

The Christian Community

# *Perspectives*

December 2020—February 2021

What is  
a sacrament?

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# Perspectives

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In the world into which The Christian Community was born, there was little space for something that obeyed different laws than those of natural causality. It seemed that the chain of cause and effect was tightly wrought.

Much has changed since then—was in fact already changing, although it took time for it to enter popular consciousness. The advances in theoretical physics left space for indeterminacy; the Big Bang theory of cosmology allowed for a time before time, when quite different laws applied. In philosophy, the twentieth century saw an extended meditation on what we mean by objective facts. The reality that we experience is our co-creation. Does this mean that there is no objective reality? Can we change everyone's reality by changing our own?

We have witnessed in the last forty years the power of ideas to reshape our social, political and economic worlds. In the official responses to the current public health crisis, we have seen the power of ideas to shape reality: the philosophy that sees the market as everything, celebrating the selfish individual; the

tendency to reduce human beings to statistics, to impose solutions that deny their individuality. We have also witnessed the power that can emerge, when such ideas are taken to their extreme, in the upsurge of selflessness and community.

The resurrection broke into a world where Jesus' death seemed certain, his condemnation justified on religious grounds given weight by the power of the Roman imperial domination system. Nobody expected that a shamed and dishonoured vagrant preacher could break free of the weight of the law, any more than they expected that the chains of death could be loosened.

Every time we celebrate a sacrament, we witness the breaking through of another order into the natural order of things. In this time, where some of us are prevented even from attending church, we hope that the articles in this issue of *Perspectives* will give inspiration and nourishment so that our celebration of the new life that wants to break through every deadly structure can grow ever stronger.

TOM RAVETZ

# Where is the Christ to be born?

Matthew 2: 1–12

Ioanna Panagiotopoulos

‘Where is the Christ to be born?’ says Herod to the wise seekers. Christ, whose being and substance unites humanity in wholeness with the starry realms of spirit.

The question resounds to us still through the waves of time.

We look around and see the state of things: a crisis at the heart of human society, and likewise, the living body of our earth in crisis. Where is the Christ to be born?

We make our efforts to seek it out. Is it in this ideology, in this society, in this church? Something shines out to us, and we follow—here or there, the Christ will be born, in this thought, in this place, in this action...

Seeking outwardly can sometimes mean abandoning an essential key: a something which lies at the bottom of the soul’s well. It lives within us. It streams a light from within through which we are able to seek; it is the instrument by which we read the world for signs of the emergence of the spirit.

The wise seekers followed a star, but in their outer seeking, they also lost their way. The star was lost to their sight.

In the legend of The Wise Men’s Well\*, after a time of great darkness, they look inside the well and the star appears to them there. Through that reflection, the star once more appears in the sky, but now, reflected there, above and around, out of an inner presence that beams its light into the world.

Within us, already, heaven’s light waits for its emergence. The fire that forged the stars is the self-same flame that pours its warmth and light into our being. We have emerged from its radiance. This fire shines as a star in our soul, hidden, until, like the wise ones, we sink our inner gaze into the shimmering waters of the soul and weave with renewed fire the new cradle of heaven.

So that when the question is asked: Where is the Christ to be born? we can say, ever and again anew:

In us, the Christ will emerge, and through His gracious light, the inner worlds that forge the stars can shine out and be seen, can be known to us once more.

\* *Christ Legends*, Selma Lagerlöf

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The Christian  
Community in  
Canberra.*

## **Listen**

1 Kings 19:12

*A great commotion  
is loose in the world  
marauding:  
competing truths  
of 'what is real.'*

*I want to find the still-small-voice  
that was promised once,  
a calm centre  
beyond our whirlwind  
or God's.*

*Where?  
Listen – in the space between  
one another:  
new sacred-space for our time.*

*Can I truly hear  
my friend -  
come awake in her voice  
or ways of being -  
beyond the noise that is so much with us,  
  
and stand at peace with the world.*

MEGAN COLLINS

# Revealing Christ's presence

## Contemplating the nature of sacrament in light of the Sacrament of Anointing

Patrick Kennedy

Dying, in its very essence, is a solitary act. Only we can do it. Yet few things bring more healing, comfort and encouragement than to experience that we are not alone as we die; of course, this is true of the whole human journey: how much more capable are we to meet and overcome a challenge when we have someone by our side, someone who knows intimately what we are facing and can offer us what we need in order to come through to the other side.

I have experienced this in ways that have left a deep impression on me through my work as a priest. Arriving at the bedside of someone who is nearing death, I often see a deep sense of calm and gratitude settle into their souls. In their eyes I can read the message: 'Here, at last, is someone who knows what this moment means, who is unafraid of it and who can bring me support and blessing.' Indeed, this is one of the clear markers of what a priest truly is: someone who can stand with another person at the threshold of death, full of familiarity with that 'place' and faith in the one who is 'the new birth in dying'.

In some ways, the fact of Christ's presence with us at the threshold of death contains the essence of who he is to us, to human beings. One can even say it expresses the very essence of Christianity itself: the story of the incarnation of Christ in Jesus is the story of what God did to be there—for us and with us—in our dying and death. The work of the Sacrament of Anointing can therefore be understood in the simplest of ways: it reveals Christ's presence at the threshold.

### **Christ's Initiation into the human experience of death**

Turning with eyes of the spirit toward what happened in the Holy Land some 2000 years ago, we see the heart of God coming to earth in Christ. He comes with one clear, cosmic mission: to bridge the great divide that had opened up between heaven and earth. This bridge could only be



built by God entering that part of reality which could not be found in the heavens. By 'heavens' we can mean that which lasts, that which is inmost, the invisible world of spirit-beings that our ancestors understood to be expressed in the lights above the earth that shine in the sky. By earth we can mean that unique place where things don't last, where 'moths and rust destroy'<sup>1</sup>. Before Christ comes to earth in Jesus, this split between the lasting and what passes away is real to such a degree that the eternal beings did not know what death and dying is. If heavenly beings knew nothing of death and dying, how alone in our dying would we be, how separated from spirit and life?

For this chasm between heaven and earth to be bridged a divine being had to learn what death is. The account of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—the gospel story—is therefore a story of God's *initiation* into the mysteries of death. It is not just the story of a simple carpenter's son from Nazareth and his ministry of love, it is the mighty, cosmic story of the Lord of Life going through a kind of 'earth initiation', Christ's *immersion* into these experiences of death and dying. The word for 'immersion' in Greek is *baptizma* from which we have our word 'baptism'. It is another word for a rite of initiation and is what Jesus names his death on the cross in the Gospel of Luke. Jesus calls out, 'I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!' (Luke 12:50 ESV). At this point in Luke's gospel account Christ is not referring to the immersion in water which he received in the Jordan river through John. That baptism has already taken place (3). He has come to be 'immersed' in the human experience, to be initiated into the mysteries of being a human being, subject to what God had never known: suffering and death. The life of Jesus Christ is the story of the divine heart of the universe entering the 'forsaken' place, the empty place where God was not.

Through the Mystery of Easter, the bridge will have been built, the chasm between the eternal and the earthly finally overcome, the eternal light of glory will now shine into the realm that was only darkness. From that moment on we can find Christ, the Eternal Spirit, the Lord of Life, *in our dying*.

\*



What happened then has the most profound consequences for everything that we can experience today. Now that he has been through death, Christ can be there with every human being—especially in their dying<sup>2</sup>. Because Christ has been initiated into the human experience, into the mysteries of death, he has become the guide who can lead us *through* death. And no one dies alone anymore. This leads us back to a core gift that comes to the human soul in the form of the Sacrament of Anointing.

### **Christ's presence made visible in the Sacrament**

Through the great, divine act of submitting to death, Christ is now in the place that was forsaken. He is with us in our dying and at our deaths. However, because humanity has become ever more blind to the spirit, he is not necessarily 'seen.' Christ Jesus is there, but there spiritually. He is therefore invisible (to most). This fact takes us into one of the essential purposes of the Sacrament of Anointing: to make Christ's presence visible at the threshold of our deaths. All sacraments and true rituals have a similar mission. They work to reveal the presence and working of invisible realities in visible actions, words and elements. What takes place on 'this side' of reality is an expression of what is taking place in the spiritual world.

The ancient Hebrew wisdom reveals this same purpose for ritual. In the book of Exodus we hear how Moses ascends the mountain, entering a 'cloud of glory' and 'devouring fire' and there is given exact revelations in spirit for how to make the dwelling place of God on earth.<sup>3</sup> He comes down from the mountain and consecrates Aaron into the priesthood, instructing him in all the details of the garments, utensils and patterns of action based on what he has observed in spirit. In the New Testament Letter to the Hebrews the earthly rituals of the Hebrew priesthood are called a 'copy' or 'shadow' of the original spiritual ritual<sup>4</sup>.

This reality behind the ritual is even more dramatically revealed in the final book of the Bible, the Book of Revelation. This is John's vision into the realms where the angelic beings of the heavenly worlds are at work. He brings

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us along into his visionary experiences where he is shown the divine, cosmic altar that stands before the throne of God and the lamb:

*Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel.*

REVELATION 8:2–4 ESV

In this passage, John reveals to us the realm from which the sacred rite is modelled. The rituals—in their order, gesture, word and image—are taken from what has been seen in spirit.

This same truth about rituals on earth was given new expression by Rudolf Steiner through his modern ‘science of the spirit’<sup>5</sup>. Speaking about this topic in June 1924, Steiner chose the funeral service of The Christian Community as an example of what is happening in a ‘true’ ritual. Here he develops a striking image we can use, the image of a *mirror*.

*Let us suppose, my dear friends, that here we have a mirror and here again some object. You see the reflection of the object in the mirror. You have the two things — the original and the reflection. Similarly, when a ritual for the dead is enacted, there are the two things. The ritual enacted by the priest before the coffin is a reflection. It is a reflection, and it would be no reality if it were not a reflection. What does it reflect? The acts of the priest as he stands before the dead body have their prototype in the super-sensible world. For while we celebrate the earthly rite before the physical body, and the etheric body<sup>6</sup> is still present, on the other side the heavenly ritual is enacted by the beings beyond the threshold of earthly existence. Over yonder, the soul and spirit are received by what we may call a ritual of welcome, just as here on earth we assemble before the dead for a ritual of farewell. A cult or ceremony is only true when it has its origin in reality.*

*Thus you see how the super sensible life works into earthly life and permeates it. If we celebrate a true ritual for the dead, a super sensible ritual is enacted simultaneously. The two work together.<sup>7</sup>*



*Fire Under the Mountain*, Richard Heys

Whenever you have such a ‘true ritual’, part of what is revealed is the one who celebrates the ritual. If we take this seriously we see: the human priest celebrating the ritual is, themselves, a revelation of something divine. Dressed in vestments and consecrated into service through the Sacrament of Ordination (or Consecration of Priests), the priest is part of what is being ‘mirrored’. We can turn again to the Letter to the Hebrews to understand this. The writer of this letter shows how Christ, through his initiation into the mysteries of death, has entered the spiritual temple, the inner Holy of Holies and become a new High Priest<sup>8</sup>. Christ himself, through what he accomplishes and goes through on Golgotha, truly becomes ‘pontifex’<sup>9</sup>—the bridge maker—connecting heaven and earth. In all true rituals, Jesus Christ is the eternal reality behind the earthly priesthood since the first Easter. This is why the gathered congregation in the sacrament of the Consecration of Priests in The Christian Community is told, ‘When [this one] stands before you, Christ’s Spirit stands before you.’

\*

All of these thoughts give us the background to understand what happens in the Sacrament of Anointing. When we invite a consecrated priest to be at our side during our time of dying, we are asking for someone to be at our side who can help in revealing the one who has changed death forever. We are looking to increase our awareness of him, to reveal Christ's presence. We are not just inviting the priest from our nearby congregation, we are inviting Christ into visibility, to be mirrored in the Sacrament of Anointing. Through calling for the Sacrament of Anointing we are seeking to make visible the reality that has come about through Christ's initiation into the human experience of death and dying. We are not alone; Christ is with us and by our side at the threshold of death. From him stream all the forces we need to meet this most profound moment in our lives.

*This is an excerpt from a book that has been commissioned  
by Verlag Urachhaus on the Anointing*

- 1 Matthew 6:19
- 2 Knowing this also reveals the role of the written gospels in our lives. They are truly the story of the divine creator being immersed in the human experience, culminating in suffering, death and resurrection. That this story exists as something each human soul can read or listen to has special significance for us when we ourselves are heading towards our death. We can live with this story, have it read to us, immerse ourselves in it and thereby he begins to live in us. Through reading and 'baptising' ourselves in the word of the Gospel we can receive his power into our souls. By living with these words that describe his life, with the images of his own death and resurrection, we open up a window into our being for the reality of his death—overcoming being to flow into us, to 'strengthen us in our wrestling soul'.
- 3 See chapters 24–31 in Exodus
- 4 See Hebrews 8:5.
- 5 For more on Steiner's science of the spirit or Anthroposophy and its relationship to The Christian Community, see the Preface/Appendix
- 6 The term used in Anthroposophy for the matrix of life forces that permeate the physical-mineral body with life and living processes, is the bearer of our memories and the spiritual, living-light side of our shadowy thoughts.
- 7 Karmic Relationships, Vol. 2 lecture 15, June 27, 1924
- 8 See Hebrews, chapters 7–10. 'Holy of Holies' is the name for the innermost chamber of the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem where the High Priest in the line of Aaron would go, once a year, to speak the name of God and offer sacrifice for the whole people.
- 9 This is the old Roman (Latin) word for priest that is still sometimes used in connection with the Roman Catholic pope (Pontifex Maximus) and that etymologically means, 'bridge maker'.

# Why sacraments?

Louise Madsen

*Never has the in-pouring of strength, that is: the offer of spiritual support for human beings, been as powerful as at the present time. However, without carrying out a step of understanding we will not be able to access this power, which seeks to press in on us, and to make it part of our earthly condition.*

*Because, this time, a god helping out man no longer works—as was the case with the Mystery of Golgotha; rather, this time the Resurrection must be accomplished by human beings themselves. (...) God is dead—inasmuch as he himself will never again inevitably come and somehow help out human beings. That is not what he does. Rather, that activity has already been within man for a long time. We must, so to speak, rouse ourselves, pull ourselves up together with our god. We have to bring ourselves into movement inwardly, and make an effort to come into contact with ourselves*

JOSEPH BEUYS (1921–1986)

*You may live in the world as it is, but you can still work to create the world as it should be.*

BARACK OBAMA

On first encountering the word ‘sacrament’ one may think that it is something that only concerns the church; or even that it is a kind of service, particularly in the Catholic Church and in The Christian Community. But just what is it: what makes a sacrament ‘sacramental’? Does such a thing exist in the world beyond the church, and if so, where do we find it and how can we recognise it?

To start with, it is worth looking at the question in a wider religious context. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul discusses the focal point of Christian life: the Resurrection. There he pointedly states that if there is no such thing as the resurrection of the dead then Christ Jesus could not have risen from the dead. And if Christ did not

*Louise  
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priest emeritus  
living in  
Stourbridge.*

rise again then what he, Paul, has to say about it does not hold good and all faith in it is an illusion (1 Cor. 15: 13f.). That is quite a statement: in so saying Paul makes clear that resurrection did not initially come into the world with Christ, but that it was already present. Similarly, we can say that if there is no sacramental aspect to the world then there would be no Christian sacrament. Without resurrection per se—or processes that are ‘resurrectional’ in nature—and sacramental types of activity, how can there be Christian forms of these two fundamental and crucial phenomena? The two are in fact not only closely related but deeply interconnected, for without the one the other cannot be present in the world either.

### **Transformational behaviour**

In nature, various processes, both biological and chemical, demonstrate how substances are changed from one form into another, and also from one kind into another. Some of these can be reproduced in the laboratory. A basic ‘school’ formula in (inorganic) chemistry is: acid + alkali = salt + water. Under certain well defined and regulated conditions the substances on the left hand side of the equation are interchanged with one another to produce the substances on the right side.

An entirely different, highly complex change of a higher order is the biological transformation of the caterpillar into the butterfly. Here, however much insight we may have into the chemistry and biology involved, it still remains a mystery how this feat is accomplished. If it were not for it being a phenomenon that we can see taking place before our very eyes, we would have in all honesty to class it as a ‘miracle’.

Such changes and transitions in the fields of chemistry and biology may not themselves be sacramental in nature, but even a ‘simple’ chemical reaction leaves us with the question: what is it that, by only changing around the molecules, produces an entirely different substance? Or, in the case of the butterfly, a ‘new’ creature.

What we do know about the transition of the caterpillar into the butterfly is that the caterpillar, the larva, dies; at a key point between the two states of this one creature the whole inner substance inside the chrysalis turns into a kind of soup; the larva digests itself, and out of the chaos a new order, that of the butterfly, arises. The contrast between the two is so very arresting that we cannot help but recognise that there must be a

powerful influence of some kind of formative forces which brings about such a change. Yes, there are special cells that are not digested and they serve as the core providers for the new structure of the butterfly, but that in no way detracts from the issue. The chemical and biological changes involved give an explanation of the ‘mechanics’ of how it is done, the steps along the way; but even should we know them down to the last detail they still leave open the question of *what* it is that brings about such a radical transformation from the one state to the other.

At this level of metamorphosis we need to look beyond what has hitherto been the acceptable province of the forces and energies accessible to the life sciences if we are to find some satisfactory description of what is happening: of finding a field of activity, even of causation, which could provide a feasible elucidation of what is taking place. And yet, it is just in the field of evolutionary biology that some fresh, innovative, twenty-first century research is breaking new ground and is, I believe, of great interest and importance for us.

### **Breaking new ground**

The Neo-Darwinist approach of seeing matters only from a gene-centric viewpoint has given way to a much more holistic approach, including an acceptance of ‘purposive behaviour’, according to the distinguished physiologist Denis Noble. In his research on the heart he realized that, ‘in the heartbeat there was not only *upward* causation from the molecular level to the cellular level, but also *downward* causation from the cell influencing the molecules.’ (My italics) Noble states that a genome can do nothing by itself. Even if he were to put it in a Petri dish for 10,000 years with all the nutrients it requires ‘it could do nothing other than to slowly degrade’. Genes, he says, are only effective as part of a complex whole, the biosphere. This is a great advance on the idea that the genes are the determining factors in an organism. According to his research, that viewpoint can now no longer be upheld. The genes function as part of a *whole*.

If there are sources of transformation and metamorphosis (causation) working from above, one must ask what these sources may be. The scientist will seek them in the biosphere, but that in turn raises the question of what it is that determines or informs that level of organisation.



In his book *Outgrowing Dawkins—God for Grown-ups*, Rupert Shortt, Research Associate at the University of Cambridge, taking up this point, says that this ‘goal-directedness’, of itself is not enough to ‘advance the case for [the existence of] God’. However, he says, in Denis Noble’s work there is evidence of teleology (i.e. goal-directedness) or, putting it more carefully, ‘teleologically configured behaviour’. It shows that ‘the world does not just consist of meaningless bits of stuff. Matter matters; and if we believe in God on other grounds, teleology can supply an appropriate intellectual resource for conceiving God’s relation to the world.’ Shortt points out that other thinkers have noted ‘that nature does not work like the human worker assembling parts, but by producing *totalities* whose existence implies the existence of what they call their parts. Plants or animals are not built ‘out of’ organs; *organs are made in the process of producing animals and plants.* (My italics) We need to see creation as dealing in whole, evolving forms...’

The sources of causation are active from below *and* from above, so they are at work in *both* directions in living organisms. Incidentally, we may ask ourselves whether this approach can also be applied to inanimate matter: where, for example, do the forces originate that produce the forms of crystals? This discovery about the workings of nature is, to my mind, a significant breakthrough and brings us a great step nearer to grasping the relationships between higher and lower levels of organisation, not only within a single organism, but by applying it more widely, for instance to the different organisational levels of the human being or of society as a whole. From our own experience of ourselves we know how our bodily conditions have direct effects on our state of soul and, vice versa, how our soul and spiritual endeavours are valued and assessed very much by their effect on our sense of general well-being. Now this no longer needs to be merely a matter of subjective, associative experience, it can be based on the knowledge of the interactive working of different levels of life and existence.

### **Sacramental processes**

Bearing the above in mind we turn again to our main subject. In sacramental processes certain related elements found in the world of matter and the world of spirit are brought into a union with each

other such that they form a single, greater entity, a new wholeness; or one can say, the physical component of a substance becomes reunited with its spiritual counterpart. In the sacrament of baptism, the ritual words speak of the (distilled) water used that it shall be no ordinary water; it is to become the bearer of the permeating and creating powers of the spirit. With the sacramental word, these spiritual qualities are conveyed through the nature of the water and its life-giving, all-permeating power into an earthly event, namely the baptism of the child. The water, united with its spiritual origins through the power of the word, is no longer 'just' water; it has been raised from being only in its physical state and dimension into one in which it can be fully itself again; water, the spiritual reality, and water in its physical manifestation have become one.

### **Sacramental events in the gospels**

When we look, with an eye for sacramental processes, at the workings of Christ as described in the gospels, we can be amazed at how the healings, the signs and also the life-changing transformations which he himself undergoes come alive for us: they no longer seem miraculous, in the sense of something utterly mysterious; rather, they reveal themselves as real processes initiated by or bearing upon Christ himself.

After his baptism in the Jordan, the first sign that Jesus accomplishes is the turning of water into wine at the marriage in Cana (John 2: 1–11). The stone jars, used for the ritual of purification, are to be filled with water. Some of it is drawn and taken to the master of the feast to be tasted. On tasting what in the meantime has become wine the master declares to the bridegroom that he has kept the good wine until last. What (silent?) transformative words of blessing did Christ Jesus utter in the interval between the filling of the jars and the tasting of their contents? With the powers (from above) that were at his disposal, Jesus brings about through his human agency what otherwise the grapevine accomplishes in nature.

In his fourth sign Jesus feeds a crowd of five thousand (John 6: 1–15). From the five barley loaves, twelve baskets of fragments are left after all have eaten and are satisfied. From a negligible amount of bread, a great abundance is left over, or rather, one should say more accurately,

produced. How is that possible? It appears that the higher dimension of forces and authority at work can bring about a degree of transformation within our earthly level of existence that far exceeds that which could, on a human level, be expected from a humble offering of five small loaves.—How, *actually*, does an acorn become a 45m high 1000 year old tree? How, *actually*, does the caterpillar become a butterfly?—We may begin to see how in the activities of Christ what in nature we may describe as a kind of natural sacramentalism, is raised into the human realm in which the workings of the divine become manifest in a new way.

What happens at the Transfiguration of Jesus (Matt.17: 1–8)? The outward appearance of Christ Jesus is transformed, irradiated by an inner power and light. For a brief moment the three disciples, in their heightened state of consciousness, are blessed with the sight of this altered state of their leader and it is granted them to hear the voice of God directly—as also happened at the baptism in the Jordan. In this next great transformational step on the path towards his death and resurrection, we see again—as has been shown above—that what works into material existence from on high brings about changes leading to what is to come. Future conditions arise through the agency of forces from above. In short they are teleological. To these various powers we need to ascribe the capacity for the acorn to change into an oak tree and an embryo into a fully grown human being. Jesus, in his unique relationship to the Father God and through his preparedness so to take the spirit into himself that it thoroughly permeates his physical life and existence, is thus ‘equipped’ to meet and overcome death (the final result of material existence) and arise beyond death as the Resurrected One.

### **The sacrament**

We can look upon the god-man, Christ Jesus, as being himself the original Christian sacrament. At his baptism, ‘the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him’. ‘In *Jesus the Christ* entered as Man into the earthly world’, as the Creed puts it. The man Jesus, born of his parents, Mary and Joseph, receives the Son of God into himself: ‘You are my beloved Son, in you will I reveal myself’. (Luke 3: 22) With the descent of the Holy Spirit a unique, world-transforming

union is forged between Man (from 'below') and the world of spirit (from 'above'). With the uniting power of the Word—the Logos, spoken out of the heavens—a new phase, or rather a new beginning of life for both the earth and mankind is set in motion. At the point of his parting it is the *Christ Jesus* who suffers 'the death on the cross'.

All this may appear very foreign to us today: it does not seem *real*, not tangible, it does not 'speak to us' and we cannot relate to it. It lifts us out of the world of our (apparent) certainties: quite instinctively, we very much want to be assured that the causes of what takes place in our world are themselves part of this world; that the cause lies where it belongs, *before* the event; that what happens arises out of what already is, i.e. the past. But perhaps this is where the concepts that are developing in the science of the twenty-first century may be able to help. If there are causes which can be shown to work 'downwards' alongside those which work 'upwards', then scientific research has entered into a sphere which carries in itself the same basic gesture as that found in the sacrament. Different levels of organisation in an organism work with and into each other. One such (biological) organism is that of the caterpillar and butterfly. Another (spiritual) organism is that of man and God; yet another, that of the heavens and of the earth. These organisms, each enclosing, as they do, two radically different aspects of their whole being are, each in its own way, tending towards a new and greater whole, a fulfilment of their 'goal directedness'. In nature the butterfly *is* the ultimate expression of the caterpillar-butterfly. Man, however, is (still very much) on the way to becoming a divine being. The 'goal' of human development is the causation of the fulfilment of man. And with the working of *this* origin of causation the present heavens and the earth 'will fall away' and from it there will arise a 'new heaven and a new earth'.

In the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection we see the archetypal deed of the working together of the heavens and the earth: the reduction 'even unto death', and out of that the raising up of the new resurrection body—working from then, in the present and into the future within the earthly sphere towards its goal and fulfilment.

In the sacrament Christ unites his body and blood with the substances of bread and wine, brought by human beings in offering to the divine world. Inasmuch as Christ is present in this human endeavour, these

two earthly substances become the bearers of the spiritual substances of the body of the risen, the ever-present Christ. This sacramental deed of the highest order strives to bring the earth and the heavens together again, to unite in a new whole: to be a 'building stone' of the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem descends from above. The powers wanting to shape this new world work from above into our earthly existence. By offering our powers of soul to the divine and opening ourselves to the grace that streams towards us, we connect to those forces that are at work in our world, drawing it towards its fulfilment.



*Fire Under the Mountain*, study, Richard Heys

# This Whitsun year

Cheryl Prigg

In the first year of my new life as a Christian Community priest, I have had many 'first' experiences to hold dear. As the anniversary of my ordination came around, New Zealand went into the lockdown that lasted throughout the time of Passiontide, Easter and Whitsun, banning our communities from gathering.

Each day during the weeks of lockdown, my New Zealand colleagues and I celebrated the Act of Consecration of Man in our homes. Our four congregations were invited to join us remotely as we celebrated at the same time each day. Throughout the country, many members and friends accompanied the sacrament, or engaged in their own meditative and religious practice at the same time. This shared experience brought a deeply unifying awareness and connection to our communities. Knowing that people engaged in their daily religious practices as I celebrated in my tiny study, revealed to me and many others, that although our religious striving is happening in isolation, our shared devotion transcends both space and time. This strengthened connection expands our consciousness beyond our country, to our region and to the worldwide Christian Community. The daily celebration is one of our responses to the needs of all who are present at the sacrament, for our earth, and for all beings connected with her.

As a personal response to the hindering of our celebration together, I chose Whitsun as a guiding star for this year. Whitsun is of course far more than just a three-day festival. It is an existential reality and an eternal festival that calls to us from the future, to unite with all who gather—as it is so poignantly expressed in the Ordination of Priests—'at the table where He sits.'

Two of my 'firsts' were a baptism and a funeral. The first Sacrament of Baptism I celebrated was for a beautiful baby boy. Preparing for this was a lovely time of connecting with the young parents, their newborn child and his godparents-to-be. We spent time looking at the sacrament, talking about how the

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birth of their first child had brought new joy and meaning to their lives, their hopes for their son and for their future together as a family. These times of preparation strengthened our relationship, as I felt accepted into their extending family community.

As the baptism approached, I made certain I was as prepared as possible. What I could not have prepared for, however, was the response of this small child. As the sacrament began, he was resting quietly with his eyes closed, in his mother's arms, and remained so until his name was spoken. At that moment he opened his eyes wide, became very alert and smiled. His delight was obvious to all who could see him—his new and expanded community on earth felt his joy and recognition. As the consecrated substances and blessing were given to him, he continued to be thoroughly engaged and happy. His response came from a deep knowingness and recognition of the heavenly forces and beings that blessed him and will remain with him as he makes his way into his new life on earth.

He was surely communing with his community from beyond the threshold who were gathered at that time—his ancestors, his angel, the spirit of the community, and a host of spiritual beings who work with Christ for our ever-renewing Whitsun community—bending towards him to bless him on his way.

The first funeral I celebrated was for a woman who throughout her long life had forged a wide circle of relationships from her broad range of talents and interests. I had the great honour of spending time with her family and friends, listening to their stories and memories of her, as they laughed, cried, searched for understanding and reminisced together about the life of their mother and friend. We took turns sitting with her, reading and caring for her as she traversed those three important days after death.

Her funeral was attended by an eclectic group of people many of whom had never attended any of our sacraments. I had a conversation with a person who was deeply moved by the words of our funeral service. He shared that he was not expecting to hear how her soul was led toward the world of spirit in such a real and meaningful way. He felt reassured and enlivened by how this experience had awoken a new reality of the spiritual world to him, with a realisation that a true funeral rite is indeed an opportunity, not only to properly say farewell to one



who has died, but also to acknowledge and introduce a departing soul into the lands of soul and spirit. He strongly sensed her community of already departed souls, and of spirit reaching toward her, to welcome and lead her into the beginning of her journey home.

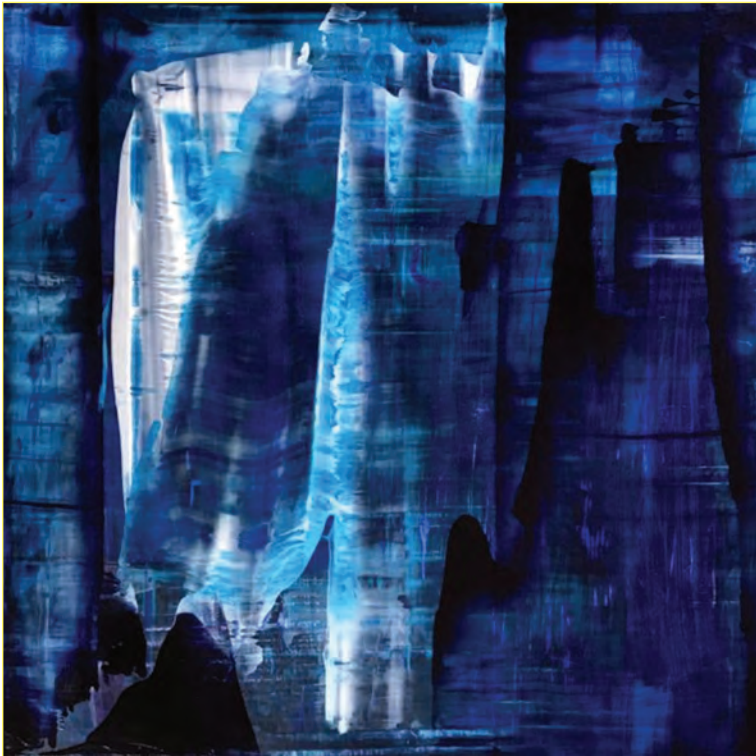
My 'first first' was the incredible blessing of being able to celebrate the Act of Consecration of Man, and to talk in a new way with people about what the service means to them as they navigate their life's unfolding. The words and prayers that speak most poignantly to them may change over time, but the common theme I hear is that our sacraments inspire them to continue their striving toward their best life, their truest self and to behold others and the world in the most positive light—a light 'shining with spirit'. At the centre of our Christian Community, the Act of Consecration confirms and strengthens our developing individuality, so we may find how to live with our past in the most resolved and healed way, that we can face in the present whatever comes towards us from the future.

As 2020 continues to unfold, there are many who find that they experience a greater fear of both living and dying. We are being asked to learn to navigate this 'new normal' of not being able to plan ahead, travel freely or come together in community when and as we wish. There is now a fear, estrangement or suspicion of others. Many people live with new or amplified anxieties, and an ever present experience of the fragility of life. This heightened awareness of the threshold at which humanity stands, brings either an experience of an unfathomable abyss, or by the strengthening forces of our sacramental life and religious striving, we may stand consciously at this doorway and learn to be at home in the fullness and richness of the reality of the spiritual world which is always present and leaning towards us.

When we gather together at the threshold, to give thanks and pray, and to share in the consecration of bread and wine, we can feel the multitude of those who have gone before us, bend to us and send their sheltering power to us as we strive towards the One who 'bears the life of the world'. In these times of the unknown and unforeseeable, we hear at the beginning of the communion that Christ stands at peace with the world, and this peace can be ours also, because it is given to us by Him. We pray for the strengthening of the self that can be healed from all that keeps us small, fearful and separate. Celebrating daily during lockdown

made me acutely aware that the 'I' spoken during communion is the most all-inclusive, all-embracing 'I'. A priest taking communion speaks for all, takes the transubstantiated substances for all, carries these substances into the world for all, confesses with and for all.

We are all confirmed and strengthened as we worship with this great Whitsun community that includes: our ancestors, our dearly departed, the souls who are fortified by our religious striving as they prepare for their life to come, the beings of the elements of our earth, the spirits of our communities, and the heavenly hierarchies. I feel called to practice living evermore consciously at this threshold where the veil is always thin, where the future resurrection forces sustain us as we congregate at our altar to celebrate birth, death and the unfolding life between, and where our deeply felt experience confirms to us, that even in isolation, we are never alone.



*Folded Light XV*, Richard Heys

# Mary's visit and the work of the Holy Spirit

Louise Mary Sofair

*The Sistine Madonna* by Raphael—portraying the beautiful figure of Mary, purity of expression of mother and child, angelic figures and perfect symmetry of composition—acts on our souls as a healing balm. The serenity of the image is beneficial in stressful circumstances and particularly helpful for pregnant mothers. Rudolf Steiner gave indications that the painting has occult significance, too: the clouds on which Mary stands signify the ether-sphere; the myriad children's faces barely visible in the background depict the world of souls awaiting birth and incarnation; the gazes of Mary and the Jesus-child connect them with the Cosmic Christ nearing the earth.

Rudolf Steiner also gave us the insight that the artist Raphael was the reincarnated John the Baptist. The painting holds further secrets about the visit of the Mary of St Luke's gospel to Elizabeth, who was pregnant with John. The curtain-veil is drawn aside to reveal an Imagination of a spiritual event. The fact that there are Beings of the cherubic, angelic world at the bottom of the image indicates that all three of the figures portrayed are in the spiritual world above.

The kneeling figure of St Barbara looking earthward is a mature woman. Elizabeth, too, was older than Mary. The figure of Pope Sixtus is depicted as an elderly priest gazing devotedly upwards. Similarly, the pious Zachariah was an old man when John was conceived.

The two cherubs show a remarkable resemblance to the child in Mary's arms. They do not have individual characteristics but rather form a group, a triangle of identity. As the representative of Elizabeth (St Barbara) takes one of the angels into her gaze, we might assume that this cherub represents her son John. In spirit he is Elijah and his counterpart is Moses, represented by the angel next to him gazing upwards, like the priestly Zachariah-figure

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(Pope Sixtus). The third, cherub-like figure without angel wings is the pure Adam-soul who was held back from incarnation until the time of the birth of the child described in Luke's gospel.

While this soul was held back, the ego of John developed very considerably throughout many incarnations. This mature individuality was able to give his ego-forces during the sixth month in the womb to the underdeveloped ego of the primal Adam. This explains why Elizabeth's baby 'leapt in the womb' when Mary arrived, as described in St Luke's gospel.

### **The parents of John**

Zachariah and Elizabeth were devoted souls who were not, as was widely thought in society at the time, to blame for the fact that they were not granted the gift of a child. Anne Catherine Emmerich mentions that they were actually well-respected because they were both direct descendants of Aaron, the one who

had been the 'spokesman' for his brother, Moses.

The fact that Mary was related to Elizabeth meant that she was also descended from Aaron. Surprisingly, Emmerich says that Elizabeth only knew of Mary by hearsay. Therefore, Mary's visit was the first time they met and it was not a moment of intimate soul-empathy but rather more objective. While many artists have portrayed both women as being pregnant, the gospel does not indicate that Mary was already expecting a baby when she arrived. The words of the angel in Luke 1:31 are a promise, but they are not yet fulfilled.

Zachariah was by then in an unnatural state whereby he had lost the use of his larynx for normal speech, after his prophetic vision of the angel in the temple. In contrast, Elizabeth burst into a powerfully spoken blessing which she bestowed on Mary. This was not an everyday occurrence since she spoke with a 'mighty' voice. Mary responded in a similar vein using heightened liturgical language which was uncharacteristic of any girl of the time. Indeed the gospel states that Elizabeth was 'filled with the Holy Spirit.' Is it possible that this was the fulfilment of the angel's promise that Holy Spirit would 'come upon' Mary. Later on, Zachariah's faculty of speech returned in a song of praise while 'filled with the Holy Spirit.'

The language spoken by Elizabeth, Mary and Zachariah was elevated and elaborate—there are no other songs which match the character of them in the whole of the New Testament. The other event which has a mysterious connection to this is the Whitsun birth of a new Christened community, when the disciples were 'filled by the Holy Spirit and began to speak in foreign tongues' (Acts 2.)

When spirituality is expressed through the human voice in speech or song, the soul ascends to a heightened state. It is possible that a being from higher realms could express itself through the human voice: indeed, it could work as a force that brings about a physical effect in certain circumstances.

### **The spiritual conception**

We know that the uniting of male and female elements in procreation can be effected by an instinctive natural sympathy of life-forces, or by the astral force of attraction. These days we have come to accept that procreation can be purely physical when, for example, it occurs in a laboratory. The procreation process initiates the forming of the sheaths, in the first instance, for an embryo on which the ego of the incarnating individual then begins to work.

If the unity of the sheath-forming elements can be brought about through physical, etheric or astral means, then ought we not admit the possibility that it could be caused by means of a spirit-force? This spiritual impetus would effect the initial formation of the sheaths so that an ego could take over its work on the embryo.

This happened at the unprecedented event of Mary's meeting with Elizabeth in the abode of Zachariah. It heralded and was a prophecy of a future stage of development when, as Rudolf Steiner says: 'This in the future will be the birth of a new human being—that he is spoken forth by another.'

It was absolutely necessary for this conception, far ahead of its time, to come about through the direct intervention of the divine world because the incarnating soul had been kept in its pure, heavenly state for aeons.

### **Mary in the Gospel of St Luke**

Emil Bock wrote: 'We know nothing of the background of the Luke Mary.' She was not of the Jewish royal line like the Mary in St Matthew's gospel. Her humble demeanour caused her to feel greatly uncomfortable when she was addressed by the Angel as 'graced among all women.' It was her destiny to give birth to a special child, specially conceived, because she had also been kept back almost as long as the soul of Jesus in the spirit-world for this particular purpose. It is not without foundation that people in earlier centuries and many, unconsciously perhaps today, empathise with the personality of this Mary as the epitome of the pure soul that all humanity once possessed. For many, this mystery alone suffices as one deserving reverence.

Mary was still very receptive to the spiritual world in which she had long dwelt and therefore immediately understood what the angelic being communicated to her. She did not question what she was instructed to do but immediately set off to see Elizabeth, 'with haste.' As the gospel indicates, there was no delay between the Angel-vision and Mary's action, and as Mary told the Angel she had never 'known a man' (although she was promised in marriage to Joseph) it seems that she had not conceived at the time of her visit to Elizabeth.

The Holy Spirit filled Elizabeth, Mary and John (even in the womb) while Zachariah's speech was inhibited. This creative force procured the initial development of the embryonic astral, etheric and physical sheaths into which the ego of John began to work. Significantly, Mary stayed at this place for three months, the first trimester period of a pregnancy. Her young soul received the benefit of the wisdom of the



mature Elizabeth during this time. In the Gospel of Luke, we only hear of Mary's pregnancy in the second chapter, by which time she was married to Joseph and travelling to Bethlehem.

Rather than lacking consciousness, Mary seemed acutely aware that the unprecedented train of events which had happened should not be spoken about, even to people like the shepherds and Simeon and Anna who perceived something of the holiness of her child. She cared for the boy for the next twelve years and then died at a young age.

However, her soul found its counterpart by destiny in the Mary whom Matthew describes, who had developed through many lifetimes while the ego of the other Mary was held back. Rudolf Steiner gave the significant insight that years later, at about the time of the Baptism in the Jordan, the etheric forces of this Mary, which had remained close to the earth since her death, now became incorporated into the Mary whom Matthew describes. Because the life-force holds memories within it, the Mary whom Matthew describes (who had not been conscious of how she had conceived by the Joseph described by Matthew) began to remember everything about the Mary whom Luke describes, as if it were her own past. This may be the reason why there has been confusion about the two Marys and the two Jesus boys, despite the clear differences between them as we encounter them in the gospels of Matthew and Luke.

### **Joseph in the Gospel of St Luke**

The Gospel of St Luke does not give any indication that Joseph accompanied Mary on her visit to Elizabeth. Rather, Mary did not return to Joseph for three months while she remained with Elizabeth until the birth of John.

The genealogy of this Joseph is not placed in the gospel before, at the time, or immediately after the birth of the Nathan Jesus. It is placed at the time of the Baptism when Jesus was thirty years old. He was 'thought to be' the son of this Joseph—in another translation 'he was the son (as was supposed) of Joseph.' Rudolf Steiner said pertinently that Christ was to bring love which has nothing to do with the blood-tie. Therefore, when He incarnated into Jesus of Nazareth it was important that 'he was free of even the possibility of any blood-tie.'



Of course, Joseph was the legal father of this Jesus, as he was married to Mary when the child was born. It seems they had no other children. We could say that the Nathan Joseph was the epitome of a God-father figure to Jesus. Furthermore, he became the step-father later in life to the children of the Mary in Matthew's gospel.

### **The Creed of The Christian Community**

The above may go some way to explaining the words of our Creed: The birth of Jesus is a working of The Holy Spirit.

In the Creed, only one of the Marys is mentioned. This may be because the Nathan Mary was related to Elizabeth, who was 'of the daughters of Aaron.' Aaron was the founder of the priestly line to whom Jehovah himself gave instructions via Moses regarding the priestly ritual, including the position of the altar, use of consecrated vestments, anointing of priests, sacrificial offering and the burning of incense (Exodus 28). This priestly stream is renewed in the rituals of The Christian Community.

### **The receptive heart**

In the centre of the painting of the *Sistine Madonna* by Raphael we see Mary, who holds the child to her heart. The pattern formed by the arms of Mary and the child resembles the flow of the vascular system. The blue and red colours are reminiscent of the blood which enters and leaves the human heart. Here is the indication that the conception of a child is first and foremost a matter of the heart: Mary's heart was receptive to the creative, formative force which worked in a divine way through her and enabled a holy child to be conceived.

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# Just an emergence?

Brigitte Marking

‘The principle of emergence states that a multitude of any number of living things ... can exhibit properties way beyond the capability of any individual’... (from a review of the book *Apeirogon* by Colum McCann in the *Guardian* Review of Books 15/02/20). What is at work that this is possible in very different contexts—for example in a murmuration of starlings and in the interaction between human beings? What are these properties—what is their quality? How can this quality be described? Is it measurable?

Can science explain what we see unfold when observing a murmuration of starlings?

Imagine a small flock of birds appearing out of nowhere silhouetted against the sky. Imagine more and more small flocks of birds joining and merging, forming a fluid, moving shape, expanding and contracting while changing direction, rounded forms giving way to elongated ones until an unseen force draws some and then more and more in groups back down to earth.

While the exact workings of starling murmurations is something scientists have yet to fully understand, various studies have been carried out looking at different aspects of this extraordinary phenomenon. In 2012, George Parisi, a theoretical physicist with the university of Rome, published research showing that each bird is reacting to the birds nearest to it, that the movement is the result of a series of short-range reactions. With an earlier study, carried out in 2010, Parisi and his team looked at velocity; this time they studied orientation. Measuring how a change in direction by one bird affects those around it, the team discovered that one bird’s movement only affects its seven closest neighbours. So, one bird affects its seven closest neighbours, and each of those neighbour’s movements affect their closest seven neighbours and so on through the flock.

It is thought that *often* the behaviour is sparked by the presence of a predator ... and that the flock’s movement is based on evasive manoeuvres. There is safety in numbers... This would agree with the definition of ‘emergence’ that a multitude of living beings can exhibit

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the congregation  
in Forest Row.*

properties way beyond the capability of any individual. But is this all there is to it? Scientists acknowledge that they still have not fathomed the mystery of this phenomenon.

The question is: can science ever define or measure the intangible quality of seeing a murmuration of starlings? Scientific explanations simply cannot capture the essential: the beauty and harmony of these changing, living formations. Perhaps there are creative forces beyond our ken which bring about what unfolds before our eyes. Seeing a murmuration of starlings is like being able to watch the invisible flow of life energy.

Dynamic movement and fluid forms—is man capable of creating such beauty and harmony *consciously*? What allows us to reach out beyond the narrow limits of our self? What do we need to do to come into movement, what forms do we need to create to help us towards achieving something of the same magnitude? Something about the interaction between human beings that is totally unexpected and therefore a mystery. Something that is not measurable. Something that goes beyond cause and effect.

The cover of the novel *Apeirogon* by Colum McCann (Bloomsbury 2020), shows an artist's impression of a murmuration of starlings. The two central characters of the novel are devoted to the testimonies of Bassam Aramin and Rami Elhanan. McCann provides the context: 'Readers familiar with the political situation in Israel and Palestine will notice that the driving forces in the heart of this book, Bassam Aramin and Rami Elhanan, are real... The transcripts of both men in the centre of the book are pulled together from a series of interviews...'

What is the connection between a murmuration of starlings and these two remarkable individuals?

Rami's daughter, Smadar, is killed by three suicide bombers a few days before her fourteenth birthday. Rami is caught in a web of despair and rage. In spite of this he accepts the invitation to a meeting of the 'Parents' Circle' founded by Y Frankenthal. Rami is taken aback to see a Palestinian woman, holding a picture of her daughter, join the meeting. He is overwhelmed by this experience, 'I had been in a sort of coffin. This lifted the lid from my eyes. My grief and her grief, the same grief.' He gradually realises that until then he had not seen Palestinians as human beings, with feelings just like his own. For him the most important question soon becomes what it is he can do to prevent 'this unbearable pain for others.'

In spite of his own continuing pain, he is able to say that joining with others saved his life. 'We cannot imagine the harm we are doing by not listening to one another and I mean this on every level.'

A murmur of starlings is a testimony to creative forces becoming visible through changing fluid forms. Rami's ability to transcend paralysis, fear and anger, his willingness to enter into a dialogue with others, is an extraordinary *conscious* offering of great beauty. It is one of the most moving experiences when a human being is able to move beyond cause and effect—when hatred and revenge are replaced by love—and his actions allow unseen forces to shine through. Is this what 'holiness' means?

Bassam wakes up to his enemy's (the Israeli's) humanity even when he is in prison in his late teens. His first reaction to seeing a documentary of the Holocaust is satisfaction. This soon turns into disbelief at the crimes perpetrated against Jews in the Second World War. He realises that the treatment inflicted on Palestinians is a result of the Holocaust. 'We the Palestinians became the victims of the victims.' He reads widely and comes to the conviction that the 'only way to achieve peace was through non-violence and resistance.' In 2005 he joins a secret meeting with Israeli soldiers—he is one of four Palestinians to attend, one of the Israelis is Rami's son, Elik. This is how the two families meet. The group sets up an organization called Combatants for Peace. Like Rami, Bassam knows that to stop violence we need to know each other. 'When you know the humanity of your enemy he is no longer your enemy.'

Two years after the foundation of Combatants for Peace, Bassam's 10-year old daughter Abir is shot in the back of the head by a member of the Israeli border police. There was no violence going on at the time. Bassam never considers revenge—for him there is no return from non-violence. Soon after Abir's death he joins the Parents' Circle and he and Rami start travelling together to tell their stories. Bassam stresses that 'we need to learn to use our pain.'

Both Rami and Bassam make their pain into an instrument for healing. Both maintain that truth, empathy and understanding are the only way to overcome the discord between peoples. It is only in working together that something new can arise. Both Rami and Bassam share a vision of a future when peace will prevail. Their personal biographies make this vision doubly poignant. A vision consciously lived and upheld. A vision as beautiful and tender as a murmur of starlings.

# Stolen Time

## Painting during lockdown

Richard Heys



Stolen Time I

*Nothing is possible without faith.*

GERHARD RICHTER

I live in Sussex on the fringes of the Ashdown Forest and work from a fabulous studio at Emerson College.

In my practice I strive to bring presence into painting, to open up a soul space allowing the viewer to breathe with the artwork. For me, a painting must have countenance—a spiritual presence—so that the artwork may live on in the mind of the viewer evolving over time. Aiming for mystery in this

world of the known, I create standing before the unknown.

What set me on this journey was

discovering Ian McKeever's *Temple Paintings* at the Royal Academy in 2007. I couldn't understand how the piece came off the wall to greet me. I have, since that moment, wrestled with the issue of how to create this presence. These days I have a deeper appreciation of how pure colour can project and recede from the picture plane and this is informed by the 'frontality' of the icon tradition, brought into the Abstract Sublime by Mark Rothko.

In 2013 I was excited to visit the Gerhard Richter Retrospective at the Tate Modern and was surprised to discover that his work made me feel unwell. Seeing image after image of

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Forest Row.*

grey or smeared and scraped colours left me without breath. At that very moment I decided to explore print making equipment and make some paintings that glowed with transparent breathing colour. In my practice I work with print-making tools: bespoke squeegees, silicon tools and brushes. I work to remould inner spaces, to invite attention to and engagement with surface and image, surface and depth, outer picture and inner soul-space. I aim to create, borrowing a phrase, 'the painting as a doorway'.

I gave my lockdown series the title *Stolen Time* for a variety of reasons—not least for the sense of time out of time which descended, along with the lockdown protocols, upon the village of Forest Row, with no cars on the roads and, amazingly, no planes in the skies—no vapour trails, no mechanical sounds at all (bearing in mind that we're twenty-five minutes from Gatwick here). I'd hear only birdsong on my way to the studio—arresting, lively birdsong, seeming all the more present for the stillness and absence of other noise.



*Stolen Time LV*

Once in the studio, always excited and surprised by the latest paintings, with my heart in my mouth, an ecstasy of purpose and delight in colour, the next painting would reveal itself. Using squeegee is such an unsentimental way to work as the veils of colour and draws of paint destroy and reveal the canvas anew time and time again. The process becomes a kind of revelation, applying and scraping away, not merely laying colour on colour. Day after day the process deepened, the mood coalesced as one particular colour mood and conversation would lead to another, calling up another and so on. I created in a heightened state of realisation—what will we do in the face of death? What will we do despite our fragile condition?

One paints by necessity alone; it is a private activity. One works toward one's centre, developing a singular focus. But I soon found I did not feel alone: as news of events in the world, horrible statistics of isolation and death and the uncertainty of our position came towards me, it seemed everything we had taken for granted was no longer there for us.



*Stolen Time XXII*



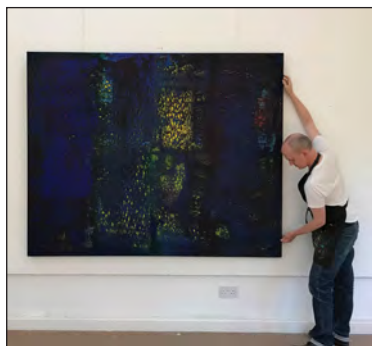
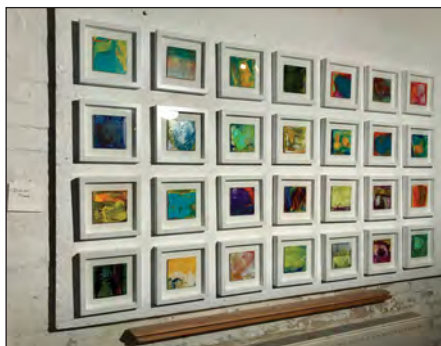
What was there day after day were heightened feelings: I felt anguish and elation, fear matched against tremendous creativity and freedom. An unusual sense of accompaniment and confidence in finding answers to the questions of each new painting, the works developing seemingly independently of my feelings.

For the ancient Greeks, Prometheus, the god of foresight, stole 'fire' from heaven, and gifted it to humanity. Was it this 'fire' that I experienced in the creation of these paintings? It was not a mindless joy, not a technical action, rather a hair-raising certainty and belief in the spiritual, serendipitous nature of the work; as Louis Pasteur said—'chance favours the prepared mind'. The destructive nature of this drawing down and removal of colour is a creative act, each time, destroying to create. This for me is work in the twenty-first century.

What a gift to have four months alone in the studio painting, without the pressure of feeling I should have been doing something else. Not preparing, teaching, marketing, social media, gallery and open-call applications, approaches to gallerists and

curators. Somehow, I found I was making work I had been attempting to create for a decade. I experienced these paintings like visitors: their presence was there with me rolling in like the rhythms of a great tide, wave after wave washing through me sometimes recognised and often not grasped in the moment. I would perhaps only realise the worth of something the next day or week later, once it had settled. These discoveries each day were reason enough to enter the studio with my heart in my mouth, to see 'What's new today? What can I make of today?'

An otherworldly, spiritual atmosphere fed this work. I felt removed from life, only for life to be all the more present! As emotion after emotion washed through the studio and filled these canvases, with their nooks and crannies of colour with meaning; struggle and reconciliation, expression and silence, self-censure leading to greater, deeper feeling—not to be spoken of, never to be sounded. The silence seeming all the louder in-between these colours, inculcating wonderful moments in paint.



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# Christmas—et incarnatus est

Lars-Åke Karlsson

Parents, teachers and anyone who works with children and young people, is bound to encounter difficult questions: Where did it all start? Where did human beings come from and where are they travelling to? How did I come to be here with you?

Everyone who has struggled to find a meaningful answer for their child can take comfort in the knowledge that these questions have been posed by myriads of people since time immemorial. Myths, fairy tales and religions have all attempted to provide answers, placing human beings in a larger context, with a world 'here' and one or several worlds 'there', on the other side. In mythology, the supreme god rules over all worlds.

It is just our modern western culture which only expects a 'here', and if one isn't here, then one does not exist at all.

## Matter of unity

In the late 1600s John Locke coined the term *tabula rasa*, meaning that we are born into the world as a blank slate without any prehistory, and ever since, our perception of reality has increasingly becoming something like this:

Outside is the world with everything it contains: objects, phenomena and processes. That is the 'truth'. In order to get a handle on it, we submerge ourselves in it, adapt to it and distance ourselves from it. We create pictures of it and form a relationship to its reality through observations, reflections and conclusions.

At the same time, we recognise how inadequately we are able to under-

stand reality and that our thinking still only succeeds in grasping shadow images or fragments of it. However I try, the reality remains 'outside' and my inner being can only reflect it palely or, at the very best, explain it.

The gap remains: I perceive physical reality as primary, while my reflection on it is secondary. Even the word 'reflect' indicates that thinking isn't the actual reality.

If this has, during the last few centuries, become our perception of how things have come to be and exist in the world, then how do we envision our own origin? Was I myself initially a cell that divided and specialised in an increasingly complex manner, to then be mysteriously endowed with consciousness? How did that happen? Should the Gospel of St. John be rewritten: 'In the beginning was matter...all things were made by it'.

This brutal materialism of the nineteenth century has modified a great deal over the last century and today's credo should perhaps read: 'In the beginning was the information...all things were made by it'. However, in truth the difference is not so great; information is still often perceived in chemical or physical terms, and therefore fundamentally as matter. The message is harsh: For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. Matter is the beginning and, after the short intermezzo that we call life, the end.

This is completely true from a purely material perspective.

*Lars-Åke Karlsson is a priest emeritus living in Finland.*

### **Life's innermost source**

I once asked some young people: What is your innermost being? And I got the replies:

*My innermost being is a song.*

*There is a voice that speaks within me, I do not hear it all the time and when that happens it's not good, but then I hear it again.*

*My innermost being is purple and warm.*

These are tangible images but they cannot be located within us. They are not 'matter', but nevertheless are perceived as real and substantial. Thus, if we want to describe our innermost being, we must take words from art, mythology, fairy tales, religions. We cannot get to it with a surgeon's knife. It is better to write a poem, to sing a song, to dance or to paint it.

If we tell a small child that Granny has died, they will most likely ask: Where is she? Or: When will she come back? We might say: She has gone to heaven, or She has gone to the place where Grandad is, or She is better now, she has wings again. For a small child, death does not exist. Granny has always existed and always will exist. She can't just disappear. If she is no longer here then she must be somewhere else.

Our innermost being behaves completely differently to perishable matter. We regard it as eternal, indelible and ever-creating, the origin of all of our thoughts and actions, the centre of our world. Everything we experience, whether good or bad, we try to relate to our own 'inner sound'. If it resonates deep within us, it will feel right, even in the midst of the deepest crisis. But should a single string not resonate, it will not feel right, re-

gardless of external success. Meaning only arises when an inner chord is struck. Without resonance there is only mechanics, the law of nature, determinism, causality.

Often we may have the feeling that we are guests here on earth. In the presence of a small child, many people, even those who are not religious, exclaim: She is a gift from God. Most mythologies portray human origin in this way: that we have descended from above, from 'heaven'. Shakespeare calls man an 'intruder in the dust' and the Swedish author Pär Lagerkvist wrote a book called *Guest in Reality*. Most fairy tales begin in more or less the same way: Once upon a time, in a faraway land, there was a king's daughter...

Seen from this heavenly perspective, our innermost being will be an eternal, creating note, while our body and soul are temporary instruments given to us at birth so that we can play our life's melody upon them as best we can.

The beginning of all things—including ourselves—is therefore in 'heaven', as the Logos, as a melody, a note, a movement, an archetype, a principle, an idea, a notion: as hope.

The Logos is searching for material realisation, for embodiment and incarnation into this world. Therefore, all birth on earth is a descent from a non-material world of forces into an impermanent vessel, tool or instrument that will carry forth the meaning of its innermost impulse.

The year begins in secret. Christmas, the year's first celebration, is about the spiritual becoming physical.

In actual fact the church year gets a head start. The year starts, as we

know, with a loud bang, with rockets and cheers. The church year starts almost unnoticed a month earlier. A single candle shines in the darkness, a week later there are two, then three and when the fourth is lit the room is quite bright even though the days have become darker. Advent is the year's 'blue hour', a time for pondering, expectation and anticipation, for preparation and for listening.

Our times are crying out for more Advent.

### **The celebration of the senses**

Christmas, which lasts thirteen days until Epiphany, is the festival of the birth of the self. The longed for, the anticipated has become tangible, alive in our often clumsy hands. The song is now in our midst in the form of a newborn child, utterly vulnerable and dependent on the good will of a few people who want to receive it and lead it into this world.

We may experience this in many different situations. Something must be created 'from nothing'; it might be a work project, an upcoming theatre performance, an impending wedding or retirement.

On the one hand we see the arrival of a newborn or even unborn child, full of purity, innocence and endless opportunities. At the same time we may be filled with anxiety over how easily the newborn may be corrupted and distorted by the world's biting wind and how much protection and support it needs in order to grow and find its place. How many good things have been stopped in their infancy?

To be born into this world and to find one's place are difficult tasks and

they are seldom achieved on one's own. The process is full of drama, obstacles, breakthroughs and new attempts in a constant exchange between one's innermost being and the environment.

The first step is for the body to become one's own. This happens surprisingly slowly in comparison to animals. A moose is able to stand on its own feet a few hours after birth; we, however, need a whole year to overcome gravity. Step by step our senses and limbs get to know the laws of existence, and although they are initially strange, through trial and error we create a trusting relationship with them.

A child doesn't need much: warmth, a lap, food, rhythm, comfort, songs and rhymes and perhaps some sticks and stones, a puddle, the scent of juniper and birdsong.

St. Augustine had a concrete relationship to the corporeal:

*O man, learn to dance, or else the angels in heaven will not know what to do with you.*

And St Teresa of Avila said:

*Be good to your body so that your soul is happy to live there.*

The process of incarnating socially is not very different. Here too, it is the adults' primary task to help a child to be able to feel confident when facing even the simplest of things: joy and sorrow, closeness and distance, big and small, strictness and leniency, playfulness and discipline. They can all create resonance in the innate internal sound of the child.

*Trust and confidence are the keywords of incarnation:*

*To learn inwardly to trust the internal sound that carries us through life.*

*To experience outwardly that there  
is a sounding board somewhere  
in the world which reverberates  
to our inner sound.*

This is Christmas.

### **Man: king of his own life?**

Alongside the nativity story are stories of kings, and with them we arrive at the final stage of Christmas: Epiphany, the three kings celebration. We encounter three kingly—or why not queenly—qualities.

Firstly, the newborn, highly anticipated ‘King of the Jews.’ Not a great and mighty world power, just a helpless child.

Nothing can take away the obvious, inherent sovereignty that every child carries in and with themselves. An adult can only marvel at the authority and pristine purity they exude.

And as adults we know that we still have some of that within us. Despite everything, somewhere in a nook deep inside us, is a place where everything is as it should be—clean, clear, unblemished as on the first day of creation—even if everything else is broken, soiled or faded. It is this kingliness that we bring with us as a gift when we are born.

Next are the three wise men, kings from the East who came to worship the newborn child. This kingliness is not a gift from God but must be found in the world and develop, step by step through constant interaction with the world. It requires openness to all phenomena, a willingness to learn and to search in the world, and to change, both inwardly and outwardly.

The road is not easy, it is often paved with trial and error, doubt,

sometimes even by open confrontation and periods of solitude. But every step towards the star gives us a new experience: life’s experience, the wisdom of life.

An everyday form of this regal quality can be observed in unassuming professionalism and the professional pride and responsibility which arises from it.

Herod is the third kingly figure in the Gospel of St. Matthew. He is not really a king at all, having taken power by fraudulent means. Therefore he is constantly, morbidly suspicious, on guard against all who could dethrone him. This reverse royal figure—the dictator, the suspicious, the brutal—also lives in us. It never rests.

If we do not achieve creative nobility, which is the true mark of humanity, we will use other methods:

If I don’t have something, I will take it by force.

Because I am uncertain, I will oppress others.

If I cannot have something, neither shall anyone else.

These three royal qualities—the child, the wise man, and the dictator—live in us at all times. The first two we must cherish. With the third there is an ongoing struggle.

So the three festivals of Advent, Christmas and Epiphany can help us get a little closer to the mystery of our origin.

Advent: the notion of all that happened before I was born.

Christmas: the story of how I was born and found my body and my surroundings.

Epiphany: how I took my life into my own hands and went out into the world.

# A perfect season to travel

Paul Corman

Most of us like to travel. I certainly do. It is important to have a goal or purpose to the travel but it isn't just the travel itself that matters. There is preparation before a trip: reading about places to visit, maybe learning a little of a new language, deciding on a route, arranging transportation, packing and finally starting off. Planning means being prepared to improvise! Emotions can arise even before the journey begins: joy, anticipation of getting away from daily burdens, perhaps anxiousness about unknown adventures. Travel is an integral part of human life. Life is often spoken of as a journey between birth and death. And what if the journey continues after death or begins before birth? That would be a journey in the realm of spirit as exciting as any to the most exotic of earthly places, a journey needing as much or more aforethought and preparation: reading about the realm of spirit, learning its language, loosening matter's overbearing hold on us by unpacking the things stored in our soul suitcase, sorting them out, deciding what to leave behind and what to take, re-packing our soul with thoughts and images that can serve in finding our way in the Spirit. But, you know, we do go to the land of spirit quite often. Thinking, fantasising, remembering, praying, are excursions into this vast land. Every night, though unconscious of it, we go there in sleep. We are not such inexperienced travellers in Spirit; we need not be tourists there. We live in that world as well as in the world of matter. We

are citizens of both. We may not recognise or appreciate its beauty and all it has to offer, but instead of being a tourist we can become adventurers, explorers. The sacraments of The Christian Community can sustain and assist us along both our Earth and Spirit paths. The gospels are a guide for such travel. In them the Christ speaks of the way. He prepares the disciples and advises them before sending them out on the Christ-journey. Each of us can become such Christ-travellers. We have the same travel guide as the disciples did. We have the sacraments to encourage and enliven our journey and we have the Christian festivals through the year to remind us of the relevance of the journey and its goal.

Especially the festivals of this season: Advent, Christmas and Epiphany do this. 'Advent' means 'come or go toward'. But who is travelling, where to or from? The Christ Child, to us; we, to him or both? 'Advent' shares a language root with 'adventure'. Advent is a time to become as awake as possible that our life is a great adventure, one which has meaning to be sought and found, one in which there is a meeting up with our destiny, with the Christ in us and in others. He is coming towards us; we are going towards him. Advent is a time to care for growth and for that which will be born. Experience the growth of a creative process by painting or sketching and working on it daily during the month, or by writing a poem or a story bit by bit. Study a skill or craft

or subject you have always wanted to learn and watch yourself grow day by day. Learn a part of the gospel, a verse or other writing of value by heart slowly but surely over the days of Advent. These are a few of the ways to celebrate Advent as an adult and not just vicariously for the children.

Although the Spanish word for Christmas, *navidad* comes from Latin *natus*, birth, the spirit of our language seems to want to remind us that birth is not just a moment in time, but rather a journey of continual birth upon the waters of life, and that we are like ships (Latin, *naves*) or sailors, navigating these holy and sometimes very difficult life waters. So Christmas (Navidad) can be thought of as not just a festival of the birth of the Jesus child, like a 2000<sup>th</sup> birthday party, but also as a celebration of our ongoing birth as naviga-

tors navigating our self-same ships (naves). Ours is a journey onto the ocean of the forces that permeate all life and which, since the Mystery of Golgotha, are the dwelling place of Christ. It is from out of these Christ-permeated life forces that we are born anew each morning. They become more powerful and more effective when we recognise their existence and contemplate their workings in earthly matter. Epiphany is perhaps the epitome of the human journey on Earth, following an ideal like a star that shines with grace above us, guiding and orienting us all along our way. The Wise Magi did that and found the highest human ideal. Our journey, whatever seeming detours it takes, through adventures, pains and joys, is to that same goal. So a proper greeting for this season might be, have a good journey, enjoy the trip and God speed!

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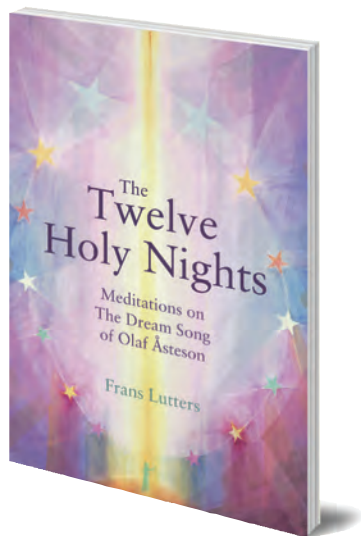
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## *Gospel Readings 2020–2021*

### **Advent**

Sunday, November 29.... Luke 21:25–36  
Sunday, December 6 ..... Luke 21:25–36  
Sunday, December 13 .... Luke 21:25–36  
Sunday, December 20 .... Luke 21:25–36

### **Christmas**

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

### **Epiphany**

Wednesday, Jan. 6 ..... Matthew 2:1–12  
Sunday, January 10 ..... Matthew 2:1–12  
Sunday, January 17 ..... Luke 2:41–52  
Sunday, January 24 ..... John 2:1–11  
Sunday, January 31 .... Matthew 20:1–16

Sunday, Feb. 7 ..... Luke 8:5–18  
Sunday, Feb. 14 ..... Luke 18:18–34  
Sunday, Feb. 21 .... Matthew 4:1–11  
Sunday, Feb. 28... Matthew 17:1–13

### **Passiontide**

Sunday, March 7 ..... Luke 11:14–36  
Sunday, March 14 ..... John 6:1–15  
Sunday, March 21 ..... John 8:1–12

### **Holy Week**

Palm Sunday, Mar. 28 ..... Matt. 21:1–11  
Thursday, April 1 ..... Luke 23:13–32  
Friday, April 2 ..... John 19:1–15  
Saturday, April 3 ..... John 19:16–42

### **Easter**

Sunday, April 4 ..... Mark 16:1–8  
Sunday, April 11 ..... John 20:19–31  
Sunday, April 18 ..... John 10:1–16  
Sunday, April 25 ..... John 15:1–27  
Sunday, May 2 ..... John 16:1–33  
Sunday, May 9 ..... John 14:1–31

### **Ascension**

Thursday, May 13 ..... John 16:24–33  
Sunday, May 16 ..... John 16:24–33

### **Whitsun**

Sunday, May 23 ..... John 14:23–31  
Wed., May 26 ..... Romans 8:18–27  
Sunday, May 30 .... Romans 8:18–27  
Sunday, June 6 ..... Matt. 28:16–20  
Sunday, June 13 ..... John 1:43–51  
Sunday, June 20.. Matthew 14:1–12

### **St Johns Tide**

Thursday, June 24 ..... Mark 1:1–11  
Sunday, June 27 ..... Mark 1:1–11  
Sunday, July 4 ..... Luke 7:19–33  
Sunday, July 11 ..... John 3:22–36  
Sunday, July 18 ..... Matthew 14:1–12

Sunday, July 25 ..... Mark 8:27–38  
Sunday, August 1 ..... Matt. 7:1–14  
Sunday, August 8 ..... Luke 15:11–32  
Sunday, August 15 ..... Luke 9:1–17  
Sunday, August 22 ... Luke 18:35–43  
Sunday, August 29 .... Mark 7:31–37  
Sunday, Sep. 5 ..... Luke 10:1–20  
Sunday, Sep. 12 ..... Luke 17:5–24  
Sunday, Sep. 19 ..... Matt. 6:19–34  
Sunday, Sep. 26 ..... Luke 7:11–17

### **Michaelmas**

Wednesday, Sep. 29 ..... Matt. 22:1–14  
Sunday, October. 3 .... Matthew 22:1–14  
Sunday, October. 10 ..... Ephes. 6:10–20  
Sunday, October. 17 ..... Rev. 12:1–12  
Sunday, October. 24 ..... Rev. 19:11–16

Sunday, Oct. 31 .... Rev. 1:1–3;9–20  
Sunday, Nov. 7 ..... Rev. 7:9–17  
Sunday, Nov. 14 ..... Rev. 14:1–13  
Sunday, Nov. 21 ..... Rev. 21:9–27

### **Advent**

Sunday, November 28.... Luke 21:25–36

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

# Ritual and Routine

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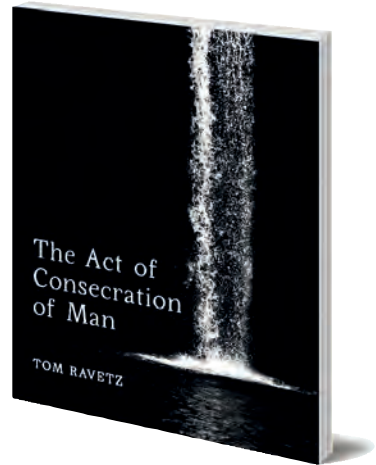
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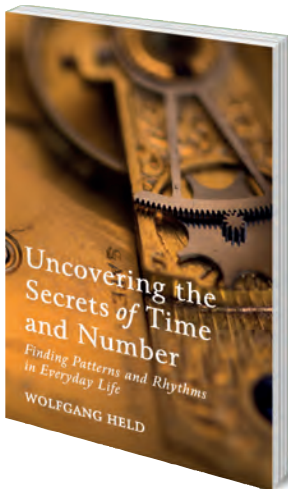
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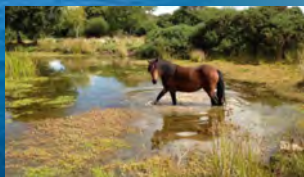
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