describes this by saying 'you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its creator.' (Col.3:9)

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in Cornwall.*

This is all very well; however it does not address the immediate problem of our self-doubting and vulnerability as we ride on life's carousel, going up and down and round and round... We know that it is nearly impossible for us to describe our essential being to another person, but we can come out of our shell when we have a problem. We define ourselves at such moments through the way in which we approach our crisis, and how we react and respond to it will define the values we believe in. On such occasions, we are experiencing the intervention of the Spirit of Truth who reaches painfully into the heart to break the mould of the 'old Adam' or 'the old Eve'. The pain referred to here appears as a condition that is often veiled in mystery. Our experience shows us that what ails us, whether physically or as a sickness of the soul, comes and unexpectedly goes again, or lingers in us relentlessly. St Paul's letter to the Romans speaks of praying to find help and clarity:

Likewise the Spirit also helps us in our weaknesses for we do not know what it is that we should pray for as we ought but the Spirit knows and makes himself intercession for us with groaning which cannot be uttered. Now he who searches our heart knows what the mind of the Spirit is. (8:26)

This 'searching of our heart' unites all those who have had a life problem and sought help from the Sacramental Consultation in The Christian Community. They come forward trusting into the world of spirit; through this, they find the courage to tell their problems to the priest. This confidential conversation will often reveal some shadow aspect of the soul; however, the longing to find a solution or a better understanding of what has happened outweighs any doubt they may have had in coming forward. In the conversation, there is a sifting of the essential from the inessential. In this creative moment there is the hope that the eyes of their hearts may be opened. They know that only they can find the right direction.

St Paul touches on this when he says: 'For you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.' (Col 3:3). Our task is to make our true life visible here on earth with the help of Christ. Can it be that the Sacramental Consultation is our way of trying to 'take off the old self and its ways?' The text continues 'When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you will appear with him in glory'. Does this appearance with him in glory begin to be perceived in your true life, your new being? If this is so, then what do we have to do to bring this about? Even as we are to look up to the spiritual world to find Christ, we also need to experience him in the depths. We can do this when we contemplate his death on the cross and his descent into the dark realm of the earth, where he brought his divine light to those who had died. There is

nowhere deeper on earth than the depths of the sea where the whales swim, which from time to time rise up to the surface to see the light of the sun and breathe the air. We can see this as a parable of the soul which rises up, when standing to receive the communion of the body and blood of Christ. Christ carries us back into our everyday world with the new breath of life within us.

At the opening of this commentary it was said that Christ told the disciples not to be afraid as he would send them the Spirit of Truth, the Comforter, to be with them always. At the Last Supper He gave them his peace and his body and blood in the sharing of the bread and the wine. When we receive the communion in the Act of Consecration of Man, our true being can be restored to us as the disciples' true being was restored to them.

Marilyn 2012

*Here, clocks do not stop.
One thing replaces another.
Each day has a sunset, and a noon,
and a slow awakening of the sun.
Memories erode, but I repair them.*

*I remember you with love,
and touch you with my mind—
The rhythm of palsy in your shoulder,
the humid warmth of your hands,
the beseeching quality of your voice.*

*When you are more forcefully present—
Is my soul more visible then?
Your disciplines all have changed.
The world must be inside you now.*

MICHAEL FERREL
Toronto congregation

What is truth?

John 18: 28–40

J Michael Brewer

‘What is truth?’ It is easy, very easy, for us to dismiss the question of Pontius Pilate as a cynical repartee and say of him that he did not understand what he was meeting. Thus, he did not have the proper respect, and asked what we hear as a cynical, impertinent question. Perhaps it is especially easy for us to do this when we sit in church, where we expect to hear nothing but truth. But what happens with the truth that we hear in church? Does the truth we take out of this space continue to be a living truth, or does it become an abstract doctrine? If it does so, is it still true? In our time we live constantly with questions of this nature. But this was not always so.

Once upon a time people did not concern themselves about truth. In that time, people—or, let us say, we—lived in such a way that our experience of the world gave us a security that left us satisfied. We experienced the world of the senses; we experienced the world of the elements; we experienced spiritual beings, some good and some bad and we did not need to question these experiences. More urgent was the question of how to describe these experiences, and out of this grew the great mythologies of the ancient world, in which the great truths became wonderful pictures in which the truths still lived.

But in all of those pictures out of the ancient world we can feel how the secure world of spiritual truth was ebbing away. It became more difficult to reach the realm where truth was a direct experience, and so people began to ask questions. The Greek oracles spoke in unfathomable riddles; the still small voice for which the Hebrew prophets listened grew silent; and instead people began to think about the world. The attempt to find truth in this world became the basis of Roman justice, in which a verdict—a ‘spoken truth’—must be reached. In the gospels it is from the Roman soldiers and governors that we hear verdicts.

Michael Brewer is a priest of The Christian Community in Detroit.

Again though, when our attention is drawn to worlds other than this one, the question arises: what can I really know of this world even, let alone another world which I can no longer see? And so Christ must meet this question as one of the necessary steps of completing the process of becoming human.

The meeting with Christ must have brought Pontius Pilate to a realization of his human inadequacy. The first questions are superficial: is

Jesus the Davidic pretender to the throne? Has he been instigating rebellion against Rome? Jesus' answers open up the possibility that there may be some other kind of kingdom than the outer one that he knows. But into what Jesus has to say about that other kingdom comes truth in a way which Pilate could no longer understand. The loss of truth is one aspect of the tragedy which befell humanity after the fall from paradise. And so the question of Pilate: 'What is truth?' echoes through the ages to the present day.

Indeed it has become more urgent as time has gone on. The beginning of modern philosophy came about when a thinker, Descartes, stated that all that we know of the world is open to doubt. His first formulation was not 'I think, therefore I am', but 'I doubt, therefore I am.' With this we have had to live, and all of the truths we claim to know may sometime be revealed as errors. What indeed is truth?

Another thinker, not so well known, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, brought a new approach to the truth. Truth, he suggested, is not something we can possess, but something for which we must always strive. Striving for truth is something which is open for all of us; the truth itself we can entrust to the Divine. And thus truth becomes not a thing we can claim but a path of development.

On the evening before Christ was brought before Pilate, he said: 'I am the way and the truth and the life.' As Christians we may, instead of claiming truth for ourselves, strive unceasingly to approach the truth. And then the question that Pilate asked in his despair can become for us a quest, which we can follow through all of our life and through many lives to come.

Whose Journey?

*Life moments
Still dropping minutes
As the clock ticks
To the last hour.*

*Scaling down
Looking out
Glancing up
Reaching across*

*To those who gather
Bewildered, fearful*

*To calm and reassure them
To be still, yet more –
To nurture, to adore
This last act.*

*Yes – it's about us all,
This journey of mine.
It's not just me centre stage
Despite age.
This last page of mine
Is shared,
No-one is spared
The final line,
The last full stop,
This mind searing drop*

*Into the next
Glorious, light filled
Place.*

Gifts

*Gift bearer of pain –
It's him again!
Knocking at my stubborn door,
Calling, crashing
Once more I implore:
'Go away, begone
Why must I suffer, bleed and die,
Why?'*

*'Because this gift has your name
On the tag – take it – give thanks!'*

The Feast

*Pray that Death finds you
Sitting prepared at your table,
Your life glittering jewels
Celebrated in dishes of gratitude,
Your achievements arranged
In the bowl of flowers,
Your hopeful soul
A candle burning brightly in the centre;
And the chair prepared,
Waiting for your guest.*

A cycle of three poems, written by Kevin Street during a workshop on 'Embracing Dying.' Kevin is a member of the Stourbridge congregation.

The Founding of The Christian Community in Romania

Barbara Meffert

Many years ago the life of The Christian Community in Romania started as a very tender plant. After Michael Debus had made contact in 1974, Gérard Klockenbring visited friends of The Christian Community in Romania twice in 1975 and celebrated the Act of Consecration in French.

Victor Dan (1941–2014), a musician, who was spiritually and artistically a very enterprising person, discovered the book *The Christian Community* in a shop window in Leipzig in 1977, did research on the author Gerhart Palmer and invited him to Romania. Gerhard Palmer accepted the invitation a year later and held the Act of Consecration in Cluj, Sinaia and Bucharest.—After the collapse of the communist regime in 1991, Victor Dan asked Rose Klockenbring to come to Romania when he was visiting Colmar. From then on, regular summer conferences were held in Beliș, which brought together people from all over the country. Claudia Stockmann and Michael Debus supported the work. Thus the Romanian friends first got to know the Act of Consecration in French and in German. The friends had to wait a while to experience the service in their own language.

In 2003, the Romanian priest Anca Burloi celebrated in Romanian for the first time in Stuttgart.

In Bucharest in 1999, in Cluj in 2003, chapels were created with the help of donations from abroad. For the last five years, Monica Culda has celebrated at the altar in Cluj. Armgard Hasselmann initially oversaw Bucharest from Bonn, but has been working full-time in Bucharest for a year now. As a lenker, Marie Pierrette Robert accompanies the two communities from Paris. Uwe Sondermann from Hamburg is part of the college of priests.

From 6th to 8th of October 2017, a celebration of the founding of The Christian Community in Romania was celebrated in Rudolf Steiner House in Bucharest, to which more than 200 people came, some from far away. The Act of Consecration, celebrated in the national language with 35 participating priests, was particularly festive. It was impressive to hear the many greetings and messages from around the world. In the breaks, there were always interesting conversations in different languages. Even if it was raining outside and we had to hop around the many deep puddles, the good, harmonious mood was not affected.

The two communities are blessed with many talented musicians, for example the three Dan brothers who brought life and movement into our meeting. A highlight of the founding event on Sunday was the lecture by Vicke von Behr, the Erzoberlenker, on 'The work of the angels'. In essence, he said:

The rituals are the language with which the ranks of the angels communicate



from left: Uwe Sondermann, Monica Culda, Armgard Hasselmann, Marie Pierrette Robert

An orchestra of soft-sounding sound-tubes provided a wonderful ending.



with each other. In the Act of Consecration, we stand at the foot of heavenly ladder; all nine hierarchies are present and involved.

It is important to create spaces to which Ahriman has no access. The Act of Consecration is not a place to escape, but here we and our angels obtain the powers we need to withstand the action of Ahriman. Our souls are the stage; on it, the gods (Michael—Ahriman) face each other. But the Act of Consecration is stronger

than anything the dragon can do. Michael is the guardian of the Act of Consecration, he protects it from the forces of Ahriman.

After many thanks to the many contributors, the room was filled with an orchestra of soft-sounding sound-tubes that provided a wonderful ending that echoed on for a long time in both ear and soul.

We wish this new foundation of The Christian Community every success!

Letters

Letters in response to Andrew Linnell's article 'Preparing for the Future' (*Perspectives* Vol. 88 Issue 1)

Without going into too much detail, Andrew Linnell makes several assumptions and connections that do not take other possible and probable reasons into account.

First of all, he seems to see Ray Kurzweil's ideas of the future as reasonable. Mr Kurzweil is a very clever scientist who has made useful inventions, but he also has a vision of a technological utopia encompassing the enhancement of the physical body, linking the brain to a super-computer, exten-

sion of life and overcoming all illness. This would all be possible due to a great leap in technology and biology; he believes that all parents would want their children linked to this super-computer and that this might happen in the relatively near future, around 2045. Many scientists involved in the field realise that they are only at the beginning of understanding the brain and so have not even begun understanding consciousness; they dismiss Kurzweil's ideas as impractical. Linnell goes on to say that Kurzweil's ideas regarding the merging with machines are similar to Rudolf Steiner's indications about the future. ... He says that the physical

body has already started to 'wither' and that the etheric body will have to inhabit machines in order to stay in touch with the earth; however, Steiner is quite clear that it is not a question of a withering of the body but a refinement. The factors that Linnell lists as evidence (crises of obesity and fertility) are linked to environmental factors including pollution and, on the deepest level, our disconnection from the spiritual world. These problems could be reversed through a change in how we relate to the world and in how we think and feel about the deeper meanings of life.

I found this a very useful article, which gave rise to a lively discussion at our meeting after the service.

John Fraser

The Future of Mankind

I was shocked to read J. Andrew Linnell's article, 'Preparing for the Future' in the last issue of *Perspectives*. The first thing that jumped out to me was: where is the love that should flow between teacher (a machine) and pupil? Rudolf Steiner did not found the Steiner/Waldorf School for what Andrew Linnell was proposing, along with farming being totally done by machine, distancing a farmer from the earth totally, and instead of mother and father themselves rocking children in cribs, having machines minding the child doing it, and so on. Who would decide the content for their education, and let other children meet them or play with them?

We are told that Rudolf Steiner's 'vision' is similar to Ray Kurzweil's (Director of Engineering for Google)—that humanity 'merge with this, our creation, the machine'; and that 'Steiner implored his studentswould take this bull by the horns so that this coming technology was developed out of selfless motives rather than out of utilitarian motives of comfort or profit.' Reference 1 in the article seems to relate to page 187 ff of the same book :

...an attempt will have to be made to place the spiritual etheric in the service of outer practical life ... These things should not be treated by fighting against them... What we are concerned with is whether ... they are entrusted to people who are familiar in a selfless way with the great aims of earthly evolution and who structure these things for the health of human beings, or whether they are enacted by groups of human beings who exploit these things in an egotistical or in a group-egotistical sense ... The welding together of the human nature with the mechanical nature will be a problem of great significance for the remainder of earthly evolution. (Rudolf Steiner)

I feel that the article in question lacked a true use of human qualities to help us to work for the highest human values. *Knowledge of Higher Worlds* by Steiner gives clear steps to help us. 'What man is lacking today is the courage to enter into the real exploration of the spirit world.'

Brian Dawes

So that we can be brave

'Here we go,' I thought, another article that begins by paying lip-service to science and technology—young people like it, and we all appreciate modern surgery—and proceeds to demolish it, proving it is anti-spiritual and leading mankind down the road to damnation. But no! Linnell's interpretation of spiritual science and its understanding of the role of technology in the evolution of human beings, does quite the opposite. Over the next hours and days, I found my attitudes undergoing a sea-change.

I have shared the reservations of many about the rise and rise of scientific innovation: genetic manipulation, surveillance, transplants, implants, pushing the thresholds of birth and death. At the same time, I am disillusioned with anthroposophical culture, which I once found groundbreaking and enlightening, but which has become unremittingly negative in its at-

titude towards pretty much everything in contemporary culture. Or is it me?

Linnell turns all this on its head. I won't go over what he says—you will have read it, or can do so. Reading him, I feel almost as excited as when I first encountered Steiner's work, because he uses the unique viewpoint and vision of anthroposophy to reveal the necessary and helpful role that technology will play, and is already playing, in human evolution. Even our current capabilities have opened a Pandora's box of ethical issues: criminality, immorality and intolerance jostle online with creativity and learning, friendship and community; the moral battlefield is laid wide open for all to witness and participate. This is a future we can embrace as co-creators; we don't have to be dragged into it as unwilling victims.

Often absent from this debate is the acknowledgement that people, the masses of humanity, are actually amazing. Amidst

the horrors, abuses and evils of the world around us, there is also a constant upwelling of courage, selflessness and compassion, as well as inventiveness and originality, amongst ordinary people. In the coming struggles we can be certain this will continue, and whilst we can be concerned about the presence of 'nanny-bots' doing the baby-sitting, for instance, we can be sure that strong, nurturing human forces will be liberated, too. In the midst of these moral struggles is the place where real spiritual growth will happen—is already happening—and where The Christian Community will be much needed, if it/we can find the will to step bravely into this new world. I feel there is much to do here.

Finally, a Michaelmas story by Isabel Wyatt comes to mind: a child asks, 'Why does there have to be a dragon?' The answer comes, 'So that we can be brave.'

Peter Howe

Reviews

***Sources of Christianity* by Bastiaan Baan, Christine Gruwez and John Schaik**

Floris Books, £14.99

Reviewed by Luke Barr

There is a wise saying : 'In order to know your future, you have to know your past.' For the last century or so, we have become increasingly fascinated by our past, individually and collectively. The import of our individual past has come to light through the work of pioneering psychologists. Now it is becoming commonplace for the average person to share their past with a carefully trained therapist. Similarly, we stand at a point in the development of those movements founded out of the common source of anthroposophy where

we scrutinise the past afresh. Thereby, we may gain new perspectives on our impulses, and understand our own direction anew.

These days, when we look to our past, we inevitably question many of its elements. We begin to realise that past events have ingrained strong habitual patterns in our soul life. There then begins the challenge to perceive our own soul life objectively, and to transform it by the force of our 'I'.

We then find many prejudices in our soul life. To be human is to carry a responsibility constantly to question the validity of these deeply held assumptions and 'beliefs'. Without repeated revaluation, our soul life stagnates. Constantly to do so is of course, an exhausting and sometimes dangerous undertaking. But it is the difficult life-task of the human 'I am' to attempt this; to try

and 'make all things new'- whilst retaining a peaceful stability in oneself for the sake of one's fellow human beings.

In that spirit, this book will be justifiable if the reader is aware that in reading it, they are in the act of entering the layers of a human collective subconscious, in which they will meet humanity's past. To use a simile: it is a little like being able to experience events and significant personalities from the first three years of your life, things otherwise forgotten. They have nonetheless determined to a large degree the person you are today—for better or for worse. To be able consciously to experience a reconstruction of that time again can be a great personal revelation. It may help to create fresh perspective and clarity, and to give back direction in life.

The three authors combine academic thoroughness with a lively capacity to enter imaginatively into their theme; be it the personality of leading figures in the early Christian milieu; or the socio-religious circumstances of those times. The text is accessible, easy to read, and at times has the power to evoke clearly that period of our collective past, which has fashioned us so particularly to be the types of human beings we are today.

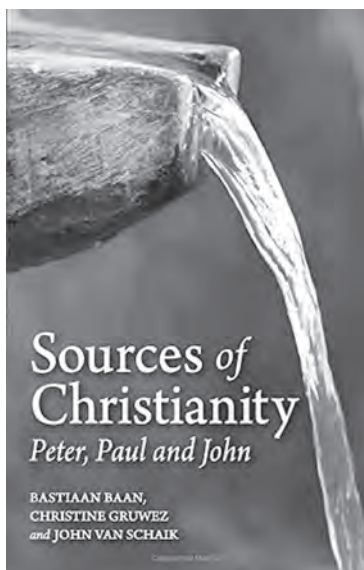
The book introduces us to the unique Hellenic world of the Mysteries; the enigmatic Essenes or Therapeutae; and those remarkable personalities whom we would today call martyrs. Our modern usage of this word creates a completely false picture of who these early Christians were. For 'martyr' does not mean a self-destructive religious fanatic, as we might suppose

today. This Greek word actually means a 'witness'. The martyr had undergone a spiritual process—an initiation—which was best described by the act of 'witnessing'. As a result of the initiation, an axiomatic truth lived in the newly initiated one's soul as a tangible experience. They were able to testify to the verity of the experience. It was impossible to doubt it. Their witnessing resonated within the core of their immortal self. They then knew of their immortality.

However, the human soul has evolved and changed since that time. In those days, doubt was unknown. At worst, scepticism existed. This was however, a philosophical attitude, one that lives, for example in Pilate. In our times, doubt is very much a necessary component of soul experience, one which we are charged to transform and use. Doubt now resides deep in the soul, in the etheric body of the human being, and affects us in ways that we are mostly

unaware of. Doubt is a hallmark of the tremendous difficulties of our modern age, the consciousness soul.

When we read of these earlier forms of human consciousness, un-plagued by doubt, we may find it irrelevant to our experience. However, it was necessary for the human soul of that time to experience the certainty that death had been overcome. This is something we simply cannot recreate today. But this certainty evolved in the development of the consciousness of the Greco-Roman age. We can have the picture that our present consciousness rests on the achievements of earlier ages, even if we are unaware of them. Without the deposit of certainty, we might have



been unable to endure the bleakness and deathly doubt of modern consciousness; or perhaps human feeling would have remained so undeveloped that the world would already be destroyed by some man-made catastrophe.

I suspect that in our age today, we are experiencing something similar to the early manifestations of Christianity that this book refers to; I believe that something of similar import is happening in the etheric world, and that we are called to become witnesses to it. The sheer extent of psychosis and neurosis in the modern age points to a momentous 'crossing of the threshold.' Perhaps The Christian Community, in some respects resembles the communities of those astonishing first decades of Christ-in-the-world. Just as those communities provided the initiate witnesses to the event of Golgotha, so our communities today may provide the new witnesses to the new event.

We do need to ponder the purpose of our existence repeatedly. We may find that one purpose is to create a culture of a new form of initiation. The community would be the cradle of a new form of seeing or witnessing. It would fashion human souls to become witnesses to the impulse of love and freedom. Somewhere a start has to be made to create the new initiation culture. This has to be very much an everyday, down-to-earth culture, and nothing occult. Goethe drew a picture of such a community (a 'pedagogical province') in his novel, *Wilhelm Meister*.

Without this possibility, we face a dire future. As the psychologist William Bento has put it, 'either we will have a culture of initiation, or a culture of mass psychosis.'

As such, this book should not be a cosy read to entertain us; rather it should draw forth the question in the reader: 'what is the event of our times to which I am called to witness?' Perhaps it may help us to grasp that we stand at a point in time when the sources of Christianity are once more beginning to flow. Do our lives reflect this?

Plays for the Festivals of the Year

Karl König

Floris Books 2017, £25

Reviewed by Anna Phillips

Just as in König's plays the lines of distinction between actors and audience are blurred by the importance of context, so too does the 17th volume of König's collected works, *Plays for the Festivals of the Year*, come alive through the well-researched context in which the scripts are embedded. Therefore, a review of the collection of plays, fourteen in all plus eight fragments, is not going to make sense without the discussion of the context of their creation.

König, the founder of the world-wide Camphill movement where children with special needs have found shelter, a home and education since 1940, reveals his way of thinking in no other place as strongly as in his plays. They were created by him as an integral part of festival celebrations, helping to establish community life.

Plays have always symbolised and enhanced community life, as both players and audience give and receive. König saw this exchange in all aspects of life as the central idea behind the therapeutic community he was developing. Curative education, as it has become known in and through Camphill, concerns itself with a healing of the soul. This is the soul-care coined by Rudolf Steiner in 1924, which became König's inspiration for his life and work. Soul healing can be brought about through social inclusion but this was hard to find in the arts at the time.

König wrote these fourteen plays between 1940 and 1962. Austrian by birth, König was exiled from his homeland by the Nazi regime and interned on the Isle of Man. 1940 saw his release from the camp and the start of his journey to fulfil his mission. 1962 was the year in which the Camphill Hall in Aberdeen was opened with its dedicated stage and festival space.

In the early days, however, the audience was included and the division of stage and auditorium dissolved. Plays were not performed on a stage as there was none, but local conditions decided the venue of rehearsal and performance. They were written with specific people in mind for specific roles. Everyone in the community could participate as there were no professional actors; all were amateurs.

These are not plays to be understood in the intellectual sense, which makes reading them particularly challenging. Indeed, this is where many flounder and give up. They are extremely pictorial in nature. Images are placed side by side to appeal to a heart-knowing rather than to the intellect. Warmth and light are the mode of convection not knowledge and understanding.

According to Richard Steel, one of the commentators in the book, the simple staging of the plays reveals their deep connection to spiritual history. Not only do the plays mirror and deepen community life, they also prepare for a new understanding of Christianity in our time. In fact, the two are inseparable. It is that connection which centres the plays on the main festivals of the year: Christmas, Easter, Ascension to Whitsun, St John's tide, Michaelmas and Advent.

The St John's Play is perhaps the most well-known and the most performed in Camphills all over the world. Here, zodiacal figures meet John the Baptist, and actors and audience become part of creation through speech, movement and song. The Book of Kells, placed between Ascen-

sion and Whitsun, is set in Ireland, as is the Easter Sunday play. Others are set in Roman times, and the Maundy Thursday play in the ether realm of speech and eurhythmy. They are not extensively laboured works but a flow of imagery where various figures from history come together.

As well as providing an image-filled ex-

perience, König developed a new sense of time through his plays. This allows us to penetrate into the realm of the etheric with its living reality. In the past this had been the task of the Mystery Centres and as such these plays are an attempt to renew the Mysteries, as Steiner had undertaken through Anthroposophy. In this respect the arts are essential. There is a connection between drama and etheric clairvoyance, the ability to see Christ in the etheric, increasingly available to us since

1933, the year König started writing his first play.

Because his plays span the cycle of the year, they become a continuous process of preparation, rehearsal and performance. No longer are the festivals isolated events, separated from each other as special days in among daily activity, but a Christian consciousness begins to permeate the whole of daily life within the community, which is engaged in the process. Celebrating the festivals in this way becomes the spiritual nourishment which provides strength for the daily tasks of all. It confirms König's wish that we should treat each day as if it were a festival.

One play stands out as particularly special, and that is the Michaelmas Play.



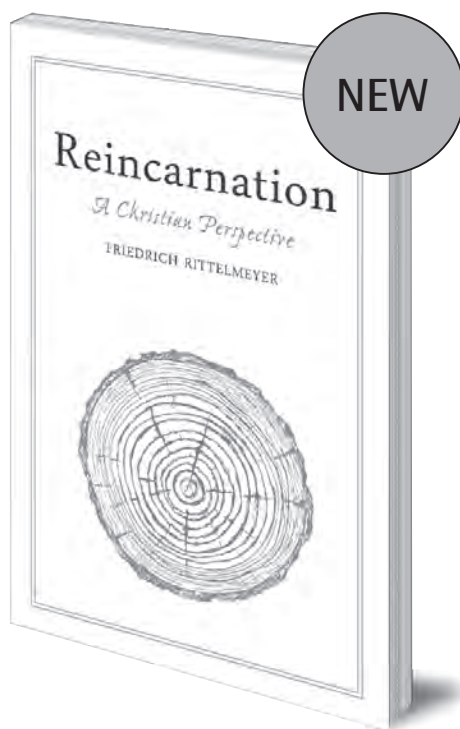
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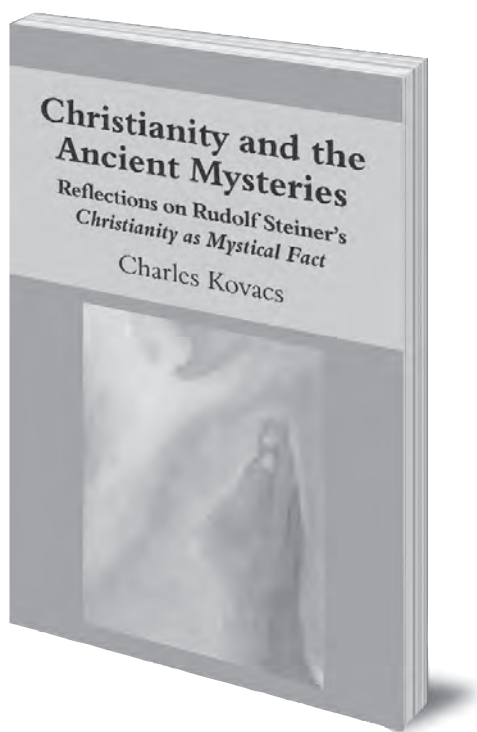


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There is no historic foundation for a Michaelmas play either in mystery play, pageant or liturgical content. And thus its place in history is new and uniquely of our time. The Michaelmas Play combines unusual imagery and is massive in scale and production, which is the main reason why it has only been performed once in the way König intended, in 2009 at the Goetheanum, Switzerland with some 400 people engaged in the process! Archangel Michael's task is to connect daily life with the spirit. König's imagery aims to become motivation for an historic conscience where we carry responsibility for what has become the present, from the past, and what will become the future. It aims to kindle the will, just as the St John's Play awakens our responsibility to continue the process of creation in our daily work. For only thoughts of action give rise to spirit vision for future life on earth.

Keeping in mind that they are plays for groups of people to labour over, connecting human souls through spiritual-visual content, day in day out, reading them seems a pale alternative. Yet for those readers who don't have the possibility to participate in a production of one of these plays, they can still be a source of nourishment and inspiration. Read them as if they are poetry. Allow each image to resonate in the soul. Connections will be made over time and deeper meanings will be revealed in a quiet pondering of the heart.

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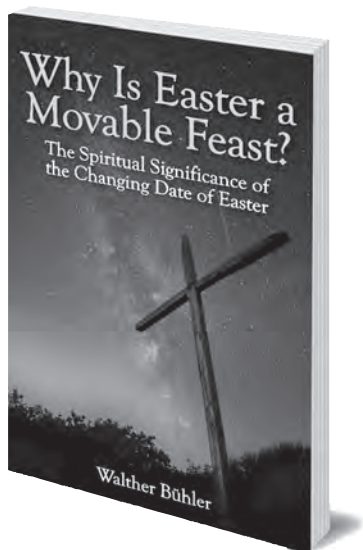
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Temple Lodge Club

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:

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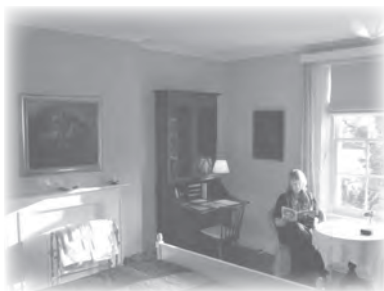
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There are four small guest rooms at the top of the building. Three of the guest rooms have a wash basin; toilets and shower are separate. There is a kitchen for self-catering needs.

Unfortunately we do not have disabled access and there are steps and stairs inside and outside the building.

Suggested contribution
at £20 to £25 per person per night.

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