

The Christian Community

# Perspectives

June–August 2022



*Lord of the Elements*

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*Cover pictures from Des Proprietez des Choses  
by Barthelemy l' Anglais, 1445–50  
Front: The creation of the elements  
Back: The four elements of the Earth  
with the twelve signs of the zodiac*

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# Perspectives

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Seventeen centuries ago, at the Council of Nicaea, the connection between the heavenly world and the world of creation was broken in the human imagination. Heaven was in a world far away; the old gods, who had ensouled every forest glade, every stream and every mountain top, were banished and described as demons.

The empty world became the blank canvas for the vast expansion of human civilisation over the next seventeen centuries. Gradually the world became Hamlet's 'sterile promontory', the place of loneliness in which the human I could come of age.

Such a thought can help us overcome the despair we can feel when faced with the catastrophes that confront us on every hand. Human beings had to desecrate the first temple, the temple of nature, to become free; now it is in our hands whether we will rise to the challenge of creating a new temple, one that welcomes the Lord of the Elements.

TOM RAVETZ





The Creation of the World (detail), from the Wenceslaus Psalter, Paris, 1250–60

# King of the elements

Luke Barr

Back in 1998, I discovered the poet Ted Hughes. His version of Ovid had just been published, and I was amazed. As schoolboys, we had had to study Hughes, whose nature poetry held no resonance with us townies. His voice fell on our deaf ears and his vision was received by blind, dull eyes. But after life had thrown me about a bit, and since I had got to know nature and learnt to appreciate good language in an age of linguistic paucity, I became an avid reader of this sullen nature poet.

Hughes was a controversial figure, whose poetry seemed nonetheless to find an appreciative audience in England. He had something very English about him, even though he came from the less fashionable North and wore his accent proudly about him! His nature poetry seemed to tap in to something in the English psyche. Was it a longing for a long-lost England—a natural England, an Albion or Avalon? An England whose people were still connected to their land?

His *Tales from the Metamorphoses of Ovid* seemed to take this a step further: Human souls transforming into hunted animals or mute trees or constellations in the heavens. He revived Ovid for the late twentieth century, for an urban consciousness which had lost its connection to nature and experienced all the terror of being abandoned by the good will of the gods, trapped in a pitiless, indifferent nature where the gods mercilessly threw us back onto the violent elements of nature, as punishment for our hubris and myopia.

I have the impression that Hughes preferred the brutal honesty of nature and was dismayed at what he found in his own soul, and in those of others. His is a pagan throwback: Nature is God and we are subject to it. We are meaningless products of nature who have begun to think we are gods. We have tried to master Nature but it exacts its revenge. Does this message not remind you of our current eco-crisis? It mirrors Ovid for the twenty-first century.

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of The Christian  
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Hamburg Central.*

And yet, while God is in Nature, Nature is not God. Christianity brought a new revelation, and it works out of a 'new nature', out of the revelation of Christ. This Christ-revelation is to breathe new life through us, into the 'dying earth existence' of nature.

How might this happen?

### **Celtic Christianity**

It is amongst the Celts that we first hear of Christ as King of the Elements, and discover crosses which seem to embody this experience. What was this experience?

The Celtic consciousness appears to have lived *within* nature. These peoples have left very little behind them. The few artefacts that have been found attest to a consciousness quite different to our own today. We talk *about* nature, and observe it from outside. Being within it, the Celts were unable to talk about it. They experienced the turmoil and exhilaration within nature itself. They were one with it, but they could not achieve the separation of consciousness from it which led to the predominant Western onlooker consciousness that we possess today.

Their instantly recognisable, swirling patterns are fluid and alive.



Celtic gold-plated disc, Auvers-sur-Oise, Val-d'Oise

There are no right angles in their culture! The patterns interweave in complexity, but with purposeful geometry. To look at them, to trace their shapes, is to feel revived, enlivened! We experience those entrancing anabolic life forces in their motion. The Celts seem to have been at home in the elements, and were themselves a consciousness which expresses pure nature. We think also of

their raging courage, fierce passion, along with a lack of strategic intelligence, which was overpowered by the more intellect-based Roman civilisation.

The Celts were within nature, and their tragedy—and our tragedy—is that they disappeared, overtaken by a consciousness that no longer lived in nature but began to take steps to emancipate itself from nature's sovereignty.

And this brings a question for the new consciousness: If nature was no longer our God, our king, who was? Is it us? Or is it the 'unknown God', the 'King of the Elements'?

## **The Elements**

The Celts lived within the four elements. They did not number them. They oriented themselves within them, as we do to north, south, east and west. The elements were their above and below, their past and future. The elements gave them a consciousness which respected the earthly; it flowed and streamed like a current; it was clear, spacious enough for them to cultivate the breathing of the soul; it felt the divine spark, flame, and energy of a god.

The elements were the consciousness of the Celts. They were not separate from them but they found expression through them. Today, we number the elements and call them by their mundane names: earth, water, air and fire. We hardly know them anymore. And yet once, we were the apotheosis of their manifestation: we lived and raged as elements. We were elemental. The last vestige of this in the West appears in the Celtic and Scandanavian cultures, and their berserker wrath.

The world of the elements has grown quiet today. It has been replaced by the noise of technology, our new slave—and perhaps future master. Occasionally nature flares up in the world: the shock of a tsunami, an earthquake, flooding—even through to the Englishman's obsession with the weather. It flares up in us too. The bland personality that suddenly erupts and runs amok; the animosity that breaks out between two different sides of thinking. We've seen much evidence of this recently.

When it is not acknowledged and befriended, it can become a harmful part of our lives. How can it be integrated into our modern souls?



## King of the elements

Christianity and the Celt: what a marriage that must have been! Not for them the Roman desire to subjugate the world. They were preoccupied with far greater matters than world domination.

They felt the gradual loss of their living and being within the bosom of nature. They felt the gradual loss of being children of *that* god. Now Godhead was revealing Itself anew. The Greeks had called it Christ. The Celts called this Christ-force 'the King of the Elements.' The elements in the world had a new lord. The old world of nature was rejuvenated by a new sovereign god-master. The holy marriage of heaven and earth, the great union had taken place, quietly. The wedding at Cana is a picture of this new union. 'Since that time, He is the Lord of the *Heavenly* forces upon *Earth*, and lives...'



How beautiful, in this context, is this one word, 'lives.'

But it is not just the earthly world which has a new lord and king. The elements in us, the consciousness of the human soul, has a new king. The heavenly forces live in our consciousness too.

Our consciousness—our soul was once beautiful, like an intricate Celtic pattern. It

*The Transfiguration*  
Raphael,  
Pinacoteca Vaticana,  
Vatican City



mesmerised us in its beauty. We flowed—our consciousness poured itself out and cascaded into earthly existence—but we were not self-conscious. Now, we are trapped in the mirror of our self-consciousness. We have been told to be afraid of our elemental self, and daily we are told of terrible examples of those who have lost themselves in this elemental berserker consciousness, and the pitiful victims of this untamed force.

Our culture is crying out for a king within, a king of these elements. If it doesn't come from within, it will surely and mercilessly be imposed from without by a 'pseudo-king'.

All of us are called upon to find this king, and to love him, the one who tames and masters the elements. 'Who is this that even the winds and the waters obey him?' (Matt. 8:27).

All of us are asked to find Celtic Christianity again today, where this king indeed 'lives'.

## **The Gospels**

We can find many moving examples of Christ and the elements in the Gospels, such as the one above. It can be an exhilarating exercise to take a concordance and search for all the references to earth, water, air, and fire in the four Gospels, and to meditate upon their appearance and their transformation through Christ. They are not there merely as part of a familiar world but are an integral part of the great transformation, the great trans-substantiative work of Christ. His substance, our substance, is being newly conceived through Christ. His being, our being, is being newly transformed, re-enlivened.

The full redemption of the four elements comes through Golgotha. The fourfoldness of Man's 'supersensible being' is reunited with its heavenly self. Golgotha is an earthly, heavy picture. Earth is the last of the elements to be Christ-ened, and it is a stubborn and painful process.

But there is a picture of the fulfilled elements that precedes this. It is a scene, or soul-picture which is a vital step on the way to Golgotha. It is the Transfiguration.

We can see in this picture of the Transfiguration of Christ, an illustration of the King of the Elements in our consciousness.

It is difficult for our earthly everyday consciousness to penetrate, and then to bear. The three disciples (or three soul aspects), although

schooled and prepared, can hardly endure or grasp it. It shines upon everything it encounters, and warms, enlightens and enlivens. It 'drenches' the form of knowing that takes hold of and 'grasps' it.

This radiant consciousness at once contextualises and harmonises our past (Moses), present (the Christ), and future (Elijah the prophet). It becomes a living Trinity-in-One. It resonates as a voice within, and echoed by the world without, proclaims that our true Self becomes revealed through this 'beloved' (*agapetos*, Matt. 17:5) Christ-process.

### **The healing after the Transfiguration**

The Transfiguration is the penultimate step in Christ's becoming the King of the Elements. Jesus is marked as the Chosen One. His crowning will be with earthly thorns. Scourged by leather whips, mocked by human lips, his marriage to the mystic bride of the Earth will be fulfilled.

But in the Transfiguration, there is first this heavenly crowning of the Christ-King. Golgotha is not the revelation that we would have expected from God. The Transfiguration comes closer: the glorification of the man-god, his visage shining like *helios*. It is at the Transfiguration that Christ enters into a re-newing relationship with the existing, yet sick and dying *life forces* of the human being. It is here that he connects with the elements. He has mastered them individually, in different instances. Now he weaves them together, like a Celtic tapestry, himself knotted within them, pulsating with new life, infusing them and invisibly growing and entwining them like a vine.

The vision ends and the king raises his prostrate witnesses again.

They descend the mountain and immediately he tells them of Golgotha. What they have perceived with their inner eye at the very peak of their consciousness, as a mystery, must now become earthly reality, or Mystical Fact.

And so he comes into the dark valley below, and what is the first thing that he encounters? A scene of despair: a sick child who cannot be healed by his disciples, who themselves have not yet passed through the initiation into the elements that will happen on Golgotha. Who is this child? It is a spiritual picture of the evolving human being, prior to Golgotha.

In Mark's ninth chapter, and his vision of this healing, all four elements appear in this scene: earth, water, air and fire (Mark 9:20-25).

All four are beckoned and come, quietly appearing, hardly noticed, awaiting their transformation by their king.

The *son of the man* who is healed here is like Hughes' modern humanity: *deaf and mute* in spirit (9:26). He awaits the true Son of Man, the King of the Elements within and without.

It is his power, his true ability to master and interweave the elemental forces of Father-God which effects the healing. It is his powers that enter into the one who is exposed to the powers of the four elements. It is an 'etheric' pre-image of the healing which may take place after Golgotha for the human consciousness and the human body.

Christ worked into the world in order to 'save' our very bodies. The body is a microcosm in which the earth and its elements are 'captured'. This very body and its incorporated elements are to be liberated from the 'death of matter'. It is a process that will take long cycles of time. It begins with our consciousness, which is so affected by our physical body. The physical body is the instrument of consciousness. It begins in that space where the elements work in our consciousness: where our hardened earthy thoughts and feelings mix with our proclivity to flow and stream; where our soul breathes sometimes in, sometimes out, and occasionally warms us in its original flame and light.

Who of us is not a pagan? Who of us does not love the world and all its sublime and simple beauty? I am convinced that I am 99.9% pagan. But there is a tiny part of me that intuitively grasps that there is something greater still, that is in process of transforming great nature. That something is what we call Christ, the King of the Elements. And we are only at the very beginning of grasping its sacred activity.

Our love must become a selfless love, a Christ-filled love—not a love that takes pleasure in beauty and variety for our own sake, but a love that lets the elements in the world, and in us, speak. I think that this is what Hughes, with all his very human fallibility, was searching to bring about, as if by alchemy, in his poetry. Perhaps we can raise ourselves to the same through the power of the King of the Elements—the Son God powers—in our own modest creating.

# The four elements and their lord

Michael Kientzler

We tend to look back at the ancient Greek concept of the four elements of earth, water, air and fire with the attitude that they just didn't know any better because unfortunately they didn't have modern science. But the other somewhat more modest view would be quite the opposite, 'we are dwarfs standing on the shoulders of giants,' a sentence by Bernhard of Chartres in the Middle Ages.

Although some aspects of this concept of the four elements existed before, it was only fully developed by Empedocles, the great philosopher, statesman, healer and magician from Agrigento in Sicily in the fifth century who in order to transcend this insight and its limitations sacrificed himself to the element of fire by jumping into the crater of Aetna.

And yet this concept has of course nothing to do with the 118 elements of modern chemistry, is related to but not identical with what we call the aggregate states, but opens up towards a different realm of existence.

The four elements constitute the earth as a living and even ensouled being:

The moisture-filled atmosphere, the oceans surrounding the continents with their deserts, mountains and plains; the rainforests with hundreds of thousands of species; warmth as the other ingredient that makes life on earth possible.

Let us call up some images of the four realms of the elements to gain a deeper understanding:

*Earth:* A granite rock with crystals growing in fissures high up in the mountains, or the amazingly beautiful and highly differentiated tourmaline crystals from Madagascar, or the stem of a coastal redwood tree from California, a rocky piece of limestone, all of this and of course a vast amount more is *earth* as well as the continents, with the tectonic plates that form a considerable part of the earth. We also see the element of earth in plants and animals and human beings in their

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physical form and appearance. So we can say that most of the world that we experience with our senses is earth.

*Water:* On the other hand the ever-changing waves of the sea, a waterfall in the mountains, fog and rainclouds heavier than a herd of elephants, rain falling in the desert giving life to millions of plants, insects and even little toads, which are encased in a sandy sheath that prevents them from drying out in the dry season. A waterfall in the Judean desert at Engedi bringing life to plants, ibexes and even a leopard. Destructive tsunamis or flash waters destroying villages and towns, killing many people—which we increasingly encounter these days. Rain in the desert where immediately flowers cover the soil, going through a very quick life cycle, demonstrating what we all know, that there is no life without water. When the Gotthard tunnel was built, there were reports of silica in a state of high viscosity, still formable and not crystallised—would that also be part of the liquid water element?

The element of *Air*: the air we breathe and desperately need for our physical existence, the first breath as the beginning of our life, the last one as the end of earthly existence, a slight breeze on a summer evening, the wind whipping up waves, gusts of wind in a gale, the destructive force of a hurricane or a tornado when trucks fly through the air, houses flattened, a grain of wheat driven into a tree like a bullet.

And finally the element of *Fire* and warmth: We depend on our intrinsic warmth not only for our metabolism but also for our ego. Children overcoming an illness with high fever take a new step in their development because the ego-organisation is strengthened. Seeds of plants depend not only on water to germinate but also on warmth from the sun.

On the other hand, we might think of the bushfires, enhanced through the climate crisis, with their all-destructive power—the fire moving at about 140 miles per hour in Australia. A volcanic eruption with its enormous destructive power, which also creates new islands in the sea, all of this in interaction with the element *Earth*.

The enormous powers of the elements are nowadays often displayed in destruction but they are also powerful in their creative force to bring about the earth as we know it.

This aspect clearly appears in ancient Greek philosophy where the pre-Socratic philosophers developed their world view of the becoming of the earth out of the quality of these four elements.

*Thales [...] called the [...] origin [arche] water [hýdōr]. He therefore taught that the land also rested on the water. The reason for this view was probably the observation that the nourishment of all beings is moist, that heat itself arises from it and lives on it; but from which everything arises, that is the origin of everything. If this was one reason for his view, another was probably the circumstance that the seeds of all beings are of a moist nature, but that water constitutes the principle of the nature of moisture. Some are of the opinion that even the ancients, who lived long before the present age and were the first to think in mythical form, cherished the same assumption about substance. These called Okeanos and Tethys the originators of the creation of the world, and water that by which the gods take an oath. [...] Whether such an original view of substance is really to be found in this, it may not be possible to tell. At any rate, Thales is reported to have put forward this view of the supreme cause. (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*)*

Anaximander, Thales' disciple or successor, therefore places the apeiron beyond water, which as that which is 'unlimited', is the origin of all material things.

Fire, Water, Earth and Ember Air (in the form of a tube enveloping them) appeared in Anaximander's thought as central elements of the cosmic becoming and passing away, in that a world initially consisting of water increasingly dries up through a constant supply of heat and thus becomes solid earth.

Anaximenes (585–525 BC)—like Anaximander from Miletus—came to the conclusion that air was the primordial substance. By compressing it towards the centre of the universe, the elements of water and earth emerged from it.

Heraclitus (ca. 540–475 BC) from the neighbouring city of Ephesus was of the opinion that fire must be the original substance. First becoming material as water, this is inwardly further distinguishable into earth and ember wind and everything is in constant transformation: 'everything flows.'

On the empirical level of our own personal experiences and observations we may think of a winter's day at Tintagel in Cornwall, where according to ancient tradition King Arthur's castle was situated. There the waves of the Atlantic Ocean are hitting the rocks, forming images of riders on horseback, spray rising up sixty feet or more mixing with rain, sunlight breaking through the clouds and all of this spectacle enabled by wind and warmth from the sun. This is an experience of the four elements of old. The same as the breakers coming into Merlin's Cave below the castle from both sides with the rising tide. This was the place for initiation of the Arthurian knights into the world of the 'upper gods' (the gods behind the world of the senses, including the visible cosmos) through the elements.

To experience the power of the elements without fear was the task of the members of this brotherhood who were voluntarily chained to the rocks in Merlin's Cave. The aim was to penetrate the world of the senses and to get behind the veil, as it were, into the reality of the elemental-spiritual world.

This western school of initiation already existed from pre-Christian times on until the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries. 'King Arthur' being the title of the respective leaders of this brotherhood through the centuries.

This was the North Western path of initiation which had its counter-image in the Southern path as represented by the Egyptian initiation, for example, where one had to face one's own demons and shadows by descending into the inner realm of the soul and meeting the much more powerful 'lower gods', who in ancient Greece are the older divine generation of gods like the Titans and the Erinyes. The latter was the more dangerous path of initiation because of this confrontation with the dark underworld of one's demons.

Britain and Ireland, as islands in the moderate climate zone of the earth with the gulf stream touching them, lend themselves to displaying and experiencing the realm of the elements, whereas in a desert climate like Egypt one would rather withdraw from the sun and the heat into inner spaces. On the one hand the stone circles open to the skies—the weather as well as the stars—and on the other the dark holy of holies of the Egyptian temple. Both being respective representatives of their culture.

But there were also cultures in the past where both paths met: Chaldea and Greece. In Delphi, Apollo reigned in summer, Dionysos in winter. Apollo the sun-related god of harmony and order, and Dionysos the god of the ego and the inner life of the soul, of wild orgiastic and chaotic feasts.

What changed in the Celtic area of the west of Europe in early Christian times?

In Celtic Christianity, Christ was recognised as the Lord of the Elements, living in and ruling over the realm of the elements. The one who could calm the waves and command the winds. He, as the creator God, the Logos, had connected and united with the Earth and her elements. One example of this from *Carmina Gadelica*, the collection of hymns and incantations of the Gaelic oral traditions from the west coast of Scotland:

## Ocean blessing

*God the father all-powerful, benign,  
Jesu the Son of tears and of sorrow,  
With thy co-assistance, O Holy Spirit!*

*The Three-One, ever-living, ever-mighty everlasting,  
Who brought the children of Israel through the Red Sea,  
And Jonah to land from the belly of the great creature of the ocean,  
Who brought Paul and his companions in the ship,  
From the torment of the sea, from the dolour of the waves,  
From the gale that was great, from the storm that was heavy.*

*Sain us and shield and sanctify us,  
Be Thou, King of the elements, seated at our helm,  
And lead us in peace to the end of our journey.*

*With winds mild, kindly, benign, pleasant,  
Without whirl, without eddy,  
That would do no harmful deed to us.*

*We ask all things of Thee, O God,  
According to thine own will and word.*



In our time there is an increasing awareness, especially among young people, of the sensitivity of water and air, of what we owe to them, and of their immense pollution in rivers and seas. Especially regarding the air and its composition with the increase in carbon dioxide. On the other hand, public sensitivity seems to diminish in relationship to the deadly pollution of the earth through artificial radioactivity. New nuclear power stations seem to be a solution for many against the increase of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. It is like 'driving out the devil with Beelzebub'. One evil is being replaced by another, from air to earth.

The pre-Socratic philosophers of ancient Greece were primarily looking at the past and the early stages of earth development out of the realm of the elements, whereas nowadays scientists and the environmentally engaged youth are looking at the future of the earth and of humanity. An increased responsibility toward mother earth and the basic foundation of our physical existence is again coming about.

But there is another dimension to all of this. Dr Ita Wegman, the physician and personal student and friend of Rudolf Steiner, wrote a short article in the thirties about increasing climate and weather catastrophes which are going to happen in the future. She points out that it will probably take hundreds of years until the direct relationship between human thinking and the atmosphere becomes common knowledge. The same as the direct relationship between human will impulses and drives and volcanic eruptions and earthquakes. This will sound weird in the age of plate tectonics.

Another aspect is that spiritual and elemental beings don't like to be ignored and their reaction is to create chaos on earth.

This does not mean though that the ideas and actions of environmental activists are wrong but they are only half of the equation.

And finally the Christ aspect in all of this: *Christ through whom human beings attain the re-enlivening of the dying earth existence*, the second sentence in the Creed of The Christian Community, points to the role of the one who is not only 'the Lord of the elements' but the giver of new life forces for the earth and humanity in our time. But we have to be part of this re-enlivening, making it possible through being aware of this fact and realising it ever more through prayer and connecting consciously with the giver of life forces; because in our time human consciousness is the bridge for spiritual beings, including Christ himself, to make positive divine interventions possible.

# Zeitenwende— time of transition

## An elementary view beyond the age of materialism

Jens-Peter Linde

Although global troubles have been becoming apparent for quite a while, we hardly took due notice. *Pollution* and the *Disappearance of Species* as well as the Climate Crisis have been lingering more or less clearly for a while. The *Energy Requirements* and limited supplies were also threatening in the background. *Refugees* from wars or hunger came in waves, but in between one tended to forget about their plight. All these were easily put aside in the news when the more dramatic *Corona Pandemic* took hold.

Through the war of Russia against Ukraine more troubles have become apparent: *Destabilization between social systems* in East and West through pride and arrogance by violence, fake news and propaganda, and the *Renewed Segregation* into civilisations of different classes backed up by a resurgent Darwinism: some can pay for rising food prices, others will have to prostitute their human dignity or die of hunger! Although the lingering troubles have lost their front page effect, they haven't gone away. Indeed, suddenly there is a potentially lethal concoction of all of these and we do wonder how we could find the right *synergetic consciousness, empathy and active engagement* to tackle them altogether, now.

The problems show that traditional political behaviour doesn't work

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Priest emeritus  
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anymore, making authoritarian systems tempting: 'Simply and obviously the war makes us realise that without true willingness and a fair ability to give in and to sacrifice something of what we have called 'normal' all too long, social structures in our world prove powerless and become irrelevant.'<sup>1</sup> When politicians don't dare to tell their voters that next winter we'll have to

put on woollen underwear, as we can't heat our houses as much as before, they are unable to *do the right thing now...* Or as Ivan Krastev is quoted: 'Powerful are only they, who can bear pain.'<sup>1</sup>

Democracy is a difficult thing to learn. It filtered through the Initiated Ones in old Greece down into society, in which the differentiation of classes of free ones who could vote and slaves who couldn't was not yet questioned although in slaves who could bear pain, some kind of fermentation began, which could have brought freedom to them by revolution. Instead, an authoritarian Alexander took over.

In Rome democracy (after the time of the kings) degenerated when 'bread and circuses' became the only guarantee of votes, i.e. of power. Dictatorship of mad Caesars ensued. But also Napoleon, Hitler or Stalin or later Latin-American, African or Asian dictatorships came to power, because the preceding social systems had not been able to mature into stability to instill into people the democratic strength which comes from being able to give in and to compromise, that is, from the ability to bear pain (although at least half of humanity knows that the pain of giving birth is a preparation to cope with the challenge of educating those whom one may love, in a sacrificial way).

Western culture was created by wealth derived from colonial exploitation including slavery and exploitation of the earth's resources. Eastern culture has grown from working very hard on the land, from toil and trouble, and bearing its pain. Western tradition is meeting now with an eastern revolutionary potential. What can be seen as 'male arrogance' is meeting 'Mother Russia' without a 'child' to bring harmony into the European family. Who or what could bridge the divide? Eastern and Western systems failed in Afghanistan and Syria; could the suffering of Ukraine be a catalyst for East and West to find a new way of relating?

In the same issue of *Die Zeit* was an article about the heritage of Angela Merkel, who knew Putin rather well. Did she overlook his potential for evil? Tina Hildebrandt quotes Armin Nassehi in this article:<sup>2</sup>

*If you are trading with each other you don't shoot at each other; they who speak with each other continue to relate. This has been a great concept which went beyond personalities. It is a global principle: Everything connects to everything. Everything is compatible*

*in its ways. Everything is 'good' in its context and thus justified, but this balance has been disturbed, it has come to an end.*

From Quantum Physics we know of this 'global principle'. The Quantum field can be described as filled with sub-atomic matter or energy and it is usually invisible and unnoticed. But when we interact with it, we force it to be *so* or *so*.<sup>3</sup> And if we do that in an uncontrolled manner, terrible effects may result! The difficulty is that we try to control its effects with a scientific *materialistic* arrogance, which does not realise that we need to enter into a spiritual consciousness to do so properly.

Fairy tales can help us to understand this. There are lots of examples how dreadful traps can be opened by goodness and humility, by an altruistic awareness of elemental presence. Then harmony may ensue. I want to explain this with the example of:

### ***Rumpelstilzchen***

by the Brothers Grimm

*Once upon a time there was a miller who was poor, but he had a beautiful daughter. Now, one day he happened to talk to the king and said, 'I have a daughter who knows the art of transforming straw into gold.' So the king had the miller's daughter summoned to him right away and ordered her to spin all the straw in a room into gold in one night, and if she couldn't do this, she would die. Then she was locked in the room where she sat and wept. For the life of her, she didn't have the slightest inkling of how to spin straw into gold.*

*All of a sudden a little man entered the room and said, 'What will you give me if I spin everything into gold?' She took off her necklace and gave it to the little man, and he did what he promised. The next morning the king found the entire room filled with gold, but because of this, his heart grew even greedier, and he locked the miller's daughter in another room full of straw that was even larger than the first, and she was to spin it all into gold.*

*Then the little man came again, and she gave him a ring from one of her fingers, and everything was spun into gold. However, on the third night the king had her locked again in another room that was larger than the other two and filled with straw. 'If you succeed, you shall become my wife,' he said.*



*Then the little man came again and spoke: 'I'll do everything for you one more time, but you must promise me your firstborn child that you have with the king' Out of desperation she promised him what he wanted, and when the king saw once again how the straw had been spun into gold, he took the miller's beautiful daughter for his wife.*

*When thereafter the queen gave birth, the little man appeared before her and demanded the promised child. The queen offered the little man all that she could and all the treasures of the kingdom if he would let her keep her child, but it was all in vain. Then the little man said, 'In three days I'll come again to fetch the child. But if you know my name by then, you shall keep your child.'*

*During the first night the queen tried to think of the little man's name, but couldn't come up with it. Then she sent out servants to find uncommon names, but none was right. On the third day, however, one servant returned and told her, 'When I was out I went deep into a dark forest and I came upon a small cottage, and in front of the house there was a ridiculous little man, hopping around as if he had only one leg and screeching:*

*Today I'll brew, tomorrow I'll bake.  
And soon the queen's baby I shall take.  
How good that no one knows my name,  
For Rumpelstilzchen is the same!*

*When the queen heard this, she rejoiced, and when the dangerous little man came, he asked, 'What's my name, your Highness?' she responded first by guessing, 'Is your name Conrad?' 'No.' 'Is your name Henry?' 'No.' 'Is it perhaps Rumpelstilzchen?' 'Ho!' the little man screamed, 'The devil told you that!' Then he ran off full of anger. And he never did return.*

Here is a *Miller*; someone who does not create new life, but who grinds grains into flour, into its smallest particles and he does so with the consciousness of a mechanic, which he needs to keep the mill going. But he tries to be more than he is in a narcissistic way. He tries to rise to the eye-level of the *King*, who should have an all-inclusive consciousness, but his ruling is blinded by greed and so the innocent *Daughter* is locked into a room full of *Straw*—material stuff—to spin *Gold* from

it. Gold stands for the wealth of wisdom, which the king is lacking and which the innocent daughter does not yet have—she hasn't yet born the pain of giving birth to future potential.

But now she begins to feel this pain—she weeps. This brings about an opening of the divide between the room full of straw and a being of elemental ability: a *Little Man*. But he cannot act from human compassion; he can act only by making a deal. He can transubstantiate matter if ensouled substance is offered up in turn into his elemental realm. First the daughter gives the necklace, a symbol of *beauty*; for the second night she offers her ring, a token of *faithfulness*; for the third night she can't help it, but she has to give the promise of her first child, a being of life which bears the quickening power of *love*.

From mediums, who can interact with elemental beings, we know<sup>4</sup> that they appreciate beauty very much and are appalled by ugliness in our cities (or dirt and disorder in our bedrooms). We also know that faith is a mystery to them as they *know* everything by being able to see within the spirit and the earthly field and so they can't understand faithfulness and faith as human abilities of the heart. They do know life, but don't know what it is to love—to act out of sacrificial willingness to be *One* with an *Other*, be it a human being or a being of creation as such.

So, for three nights the little man does what she cannot do and she accepts her debts to him as otherwise she would be killed. However after the third challenge the king is satisfied and marries the miller's daughter and over a year she gives birth to a child. Well, the little man comes and wants to take it away, but is touched by her beauty as a wife and by her faithfulness as a mother and so allows her to keep the child for three days—and to keep it altogether, if she can guess his name. Can she do so? Can her love transcend the divide between the different worlds, the one of the senses and the supersensible one and *behold*?

It is interesting that she cannot do so by herself alone, she needs to employ a servant or messenger, in other words: an angel. It is by prayer that one can open up ways which otherwise are hidden. This angelic being is able to transcend the divide between the different worlds and can behold that the little man wants to brew and bake: to transubstantiate the milled grains with water into beer or with fire into bread, both times with the help of fermentation, something which is lifting

up the particle nature of matter into something which can support life by energy, something cultural: to brew and to bake are activities which are eminently *human* and are signs of civilization.

And now the riddle of the name *Rumpelstilzchen*. *Rumpeln* is to make a rumbling sort of noise. *Stilzchen* is the diminutive of *Stiel*, a stick or a handle. Often people with a wooden leg would make a rumbling noise when walking. But here is an elemental being which by definition does not have physical members. However, the little man is handicapped in a manner of speaking; he is missing something. Obviously, this one had a longing to come closer to human nature and when he could not he shouted, 'The devil has told you so!' Perhaps his true handicap is that he could not witness the angelic messenger and could only suspect an adversary power.

This little man does have a name that he identifies with, but it is only a general description of his rumbling, stumbling walk. A true name would call up his individuality. Without it he cannot love; he cannot yet become a stepfather to a human child. But we could help elemental beings grow *towards* personality by including them in our prayers.

This should remind us that indeed, not everything that seems evil is turning out to truly be so. The prick of a needle is painful, but perhaps it allows us to receive the medicine we need, to make us healthy. Let us hope that present troubles in the world can bring on a new *faculty* of humankind to see the potential that pain can turn into power for future creation. Perhaps it can help us to learn *to bridge the divide* between the material world and its laws, and the spiritual world and its potential, by prayer or by sacrifice, or indeed by both together and in cooperation with subtle worlds and energies and beings who are able to save situations when we are still unable to do so. Then we will be able to do justice to the challenges we see around us in a responsible and promising way.

1 Adapted quote from *Die Zeit* Newspaper of 24. III. 2022, Article 'Sieben auf einen Streich' by Bernd Ulrich

2 Adapted quote from *Die Zeit* Newspaper of 24. III. 2022, Article: 'What did she leave us behind?' by Tina Hildebrandt

3 *The Field* by Lynne McTaggart, Harper Collins 2001

4 *Flensburger Hefte* No. 79, IV/2002

# Stepping into freedom through Trinitarian ritual

Originality, spontaneity and adaptability  
in the Act of Consecration of Man

Michael Ronall

*Enter through the narrow gate.* Matt. 7:13

When I first came to the Hamburg seminary and asked one of its directors how Christian Community priests make themselves inwardly so accessible to accompany those around them, he answered that it was chiefly by immersing themselves in the Act of Consecration of Man. Because I had reasoned that barriers between people consist in one person's feeling unfree in the presence of the other, i.e. that beneficial closeness requires that it be desired by both parties, I sought within the ritual indications of how it nourishes human freedom. To deepen our own saturation in the sacraments, seminary students are encouraged to serve at the altar, and so I followed suit.

Serving at the altar brings heightened consciousness to our archetypal human capacities for upright walking, speaking and thinking, but for walking along prescribed paths, speaking others' words, and thinking ideas that are given—indeed proclaimed—from without, plus whatever quick planning might be required to correct inadvertent strays from these sequences.

*Following three years as a guest-student at the Hamburg Seminary of The Christian Community with a special interest in pastoral counselling, Michael Ronall has been developing an approach to managing emotional life through living thinking.*

All of a server's expressions are therefore designed to eliminate unpredictability, improvisation or anything novel at all: In order to fulfill their assigned roles, the only variations in form that servers are trained to keep in mind are the liturgical details of

the seasonal festivals, whatever very minor customs belong to a given congregation, and any minute specifications that may be known to be favored by an individual priest.

But if the value of this specifically contemporary form of worship is said to live in its suitability for addressing the consciousness of modern humanity, which in the course of its historical development is supposed now to have matured into individual autonomy, how then can *any* assigned behavior serve as a model for truly human conduct?

Seeking to learn how ritual nourishes freedom therefore immediately presented me with a puzzle. For it is not at first self-evident how such features as originality, spontaneity and adaptability, by which we commonly characterize ideal—that is, free—human conduct, can be developed by tracing a choreography of ever-recurring stylized motions, by perpetually repeating others' scripted words, and by restricting our thoughts to those, however lofty, intelligent or situation-relevant, that are invariably received from without.

Contemplating this question in the light of our seminary studies on the nature of the three persons of the Trinity suggested to me that these aspects of 'conscious human action,' which seem absent from our form of corporate worship, actually derive from and reflect the elements of the triune Godhead, elements with which our studies acquainted us. I was then forced to wonder: Do these several distinct characteristics somehow become accessible to participants through their very invisibility in that Godhead's sacramental incarnation?

***... by their fruits you will know them. Matt. 7:20***

If, as has been increasingly assumed at least since the Middle Ages, the rational or romantic naturalism that champions our unconditioned responses offers the most reliable access to our true selves in our encounters with reality, why then does social life so often break down under what we value as expressing ourselves authentically? Namely when, eschewing convention, we assert what we think of as our originality, but which is often merely our pet, and possibly disturbing, idiosyncrasies; what we call our spontaneity but which others might experience as dissonant impulsiveness; and what we take for our adaptability that can often be merely self-serving opportunism.



Perhaps, contrary to the trust that we place in our native impulses, they stand in need of transformative cultivation in order to prove valuable and useful. In that case, they would benefit from exposure or even submission to their archetypes. And such introduction could find in sacred forms opportunities to partake of true, divine originality, spontaneity and adaptability, which would adequately inform and infuse our natural tendencies by baptizing, confirming, metamorphosing, supporting, wedding, ordaining, and anointing our small, fallen, fractured versions of divine creativity in their macrocosmic trinitarian source.

Turning to the common source of our independent styles of expression might then convert our subjectively distorted caricatures by encountering the Father God's paternal originality, which is radically devoted to serving the souls whom He produces; the Son God's filial spontaneity, whose divine sovereignty unendingly confers its own freedom on creatures adopted to become immortal neighbours; and the Spirit God's aerial adaptability, which weaves human hearts into a living tapestry of perpetual, mutual solicitude.

For in their cosmic archetypes, adaptability preserves a representation of integrity that does not demand of *others* that they adapt to oneself; spontaneity issues the reliably salutary effect of taking interest in furthering others' spontaneity; and originality feels ever unthreatened by, and indeed thrives on supporting, *others'* originality. Thereby, originality loses its claim to monopoly, spontaneity sheds tactless intrusiveness, and adaptability is free from any instrumentalizing tendency. And in the Trinity, each aspect infinitely and generously partakes of and gives to the natures of the two others. Being consecrated in our humanity, that is, in our nature as the image of God, would seem to mean becoming capable of likewise reliably sustaining our contemporaries, creatively initiating service for them, and relationally responding to their expressions, each of these faculties likewise enabling the other two.

And now to our ritual, from which the three apparent markers of human freedom seem at first glance to be absent. Seminarians learn in their gospel study that speech recorded in scripture, including Christ's questions and answers even when iconoclastically rejecting cultic formulas, can itself be embodiment in daily life of a cosmic *cultus*, and so denote their speakers alignment with, and enactments of, macrocosmically

conferred roles. This suggests that when Christ rejected received ritual as humanly unworthy, He did so not because it was taken too seriously, but rather because it was *not grasped seriously enough*. It would be as though a belligerent letter that conventionally, that is ritually, opened and closed with the salutation and valediction 'Dear Sir' and 'Respectfully yours' were condemned, not because these sentiments failed to reflect the author's unfriendliness, but because the hostile content had failed to submit and conform to the courteous formulas! This inversion of contemporary naturalism seeks our authenticity not in the attitude that we indiscriminately bring to the beings surrounding us but in the attitude that certain beings responsively offer to bring to us.

***... these three are in agreement... 1 John 5:8***

The origin of human originality itself must belong to the divine progenitor of all existence as we know it, which theology terms the world of the enduring Father: That we can creatively bring something into existence requires that something at all already exist for us to refashion at will. Thus our world's very presence and its availability for us to celebrate, learn from, use, and ourselves create in, is a sign of a warm, engaged, cosmically paternal loving interest freely generated *in the present moment from the past*.

The spontaneity that human beings manifest, appreciated by all who respect the freedom in which another shows interest, is a revelation of the Son, for example when Christ's spontaneity confronted, as with a wall, His contemporaries imprisoned by philistine reflexes. Through His bold self-confidence, sufficiently assured of its own creativity to welcome and encourage that of others, Christ Jesus nonplussed those around Him by his unscheduled healings, and He shocked them by his extemporaneous teachings, both prompted by human needs as they arose. Even in its human appearances, Son-love is spontaneous: As many have reluctantly come to realize, no love cannot be coerced from without, whence Son-love is freely generated *in the present moment for the present*.

The Holy Spirit is that divine agent who both enlightens and comforts by a responsive touch that instantiates radical adaptability. That Spirit, classically characterized (Augustine, *On the Trinity*, XV.17.24) as the

relation of love between the Father and the Son, is the one who, without our prior preparation to meet trying circumstances, ‘will teach you at that time what you should say.’ (Luke 12:12). This love proves itself distinguished from ‘fair-weather friendship’ by its faithfully adjusting also to uninvited and unwelcome circumstances. Thus the Spirit of Love is freely generated *in the present moment for the future*.

And thus, it has come to seem to me: By petitioning the Father God and his laws to saturate our conscious being, our originality issuing from that being may come increasingly to express the laws of his own primal originality; by praying that the Son God create in us, we ask that our spontaneity be a fertile rather than, as is so often the case, a destructive power; and by asking for the Holy Spirit to enlighten us, our ability to adapt will aim to serve rather than leverage our circumstances, and so prove fruitful rather than sterile or even lethal.

The seminary exists to help students develop their capacities to accompany others. This accompanying consists in ever and again freely opening up an inner space where those others might choose to walk, speak and think within our warm interest. To make us capable of worthily fulfilling this divine service, the Godhead has itself invited *us* freely to walk, speak, and think within His own life, which is the triune personification of love.

When we respond to this invitation by allowing ourselves to be so accompanied, we can be opened to our daily surroundings through God’s own original, spontaneous and adaptive love for our freedom. In the deliberate, solemn choreography through which we seek actively to rehearse His deeds, faithfully to formulate His words, and attentively to recognize His thoughts, we invite Him, for an hour, to think, speak and act through us. In that hour He can subsume and refine the fruitless darting and drifting of our ideas, the crashing waves and stagnant ponds of our emotional life, the explosions or smolderings of our fitful impulses.

We may then return to our daily lives infused by His service—in both senses of the word—and invite it to transform every encounter in which we have the opportunity to accompany others. Those others might then find that they can realize, articulate and act just a little more closely to the perfections that—with some assistance—we are all seeking to develop, that is, into the free beings that we really are.

# An Ascension fairy tale

Luke Barr

In the perfect evenings of May, when the world seems to have become what it was meant to be, and memories of the Garden of Eden whisper themselves through the cool air, the copses and glades fill once more with birdsong. The human folk have gone back to their houses and get ready for their nightly sleep and sojourn in dreamland; badgers and foxes, friends of the twilight, start to roam about; and... the little folk begin to peep out from behind their hiding places.

All day long and through the night they work. And they take great joy in their work. The gnomes, those little heroes of the Winter, work relentlessly underground, enriching the soil with their strong thoughts and brawn. The undines, spirits of the water, flow through the earth, uniting all things, bringing life to every corner. The sylphs delight in the air, playing with butterflies and dragonflies; and the fire-spirits rise in their generous warmth as the days grow longer.

They work and work; for this is what they have been tasked with: to keep the Earth beautiful and rhythmic and dependable. They have been asked to be ready to work with the human folk too, if men and women wish to, and bring with them the right attitude to the Earth, that great garden that we share with the nature spirits.

This is their work, and they work happily. But if you were to ask them,

why they work, well...most of them cannot quite remember. They would stop and search within themselves for an answer, and they can feel that there is an answer, but what it is they no longer know. Only the oldest and wisest amongst them know, and they have become so changed from the other nature spirits, that the younger ones hardly know their language anymore.

However, it is the evenings when the fairy people take their rest. They work in the day, and in the night, but at twilight, they stop for what seems like a long time to them and watch the great Father Sun go down, and the sky bidding him farewell with all her most glorious colours, and then they share with each other all the things that they have done and seen that day.

And what wonderful tales they tell each other! How they delight in hearing all the tiniest details of the comings and goings of every single patch of ground in their neighbourhood. Sometimes, the big folk, the people, can be quite annoying to them, walking all over the place as if they owned it, without a single thought for all the little people's hard work to maintain it. But they forget their annoyance when they start to tell each other about that treasure which is a strange part of the human kingdom: the children.

When they have thought that they have heard the most wonderful things about a blade of grass that

grew a little that day and stretched itself so exquisitely; or of a buttercup that held its head up in the most charming manner; they then start to speak of children: and all the company become quiet as one after the other tells a little story of an encounter they had that day with a human child. Their eyes light up. They don't know why but these are the stories they love the best, and they feel their little hearts flutter with joy when they hear them. Why is this?

Once a clever pixie asked one of the older wiser gnomes why this was: She said that it was because this was how the human folk were supposed to be. They were supposed to be like children, full of fun and creativity and play and newness, and always wanting to include everyone. The old gnome admitted she didn't know why they didn't stay like that when they got bigger, but that couldn't be helped, and one must take them as they were. Great Father Sun and Mother Earth must know why and it must all be part of their great wisdom. But only a few seemed to grow up into proper folk of the Earth. As for the rest, one just had to keep playing tricks on them until they woke up to us and who they really were. But alas! So few did.

Never mind. But, she added, when they grew up to be Earth folk, then something wonderful would happen. All ears amongst the fairies were straining to hear what this wonderful was: They became like glorious beacons of light. Where so often they seemed to walk in darkness and spread a grey mist around them, some of them began to shine with a great light. But what this light

was and where it came from, she could not say.

But this was why they loved children. Because they were always full of heavenly light, and it reminded the fairy folk of where their own legends told them that they came from.

Now on that evening, a fine evening in May, the fairy folk had one by one told all their stories of the day, and all the new blossom children of May were dressed still so beautifully in their pretty colours, and everyone took delight in these May children of the Fairies, when a quiet set in. All the little folk looked at each other and realised that something was not quite right. Normally, they would get up without a further word and happily return to their work. But tonight they felt a strange uneasiness.

'What is this that we feel?' the younger ones asked. The older elves and fire-spirits spoke up first. 'This is a sadness that always comes to us now, even when the glory of our blossom children has lit up the world. Always now, we feel a sadness in our hearts, and always we forget why this is. Once, the old wise gnomes told us that the human folk were meant to tell us why. That is their task. But we never hear it from them. Their children make us happy when they run out to play amongst our leaves and grass and trees, but oh! if only their big people would tell us what they should know! Then we would be glad.'

When the fairy people thought of the big people that they had seen that day, they could not imagine that these giants held within them any kind of secret that might make the Earth rejoice. When they listened



to the human thoughts, they found little there which helped them. Most of their thoughts seemed to be about themselves, and that made the fairies wonder how these big people were even able to walk about or do anything at all.

A great sadness fell upon them all, and Mother Earth felt it. So she sent one of her oldest beings to them. He appeared suddenly amongst them, wise and beautiful in his rough old appearance. He was an exalted old oak tree spirit, his face all gnarled and his brow knotted with great thoughts. And even though he was as tiny as they, he appeared somehow just like a great oak tree. The older elves knew that he was a special spirit and they turned in silent reverence towards him. All the others followed their example, sensing that here was a special being who had come to bring them a special message.

The oak spirit opened his eyes and looked at them sternly but kindly. He didn't speak at first but held them all in his gaze, reassuring them with his presence which seemed to emanate great thoughts and insights. His arms remained motionless, but they nonetheless seemed to stretch over the whole company like great oak branches, as if he held and protected them. He was searching to remember the language that these younger ones spoke, which he had all but lost. His thoughts had become greater and had spread out from the earth to the skies. Finally, he seemed to remember it; and eventually, he spoke to the quiet gathering. 'So children,' he said. 'Mother Earth has felt your disquiet and sadness. She sends me to com-

fort you. Your hearts are heavy.' His words were measured and slow. Each word seemed like it had been fashioned in a smithy over thousands and thousands of years. It was like honey and nectar to the fairy folk, and it lifted each of them momentarily to their forgotten home amongst the great angel beings.

'You seek to know why; and you wait to hear from the human folk what this is. You are right. You must hear it from them. Only they can tell you. But it is true, very few of them seem able to know. But when one of them learns it, and they tell you, you will remember it always.' He paused to let them move his words in their little hearts.

'But Mother Earth will let me tell you now. But be aware! You will forget it again soon. My words do not have the same power as a human word may have. Their word can be strong and everlasting. My words are like the morning dew on the grass of your souls. Soon, they will rise again and be only a memory that is no longer clear. But I will tell you what you seek to know.'

The forest became silent. The birds had stopped singing. They too bent their listening to the old oak spirit.

'You are sad because your beauty is coming to an end. But it has to so that something greater can come to you. What is this great thing that wishes to come? It is love. You are all children born out of great wisdom. The stars wept with joy when Mother Earth was born. They delighted to see you all teem over the earth, playing and working, working and playing. But even wisdom wishes to become something greater.' The fairy folk were spellbound by his words.

'All the beauty that you maintain, all of your work that you so thanklessly do, you do as servants for the great Lord of Love.' Love, the word was like honey for the little folk. What was this wonderful new wisdom?

'I come from the oak tree race. We are servants of great Jupiter, the wise star. Jupiter is honoured among the big people as the lord of their day, Thursday. Great wise Jupiter sits on his throne next to Friday, the day of Venus and of love. And his wisdom wishes to serve Love's beauty.

Every year on the day which is coming after this night, Mother Earth celebrates with great joy 'because Jupiter opens his door to let the Lord of Love come to her, and a great marriage takes place.' The little people saw the picture before their souls and their hearts warmed. The oak gnome continued, 'The human folk call this Ascension.' Again, all of nature listened. It seemed like a wonderful eternity as he uttered it. The word brought forth in their souls an ecstasy of feeling. They felt understood, seen, completed as he spoke the word. 'Few of them know it,' he said in a steady voice. Already, they felt the ecstasy fading. 'So we must help them more often. The tricks that you play to wake them up, when you hide their socks and 'lose' things for them, might amuse you in your idleness.' Suddenly, they all felt quite ashamed of themselves.

'But it will not be enough. Soon perhaps the great wise ones of the stars will decide on more urgent action.' The little folk wondered what he could mean. He was quiet and contemplative for a long time. Then he said, 'But that is not ours to decide. Now: Go back to your work and take heart. Remember in your hearts what I have said even if you cannot fully grasp it. And: help the big folk to remember their task. They are to tell you these beautiful things by the way that they behold you.' He thought for a moment, then continued. 'Nudge them to spend more time with their children. That will do them good. It will help them to lose that illness of self-importance that they suffer from, called 'haste'.

With that, old oak spirit disappeared. They sat in silence for a long time. The stars had come out and each one of them seemed to sing a glorious song to the souls of the little people. Quietly, one by one, they got up again, and with a feeling of steadfast joy, returned to their work, the work of the ages for which they had been born. But each one of them felt as if they were new-born as they silently mouthed the word 'Ascension' while they set to work. And even as they mouthed it, it faded from their memory; but nonetheless flowed into all that they did and all their ceaseless work.

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# Perspectives on a Century

## A Compendium of 100 Years of The Christian Community Journal

David Budd

*David Budd is an Assistant Editor at Floris Books and has been a member of the Anthroposophical Society for twenty-five years. In this piece he writes about the exciting challenge of putting together Perspectives on a Century, a collection of articles drawn from a hundred years of The Christian Community journal, and gives us a glimpse of what to expect from it.*

*Perspectives on a Century*, which has been published to mark the centenary of The Christian Community in 2022, is a collection of articles selected from the last one hundred years of The Christian Community journal. In his Foreword to the book, Tom Ravetz writes:

*In a world where nothing is outside the circle of divine working, puzzling over the existence of a moth can feel as essential as fathoming the mysteries of the Trinity.*

It's a phrase that perfectly encapsulates the staggering breadth and depth of a century of writing in The Christian Community, which we at Floris Books wanted to bring together in this special book.

The task of reading through a hundred years' worth of journals, which fell to me and my fellow editor Christian Maclean, was both daunting and exciting. How were we going to sift through thousands of articles and whittle them down to a collection of forty or so? This gave rise to in-

teresting insights into the art of curation. We wanted the collection to feel comprehensive, covering every decade of the last hundred years, and for it to showcase the unique perspective of The Christian Community. And then, every once in a while, we hoped to throw in something to challenge our readers' expectations, to make them think differently about a subject, or to provoke debate.

What I found fascinating as I read the journals was not just the ideas they explored and the mysteries they attempted to fathom, but the way in which they offered a glimpse of the world at that time, providing a contemporary view on resonant historical moments. One such article, 'Billy Graham and the Religious Situation in Britain', describes the visit of American evangelical preacher Billy Graham to the UK in 1955. Graham came to Britain on a twelve-week 'crusade' that included a meeting with Queen Elizabeth II—then aged twenty-nine and only three years into her reign—and saw him preach to an estimated two million people. Alfred Heidenreich, one of the founding priests of The Christian Community, went to hear Billy Graham preach at Wembley Arena in May along with 80,000 other people. The account he gives of that evening and the discussion it sparked among the members of The Christian Community in North London is a fascinating exploration of faith,

knowledge and the power of personal conviction. In contrast to the simple interpretation of Christianity presented by Graham, it might seem that we have a wealth of knowledge derived from the insights of Rudolf Steiner. But as Heidenreich asks, 'Has our knowledge really become faith? Do we live by it? Do we stand witness to it with the whole of our being?' These are questions we could ask ourselves now with the same degree of urgency that Alfred Heidenreich expressed nearly seventy years ago.

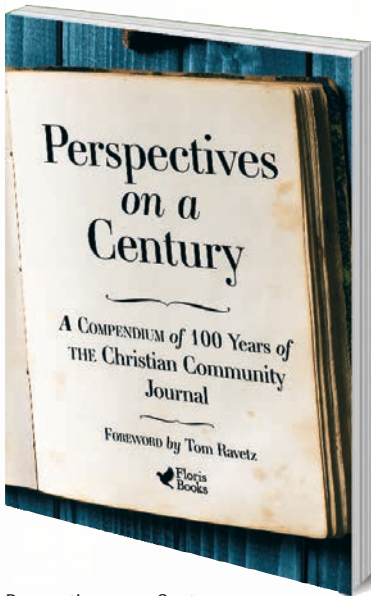
The outward-looking character of Heidenreich's article and its engagement with contemporary culture appealed to me. These elements were also apparent in other articles that offered thoughtful commentary on momentous events of the last century. In 'Forgiving is More Than Amnesia,' Julian Sleight writes about the process of reconciliation following the end of apartheid in South Africa, and the challenge of forgiving the suffering caused by the regime whilst ensuring that it is fully acknowledged at the same time. Sleight quotes a religious studies scholar, saying, 'True reconciliation is a deeply spiritual exercise that cannot bypass the pain of the past.'

The writing in *Perspectives on a Century* does not shy away from tackling difficult and controversial subjects either. One article from the 2010s, 'Fighting the Stigma of AIDS in Uganda,' tells the story of Gideon Byamugisha, a Ugandan Anglican minister who took the courageous decision to go public with his HIV status and speak out against the prejudice and denial surrounding HIV and AIDS. Deborah Ravetz handles this challenging issue with compassion, describing how Gideon decided to 'put his trust in

God and face shame, discrimination and stigma,' ultimately finding his life's work 'among the stigmatised and, with that, the meaning of his existence.' Alongside these articles commenting on issues and events are those that deal with thought-provoking esoteric and spiritual concerns. In 'The Trinity,' Evelyn Francis Derry tackles one of the most profound mysteries of Christianity, considering how the idea of the Trinity developed over time and its relation to monotheism and the threefold human being of body, soul and spirit. In 'The Two Messiahs,' Ormond Edwards writes about the messianic expectations of the Essenes, which were recorded in the Dead Sea Scrolls. He explores how these agree with statements made by Rudolf Steiner, some thirty years before the discovery at Qumran, that not one but two Jesus children were born in Palestine two thousand years ago. And in 'The Tragedy of Judas,' Alfred Heidenreich looks at the tragic destiny of Judas as well as the problem of evil and its place in our world. He ends his article with the poem 'The Fullness of Time' by the Irish poet and storyteller James Stephens. In it, Stephens imagines an aged and haggard Satan being led back to Paradise by his brother archangels, his 'ancient peers,' for 'now the work is done / Enmity is at an end.' It is a deeply moving poem about the redemption of evil. I have returned to it many times since finishing my work on the book.

The project was a great opportunity to read contributions by the luminaries of the early Christian Community. Writers and thinkers such as Emil Bock, whose magisterial, eight-volume work on the Bible made such an impact on me when I first came to anthroposophy, and Rudolf Frieling,

# Celebrating 100 years of Perspectives



Perspectives on a Century  
256 pages | paperback | 978-178250-788-8  
RRP: £14.99 | OFFER: £11.99

This landmark compendium gathers a wide-ranging selection of important articles spanning one hundred years of The Christian Community journal from 1922 to 2022.

The articles include contemplations on the Bible and festivals of the years, essays on the lives and work of artists and writers, and explorations of ideas about science, the natural world and the earth as a living entity.

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The book includes a foreword by Tom Ravetz, Lenker of The Christian Community in Great Britain and Ireland and the current editor of Perspectives.

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whose own studies on the Old and New Testaments offer truly penetrating insights. New editions of Frieling's work, including sections never before published in English, are being reissued by Floris in two handsome hardback volumes *The Complete New Testament Studies* and *The Complete Old Testament Studies* as part of our celebrations of the centenary of The Christian Community.

We also relished the chance to include work by less prolific, less familiar writers. Kalmia Bittleston, who was a priest of The Christian Community, writes about the different types of community, from those we are born into to those we choose; Donald Perkins, who was a minister of the Congregational Church before he, too, became a Christian Community priest, presents a portrait of Abraham Lincoln as an individual inspired by the archangel Michael.

As well as searching for articles that dealt with important topics and grand themes, I was also on the lookout for that little gem of an article. The one that takes a quirky view of what appears to be a modest subject, but which ultimately reveals itself to be so much more, which brings us back to the sub-

ject of moths and Yaroslava Black's wonderful article 'Why Did God Create Moths?' This is a humorous take on our urge to accumulate material possessions, noting how the humble moth demonstrates the impermanence of all things as it eats its way through our wardrobe. It's an amusing reminder of the wisdom of emptying ourselves out (and occasionally decluttering) to find true satisfaction, and a perfect example of what Goethe meant when he wrote at the end of *Faust*, 'All things transient are but a parable.'

It has been a very enriching experience reading through a hundred years of The Christian Community journals, and I hope the finished collection, *Perspectives on a Century*, captures that enrichment. When I think ahead to the next hundred years and consider the many challenges we face today, it seems clear to me that the insight and engagement brought to bear on events by The Christian Community are needed now more than ever.

*Find out more about Perspectives on a Century: [www.florisbooks.co.uk](http://www.florisbooks.co.uk) Receive 20% discount on your copy (and free postage in the UK!) when you enter offer code **PR0522** at checkout.*

## Reviews

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### ***Reflections on the Gospel of John*** **Johannes Lauten**

Translated by Cynthia Hindes 144 pages, £14.99

***Review by Douglas Thackray***

In finishing this short book one is left with a sense of gratitude to Johannes Lauten, as he guides us to a deeper understanding of the Gospel

of St John and Christ's deed on Golgotha. It takes more than a lifetime of thought and study to understand the true significance of Christ's deed and Lauten helps us on the way to this understanding which can come about when faith and knowledge are brought together, as he describes here.

We always walk both paths. The more intensely we walk the path of knowledge, the stronger our faith. Just

*Perspectives*

as our physical existence is healthy through the harmonious cooperation of the blood and the nervous system, so our spiritual existence is healthy through the harmonious cooperation of knowledge and faith.

At the beginning of the book, Johannes Lauten focuses on the importance of investigating the authorship of the Gospel of John. For this reader, this section was rather too detailed, which disturbed the flow of the narrative. He then sets out to show us how, like the disciples, we are also called to become witnesses to the message of salvation. In the chapters 'Encounters with Christ' and 'The working of Grace', we are drawn into the circle of witnesses. Here, Johannes Lauten's lifetime of experience as a priest shows in the insights that he brings to the text. The reader will recognise the many themes which are heard in the gospel readings of The Act of Consecration of Man. We are not only surprised by the novel ways of interpreting these, but also by how they are intertwined in such a way as to lead us towards a broader picture of their consequences as they unfold towards the end days of Christ's life on earth.

We accompany the great journey from the baptism in the river Jordan to Christ's death and resurrection, witnessing the calling of the disciples, the encounter with key personalities, the healings, the supernatural miracles up to the raising of Lazarus. As we approach Holy Week there is a change of tone in the narrative. We are led into the heart of the events by Johannes Lauten's penetrating commentary, which is contained in the chapters 'Jesus Christ's Path to the Cross' and 'An Easter Path'. Although we might be familiar with the Washing of the Feet and the Farewell Discourses, Lauten imbues these events with an intimacy and a

tenderness which is very moving. He reveals Christ and the mystery of our participation in the events of Holy Week and Easter when we receive the holy communion of the bread and wine.

In the preface of this book, Lauten expresses the hope that the reader will find an inner confirmation of the closeness of Christ and his work of salvation, and come to experience the significance of a contemporary Christianity.

In my view the author has more than achieved this giving the reader many valuable insights into the heart of the matter.

### ***The Disappearance of Rituals: A Topology of the Present***

**by Byung-Chul Han**

Polity Press

186 pages, £11.99

***Review by Jens-Peter Linde***

*The current culture of authenticity is accompanied by distrust towards ritualised forms of interaction. Formal behaviour is seen as inauthentic or superficially external. Thus a narcissistic process of inwardness develops an enmity towards formality as such: ritualistic conditioning is discarded in favour of subjective improvisation.*

Byung-Chul Han (my translation)

In this book Byung-Chul Han tries to explain the connection between the disappearance of rituals and the state of our present society. Its language is very concentrated without too many

examples. But if one allows oneself to enter into the train of thoughts presented, one may begin to think differently too—not only about one's own consciousness but also about what moves societies and thus our world!

He does—quite consciously, I suppose—hardly use clerical rituals as examples although one can see that he has studied church history. But if one reads the various chapters—each of which could stand as a separate essay—one becomes aware how much of the troubles of religious life and clerical organisations, of whichever faith, arise from a lack of trust in ritual support—or from its dogmatic following.

Of course, the discarding of rituals is usually seen as an act of free and conscious emancipation but generally one does not notice the erosion of community life which happens at the same time for, like individuals, societies can also fall all too easily into a 'trumpish' narcissism...

In the first chapter the author addresses the ideal character of ritual as based in a symbolism, formed by its *essence*—like the edges of two broken shards which friends in ancient Greek culture would continue to carry on their journeys, as the fitting together again in their forms would prove their friendship after long times of absence.

Although a philosopher, he does not use the Greek words *hylé* and *morph* (*materia* and *forma* in Latin) but the words *signifikat* and *signifikant*, as that which has become significant and that which has made it to be significant. This helps us see that the one cannot be without the other. The quality of a *thing* which has crystallised from *stuff* or has been shaped from it, gives a point of departure, a kernel to space, a centre which holds—like the word which became

flesh and still dwells among us that we can behold glory...

Byung-Chul Han is quite scathing about the fact that modern culture does not respect the interaction of these two qualities, as everything in life has become geared towards production and consumption. He says: 'Rituals and their relationship to reality in this world stabilise life by repetition and preservation ... The present drive towards production on the contrary diminishes the durability of things, as loosely formed items must break soon again so that we can produce more.' But the parts have no meaning, unlike the *tesserae*, the shards of Greek friends.

Instead, as we are meant to consume things quickly so that more can be produced, they are designed fashionably—beautiful for the moment but soon yesterday's style and we need to go shopping again—narcissistically. So also *emotions* have become subjected to this!

The author relates the social context for this loss of ritual in favour of short-term production and consumption—to Neoliberalism. And indeed in this 'ism', values like justice, humaneness and sustainability are also becoming consumable products of fake authenticity. Changing the world by consumption should spell the end of revolutions! 'Soon we all *just must* have vegan smart-phones',—the author assumes with a twinkle in his eyes—and a tear, and points to 'binge-watching and coma-glaring'.

Of course in today's quick change of circumstance we cannot pay proper attention to everything—we cannot be at home in the real world anymore. But deep attention as a practice of daily life points to one dimension of religion. It could come from *re-ligio*: 'I connect again' (to the spirit world),

or from re-lego: 'I attend again' (to the world around me, full of divine creativity). Here, Byung-Chul Han proposes that the quality of attending to prayer could become the home for healing attention! But the soul would have to learn to rediscover ritual!

The compulsion of production and consumption will result in the 'mud of routine'. But true rituals will found 'communities of resonance'. Through narcissism, a private ego will get stuck in that mud, while resonance will always involve a joyful response to an individual You which, when repeated, will not become boring, and when engaged in jointly, can become ever so creative—in this world and in relation to the spirit world also!

In the chapter on 'Festivals and Religion' Byung-Chul Han speaks about the ritual of festivities and begins with the myth of creation as spoken of in Genesis. He looks at the seven days of creation and finds it important to re-align that God's resting on the seventh day is not in order to recuperate from all his 'hard work' but as the *completion and fulfilment* of creation by a 'day' of quiet—which is just *not* 'business'! The Hebrew word *menucha* means 'rest', or 'not doing' or perhaps best 'being', as the essence of creation. The writer wants to make clear that if we use the idea of rest as vacation which just lets us recuperate to get back to work, this vacation becomes vacant of spiritual quality instead of being its fulfilment or completion.

The weekly Day of Quiet on the Sabbath should allow us to hear God's Word as the essence of that which is the 'becoming of creation'. To it belongs the discipline of 'listening to God's sound of silence, instead of babbling away on our mobile phones... For only that which can reveal itself on such a holy day as inner peace can

help us find the peace of spiritual community, whereas our 'babbling away' makes us ever more intent on our individual opinion and thus on our separateness from each other.

Here Franz Rosenzweig is quoted from his book *The Star of Salvation*:

The Word unites, but the united ones are silent—thus liturgy as the focussing mirror, which collects the sunbeams of eternity into the small circle of the year, must introduce the human being into this silence.

Of course people aren't able to fulfil this 'just like that'; we have to learn it, and holy rituals in the rhythms of yearly festivals and weekly sacred celebrations allow us to form our constitution so that we learn to distinguish profanity from sacredness, to hear the Word of the *vita contemplativa* in the noise of the *vita activa* scene within a digital world.

Byung-Chul Han finds that a 'babbling' communication only knows the horizontal surface of arbitrariness, but to become true human beings we need to become aware of the vertical sounding of the Divine Word from the spirit heights right into our hearts. While the realm of work belongs to the sphere of the profane, the realm of silence is the basis of the sacred. And we must not mix them up by creating 'events' instead of festivals. Events are managed profanities whereas festivals should be spiritual artistic experiences. But nowadays festivals become ever so easily subsumed in economic events that we may forget their divine origin. Even a wedding which in German is called *Hochzeit*, 'high time', may easily become a managed event nowadays instead of being a sacrament and continuing from that as a celebration of divine dimensions.

As in the first chapter, the author relates the trouble religion is in to

Neo-Liberalism. In physics, power is an equation of work through time. Whereas work can have a beginning and an end, power, or in social dimensions perhaps better to say 'performance', is linked by division to a horizontal flowing of time and thus is 'breathless'. Thus Neo-Liberalism does not allow for 'high times', only for recuperation as part of the profanity of a work process in progress. But we could rediscover the menu-cha of 'playing', not as *Zeitvertreib*, a wasting of time, but allowing its contemplative presence to fill ourselves with full attention without profane purpose.

Communism was against the slavery of work as exploitation, but in a materialistic way. Instead, capitalism seems to have become a modern pseudo religion. But if 'religio' means 'I connect', capitalism is quite the contrary, it divides! And capitalism counts but religion re-counts and re-members—a different translation (from 'relego'). We could be pilgrims to holy sites, but in neo-liberalistic times we have mostly become tourists to temples and churches. As we cannot expect the times to suddenly be different, only we ourselves can turn again to rituals of reception when visiting these sites. How these can be is not spelled out in the book but I would propose, besides trying to pray on site, to develop some kind of artistic relationship to that which may become visible or audible as the 'Countenance of the Divine' or the 'Word of God'. We can contemplate it and let our experience become a drawing or a verse, a vertical reality of spirit heights in our hearts.

This is a review of the first and third chapter, more or less; the rest of the book circles around—and deepens—the essence of this.

The chapters have the following titles:

*The Compulsion of Production*  
*The Compulsion of Authenticity*  
*Rituals of Closure*  
*Festivals and Religion*  
*A Game of Life and Death*  
*The End of History*  
*The Empire of Signs*  
*From Duelling to Drone Wars*  
*From Myth to Dataism*  
*From Seduction to Porn*

They all speak of a kind of slavery which we are in danger of entering into, not by outer compulsion but by an inner one—and an unacknowledged *narcissism* is the trap by which we are seduced. However, attention to *living form* and in consequence to *ritual* may help us find balance and harmony with all kinds of themes or processes, and creative engagement for a future of life on earth may sprout in due course. After 100 years of efforts to be a 'Movement for Religious Renewal' we too have to watch out for the narcissism of 'I know things which you don't, because Rudolf Steiner has said...' We can hope that the shaping of The Christian Community by living ritual will manage to evolve and shine the way to go forward in togetherness.

I hope I have made you interested. The book can certainly show that despite global warming and viral flooding there are other thoughts which can catch our attention and point to an interesting future for individual life as well as for social interaction.

*Byung-Chul Han studied philosophy, German literature and Catholic theology in Freiburg im Breisgau and in München and has published several books on sociological themes.*

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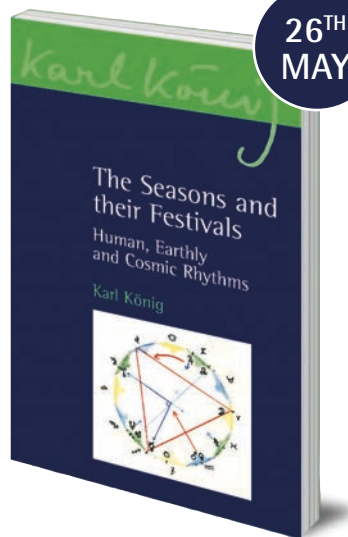
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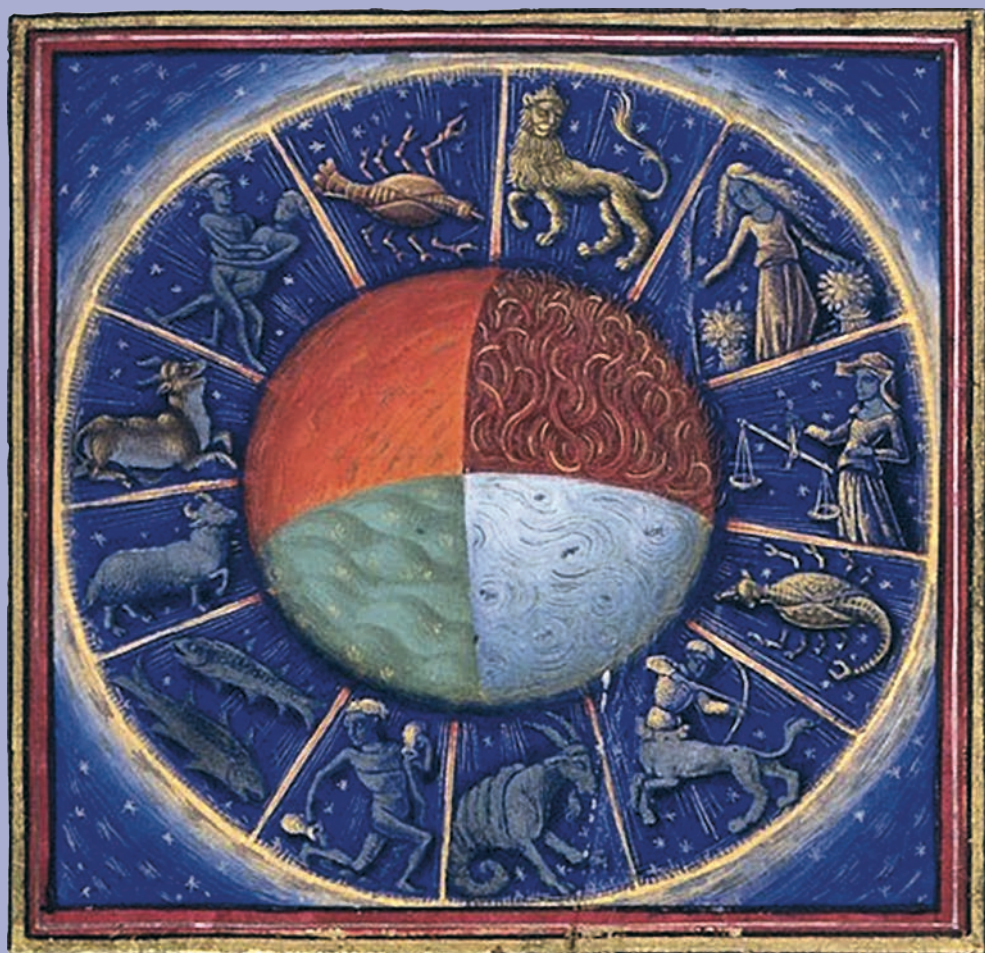
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