The Christian Community

Perspectives

June–August 2021

Alone and together

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Editor:
Tom Ravetz
11 Upper Close, Forest Row, RH18 5DS

Editorial Team:
Peter Howe, Deborah Ravetz
Kevin Street

Subscriptions & Advertisements:
Gabriele Kuhn, Tel: +44(1383)821204
subs@perspectives-magazine.co.uk

All correspondence: Perspectives,
21 Napier Road, Edinburgh, EH10 5AZ
editor@perspectives-magazine.co.uk

Lay-Up: Christoph Hänni

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c/o The Christian Community,
906 Divisadero Street
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(Cheques payable to: The Christian Community San Francisco)

Australia: Enquire for price at:
Matthew Bond
C/- 319 Auburn Road
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Perspectives

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No man is an island, entire of itself … any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind …

What does it mean to be human? Is it to be an individual – the thing that cannot be divided? This picture of our essence, of an ultimate, discrete and separate entity, distinct from all other entities, underlies modern consciousness.

There is only one problem: that final, separable and indivisible substance is nowhere to be found. If we picture it as a 'thing', analogous to the substances in the physical world, we have fallen behind the revolution in physics in the twentieth century, which has shown that the search for the final, smallest building block of matter is in vain. When physicists speak of matter nowadays, they use words like 'event' or 'process'.

But don't the creation stories show us how the spiritual world bequeaths human beings with their substance? When we look closer, we might realise that they too speak of processes, events: Adam receives God's breath; the gods bestow give the gift of a spark of their divine fire. Unless we imagine that Adam is supposed to breathe the breath in and never breathe out again, surely the point of the divine respiration is to stimulate Adam's own breathing. A spark is not a thing either: it is a moment in a process of combustion. It would seem that the core of

our being is not so much an unchanging substance as a process too.

A fascinating recent book, *Transcendence*, marshals all the evidence of evolutionary biology, archaeology and anthropology to demonstrate how our human journey started when we created culture. One of the painful observations of the lockdowns that many of us have experienced in the last months has been that we don't thrive in isolation from each other. Even parts of ourselves that we think of as our own private reality are the gifts of others: language, thought, our interior life. The hermit in her mountain-top retreat is a much a part of society as a politician, nurse or teacher. Our humanity can only unfold in community.

In recent years, this sense of community has grown to include the natural world, once seen as the dumb counterpart to our humanity; now we learn that even the trees are embedded in extraordinary networks of communication and cooperation. Where once we saw the success of an economy in its capacity to exploit the natural environment, we are learning to understand that we are enmeshed here too.

The public health crisis of the last months has confronted us with our interconnectedness in hitherto unknown ways. Decisions taken for good and ill in one part of the world have affected us all. This awareness could contain some seeds of hope: it could stimulate progress towards a truly global culture, where we are aware of the suffering that our actions cause, both near to home and far afield. If our awareness extends even further to our embeddedness in the higher worlds, we may find the inspirations we need to create a truly inclusive culture for the future.

Tom Ravetz

Whitsun, then and now

Jens-Peter Linde

The original festival of Shavuot, or Pentecost, was celebrated by the Jewish people fifty days after the Passover as the day of sacrifice of the first fruit of the harvest. As a celebration of giving, it was an answer to God's giving of the Torah to the Jews through Moses. Thus Pentecost was a grateful reciprocal gesture of human beings to the Divine at the altar of the temple, after this Divine first of all had reached down to mankind through the 'burning bush'.

This reciprocal gesture may even be seen in the creation of human beings in Genesis: from *ha Adama*, the earth, *ha Adam* the human being was created. But when the Elohim looked, they saw that this original Adam being was missing something; it needed *ezer*, spiritual help. And so one 'side' of Adam (*tsela* = side—not rib!) became Eve, his spirit help. What is seen usually as a division into the sexes thus becomes a complementary gesture: spirit quality is given to earthly substance. And in return, humankind proceeds to give earthly offerings to God: people are working the earth in the sweat of their brows and are giving birth in pain.

This conversation between what is heavenly and that which is of the earth continues into the time of the New Testament and also into the apocalyptic times of today. The divine offering of the Christ Being was sown into Jesus of Nazareth's being at his Baptism. It died into the earth on Good Friday, germinated at Easter and was harvested by the Divine at Ascension when the transubstantiated Christ was taken up into the 'realm of the clouds', the life sphere of the earth. Then—as first fruit of this harvest—the offering of the Holy Spirit into human beings was given, with the Whitsun flame revealing itself again, not in a burning bush, but in the flames on each apostle's head—on individuals in togetherness.

'Where two or three are gathered in my name I am in their midst' was becoming reality in the form of the Comforter, the Paraclete poured out over the apostles

Jens-Peter Linde is priest emeritus in Neustadt in Holstein, Germany.

and thereafter into those who let themselves be baptised in 'the name and the spirit' of Jesus Christ.

This Greek word *Paraclete* was being used in the Pentateuch translation of the Torah for the word ezer. In Genesis it was the spirit sent to help Adam and Eve. What could be seen as a polarisation into male and female qualities can now be witnessed as potential communion within a group of individuals (two or more) through the Comforter, their common spirit.

This mystery becomes vital in our apocalyptic (= revealing) times. Where adversarial spirit powers try to tempt people away from their earthly calling or squash them in the burden of their tasks, we can only rise up in strength when we consciously offer our good will to the Divine–and that is best done by individuals in togetherness. (The celebrating of the sacraments in a Christian community, or of the Bible Evening and Offering Service in Camphill, are good examples of that, as are marriage, and even teamwork in sport or in work—if a higher purpose can be seen.)

Then we will be graced, assuredly, for the conversation between heaven and earth can continue in truth. Sometimes the sentences in this conversation may be painful, but they will always reveal themselves as making sense—sometimes sooner, sometimes alas only later. If we have patience to wait for this revelation, faith will be given a chance to work, and also peace: the peace of the Comforter in the grace of his communion.

George Floyd and the fire of self-knowledge

Rev. Jonah Evans

In the gospel of Luke, Christ says 'I have come to throw fire upon the earth.' St. Paul said, 'Our God is a consuming fire.' And we can ask, now that we have experienced the Whitsun flame of the Holy Spirit: How do we maintain and cultivate this flame? How do we ever and again become enflamed with the Spirit?

We know that flames burn, bring light and warmth.

The fire of the Spirit brings light when we grasp new inspiration, life-filled understanding. We know it is the Holy Spirit because we feel enlivened.

The fire of the Spirit also brings warmth. When we are touched by the Spirit's fire, we feel the warmth of compassion—the capacity to connect with and feel empathy toward everything that is human.

And the fire of the Spirit burns. And this burning that we are called to welcome again and again if we want to cultivate Christ's flame—this is the burning flame of conscience. For the central task of the Holy Spirit, the fire of Christ, is to call us to account by awakening our conscience. And conscience always brings a kind of burning which we call shame, true shame. For shame, if it is true and not exaggerated, is the most precious form of fire because it awakens us to darknesses that are hidden in our souls, secretly influencing our actions and words. Real shame is truly good.

Many of you will remember the murder of George Floyd last year. As painful as it was to watch this event on youtube, I made myself look into the eyes of Derek Chauvin, the man who knelt on George's neck. And as I looked into his eyes, I saw no shame. No shame.

And yet, I also knew in that moment, that I too could do what Derek did. That darkness also lives in me. Derek could be me if my karmic circumstances had

Jonah Evans is a priest in Toronto and co-director of the Seminary in North America.

Listen*

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.

* I Kings 19:12

Megan Collins

been different. This is because I know that there is no evil on earth that is not possible in me. And this activity of learning to identify with humanity in all its forms, learning to see oneself in every human deed, this is one of the most important practices for cultivating the flame of the Spirit. This activity of identifying with and taking responsibility for evil in humanity, identifying oneself with humanity in all its forms, Rudolf Steiner calls the second condition of esoteric training. (This is found in his book *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds: How Is It Attained?*)

I allowed myself to feel the shame that could have been in Derek's heart. I did not do this because of some morbid obsession with pain and guilt. I did this because the practice of identifying with and taking responsibility for everything that is human *unites* mankind. It *unites* me with Christ Jesus who is suffering what we suffer. We are called to do this because it is the true way of unity, the very basis for becoming a member of the beloved community.

From this point of view, we can begin to see that the forces that would snuff out the flame of the Spirit work in two ways.

The first is convincing ourselves to bless our own denial. We bless our denial by deciding that we are already good, that we are not prejudiced in any way, that we have no evil in us. These thoughts are not helpful. For the Act of Consecration teaches us that darkness lives in our hearts at all times and is constantly flowing from us to God. The existence of this darkness in us is the very reason we make our offering to God. It is also why we pray, 'All evil be taken from my word…'—for darkness is located within me and must be constantly kept at bay. Not acknowledging my ever-present potential to act out of darkness serves to snuff out true shame in our hearts so that we can no longer burn.

Instead of this aspect of the Act of Consecration, one could just as well use the picture of the 'lower Guardian of the Threshold,' our 'double,' as the basis for understanding the part of this work involving the darkness within us. (The lower Guardian is likewise described in the book *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds*.) The encounter with the lower Guardian is the same as what we experience through these words of the Act of Consecration, but just more from a spiritual-sci-

entific perspective: the double as a being of 'evil' located within me that never goes away, that asks me to take up a relationship with it, to learn from it, and to take responsibility for it. The fact that this is *universally human* is important, as it teaches us that we are all called to be in an ever-deepening relationship with our own darkness, prejudice, and denial.

The second way that we allow the darkness in us to snuff out the flame of the Spirit is blame. Blame has its origin in our hearts as a deep, often unconscious desire to not take responsibility. We don't want to take responsibility because it is so painful—painful to our self-image. The tendency to blame is also strengthened in us by the thought that we actually deserve a life free from struggle, free from wounding and pain. This thought comes partly as a consequence of materialistic consumer culture. This is because as consumers, there is no value in wounds, illness, and pain, as they simply hinder me from taking pleasure in earthly treasures. For the true Christian, however, blame and the inner attitude of justified victimhood are so unhelpful because they cut us off from becoming enflamed with the image and likeness of Christ Jesus. This truth is revealed in the gospel of John when Christ tells Pilate, 'You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above…' In these words, we can see that Christ is not resigned but at peace with the fact that life is meant to have struggle, persecution, and unjustified wounds. These are given as divine. These difficulties, however, do not prevent Christ from speaking truth to power and taking responsibility for his task as a vital deed for the very meaning of existence. Christ Jesus shows us that the Spirit burns brightest when we decide to take up pain, battles, and wounds in the way they are meant for us. When we decide that, like Him, our divine mission is hidden in what oppresses us.

Dear friends, we now approach St. John's tide, where we will hear from the altar the importance of the 'health-bearing, guilt-conscious Word of Flame.' In this light, let us be reminded that the flames that we have seen burning our cities are only the projected shadow of this true flame that can burn in our hearts. This is the flame of conscience, the John Word, the flame that is filled with health and true shame.

May the consuming fire burn in us, that we continue to shine.

What I'm saying is not complete without you

Peter Howe

I don't use Facebook much and it was a friend who alerted me to the page. It belonged to a man I don't know well, though we once worked together on a project. I respected and liked him, recognising him as intelligent, able and—most important of qualities—kind. But here was his Facebook page: voicing ideas that were, in my opinion, idiotic and even dangerous, supported by information which was, at best, dubious, and sometimes shamelessly untrue, gathered from unreliable sources.

At around the same time, I happened to see a TV interview with a group of supporters of Donald Trump. They were all women: one black, two white, and one, I think, Puerto Rican. They were articulate, intelligent, with the best intentions for their communities where, I could imagine, they were sympathetic and kind mothers, wives, sisters and friends.

In both cases—my Facebook man and the Trump women—a horde of questions rose up and began to overwhelm me: How can warm-hearted, clear-headed people arrive at opinions about our world which are—to me—irrational and bigoted? How can they trust evidence which is so obviously skewed? Why do they listen to people who take pride in saying the opposite of what they really mean? Why is this happening, globally? Has some kind of mass hysteria taken hold? Have they been brainwashed by the cultures they associate with? Is it wilful or are they victims?

And they, of course, are thinking something similar about people like me. They would say I have been swayed by mass opinion and untrustworthy media; I'm not thinking for myself; I am driven by fear. So: which of us is right?

The Facebook man in particular brought all these current issues suddenly close to home and my foun-

Peter Howe is a member of The Christian Community living in Glasgow.

dations shook. My gentle Facebook acquaintance and I seemed to have fallen on opposing sides of a conflict—brothers caught up in a civil war. What, who, can I trust? Science? Spiritual science? The Bible? My community? My own inner sense of right and wrong? Where is the sense for truth located in the human being?

I phoned a friend, someone who had occasionally supported me in desperate moments.

'Extend interest,' he said. 'Ask the person with a different opinion: "Why do you think that? Where did you find that information? Have you witnessed that yourself? What is your experience?" Be genuinely interested, open to learn and to change, whilst being firm in yourself and knowing where you stand: "I have a different viewpoint. I trust different sources. My experience is this…"'

Shortly after this conversation, I was introduced to the ideas of the African-American spiritual mentor, Orland Bishop. He works in the deprived black communities of Los Angeles with young people caught in the prevalent culture of drugs, gangs, violence, prison, and cycles of hopelessness. He approaches anthroposophy from the direction of African spiritual tradition. Bishop does not promote himself, and his work is to be found piecemeal on YouTube and gathered in his book, The Seventh Shrine. One of his main themes is the Word, communication and connection. He makes a remark that the English language is designed (or has evolved, or is used) to exercise power. He means not so much colonial power—though perhaps that, too—but power in conversation and in making an argument.

I should say here that the English language is my first and enduring love: the language of Shakespeare and the King James Version, from Chaucer and Donne, through Dickens, Gerard Manley Hopkins and a thousand others, all the way to Carol Ann Duffy, Alice Oswald and Kae Tempest*. But, building on Rudolf Steiner's insights into language, Bishop points out that, 'English is language to acquire power. Its nature is to convince you that I'm right.' English is down-to-earth, logical, cut-and-dried; it is well-designed for me to make my point, lay out my argument and prove that my opinion is right and therefore yours is wrong. I persuade you, change your

mind, win over the audience. Polarised debate has been the basis of our democracies and political processes. But, says Bishop, there is another way to use language…

> *…when you hold reverence for it. Reverence will be, 'If I'm to host this word as a means of giving meaning and sharing it, I'm also inviting you to heal it. Because I know that [it] is not complete without you; what I'm saying is not complete without you.*
>
> *I have to remember that… that you're actually making what I say more true. And if I understand that, English works for anything. But if I'm making it law—that you have to take what I say as fact—it's actually not good.*
>
> *The romantics, those who wrote, and others, like Ralph Waldo Emerson, that was their craft. To make sure that love is in the language—feeling for it is there. The other is in the language when they're speaking to it. The stuff is rich with the feeling of the other being present.* conversations with Orland Bishop

I quote this transcript of a conversation between Bishop and Charles Eisenstein not only for its content but to indicate that in his style of speaking and writing, Bishop exemplifies the point he's making. His words are expressed in a way which is open-ended, not concrete and closed-down, yet also not vague or ambiguous. It invites activity in the listener, or reader, who divines meaning through the sense of thought as much as pins it down with the sense of word. Many people find him difficult to follow, and his friend Eisenstein acknowledges this. Taking it to another level, Bishop says:

> *Human speech invokes the self. Human speech awakens the self to be present. The nature of speech is not just to communicate words or ideas, but to communicate presence.* (From *The Seventh Shrine*)

The process of communication is completed by the listener, the primary aim being not to convince, to dominate and exercise power, but to connect and to awaken the self. Connection is everything.

I am reminded of something said during a Christian Community Schooling Course. At the time I was struggling with the language of the Act of Consecration and the rhetorical question was for me a gateway to go beyond problems of language:

Who is it who speaks through the words of the Service? Who is the Being, the Self, who is present in the stream of communication—and who relies on us for its completion?

It is something that we can ask in every conversation we have: Who is the self trying to communicate?

In these apocalyptic (i.e. 'revealing') times, there are no easy fixes. But there are seeds everywhere, if one looks around, new ideas germinating in the most unlikely places—often hidden by the detritus of the old, like cotyledons pushing up through manure. New capacities are becoming available to the human being. That includes me.

I find I am relieved of trying to work out the conundrum of who is right and who is wrong, and needing to own a final truth. Instead, I am entrusted with responsibility for a process:

- of extending interest and listening in the new ways which are opening up;
- of speaking, too, in new ways, not with brittle certainty—be that traditional dogmatism, or the new 'woke' correctness, or conspiratorial righteousness—but with the open-ended invitation to connect;
- of being, above all, present in new ways, and trying to find truth in the living being who becomes present whenever two or more of us connect.

*Kae changed their name from Kate last year.

The Seventh Shrine, Orland Bishop, Lindisfarne Books 2017
Conversations with Orland Bishop, https://charleseisenstein.org

Is it true? What is truth?

Paul Corman

More than a century ago, when Friedrich Nietzsche wrote, 'There are no facts, only interpretations', it was not the first blow to 'truth' in human history, but it most probably gave rise to or at least fed the ever more prevalent modern assumption or, better written, conviction that truth as an absolute does not exist, only small truths do and they are relative to one another, existing side by side with supposedly equal validity. However, many of our contemporaries, in a strange twist of this fatality, ardently believe that only their beliefs are true and that any belief different to theirs is not true. Thus, with one stroke of misguided conviction, relativism and absolutism are married in unholy wedlock, a nifty trick if you can get away with it. This is not the same as plain old-fashioned relativism in which absolute truth (absolutism) does not exist, but relative ones do: my truth is my truth and your truth is yours. That certainly has some merit to it, for there are, indeed, smaller or partial truths that are apparently contradictory, because they have not yet grasped the whole, but which in part at least contain bits and pieces of truth. The current situation tends, as we can clearly experience in today's world, to lead us to be utterly divided and absolutely intolerant of any other truth than our own. Relativism becomes absolutism. This has led to such contradictory concepts as 'alternative facts' and 'fake news'. Of course, some news is not true, some of it is made up and fake, but then it shouldn't deserve to be called news. Those who cry loudest about 'fake news', mean that certain news is fake and false, because it is contrary to what their convictions insist is true. Again, we come face to face with a modern, irreal hybrid: relative-absolutism. And the concept of 'alternative facts' is another thought-pretzel. Either something is factual, real and provable or it is not a fact, at least not yet. Alternative facts do not exist. Facts are true; false 'facts', alternative 'facts', cannot exist. They are lies dressed up as convictions and parading around to look like truths.

Paul Corman is a priest emeritus of The Christian Community.

This takes us to the present all-pervasive world of conspiracies and conspiracy theories, all of which, no matter where they may come from or by whom propagated, by their very nature of being a 'theory', are not yet proven, so not yet true. They are theories and when we elevate them, without proper methods and proofs, to the realm of truth, theories become convictions which we feel obligated to defend tooth and nail against anything that presents itself as something which we do not hold to be self-evident or even a little bit evident. It may be of little comfort, but it is astounding that Nietzsche also wrote: 'Convictions are more dangerous foes of truth than lies'.

Some will think that all of this is a political problem. I would suggest that it may appear so, but fundamentally it is a spiritual and religious problem. When we confuse theory with conviction and conviction with truth, we do grave damage to our social discourse, to our own health and to that of others. We do damage to the realm of thought, divine thought, the home and birth place of language, of the Logos, of the Christ himself; as the Evangelist John, writes: 'In the beginning was the Word (Logos) and the Word was with God and the Word was God'.

Christ says of Himself: 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life' (John 14:6), and before He was sentenced to die on the cross, some of the last words—always expressions of His own logos substance—that He heard, were phrased as the monumental question by Pontius Pilate: What is truth? We have on the one hand an absolute in the statement that the essence of Christ, of His being and His being in us, is the 'I Am the Truth'. On the other hand, we have the very real question that comes from an honest query, derived from the state of separation of the human condition, in which the human being no longer knows for sure whether absolute truth exists and must come to terms with relative truth. This is still our situation today . Both absolute truth and relative truth should be able to live in harmony, side by side. We should be able to live with them in a more perfect union than we seem to be able to do at the present time. We can take this condition as a loss and tragedy, which of course it is, but we can also take it as a challenge and a path to be taken forward toward higher knowledge.

Let us look for a moment at the mysteries that language holds in the words we have at our disposal to express the concept of 'truth'.

The English word is derived from a proto-Indo-European root, *deru*, whose basic meaning is 'firm', 'solid'. From this same root, Latin gave birth to *ver* (veritas), the Latin root word that means 'truth' or 'true'. This root is also found in a number of English words, like 'verdict', 'verify' and 'veracity'. When we think or speak of 'truth' in English we are referring to firmness and solidity, something fundamental to our existence and that can be both absolute and relative, both personal and collective, both objective and subjective.

Since we are dealing with this topic in a religious context, it will be helpful to look at the words for 'truth' in the Hebrew and Greek in which the Bible was written.

In the Hebrew scriptures we find two words for truth:

אֱמֶת (emet), a feminine noun that like the English, means 'firmness', 'faithfulness', 'truth', and

קשְׁט (qoshet), a masculine noun that comes from an otherwise unused root meaning 'to be balanced', 'distributed with equity', as in something evenly weighed, an accurate and true measure.

One can gather from these Hebrew words and their meaning that for Hebrew thought, 'truth' is something that has to do both with the divine and with humanity. The firmness of God's creative work as the basis of all life, is absolute. When humans have to deal with each other in the earthly sphere, it requires finding a balance and an honesty that doesn't cheat one's fellow man on what is correct, equitable and real. 'Qoshet' can be considered a more subjective, social, 'relative' aspect of truth, while 'emet' would be an objective, even absolute aspect. However, we must consider that in the Old Testament what was equitable and balanced and fair in our dealings with our fellow humans was given to us as commandments or 'mitzvot' by God. We see here, too, that absolutism and relativism can live in harmony.

The Greeks had a different take on 'truth' as evidenced by the Greek word used in the New Testament, ἀλήθεια (alethia). It is often translated as 'unclosedness', 'unconcealedness', or 'revelation'. All of which are not very accurate translations, although they can be considered as related to 'truth'. The literal meaning of the word ἀ–λήθεια is 'un-forgetting', in other words, 'remembering'. For the Greeks, this world and the world of the spirit, the world of the dead, were separated by a

river, called the Lethe stream. A soul, before it could incarnate in the earthly sphere, had to swim through the Lethe stream, the stream of forgetfulness, in order to forget all that it had experienced in the realm of spirit. The same was true for a newly departed soul. Before it could enter again into the realm of spirit, it had to swim through the same Lethe stream and forget details of the past Earth life. 'A' is a Greek prefix that means 'un' or 'not'. A-letheia would then mean 'not forgetting'. Alethia is most commonly translated as 'truth'. Truth, for the Greeks, was an act of remembering what they had experienced in the realm of spirit before incarnating, and recognising it in some aspect of life on Earth. So, truth was revelation, or better described, an act of recalling prenatal spirit thought, ideas and pictures. Truth was, indeed, the state of something spiritual becoming evident, of being revealed. Aletheia, thus, was considered factuality and earthly reality. Truth was spirit objectivity revealing itself to the subjective human mind and heart.

Of all the four Evangelists, John was the one most concerned with the concept of truth. We have seen above that for him, Christ was the creative Logos-Word. At the end of his Prologue, he writes: 'For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.' (John1:17). One could say that for John, writing in a Greek sense, Christ is the revelation of all that is true, that He is Truth on Earth. Later in John 14:6, as we read above, he lets Christ confirm this about Himself: 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life'. There are other moments when John shows Christ grappling, for Himself and for us, with what truth is all about. John 8:32, 'The truth shall make you free', or John 15:26 where the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Truth sent from God, and finally Pilate's fatal question, John 18:38, 'What is truth?', which leaves to us the task to continue to grapple with this central human-divine question.

We do continue to grapple with it, nowadays almost on a daily basis, in our social encounters and dealings and through the vastness of social media. Even in the Act of Consecration of Man, though in a somewhat indirect manner, we are grappling with the question. The service does not mention the word 'truth'; it does, however, mention 'all *true* Christians who are born' and 'the attainment of *true* salvation', leaving us with the obvious looming counter-question: 'Are there un- or not-true Christians who are born?', and if so, who decides who is and who

is not a 'true Christian'? I think not any of us should have that power over any others of us, and yet that is exactly what the tendency seems to be today: 'Those who do not believe as we do, are not true Christians'. What arrogance, what presumption has invaded the sacredness of modern religious space!

Still the question of what 'true Christians' and what 'true salvation' may mean is a serious one and deserves to be seriously considered. If that were not the case, these words would not appear in the Act of Consecration. Quite possibly they have little or nothing to do with a judgement of who is or who isn't a true Christian, but rather, perhaps, with the central act of becoming Christian: struggling with 'I am the Truth', with what truth is and means. And then there is 'true salvation', begging the question again: 'Is there untrue or false salvation?', and if so, what would that be like? Answers can be given, but my answers could well not be your answers and more to the point is the sense that can arise from these contemplations: the process of becoming a Christian must involve a struggle with these true questions about truth.

To close this contemplation, the following two quotes may be helpful in our struggle for truth:

> *If you shut your door to all errors, truth will be shut out as well.*
>
> Rabindranath Tagore

> *It is not the possession of Truth, but rather the pursuit of Truth by which the human being extends its powers and in which its ever-growing perfectibility is to be found. Possession makes us passive, indolent, and proud. If God were to hold all Truth concealed in his right hand, and in his left only the steady and diligent search for Truth, albeit with the proviso that I would always and forever err in the process, and offer me the choice between the two, I would, with all humility, fall down before Him and say: Father, give me what you have in your left hand.*
>
> Gotthold Ephraim Lessing

Preaching a baptism of repentance

Rosebuds
Prepare to
Blossom and welcome
The sun. So John the Baptist
Prepared his people
For the flame
Of love.

Thorny
Paths become
Smooth when we heed the
Call for 'Metanoia' and*
Allow God's grace to
Singe away
The Blues.

May destiny teach
My wandering wants always
To welcome my way.

24. VI. 2010
Week of St. John's, Day 2

* = Changing of heart and mind

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in Verses of Sermons by Jens-Peter Linde

Islands – paradise or purgatory?

Kevin Street

So, I'll get the quote—but the full quote—out of the way to begin with:

> *No man is an island, entire of itself;*
> *every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main;*
> *if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less,*
> *as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of*
> *your friends or of your own were;*
> *any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved*
> *in mankind,*
> *and therefore, never send to know for whom the bells*
> *tolls; it tolls for thee.* John Donne, Meditation XVII,
> *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, 1624

Islands—for many of us, the very word conjures up escape, peace, a sense of being at one with the elements in a beneficial way. But there looms too the possibility of isolation, of an escapism that might not be entirely healthy. No doubt some reading this will have detected in John Donne a viewpoint of Brexit, and although understandable, clearly this isn't his primary concern. He wishes to point out that as individuals we have a desperate need of others in order to fulfil ourselves.

This was well explored in a short story by D. H. Lawrence, *The Man Who Loved Islands* (1927). In it, 'the Master', a man of some fortune, ruled over the first island, where at first all went well. But then strained human relationships and growing debt forced him to abandon what had once been paradise, to move to a second smaller island, with only a handful of tenants from the first island. Again, all

Kevin Street is a member of The Christian Community in Stourbridge and edits the UK Newsletter.

seemed to go well at first, but this time it was his relationship with his housekeeper's daughter that disrupted his peace, with her becoming pregnant with their child. Loathing all thoughts of the future of their relationship, he decamped to his third and final island, not more than a lump of rock with a few sheep and a cat, where he had a simple shelter built. Contact with the outside world was just enough to keep him supplied, and there he lived in total isolation until even the sheep irritated and revulsed him:

> *And the hustle and the horror of getting the sheep caught and tied and put on the ship made him loathe with profound revulsion the whole of animal creation. What repulsive god invented animals, and evil smelling men? To his nostrils the fishermen and the sheep alike smelled foul; an uncleanness on the fresh earth.*

Finally as snows and storms batter his island, we can only assume that he dies, alone and totally disorientated.

An extreme parable perhaps, but one which might resonate even more in our current situation. When I agreed to write a piece on islands, some eighteen months ago (yes, there is considerable forward planning in the editorial team!), Covid-19 and its ramifications couldn't even have been suggested as a bad dream, but the consequences of social distancing, screening, isolation, the virtual shutdown of society, all seem to highlight even more the human need for contact and relationships that can be conducted in person, hand in hand, embrace to embrace. The initial novelty of spring birdsong in a traffic-free world, of being able to conduct Zoom meetings without the inconvenience of travel—all have become memories for the majority who now wish to abandon their Covid islands and move back into a society of real relationships.

This vital need for human connection is often referred to by Rudolf Steiner. In the lecture cycle 'Problems of Society', he writes:

> *Today people are in a sense driven asunder, and have to seek and reconnect with each other in a quite different way. …Nowadays people know little about each other… People do not generally penetrate to the depths of each other's soul, but this is what must be found in a deeper social organism: new insight into human nature must enter human evolution.* Zurich, February 4, 1919

This separation is identified as an increasingly Ahrimanic activity, one to be countered in every possible way. Retreating to an island to escape is not an option!

However, an uncertain future lies ahead and it's one that again Steiner commented about on several occasions. The age when humans would become 'blended' with machines was dawning and this whole scenario has been well described in an article in *Perspectives* (December 2017–February 2018) by Andrew Linnell: 'Preparing for the future'. In it, he charts the rise of our reliance on machines, and how this will evolve into an age of robotics and Artificial Intelligence, leading to an end to physical incarnation in 6000 AD. Along this path though (is the time-scale shortening?) there still remains the need for human interactions, and elsewhere Steiner comments that the machine age will come, but whether it is controlled by humans of goodwill, working for the common good, or by a small group intent on self interest and profit, remains a challenge to human relationships. The future of these relationships is crucial at so many levels and demands of us the increasing awareness of others, at something more than a superficial level.

If Steiner seems to be amazingly prescient in his views of the future, then perhaps even more remarkable is E. M. Foster. Most of us will know his novels dealing with the complexities of human relationships in Edwardian society, but in 1909 he wrote a novella, *The Machine Stops*. In it, we are projected into a future where humans have retreated below the surface of the earth, and all their needs are met by the Machine. Shortly after birth children are reared in communal nurseries and then allocated a room somewhere—and in this room their needs are met, using a device to communicate, very much like a hand-held tablet, with which they can 'Zoom' anywhere and anyone. A device very much like Alexa serves their wants. Into this we are introduced to Kuno and his mother Vashti, separated by thousands of miles, and the plot develops round Kuno's brief escape to the surface of the planet in defiance of the Machine. It transpires that the Machine is maintained by despoiling the natural environment of raw materials—but the day comes when these are exhausted, and as the Machine starts to malfunction, no one has the knowledge or skills to repair it. Most of humanity finally perish as their life support system fails. Forster comments:

> *In certain directions human intercourse had advanced enormously…but humanity in its desire for comfort had overreached itself. It had exploited the riches of nature too far. Quietly and complacently it was sinking into decadence, and progress had come to mean progress of the Machine.*

Living isolated in their allocated 'cells', humans wanted for nothing—but lacked everything. Vashti was horrified that Kuno wanted to meet her face to face; as for her, they could meet perfectly well through the Machine. That this was written in 1909 is astonishing, and that the last year has seen much of this isolation made technically possible by Zoom, the internet, the 'device', and a population convinced, for better or worse, that this is the only way to deal with the threat of Covid-19, serves as a reminder as to where isolation might ultimately lead if future governments and organisations deem it 'best' for the people to 'streamline' their lives using advanced technology.

Forster also touches on another repercussion of leading a narrow, isolated life in one's own bubble—that of over-specialism, and the disempowerment of humans in their understanding of how things work as a whole. No one knows how to repair the malfunctioning Machine, even though it was humans who created it. Back to 2021: the TV breaks, there are no more TV repairers to come out and fix it, so it is thrown away and

a new one easily bought. A patient suffering from problems with their hand due to a shoulder injury is told that she can have an appointment with a hand specialist immediately, but there is a long waiting list for the shoulder specialist. Our very bodies are becoming broken into isolated parts, where one specialist cannot talk to another. Not only are we on islands isolated from each other, we are becoming islands in our very being. The thought of body, mind, soul and spirit as being intrinsically one are the thoughts of a minority.

All might not be gloom and doom though. We witness the phenomena of heart transplant patients taking on aspects of their donor's personality, often totally at odds with how they were before the transplant. There is a growing realisation that the biome of the gut is responsible for more than digestion, and that every major organ has its own cellular memory, linking to the whole. Questions are asked of the brain in its relation to thinking, and whether mind is more than brain—and if so, where can we find it? Through all of this, we might turn to St Paul writing in 1 Corinthians 12:15–26, of the total reliance each part of the body (and therefore, each member of society) has on the other, with the concluding verse:

If one part suffers, every part suffers with it;
if one part be honoured, every part rejoices with it.

This deep wisdom, lost really from the growing rationalism of the eighteenth century that came to regard our bodies as a collection of components that can be tinkered with in isolation, is slowly emerging again, and although the far future will undoubtedly see our being transforming into something other than the earthbound physical entity we regard as 'us' at the moment, there is still much to be done in reaching out to others, and to ourselves.

I had a memory of islands from the song performed by Harry Belafonte in the film of the same name, *Island in the Sun* made in 1957. I seemed to think of it in the terms of a catchy calypso, and refreshed my memory by turning to YouTube. Belafonte sings simply, seated on a stool before a very plain background. I'm sure that today this would have to be interspersed with bikini-clad beauties running along a surf-splashed sun-soaked beach with palm trees swaying beneath a bleached blue sky. No—he sings, just sings, of a wistful appreciation of his heritage, even though it was founded on

slavery, of the gifts of sun and earth and how they help to ground him in his daily life. Slow, appreciative, connected—these are the qualities of his performance.

Might this be the way we need today to look at islands, both figurative and metaphorical? From time to time we do need to step back, to retreat, to visit an Iona, and to come to appreciate the depths of being that such surroundings can engender. On a daily basis too we need those moments of quiet, peace and aloneness when we are enabled to reconnect out of consciousness with the greater themes of the day. We sit on our own during the Act of Consecration turning our gaze, and thoughts, to the island that stands before us—the altar. And then, bags packed, we return to the mainland, reinvigorated; we leave our room to join again with the family; we come together and stand before the altar, before receiving a shared communion and the peace, and dispersing to our lives outside.

Islands, as phenomena of physical geography are always with us, and their attraction is universal. They have their place, and we can relate to them healthily, renewing and redefining our place in the wider world. Metaphorical islands, too, enable us to step out of our daily contact with others to reflect on and strengthen our whole world of relationships. If I am taken to A&E with a severe hand injury, I would value the expertise of a specialist before being discharged and finding ways of working again with my whole body in a holistic way whilst my hand heals. Islands might be wonderful, but ultimately, our work, our relationships and our outlook all tell us that we have to get back to the mainland and the destiny of each day.

Picking up then on Harry Belafonte, let's finish with his words echoing in our ears:

Oh, island in the sun
Willed to me by my father's hand
All my days I will sing in praise
Of your forest, waters, your shining sand
As morning breaks the heaven on high
I lift my heavy load to the sky
Sun comes down with a burning glow
Mingles my sweat with the earth below.

Journeys to the self

Deborah Ravetz

I have always been fascinated to learn what can lead powerful people to do great harm. The reason I am so affected by such revelations is that we can often find that we face the same challenges as they do, on the smaller stage of our lives. Then, the distance between those we might think of as evil, and the rest of us is suddenly diminished. We ourselves in them, and them in us, instead of placing them in a different category from us.

Recently I listened to an interview with Michael Cohen, Anthony Scaramucci and Anthony Schwartz, three men who were in the public eye in the USA because of their involvement with Donald Trump. Each described how they had become involved with the ex-president. They then described what had caused them to cease being Donald Trump's loyal aides and to become some of his severest critics. Listening to their stories, I became aware of the small human frailties which had ended in them becoming so alienated from their true selves. Through understanding this, I ceased seeing them as monsters; they became evolving human beings.

Schwartz was the ghost writer of Trump's book, *The Art of the Deal*. This book inspired many aspiring businesspeople to follow Trump's model. Cohen and Scaramucci worked for Trump for ten and seven years respectively. In the interview they were asked what motivated them to join Trump and to do things which they felt would haunt them for the rest of their lives.

Schwartz admitted that he had never trusted Donald Trump but that he had ignored his conscience because the book contract was so lucrative. What drove his pursuit of wealth was a frailty that he felt that he shared with many American men. This is a sense of worthlessness that resulted from his never having felt recognised and encouraged by his parents, particularly his father. Trump stood as an example of someone who seemed to have overcome this sense of worthlessness by pursuing a false sense of self that comes with fame, wealth and power.

Deborah Ravetz is a member of The Christian Community in Forest Row and part of the editorial team of Perspectives.

The others' accounts were similar: the glamour and fame of Trump's life, which he lived so extravagantly and publicly, had inspired these three men to imitate him. Stardom, fame and power gave them a sense that they too had lived their lives largely and risen above the mediocrity of the norm. This had made them lose touch with their moral compass and to do and say things which would eventually endanger democracy in America.

Cutting their ties with Trump felt to them like emerging from a cult. Asked what had changed, one of them described how suffering at the hand of Trump had educated him and made him aware of the consequences of his actions. His pain had brought his unquestioning obedience to an end: he began to think for himself and, most importantly, to develop empathy. All three men are now working on mitigating all the divisive impulses that they helped to inflame in society.

Rudolf Steiner describes three qualities essential for a healthy social life. They are a love of truth, responsibility for others and courage for destiny. At the beginning of Trump's presidency, I was very shocked to hear a White House press officer countering a factual statement with a lie which she called, 'alternative facts'. In response to this extraordinary act, people wanting to protect democracy made it their business to record every untruth uttered during the next four years. This ended with the great lie regarding who won the election. In my lifetime, the words, 'What is truth?' have never seemed more important and more elusive. Never had it seemed more important to develop a sense of responsibility for others and the courage not to 'blank out' the seriousness of the situation, but rather to own that we are responsible for helping to form the world we want to live in.

I have searched long and hard for images of true personhood and service. One such figure is a character from literature: Dorothea, heroine of George Eliot's novel, *Middlemarch*. Although she is a figure born from imagination, her journey is a model for what is possible in terms of self-knowledge and true success. She is brave, loving and sincere. She is also remarkably intelligent and beautiful. However, she lacks all life experience. This makes her prone to making unwise decisions. As a woman of her time, she has no proper outlet for her great gifts. Instead, she tries to do the good by marrying someone whom she believes to be a great man, serving him so that he will be able to do good.

Her marriage is a disaster mainly because she has misjudged the true character of Dr Casaubon, her husband. After his death she suffers the pain that comes with the recognition of her mistake. She begins to know herself and the world more clearly. She gives up her fortune and marries again, this time to someone worthy of her ideals. This means giving up her place among the wealthy and influential and entering a life of comparative obscurity. Nevertheless, this is how Eliot describes Dorothea at the end of the novel:

> *But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.*

This image of achievement that consists in making the world better for others rather than seeking recognition for ourselves, runs counter to the popular image of success. Perhaps the greatest challenge that we face is to develop the courage and wisdom that will so ground us in our sense of self that we have no need to be recognised. An older mentor once spoke to me about how to become secure in real selfhood. This was someone who had once been deeply addicted to this negative, worldly recognition. He described how he had struggled with many different kind of addictions and how he had finally found a sense of his own worth through keeping his promises to himself. Released from the craving for love and recognition from without, he became a person who gave others love and recognition.

Michael Cohen, Anthony Scaramucci and Anthony Schwartz know what it is to lose their way in life. Interestingly, this has not made them scathing about those who still follow Donald Trump. Instead, they seek to understand others and to meet difference with empathy. Their failure has made them men of character. Schwartz said that he had learned not to be defensive about his failings but to learn from them and do better. Embracing failure and committing to learning to do better is an essential precondition for the development of our true sense of self. Embracing this would mean that our families, our communities, our governments would be made up of people who were there for the needs of the world rather than to mitigate their own sense of worthlessness. Is this true selfhood and true power? Is this how we become part of what Eliot calls ‘the growing good of the world’?

Scottish Islands

Gabriele Kuhn

Living in Scotland is not only living on a 'big' island (as part of the UK) but also being surrounded by many smaller islands. Scotland can claim over 900 offshore islands of which the bulk is part of the Inner and Outer Hebrides, Orkney and Shetland. However, there are also clusters of islands in the Firth of Forth, Firth of Clyde and Solway Firth. Of all these islands only ninety-four are permanently inhabited.

The geology and geomorphology vary greatly from island to island, from impressive rocky mountains (Skye and Mull) to low-lying, flat ones. However, what they all have in common is very old bedrock. Many are formed from Lewisian gneiss, about three billion years ago; others, like Orkney, have the characteristic Old Red Sandstone from about 400 million years.

The culture was influenced through successive invasions from the Celts, the Vikings and other Norse people and eventually by the English. To this day this heritage can be felt and seen on the islands. There is a wealth of archaeological evidence of the past and in the names and the language of the people, history lives on. There are still numerous Gaelic speaking islands.

Quite a number of places are associated with the early Irish Christian missionaries, in particular St Columba who landed on Iona in 563 AD. He was very energetic in his work and in addition to converting the Picts to Christianity he founded several churches in the Hebrides and turned his monastery at Iona into a school for missionaries.

Gabriele Kuhn is a member of The Christian Community in Edinburgh and manages the subscriptions of Perspectives.

There are other holy islands associated with saints: Egilsay (part of the Orkney Islands) is the burial place of St. Magnus. Inchcailloch, an island on Loch Lomond, is where St Kentingern lived and died as a hermit. Inchcolm, in the Firth of Forth, was visited by St Columba and named after him. An abbey was

founded there and a hermit lived on the island from the twelfth century. Isle of May is an island on the outer Firth of Forth which is now best known for its bird-watching opportunities. It is also home to the remains of the chapel of St Ethernan, the priory of St Adrian, and is possibly the burial site of the seventh century saint, Ethernan. Lismore, in Argyll, is home to the remains of a Celtic cathedral originally founded by St Moulag in the sixth century.

Quite a number of smaller islands were depopulated during the Highland Clearances by forced eviction (18–19th century). But emigration from islands continued into the twentieth century. In 1930 the remaining population of Hirta (near St Kilda) had to be evacuated as a survival on this rocky outcrop by means of crofting was no longer possible and the provisions of food supplies from the mainland by ship proved to be very difficult, at times even impossible, because of the treacherous seas and tides.

Many of the islands are surrounded by strong tides and currents, the most famous of which is Corrievreckan Whirlpool: 'The world's third largest whirlpool, located in the Gulf of Corryvreckan between

the islands of Scarba and Jura in the Inner Hebrides, is powered by the exceptional tidal races flowing around a rocky pinnacle which rises up 91m (298 feet) from the sea-bed to within 29m (95 feet) of the surface. This treacherous phenomenon varies in intensity both with the time of day and through the year, from flat-calm to a turbulent vortex.' (Wikipedia)

Weather and tides are very much part of island life. Reaching the island of your choice by ferry can be quite an experience. Adverse conditions at times make crossings impossible. However, when safely moored after a choppy journey in strong winds and wild seas, one is grateful for the solid ground under one's feet. The power of the elements can be felt so much more in these parts of Scotland.

Living on an island is something many of us dream about: being part of a community which is creating, living and sharing its own 'world', away from the hustle and bustle of mainland consumerism. But it also means voluntarily forsaking many things we thought we couldn't live without in part or altogether: theatre, concerts, hospital access and/or reduced medical treatment, travelling to other parts of the country (as ferries and flights often only operate on certain days). Life under these circumstances takes on a very different quality as one can no longer depend on what was unlimited on offer in the past. Instead we are asked to offer something for the benefit of all of the island community. Being there for each other is sharing our life and destiny with others.

Maybe this way of life sounds similar to what we are experiencing today: the past year has demonstrated what it is like to live on an island, our own island. Suddenly we had to adapt to a situation where the world around us took on a different dimension. Our immediate surrounding / neighbourhood became tangible and was no longer something we simply knew existed. Suddenly we met each other, heard the birds sing and had conversations with people we did not know but had lived next door to for the past ten years! New possibilities have opened up. It is up to us on our island to either despair because of the restrictions or learn to create our own new world and reach out to all those other islands and together build a new continent for the future.

Religion can and will change the world

Ulrich Meier in conversation with João Torunsky

UM | The Christian Community is in its centenary year. There will be a change in the central leadership of the priesthood (Circle of Seven) when you are inducted as Erzoberlenker at the s ynod in Berlin in June. I would like to take this threshold moment as the topic of today's conversation, particularly with regard to the future. However, I wonder whether we might begin with an anecdote from your childhood that shows something of your religious journey.

JT | With pleasure! I had two experiences when I was seven years old that had a great impact on my religious path. I grew up in the very south of Brazil in a Catholic family. We hardly attended church but my family was very connected to spiritualism, which is quite common in Brazil. When it was time to receive my first communion, I had to make my first confession. We were given a list of every sin that a child and young person could commit. I learned a lot about what I could have done, but I hadn't done any of it! Still, I had to choose something to confess, even though I hadn't done it, and accept a penance so that I could receive absolution and my first communion. A few days after the communion, I went to have my picture taken for the family album. In the middle of the studio was a picture of Christ, larger than life-size, holding out the host to me. I was supposed to kneel down so that the photo would look as if I were receiving the host directly from Christ. I was deeply trembling as I knelt before the image of Christ . However, when I knelt down, I could see that the image was mounted on stiff board, supported by a broomstick. The beautiful picture was nothing but an illusion! This experience had a strong impact on me as a seven-year-old. It didn't shake my sense of religiousness, but it turned me away, even as a child, from institutions, from the church.

João Torunsky

UM | You have been active as a priest in The Christian Community since 1985.
Would you also tell us something of your time at the seminary?

JT | My main impulse to come to the seminary was to get to know anthroposophy. Before that I did not have such a great impulse to delve into religious content. At that time Friedrich Benesch, Hans-Werner Schroeder, Gérard Klockenbring and Michael Debus were seminary directors. The

opportunity to encounter and study anthroposophy in depth in this way made a deep impression on me and also left a deep mark on me. That is one experience for which I am very grateful. The other was: the hierarchical authority, the manners in the seminary at that time— I was very rebellious. On the one hand, I was interested in absorbing what I was learning; on the other, I strongly resisted the authoritarian structures. I was the first Brazilian who had the prospect of being ordained, so I was tolerated with a little more patience and I got through the seminary.

UM | I remember the experience at a synod which I would like to address as the third biographical station in our conversation. I can still see you in front of the international synod of priests. You had placed a great whale bone behind you. Whilst the bone was impressive, what touched me more was the story you told about it.
JT | Yes, I can hint at it a little. This whale bone has been with me since 1999. I found it in a time of deep crisis, when I had been granted some leave from priesthood. I was staying on a fjord in the far north of Norway. Both my professional life and my personal life were in turmoil.

Once, in the middle of the arctic night, I was walking on the beach when I saw a whale's vertebra on a large rock. It felt like a gift. This gift was connected to a deep inner experience—the deepest inner experience I have had in my life, which is difficult to describe. It wasn't hearing a voice as I hear you talking to me now; it was like hearing that it is indeed my mission in life, in this incarnation, to be a priest in The Christian Community. From that difficult time in Norway, I brought this bone as a memory, as a talisman . Since then, I have felt an unshakeable certainty that it is my task in this life to be a priest in The Christian Community, to learn to celebrate and, as far as I can, to help people so that they can find their way in life.

UM | How long have you been a lenker?
JT | I worked as a priest in four different congregations in Württemberg for twenty-five years, from 1985 to 2010. In 2010 I became the lenker for Württemberg until 2015, when I moved to Brazil and became the lenker for South America.

UM | Is there an aspect of the priesthood that is particularly close to your heart for our time, for the next period of our development?
JT | I see our whole task as framed by two challenges that Rudolf Steiner gave to the founders of The Christian Community 100 years ago. When they first approached him for help, he posed what he called the 'Cardinal Question.' By this he meant the fundamental question of whether something which belongs to the religious or moral life, something that has to do with our ideals, can bring about a change in the sense-perceptible, material world, which is determined by natural causality. In natural causality, the past always determines the future. Our ideals, our impulses of will, our feelings and thoughts of a religious and moral nature are connected with the future. The crucial question is whether these two worlds merely exist alongside each other. If this were so, it might be pleasant to

experience the Act of Consecration of Man, to pray and think of high ideals, but it would have no meaning for the world. Our challenge is to recognise and work out of the conviction that religious ideas can change the world right down to the level of matter.

UM | I believe that this cardinal question is at the same time deeply serious and joyful, especially in our current world situation. If this becomes the ideal of our Christianity, then our work could gain a whole new significance, even in this world crisis with the pandemic and its social consequences.

JT | That's it! The conviction that the spiritual, the soul, our sensations, our thoughts and our ideals really change something in the world, this is what prevents us from being shackled by materialism. But it is also not enough to have only a subjective feeling: we will need to experience it. To understand more precisely how it works, we need anthroposophy, not as a set of answers, but as a way of understanding. In my opinion, the central task of our priesthood is really to bring into the world this attitude and this realisation that morality, spirituality, religiosity can have an effect in the world of causality, an effect that draws something from the future into the present.

UM | I would love to hear more about the other challenge, the 'Dominus' question, the problem of the Dominus, because it leads us over to the topic of leadership.

JT | What Steiner calls the Dominus question is connected to how we as priests work in the social sphere. Historically, there have always been spiritual guides, initiates and priests, who led humanity. Such leaders had the task of leading the others from a more highly developed consciousness. This is the attitude that works today in relation to children. As adults, we are awake in that realm where they are not yet conscious: their own individuality, their I. We have to take responsibility and make decisions for them. And that is how religion has worked in the past. But what about now, in a time when every person can have access to their own I? Are priests like shepherds who go in front of their flock, who have to follow? In John's Gospel, the Good Shepherd is not good primarily because he leads his sheep but because gives up his life for the sheep. Our task as religious leaders today is to help people find their own self, their higher self. This is what excites me about being a priest: not telling others what to do, but helping them to take charge of their own lives out of their own freedom, in alignment with themselves.

UM | Revd Torunsky, you are about to take on the role of Erzoberlenker, one of the three Oberlenkers and a member of the Circle of Seven. Would you like to tell us some of the ideals that you bring to these roles?

JT | Looking inwards: how do we foster ever more fruitful cooperation? We have been working hard on this for a hundred years, and the challenges grow ever greater. I could put the same question in religious terms: How do we become a Pentecostal community? Let me explain what I mean.

When I am alone, I may have an idea, which arouses my will to bring it about. As long as I work alone, that is exactly the right thing to do. When I

work with others, I also need to have good ideas. And so must everyone else! But the impulse to make my idea a reality becomes a problem when everyone else feels the same way about their idea. How can we learn to have good ideas, to share them and to let go of the will that is connected with our own idea and to try to feel as committed to bringing about someone else's idea?

Looking outwards into the world, I think that our task is to reach those people who, in my experience, are increasingly searching for spirituality and religion today. People are hungry; they are searching for spirituality, for religion, for real knowledge of the spirit. And we have something to offer them; we can walk a path together with these people. But they are not looking for a church in the sense of a religious institution. The Creed reveals the true meaning of the word 'church' as a spiritual body. And now we have the problem that over the last hundred years we have created forms, buildings, etc., for which I am deeply grateful. They form the basis for the present and the future. It is imperative that we continue to nurture that. But at the same time, the forms create an image that often obscures the fact that we are not an institutional church just like all the others. How can people experience us as a source, a wellspring for inspiration, for spiritual nourishment and help? I think that is difficult. It is a different challenge from what you face when you are founding something completely new. We have to recognise that what has been created for the last hundred years is our body; it is our history, the ground on which we can grow and stand. But fewer and fewer people are looking for an outer form; they are looking for what we have inside.

UM | Just a very brief look at the conference that will take place in October 2022 in Dortmund. Do you have a wish for this conference?

JT | I am very occupied at the moment with the question of Nicodemus in the Gospel of St John: How can someone be born again? Can we return to the womb, so that we can be born again? Looking towards a new century, we could ask: How can The Christian Community be founded anew? Should it go back a hundred years to its origin to be founded anew? Of course not! But what does Christ's answer to Nicodemus mean for us today? Whoever is not born of the vital power of the water and of the Spirit has no access to what is to come. We need to recapture our own founding impulse, which incarnated into the world a hundred years ago, in such a way that we really work out of the Spirit, as it says in the Gospel of John, like the wind. We don't know where it comes from or where it goes, but it is at work everywhere. There is no longer any security. Our task is no longer to build firm foundations in the twenty-first century. We have to learn to walk on water, to work with creative forces, with the realm of life, and to be like the wind. You don't know where you're coming from or where you're going, but you're glad when something blows and takes you a little further.

UM | Thank you very much, Revd Torunsky, for this stimulating conversation!

About the cover art

Jane Chase is a Biographical Counsellor and Family Therapist living and working in Stroud, Gloucestershire. Her first love was making art, and from time to time she comes back to it, although not as much as she would like. These pictures were made 2019–2021, oil on canvas, and chalk pastels/drawing on paper.

I have known Jane now for many years. When I first met her, she had two small children and a husband who was dedicated to a demanding job. She had come to visit my studio with a small, intense portfolio of work she had made at a very difficult time in her life. I was just about to have an exhibition at the Glasshouse College in Stourbridge and I invited her to share it with me. There began our friendship. Painting and being creative was a continual theme. Trying to find space for it was often hard for her not only because of time but because to enter into the realm of creativity is to cross a threshold.

The first painting of this group was made in my studio in Forest Row. Jane had come to stay for a week to allow herself some time to paint. A friend came to see us and she said of the painting: 'Oh, you have taken your dreams and blown them onto the canvas!' The other paintings were then made back home amidst all the demands of family and work.

Creativity is an essential part of life even when we feel overwhelmed. It is not product-orientated; it is a kind of play. Schiller said that to play is to be free. Van Gogh said that Christ was the greatest artist of all, whose subject was the free human being. To create and be free is to connected to your wellspring, and to be connected to your inner source is to know joy no matter what. These tender and fragile paintings, made in between huge challenges, celebrate this truth, that to be creative isn't a luxury, it is an essential and radiant part of being human.

Deborah Ravetz

Udo Steuck

18th May 1928 – 25th March 2021

Udo was born nearly 93 years ago on of May 18, 1928 in a small village in Eastern Prussia which was then part of Germany but is now in Poland. Most of his family had been farmers or crofters over many generations but Udo's father was a schoolteacher. His first ten years were idyllic, growing up as the eldest of five in a loving family in a little village out in the country.

But when he was 11 the war broke out and his father was called up to join the army.

As the eldest son Udo felt a deep sense of responsibility to help his mother look after the rest of the family. But shortly after his fifteenth birthday, he was himself drafted into the army to become a helper in the navy's anti-aircraft battery. Four months before the end of the war he was sent to Austria to train as a naval engineer. And so he miraculously missed the terrible fighting of the last desperate battles of the war.

In summer of 1945 he walked back from Austria to Bavaria and then started the epic search for his family who had fled from the advancing Russian army. It was a very dangerous adventure but eventually he found them on the island of Ruegen off the North coast of Germany. As his father was missing, Udo had to become the breadwinner. He did a very short teacher training and a few months later, having just turned 18 he started teaching in the village school on the island with a class of over forty pupils.

It was during this time that he was introduced to Anthroposophy and also heard about The Christian Community.

The following year they discovered that their father was alive and the rest of the family went to join him in West Germany, whilst Udo went to Stuttgart to study Waldorf education. It was there that he first attended the Act of Consecration of Man. He got a job as a teacher for children with special needs in Eckwälden, where he met Dr König, who invited him to Camphill. Udo was then 23.

In Heathcott House in Aberdeen he met Lisa when they shared the task of looking after a group of children. They were married four years later. When their son Johannes was born they decided to move to Hanover in Germany and live as a family. Udo taught in the Waldorf School there for six years. In 1962 they moved back to Camphill, to the Sheiling schools in Thornbury, where their daughter Maria joined them to complete the family. Udo worked again as a teacher but then

he felt the call to become a priest in The Christian Community. He went to study at Shalesbrook in Sussex and did the first part of the priest training but the time wasn't right and he returned to Thornbury for yet another change of career. Udo became a farmer. Although farming was in his blood, he studied agriculture and during this time he also did a BA in curative education and craft teaching through the Open University. Then he went to Stuttgart and completed his training as a priest. He was ordained in March 1985 at the age of 57. His first sending was to Braunschweig, where he inherited a divided congregation. In his short time there he was able to bring healing and unity. But a year later Udo and Lisa moved to Mourne Grange so that Udo could join Baruch in building up the work of The Christian Community on the island of Ireland. It was a joyful but exhausting time for Udo with lots of travel all over Ireland. It was challenging because Udo was not naturally gregarious and outgoing. He was however much loved wherever he went.

When Baruch retired, all the travel eventually became too much for Udo. So other priests came to look after the congregations North and South and Udo could focus his attention on Mourne Grange. There were several services a week, many special sacraments, religion lessons and gospel study.

Udo was much loved as a priest. He had an almost childlike openness and reverence and he had a very big heart full of love for his fellow human beings but also for the earth, for the elemental world, the plants and the animals. From an early age he had felt himself blessed and graced by the guidance of his angel and the help of those who had gone before him. And he had a deep humility and a wish to serve and do what was needed. During his time as a priest, he continued two lifelong interests: writing and beekeeping. With his calm and easy going manner, he was an excellent and natural beekeeper and at one point he had seventeen hives and supplied the community with all the honey they wanted. Udo also wrote and studied a lot and brought out many booklets. The subjects included proverbs, plants of the bible, animals of the bible among many others. They were well researched and often beautifully illustrated, but Udo did not add any personal words. He preferred to

share his own deep wisdom and insight through the spoken word. His sermons were always interesting, fresh and thought-provoking.

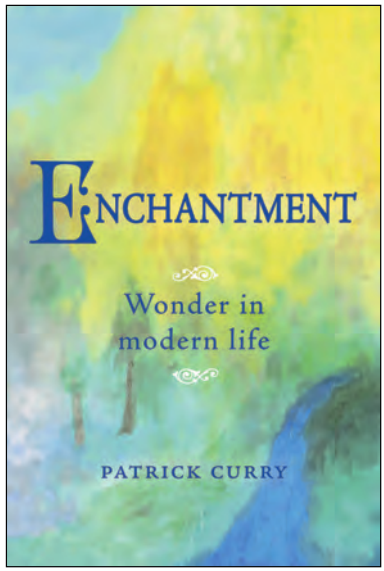
Udo retired from his priestly duties at the age of 80. That opened up the possibility for him and Lisa to get away on holidays to Malta, Greece, Lanzarote and Israel, where they could receive a real boost in culture and sunshine. Udo also loved his holidays with his family in England. There he would put on his old clothes and play with the grandchildren or make himself useful cutting stacks of firewood. Udo and Lisa were always very close and he supported her in everything and looked after her faithfully over the last years of her life. He faced the last ten months of his life after Lisa died with great courage and acceptance. It was wonderful that Johannes could be there for them, first to help Lisa through the last months of her life and then to help and care for Udo over the past ten months which still proved to be a very eventful time. It involved a stay in faraway Craigavon hospital during lockdown with no visitors allowed and two operations. Then the move to a holiday house while Orchard cottage was being renovated. Finally, Udo could move back to a completely changed house. Udo took it all in his stride and was just deeply grateful for all that was given to him. On Sunday, 21 March after the service, he received the Last Anointing and the following Saturday he died peacefully in the early hours of the morning.

Udo was a very special person. He was a good man: honest and truthful, loving and giving and with it all self-effacing and humble. He once said: 'When I die, perhaps my greatest achievement from the perspective of the spiritual world, will be that I kept bees'. Now I don't have that perspective but I know for certain that what really counts for the heavenly world is all that we do out of love. Udo has now crossed the threshold of death and he will be able to look back over a long life that was richly filled with love: love for the earth, for plants and animals for all the children and adults that he came to know. Udo has given us so much; he will be greatly missed and long remembered.

Rev. Ben van Leishout

Book review

Enchantment
Wonder in modern life
Patrick Curry
paperback, 152 pages, £20.00
Floris Books 2020
Reviewed by Anna Phillips



Enchantment. A word that conjures up feelings, images, memories. But they are fleeting. The mind tries to find a box to put it in, to give it a meaning and a history. Yet it retreats from reason behind a veil of colours and impressions. It is Blake's joy which can be kissed in its passing and lives in eternity's sunrise but cannot be bound or you will destroy its life. So, to find myself with a finite, concrete book which claims to be full of words relating to Enchantment, and its twin Wonder, seems a pure contradiction. Yet, Patrick Curry has succeeded in writing a book which in itself reads like a poem in progress. In trying to define without imprisoning this evanescent theme the door is left open for us to feel and sense our way into this illusive occurrence. For that is what it is. An event, an experience which takes place at a specific moment in time and place between two or more subjects and is gone before you know it; its after effect and its depth of penetration can however last for ever and change a life profoundly.

Curry, a scholar of J.R.R. Tolkien, quotes him when he defines Faerie, or enchantment, as the place where we find ourselves together with what we are enchanted by. This could contain all things in the entire universe. But because we are human we cannot live there. Like in fairy stories, sooner or later we will be un-enchanted and find ourselves outside the fairy knoll. Therefore, the experience is shot through with a poignant intimation of its end: 'every presence is attended by an absence, which can then become a strange sort of presence.' Yet enchantment is a real relationship in contrast to one based on narcissism or egoism which aims to possess. One is sensed as well as sensing. The connection is made on a deep level with another being of any kind. For this to be a healthy relationship we need a strong ego able to resist capture or recapture of the moment. Enchantment can be invited but not commanded.

Because wonder and enchantment are wild and unpredictable

their closest affinity lies with nature and we are part of nature. According to Karen Blixen, Curry's unfailing guide to enchantment, it is 'the idea God had when he made you', describing the inexhaustible meaning and immanent mystery of a being, natural or human. Curry, who refers many times back to the Greek myths and its gods, is also an ecologist and his work there seamlessly unites with his love for mythology in the being of Gaia, the earth herself, to which all enchantment ultimately leads. Enchantment literally means 'to be in song', the original way of disseminating myths; to hear it you need to participate. The precise arrangement of a unique moment and place where personal and universal meet is when myth speaks. Myths are both timelessly ancient and forever present. Where myths enchant, enchantment creates myths. We live as creative beings and in art we often find things which can enchant where life cannot. Especially in storytelling and poetry. Curry also defines other areas where we can experience wonder in daily life as love, education, food and drink and religion.

The more you engage with a subject the more you will find in it—unlike abstractions which explain things away. Enchantment ignores opposites and differences. Both religion and science, the spiritual and physical, lie within its compass. The ongoing arguments between parties are maintained because realising that two poles support each other and can meet in the middle would subvert modern life as we know it. To value wonder can make you instant enemies and be branded a heretic, as it is useless and priceless in both the spiritual and material sense. Modern science has actually never rejected the occult or its magical practices, only redefined it. But the difference between magic and enchantment is that the first uses powerfully directed will where the second is open and receptive. Science split the can-be-known from the cannot-be-known through measurement. To enchantment, that which can be mastered is not interesting and it therefore lives outside that type of science, waiting to be touched into life.

In religion enchantment is found in its practices and rituals but it becomes disenchanted in its theory. Curry is a Zen Buddhist and, self-confessed, not interested in the idea of God. Yet he is religious in his attitude, practice and devotion. He sees modern practices to secularise Buddhism, by extracting its mindfulness practice as a tool, a disenchanting exercise of rationalisation. Its true mystery cannot be grasped or calculated. Likewise, he sees in Christianity a practice of measuring everything against a supreme father figure of truth, since there is only one god, which becomes a belief that all can be mastered through calculation. Thus monotheism becomes imperialism, the prerequisite of disenchantment. But he acknowledges the principle of the trinity, 'a unity-with-difference whose paradox allows enchantment even if it passes most understanding.' And ultimately, 'Christ as both human and divine is a tensive truth that is potentially powerfully enchanting.' No matter what religion you prac-

Transitioning Beyond

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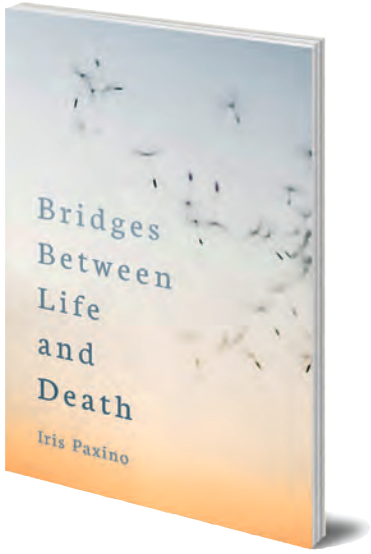

Iris Paxino, psychologist and professional counsellor, has spent her adult life exploring near-death experiences. In this book she shares insights from her studies, as well as her own personal thoughts on dying, near-death experiences, and life after death.

Paxino leads the reader through the process of dying and the moment of death and goes on to explore different aspects of death, from fear of death, to meeting with Christ, to materialistic and atheist outlooks. These thoughtful insights help readers to understand more about death and dying, as well as the journey of the soul.

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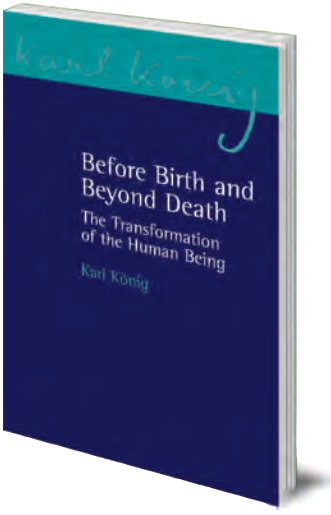

A spiritual community

Karl König, following Rudolf Steiner's teachings, believed that human beings are eternal and that our time in our earthly bodies is just one part of our journey. Our souls exist before birth and continue on beyond death until they are reborn.

These important lectures and essays argue that the greatest part of our community exists beyond this earthly life, encouraging us to solicit their guidance so that we might rediscover the values that our society has lost.

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tise or follow, enchantment is only real if it acts locally, in particular circumstances with actual people. And this enchantment he now defines as spiritual love or power which radiates universally.

Where there is enchantment there is non-enchantment, a simple fact of daily life of the return to normal after being enchanted. But then there is also disenchantment, at no time more obvious then at present. Curry makes a passionate plea to be aware of what is happening. He favours Weber's definition of enchantment as 'concrete magic'. Writing a hundred years ago Weber predicted 'the disenchantment of the world'. There are powerful enemies of enchantment with a programme to disenchant the world by means of rationalisation and intellectualisation. They would split concrete magic into either material mastery of nature or spiritual-mystical experiences. But to Weber, and Curry, enchantment is both embodied and embedded, in and of this world, ineffable and deeply mysterious. The main threat to enchantment comes from what Lewis Mumford calls the Megamachine monster with three engines: capital, state and technoscience. This ring of power destroys enchantment through, amongst other things, privatisation which replaces 'the different selves of a relationship with a universal Me', distraction, glamour, loss of will, using a binary code of one and zero without space for an in-between, the state's subservience to the capital's elite and the metaphysical, ideological and political interventions which create the kind of world the powers that be say it is. At the root of technoscience lies naturalism which in turn has its roots in Monotheism, Platonism and Aristotelianism which Curry calls the philosophy of death. It redefines 'death as true life, because spirit is supposedly eternal.' This spiral of disenchantment uses splitting as a mechanism which is inherently misogynistic. In denying life it denies birth and with it the Mother, thus effecting a matricide which, since the Earth is the source of life, becomes Ecocide.

What, then, can we do to invite enchantment and wonder into our lives? Keats practised 'negative capability; being capable to live in uncertainty with doubt and mystery.' And Freya Stark is quoted as describing the best attitude to be one of 'fearless receptivity: neither a desire to extend one's self or to lose oneself but having the intention to pay attention, here and now, to come what may.'

Go on. Try it. You may be enchanted.

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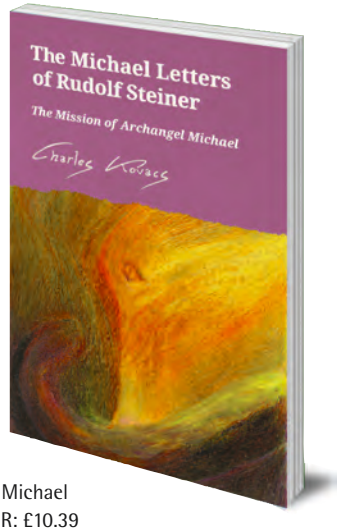
A champion of human freedom



Towards the end of his life, Rudolf Steiner published a series of weekly letters addressed to the members of the Anthroposophical Society. Among them were fourteen letters in which he described the mission of the Archangel Michael, the mighty spiritual being who has accompanied humanity's evolution from primordial times right up to the present day.

In this insightful book, Charles Kovacs draws on his knowledge of Steiner's work to provide a deeper understanding of the history and ideas that inform each letter, and how we can embrace a truly universal view of humanity.

The Michael Letters of Rudolf Steiner: The Mission of Archangel Michael
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Temple Lodge Club

a quiet oasis in the middle of London

Temple Lodge is a Georgian listed building in the centre of Hammersmith and was once home to artist Sir Frank Brangwyn. The house is now a guest house welcoming visitors to London from the four corners of the globe. The large studio he built for his work has been refashioned into a space for worship by *The Christian Community* in London. The mezzanine floor has been kept for its historical associations and has been home to *The Gate* vegetarian restaurant for the last 30 years.

Many visitors have described the peace and tranquillity they experience upon entering the house as an oasis amidst the turmoil they leave outside. An experience of the garden can be gained from most windows, and this will be enhanced as a redesigning and replanting of the garden takes place.

The work in the garden follows work to build three new double-bedded garden suites, each with its own en-suite facilities. Guests now have access to and through the garden on their way to the dining room. A hearty and substantial vegetarian/vegan breakfast provides just what is needed for the new day ahead.

Upon becoming members of the **Temple Lodge Club** (£2.00 annual membership) visitors seeking accommodation may share in all the facilities the house has to offer. There is the Reading Corner with newspapers and the Library for reading, relaxing or quiet conversation, the well-used Conference Room with seating for twelve around the table and the unique Lantern Room taking its name from the large octagonal skylight which provides an exceptional, comfortable and adaptable space for many and varied meetings.

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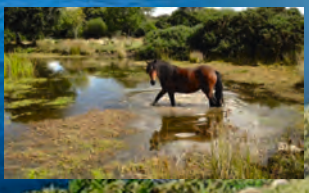

There are four small guest rooms, three single and one double room. Three of the guest rooms have a wash basin; toilets and shower are separate. There is a kitchen for self-catering needs. Local shops and pubs/restaurants are within a couple of minutes walking distance.

Unfortunately we do not have disabled access and there are steps and stairs inside and outside the building. We ask for your consideration regarding the other guests and our events taking place in the house.

Suggested contribution £25 per person per night, one night £30.

Weekly rates available, also pick-ups and drop off for Two Moors Way.

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