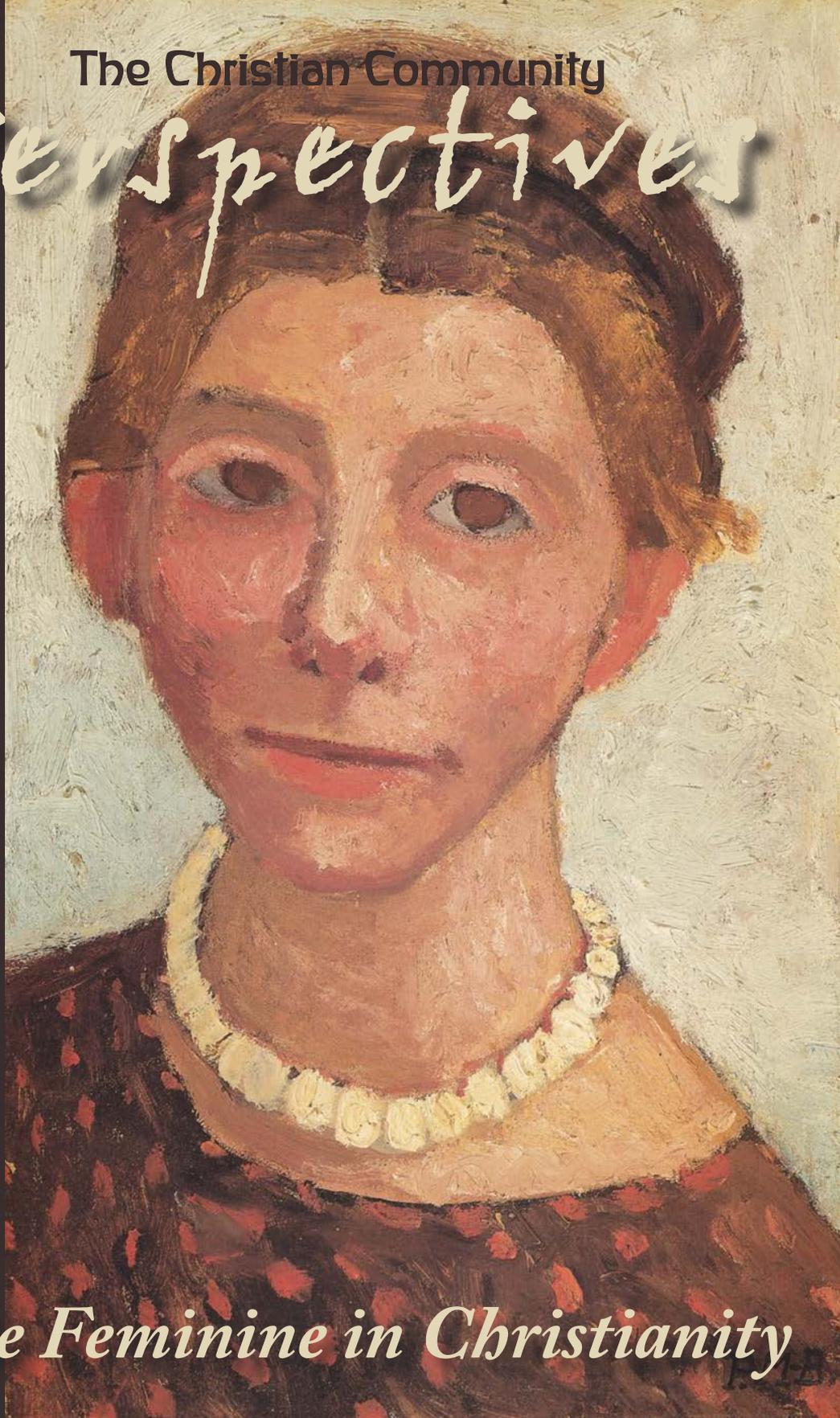


The Christian Community

Perspectives

March—May 2012



The Feminine in Christianity

Contents

- '...by hanging Him from a tree'** 3
Rev. Peter Skaller
- Mary, Sophia** 10
and the New Advent of Christ
Rev. Patrick Kennedy
- Is God a He or a She?** 16
Rev. Monika Schneider
- Confirmation in The Christian Community** 23
David Ramsay
- International Youth Camp 2011 in Romania** 28
Helen (Leo) Keller
- Review:** 30
Celebrating Festivals with Children
by Freya Jaffke
- A new and correct Gospel Reading List** 33
December 2011–November 2012

Unfortunately the previous list was full of mistakes.
Please disregard it and use the one included on page 33.
With apologies.

- Cover pictures**
Paula Modersohn-Becker
- front:**
Self-portrait with white bead necklace, 1906
- back:**
Self-portrait with two flowers in my raised hand, 1907

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Perspectives

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In a fascinating book, *A.D. 381*, Charles Freeman describes the events that led to the adoption of Christianity as the state religion of Rome under Theodosius I. The trajectory that began with Constantine came to fulfilment when the Church became the instrument of state policy. Hand in hand with this went the suppression of opinions that deviated from the Christian mainstream—the ‘heretics’, and the destruction of the ‘pagan’ temples and mystery-centres. In the space of less than a century, the Church changed from being the persecuted minority to being the persecuting majority. Charles Freeman’s particular interest is how this change meant that the lively spirit of enquiry that had been cultivated in the ancient world was dampened under the weight of politically-enforced dogma.

As we emerge as it were on the other side of the Constantinian and Theodosian age, and the outer institutions with guaranteed authority pass away, there is a task to revive the spirit of enquiry that lived in the early church, and to find our own answers to the great questions of life. In the current issue of *Perspectives*, we turn to some vital questions. We hope that the articles will be food for thought and further enquiry.

We have included the corrected list of gospel readings in this issue. Our heartfelt apologies for any confusion caused by the many errors in the list included in the last issue.

TOM RAVETZ

Forgetfulness (an hexameter)

*Starry worlds whirling in mayhem,
Galaxies rumbling in thunder.
Rage of the gods who are snarled
In forces that clash with the Godhead.
Only the King of the Cross
Can redeem the irreverence of Chaos
Caused by the humans in kind,
Who forgot that the Word
Should be Reborn!*

VIRGINIA GILMER

'...by hanging Him from a tree'

Rev. Peter Skaller

*Let us love the trees,
to us the trees are good.
Within their shoots of green
streams God's own living blood.*

*Once the wood did harden,
so Christ hung thereupon.
To nourish us with new food
eternal flow'ring was won.*

ALBERT STEFFEN 1921¹

Holy Week And Trees

Trees permeate Holy Week. On Palm Sunday branches are torn from trees (Greek: *den'-dron*) and placed on the road into Jerusalem (Matt 21:8). On Monday the fig tree (*soo-kay'*) is cursed, on Tuesday it is dead (Mark 11:13, 20). Also on Tuesday, in his apocalyptic discourse, Christ says: 'Observe the fig tree and all the other trees (*den'-dron*).' (Luke 21:29)² On Thursday he refers to himself as the vine (essentially a water-laden prostrate tree) (John 15:1–5). On Good Friday Christ says: '...if they do these things when the wood (or 'tree') (*xoo'-lon*) is full of water (or 'green'), what will happen when it is dry' (Luke 23:31)³

In Acts and Peter's Epistle, tree or wood (*xoo'-lon*, 'xylem') is the term exclusively used after Pentecost rather than 'cross' (*stow-ros*)⁴ in describing the Good Friday event.

Acts 5:30: *But Peter and the apostles answered, '...The God of our fathers raised*

Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree.'

Acts 10:39–4:

again Peter: *They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day...*

Acts 13:28–29:

Paul: *... they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead...*

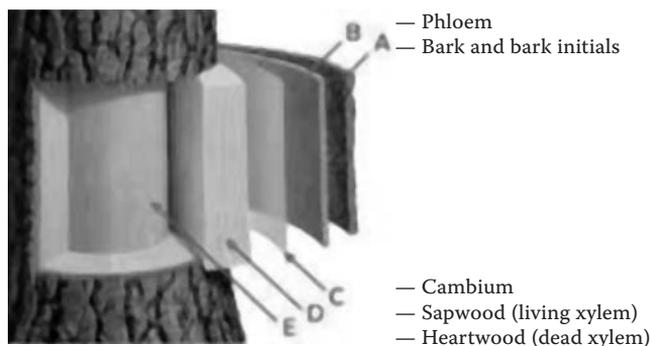
1 Peter 2:24: *He...carried our sins in his body up onto the tree...*

After Pentecost, Peter and Paul, filled with their new understanding of what happened, used ‘tree’ when speaking directly to others. Later Paul does use ‘cross’ in his letters. The tree-picture is so central to the events of the Mystery of Golgotha that we cannot dismiss it as a simple or equivalent alternative to ‘cross.’

What is a tree?

Below is a typical cross-section of a trunk (or large branch).

The cambium is alive, just a few cells thick, encircling the entire tree.



When these cells multiply, those moving towards the center become sapwood (xylem); those going towards the periphery become phloem and bark initials. Bark initials give rise to bark, a dead tissue continually sloughing away like skin. Sapwood continually dies forming heartwood, the bulk of the trunk. The heartwood accumulates, increasing the trunk’s diameter.

If we include sapwood, cambium, phloem and bark initials as the ‘living part’ of, for example, a sugar maple $\frac{1}{2}$ meter in diameter, this living layer would comprise but 2–4 centimeters, the cambium itself but a few millimeters. The phloem transports photosynthate from the leaves downward for the tree’s growth and functioning and for storage in the roots. When tapping for syrup one must not go in too deep, otherwise one misses the sapwood, which transports sugar-laden sap up from the roots. But, as already said, the sapwood continually dies into heartwood. *So, the tree is built out of death.*

Wood is made of substances extracted from the air above and the earth below. Earth substance is pulled up into the air and light via roots and sapwood, while air-light substance densifies and moves earthward via leaves and phloem. Rudolf Steiner describes a tree trunk as a pillar of earth reaching skyward,⁵ but it is also sky and light drawn earthwards. He describes

the cambium as continuous with the forest-soil's humus layer, which itself is a kind of 'cambium.'

So the living part of a tree is a thin cylinder of life around death. The tree's life radiates into the surrounding forest. In the roots the dead proportion increases, and Steiner describes an impoverishment of life-forces in the soil around the root zone.⁶ He further describes how there is a gathering of rich soul-forces surrounding and emanating from a tree's crown, and where birds and insects abound. He suggests taking in the wafting aromas of trees as a way to perceive sensibly the supersensible, astral environment of a forest.

A tree, as we know, is a blessing for all sorts of life. And do we not love the trees probably more than any other plant form? The rejuvenation we feel when walking through a forest comes not just from the peace and quiet, but also from being embedded in these tree-borne fields of life and soul.

Are human beings like trees?

Mark 8:22–26: And they bring a blind man to Jesus... Taking the blind man by the hand...and after spitting on his eyes and laying His hands on him, He asked him, 'Do you see anything?' And he looked up and said, 'I see people, but they look to me like trees, walking.' Then again He laid His hands on his eyes; and he looked intently... and began to see everything clearly.

People looking like walking trees? Was the man, at first unable to perceive clearly physical forms, perhaps sensing moving fields of etheric and astral light reminiscent of those around trees?

Deuteronomy 20:19 When you besiege a city...in order to capture it, you shall not destroy its trees by swinging an axe against them...For is the tree of the field a human being, that it should be besieged by you?

Does God ask a rhetorical question? Might there actually have been some confusion in that early, still clairvoyant consciousness, between a man and a tree?

Or consider Psalm 92:12–14.

The righteous man will flourish like the palm tree. He will grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still yield fruit in old age; they shall be full of sap and very green.

Is this only a metaphor?

Rudolf Steiner compared the human being to an upside down plant, roots corresponding to the thinking head, flowers to the reproductive-digestive-will pole. But he was referring to the

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Bersshire
Region in the
USA.*

general plant form.⁷ The specific tree-type has its trunk as a kind of root extension, together corresponding to the mostly dead human head, not just the skull but also the nerves. In this sense, the death-process within the roots and trunk corresponds to the death-creating activity of our fallen and dead thinking. In the letter to Sardis (Rev 3:1), the community presaging the consciousness of our current epoch,⁸ the angel says:

You have the name of being alive, yet are dead.

The trees in the garden

There was a river in the Garden of Eden. Outside the Garden, it branched into four great rivers (Gen 2:10). But earthly rivers don't branch; the branches *converge*! The branching *form* of earthly rivers, often called 'dendritic,' is a reversed image of how life moves in the spiritual world. The great river of life originates as a single gushing from God, then branches as does a tree.

In a tree the movement of water follows both patterns. It is gathered from the periphery into the roots, *converging to the trunk like earthly rivers do*. But in the crown, the trunk river branches out as water flows back into the peripheral air and light corresponding to the Paradise-river's movement. On the other hand, as sugar-laden water flows back downward, the earthly pattern is above, the heavenly below. Both flows occur simultaneously. In the tree, therefore, life moves in both the earthly and the spiritual patterns. The part where death truly dominates, the xylem, holds the heavenly and earthly streaming together.

The bible says there were two trees in the garden, the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge which could also be called the Tree of Death, for Adam was told that if he ate from it he would die.

The Tree of Life is the great flowing river-of-life emanating from God with the 'sound of many rushing waters' (Rev 1:15), then branching out into the myriad of created living beings, the 'ten-thousand things' of Taoism.⁹ This is a supersensible tree. The Word is this very Life, which is also Light (Jn 1). This is another way of thinking about Christ; as the life-light of the world born as an 'only' river from God, then branching out and through all living beings, both spiritual and earthly.

As Man fell in the Garden, attaching knowing to sense-perception, our thinking took on hardened contours and the world also took on hardened contours (see poem by Steffen). Man and World hardened together. Gradually we left the Garden entirely. Do we have a mission to accomplish spiritual freedom through being separated ('sin') as individuals from the Tree of Life? Through experiencing 'death'?

One could say that the entire sense-world is the Tree of Knowledge or Death having arisen *within* the Tree of Life as the *heartwood-xylem of the world*. When the Bible states that Christ was hung from a tree (xylem) it means that he was hung on the dying, dried-up and dead wood of our sense world.

A remarkable thing about our trees is that they are both alive and yet mostly dead. In the cambium lives a vague remnant of the Tree of Life while most of the tree's size and mass comprises dead wood, like the Tree of Knowledge which separated out (again, separation—'sin') from the Tree of Life. Consider again what is said to the community in Sardis in Apocalypse 3:1–2: 'you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die...'

How much of us is dead, how much still lives? This question faced the spiritual world when Christ was sent to the earth. On Good Friday, the wood still had 'green'; had some life. But all the tree images of Holy Week point towards the wood being caught up in a drying, dying process. Humanity's death process, originating from eating from the Tree of Sense-Knowledge, was threatening to overtake it. With Christ's hanging from the tree, not only did humanity's death-process reach a nadir (or zenith depending on the point of view), but also a turning point.

The turning point came because the Life of the World united with World Death. Or, one could say, the Tree of Life reconnected with the Tree of Death infusing it with rejuvenating life as a New Creation!

The tree and the cross

Picture Christ hanging from the Tree.

(Deut 21:22–23):²² *When someone is convicted of a crime punishable by death and is executed, and you hang him on a tree, his corpse must not remain all night upon the tree; you shall bury him that same day for anyone hung on a tree is under God's curse...*

Under Mosaic Law, to be hung from a tree was the ultimate punishment and disgrace. It meant the person had abandoned connection to the Law, hence to God, and was so totally given over to the earthly world that he at the same time fell into separation from the community. He was suspended between heaven and earth, dead and at home in neither world. He was 'hung from a tree'.

Whereas the Cross-symbol pictures being fastened to the physical human body of death, the tree-symbol goes further. It shows Christ being hung from the very dying world, the entire universe. Thus Paul can say: 'For we

know that the whole creation groans and suffers...’ (Rom 8:22–23), because all of creation had been, through the Fall, taken into Death. The great river of life was in danger of being overwhelmed by death.

The new Jerusalem Tree

Christ came to restore the Tree of Life, that is, to resurrect a living world from a dying world. In the New Jerusalem only the Tree of Life grows. That ‘other’ tree is no longer there. He hung from the Tree of Death reuniting it with the Tree of Life. We could also say that *He himself became the Tree of Death!* By taking upon himself the sin, the separation, of the world from God, He so permeated this tree with Truth, with the ‘New Confession,’ and with Life, the ‘New Faith,’ that the Tree of Life resurrected.

Perhaps we can think of tree anatomy this way: that the Tree of Life consists only of cambium, sapwood, phloem and bark initials. There is no heartwood, there is no bark. There is only flowing, pulsing, moving light and life. This is another way of thinking about the Resurrection Body; as pure flowing Life and Light in the true Form of the human body, the living human body, being the microcosm of the World-Tree of Life.

Legend has it that the tree that was dead, even thorn imbued, sprouted roses. Hence the Rose Cross picture as a picture of the new Tree of Life redeemed from the Tree of Death by the Deed of Christ.

Revelation 22:2: ...in the middle of its street on either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

What kind of a tree is this, which grows on both sides of the river and bears twelve kinds of fruit? This supersensible tree emerges from the river of life springing from God. The river branches ‘dendritically’ out into the tree and is continuous with it. This tree branches through the twelve regions of the heavens pouring a twelve-fold variety of beings and moralities into Creation. The world itself has reconnected with *the Tree and River of Life* which are again one.

Christ made this possible by being the first to redeem life from death. We are to continue this work which He began, far into the future. With His life working in us, we can hope to bring life back to the world. In time, each of us must also hang from the tree as He did.

And all that has been said here is contained in Albert Steffen’s beautiful short poem.

Notes:

- 1 From the German in: Steffen, Albert: 1921, Weg-Zehrung, Im Rhein-Verlag zu Basel.
- 2 (Here the Greek word den'-dron is used, the more usual word we associate with 'tree.' Why did Luke not use this word in Acts, where tree is translated from xy'-lon from which we derive 'xylem,' the mostly dead wood of the tree?)
- 3 The 'green' wood is literally the 'xylem full of water' (hyd'ro xy'lo) or 'sapwood' as opposed to when it is dry or xeric (xe'ro) or 'heartwood'. See below, What Is A Tree?
- 4 In his gospel, Luke, also the Acts' author, uses 'crucify', which contains the root for cross (*stau'-ron*), but only refers once to an actual cross on Good Friday, that which Simon of Cyrene carried. The other evangelists use 'cross', but this word never comes from the mouth of Jesus when referring to the event on Golgotha. In the conversation with Nicodemus in John 2 Jesus says he 'must be lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent...' Moses used a staff, according to legend a piece of the 'Tree of Life' from the Garden of Eden, to lift the serpent, which wrapped around it and later became the healing symbol of the medical profession.
- 5 Rudolf Steiner, June 12 & 15, 1924 (GA 327), August 30, 1919 (GA 295), March 15, 1920 (GA 312)
- 6 R. Steiner, June 12 & 15, 1924 (GA 327)
- 7 R. Steiner, March 25, 1920 (GA 312)
- 8 R. Steiner, June 20, 1906 (GA 104)
- 9 Tao Te Ching, Verse 34 Lent Song

Lent Song

*As Jesus to the garden went
in sadness all the branches bent.
Then stirred a cry from every shade.
In sorrow stood the rising blade
and every leaf that God had made.*

*When Mary near the cross did stand,
in bitter woe she raised her hand:
O bend you trees, o break you stone,
my son is utterly forlorn
and pain within my heart is born.*

*The heart's song did not sound in vain,
for many now can hear again
the word of angels: Do not fear!
New light and sound in us appear
for strengthened heart and wakened ear.*

German folk song, translation from Camphill

Mary, Sophia and the New Advent of Christ

On the source of renewal in Christianity

Patrick Kennedy

In an open conversation last year someone asked about the nature of the second coming of Christ and what connection, if any, this might have with the emerging awareness in our time of the divine feminine, or 'Sophia.' This question touches on the deepest realities of our time and on what must begin to happen within Christianity if it is to have any positive future, so I offered to address it within a longer talk. The few thoughts offered here can only be taken as one aspect of an unendingly deep subject.

Christ's 'Second' Coming

First, we need to explore our assumptions about the nature of the 'second coming,' a name or title which itself is very misleading. Why? Because it implies that Christ has left. Yet, if we alone follow what the gospels tell us on this subject, he has not left us at all. In the Gospel of Matthew it is Christ who promised 'I am with you always, even to the end of the age,' (Matt 28:20) or 'wherever two or three are gathered in my name there I am also' (Matt 18:20). The traditional conception of Christ's 'leaving'—as well as the promise of his 'return'—comes, of course, from the story of his 'ascension' (Acts 1:9-11), where the disciples follow his rising into the clouds and hear the words of the attending angels that he will return in the same way. What can be made of these discrepancies? Either these two parts of the Gospel are in direct contradiction to each other or we need to gain a different understanding of what is meant by *ascension* and *return*.

The essential new understanding, attainable through modern Spiritual Science, of the meaning of Christ's life, death and resurrection, is that Christ's inmost being was united with the earth's being, with the processes and substances of the earth. This truth is expressed in all the central images of the event of Golgotha itself: On the cross we see his blood flowing into the ground and his body was laid into a cave, into the depths of the earth itself. Why would he come so deep into our experience, into human-ness, into the depths of matter, only to abandon the earth for the heavens again?

St. Paul can provide us a key to understanding the ascension in a way that harmonizes with the comforting words of Matthew: 'behold, I am with you always...':

In saying, 'He ascended,' what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions of the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.
(Ephesians 4:9–10, *author's emphasis*)

Through all that happened on the mount known as Golgotha, Paul leads us to see his ascension into 'heaven' as something that could more accurately be called the 'expansion.' Christ does not abandon the earth, but expands into and permeates all earthly and heavenly spheres. What the gospels and the esoteric teacher we know as St. Paul show us—and what the open eyes of the heart can perceive—is that Christ did not abandon us here on the earth; he has simply grown beyond the limits of the human form into a new cosmic level, permeating the earth with heavenly being. Christ is with us; with his 'ascension' he had simply grown beyond our capacity to 'see' him.

But if Christ is with us, what is meant by the 'second coming'? If he permeates our earthly reality, why is it that so many souls cannot perceive him, acknowledge his presence, or know him? What is it that has left us; what have we lost?

The Fall of human consciousness

As a way to illustrate what is now missing for us, that is, what we in humanity have lost here on the earth, one can begin by listing the traditional doctrines and tenets of Christianity and honestly asking: what of these can we understand? Which of these fundamental teachings of Christianity can be comprehended and grasped by modern, Western souls? I did this recently at a talk given on this subject. The list began slowly and then began to pick up pace until the entire writing pad was covered with all the fundamental truths of Christianity. For example:

- the 'virgin birth'
- why Jesus has two different lineages in the bible
- angels—of all ranks
- any of the miracles—the healings, walking on water, feeding the 5000, etc.
- the trinity
- the transubstantiation, and most importantly-
- the resurrection—the central truth and signature of Christianity

We had to acknowledge that for the modern soul, Christianity and Christ himself had become incomprehensible, something

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we simply no longer understand. Clearly what we have lost is our understanding, our knowledge of Christ. What is missing is the ‘Sophia’ or Christ-Wisdom.

Following the trajectory of human thinking and inner understanding of the nature and reality of Christ over the course of the centuries from the beginnings of Christianity, we see a very clear trajectory. The early centuries reveal a consciousness still very much open to the reality and light of the spirit and of the divine, cosmic dimensions of the being that incarnated in Jesus. By the middle ages the light begins to darken, the doors to heaven begin to close and the church desperately tries to hold onto its truths through the establishment of official ‘dogma’ (teaching). By the 19th century, almost everything has been lost and the great theologians of the day can only honestly stand behind the figure of Jesus as the ‘simple man of Nazareth’ who was deluded that the culmination of time had arrived. Thus, in terms of our consciousness, Nietzsche could honestly declare, ‘God is dead.’ From the time of Christ’s appearance in Palestine to the 19th and 20th Centuries we can follow how Western souls are less and less able to recognize, acknowledge or understand the divine reality of Christ or the essence of Christianity. Our minds fell into the darkness of materialistic consciousness; our ‘soul eyes’ became blind to the presence of Christ.

The fructification of the individual soul by the spirit— or Mary and the moment of ‘conception’

So what is it that could bring about the renewal of Christianity? What is it that could bring about a new perception of Christ? Nothing other than a search for the Sophia, the knowledge or wisdom of Christ. This was—and is—the mission of that spiritual movement that goes by the name of Anthroposophy. Modern spiritual science, or Anthroposophy, provides the means to understand everything that has become non-understandable in Christianity (including each of the items listed above).

The path to rediscovering the Sophia begins with taking in the fruits of Spiritual Scientific research on the nature of the being of Christ and his transformative life and death. Thinking these thoughts through with honest reflection and sound judgment begins the process of shaping new eyes for perceiving the reality of Christ. However, higher knowledge of the reality of this being requires more than learning new facts; it requires a total revolution and transformation of the soul.

This soul transformation for the reception of the spirit is often called ‘initiation’ for it is the process whereby one is led, or initiated, into the knowledge

of worlds hidden from the senses. The process of initiation is the process to prepare the soul for the birth of the spirit. This preparation can be achieved through what is sometimes called ‘catharsis’, or the purification of the soul. Exercises in moral development, meditation and prayer, taking in thoughts of the spirit, of the eternal, work to transform the soul and awaken the slumbering, higher Human Being within. Ultimately this leads to a transformation of the forces already found in the soul: our thinking, feeling and willing. Before initiation they were haphazardly developed in response to life and directed towards the transitory world of the senses. Through esoteric training these powers are ‘lifted’ up to the highest, the eternal world of the spirit and brought under the direction of these spiritual principals.

In the path laid out by Rudolf Steiner in his book, *How to Know Higher Worlds*, the student is first directed to wrap their inner life in a mantle of feelings of reverence, wonder and devotion. This comes out of a deep knowledge of the laws of the soul and spirit worlds which Socrates once explained, ‘Wisdom begins in wonder.’ The inner experience of the Sophia (Wisdom) is made possible through the cultivation of reverential wonder and devotion.

The next step is to educate carefully the three forces of the soul. Our thoughts are to be brought into a harmonious, logical flow and educated in careful attention. With our feelings we are led to three different qualities that must be developed. We are taught to develop an objective relationship to our feelings, no longer overwhelmed by the highs and lows of our soul, the exaltations and lamentations, developing the power of equanimity. Openness to everything that comes our way in true interest and trust that all that comes our way is directed by the guiding wisdom of the universe is a second important quality to develop for our feeling. This is expressed in Mary’s words, ‘may it come to pass as you have said’ (Luke 1:38). A third quality of feeling that we must ever strive to develop is the ability to focus our attention on what is good and true, to focus on the positive. This is a very important quality to develop, for as inner vision develops, more and more of the world begins to reveal itself to the esoteric student. This includes the detailed and easily overwhelming vision of all that is imperfect, untrue, ugly and evil in the world and other people. It often happens, if the student of the inner path has not attended enough to this exercise, that the person on the spiritual path becomes more intolerant, judgemental and negative than before they started!

In the case of the higher development of our willing, it is to be born anew out of our own direction and guidance, not constantly in reaction

to the world nor involuntarily following passions and drives. The esoteric student is called to open his/her will to the needs of others and of the earth and to give his/her actions a guidance born of insight and inner wisdom. In summary—if one were to use the words of the Act of Consecration of Man—you could say that the intention of the esoteric student is to develop: pure thinking, loving heart, and willing devotion.

The transformation of the forces of the soul, the purification of our feeling, thinking and willing, is what one can call ‘making one’s soul a ‘virgin’ soul’. Now, when the student of the inner worlds approaches the world, another person, a higher thought in meditation and prayer, their pure thinking, loving feeling, devoted and accepting willing, open up the soul to more than the abstract truths of existence. They enable an encounter, a moment of fructification. This opening allows a moment of grace to take place, the moment of inner ‘conception’. It is a real event in the life of the person on the path in which a new, higher life stirs within the soul, which, through the path of intimate careful development—referred to in simple sketch form above—transforms the soul into a womb, a place in which the delicate development of the spirit can unfold, be fed and nourished and protected by the purified soul.

This event in the life of the initiate has been portrayed artistically over millennia. Think of Isis holding Horus, of images of the Madonna shown with the child, often emerging from an opening in her mid-section. In Mary, the artists depicted the purified soul, expressing pure devotion, openness, equanimity and trust in every gesture and colour. All of these images are a representation of a higher experience of knowing, of inner wisdom being fructified by the spirit. In medieval annunciation paintings, Mary is almost always shown reading a book (the scriptures), meditatively pursuing knowledge. And we see her at the moment when this knowledge becomes something much more than what we normally associate with knowing: it becomes new life within. We see her head lifting from the page and a ray of light shines down from the heights and touches her head. It is the moment of the conception of the ‘divine child’, the higher human within, the one ‘born of God’. These images of Mary are a depiction not only of a historical figure but of the human soul itself, and the Christ child presents to us an image of the eternal human spirit, the higher self. Anyone who seriously and devotedly follows the path laid out in Anthroposophy will themselves experience this annunciation moment. It is an intimate but completely real and objective experience of the striving individual that comes as a moment of grace on the path of self-development, where they begin to experience ‘Not I, but Christ in me’.

The fructification of the community soul—or the moment of conception in the congregation gathered around the altar

But how does this relate to the specific mission of The Christian Community? One could say that our mission is to facilitate this spiritual conception, this higher knowing, in community through the Eucharist, the centre of the seven sacraments. There too, it requires a 'Mary-Sophia-Soul' to receive the new presence of Christ. In the service, this higher, generative knowing is spoken of in an amazing way. We follow the movement of the book from the right to the inside left of the altar—from outside to inside—a representation of crossing over from the outer world to the inner world, the crossing of the threshold. There, during the stage of the service traditionally known as the transubstantiation but perhaps better understood as the Transformation, the priest speaks for the soul of the community, praying that the offering be brought through 'our pure thinking, our loving heart, our willing devotion.' Here the three forces of the soul are attributed to a 'we' not an 'I'. A few moments later, the sacred act of inner knowing is described this way: the congregation *knows* Christ in freedom.

These thoughts may at first seem abstract. However, when we take them into our souls and enter into the Act of Consecration of Man with this thought: together we are building a higher, community soul, that can receive—as Mary did—the being of Christ—this thought can open the doorway to whole new experiences in our celebrating together. Through this we can begin to feel into how in the Act of Consecration of Man, we approach the divine ground of existence through the purified Mary-Soul of the community who is able to be the 'virgin soul' in which the Christ-Spirit can be born. In the service, it is the community that becomes the bearer of Christ. It is the gathered devoted community and the eternal forms expressed in the ritual that creates a new vessel for Christ's 're-appearance.'

Human souls are in desperate need of the experience of the one who brings peace to human hearts, strengthens their wills and unites us in a new humanity. This is the deepest longing of every soul. Since the time Jesus Christ walked the earth, our souls have grown ever less able to perceive his nearness, his presence. Though he is here, radiant and bright, we have grown blind; we have lost the Sophia who knows Christ in the highest sense. I hope that this article can help us to gain a sense of how the power of the Sophia can be found again as the essential, receptive power on the individual path of initiation and on the community path of offering.

Based on a talk during a recent visit to the affiliate congregation in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Summarized by Linda Finigan, edited and reworked by Patrick Kennedy.

Is God a He or a She?

Monika Schneider

Is God a He or a She? In the preparation for her Confirmation a girl last year asked the priest: 'Why is God a He?', which is a very understandable question, given the fact that Jesus was a man and that we call God Father and the Spirit 'He' in the Act of Consecration of Man. The treatment of women in the history and present of Christian churches also raises questions. The dominating of the male element has by no means always been the case. Some thousands of years ago, at the time when the female element dominated and the Goddess was revered, a boy might have asked his priestess: 'Why is God a She?' But is She? Or He? When some months ago young Muslims gave a talk about modern Islam in Stourbridge, a young woman spoke about the difference between religion and culture and pointed out how much of the suppression of women in Muslim societies is really of cultural origin, has nothing to do with Islam and is nowhere to be found in the Qur'an. She said that she had decided not blindly to trust the Imam or anybody anymore, but to go to the sources and read for herself what is actually written in the Holy Scriptures. When we do the same we find plenty of examples which show that the almost exclusively male interpretation of the Bible is not entirely justified. The Hebrew word for God's Spirit brooding over the chaotic waters at the beginning of Creation is 'ruach', which is feminine. In the Aramaic Lord's Prayer the word for 'kingdom' is related to the word for 'Great Mother' still used in the Middle East and the word we translate as 'daily bread' means nourishment of all kinds and derives from roots for the Divine Feminine and for Holy Wisdom (or in Greek 'Sophia'). There is more to be found, feel free to investigate it yourself!

Turning to the New Testament we find one of the most touching examples in the Prologue of John, where in the last verse it says: 'No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom (or womb) of the Father, he has made him known.' The Greek word 'kolpon' means indeed bosom, and

womb, and curvature. So God is a Father with a womb and a bosom and all curved. All the Gospels give evidence of the integration of women and of the importance of the female element, especially the Gospel of Luke.

It was the women who held out and remained near Jesus at the Cross whilst the male disciples were dispersed and

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hiding. The women were also the first to be at the grave, given by the angel the task to tell the others that Jesus had been raised. They were the first to meet the Risen One himself. It was also a woman who performed the first sacramental deed when she anointed Jesus' body for burial in Bethany. Luke tells us that women were not only following Jesus but providing for him and his disciples out of their means (8:1–3). Rosemary Radford Ruether writes in her book *Sexism and God-Talk* about the parables in Luke's Gospel: 'The images of male and female in Luke's parables are equivalent. They both stand for the same things, as paired images. One is in no way inferior to the other.'

Again, feel free to go on your own journey of discovery by reading the Gospels with the question of the representation of the Female in mind. You may join me in my conclusion that Jesus did not exclude, patronise or oppress women. That began later. However, in the early 12th century Anselm of Canterbury, Benedictine monk, philosopher and Archbishop, wrote: 'But you too, good Jesus, are you not also a mother? Are you not a mother who like a hen gathers her chicks beneath her wings?...And you, my soul, dead in yourself, run under the wings of Jesus your mother and lament your griefs under his feathers. Ask that your wounds may be healed and that, comforted, you may live again. Christ, my mother...'

The question remains though why God incarnated in a male body, Jesus, and why we call God Father and not Mother. In the book *The Shack* by WM Paul Young I found a very interesting thought. The hero of the book, Mack, meets the Trinity. The Father God is a black woman whom he calls Papa and in one conversation Mack asks her/him: 'but then why is there such an emphasis on you being a Father? I mean, it seems to be the way you most reveal yourself.' 'Well', responded Papa, 'there are many reasons for that, and some of them go very deep. Let me say for now that we knew once the Creation was broken, true fathering would be much more lacking than mothering. Don't misunderstand me, both are needed—but an emphasis on fathering is necessary because of the enormity of its absence.'

The enormity of the absence of fathers and true fathering—sadly this has been the reality for humanity not only in our days of divorce and single mothers, but also through wars where the fathers fought and all too often died. Or through demands of work, which in the past caused the absence of fathers from their children often even more severely than today. Do we call God Father, because we are in such a need of a father?

Elizabeth A. Johnson in her book *She Who Is* has yet another suggestion to make why God incarnated in a male body: 'The crucified Jesus embodies

the exact opposite of the patriarchal ideal of the powerful man, and shows the steep price to be paid in the struggle for liberation. The cross thus stands as a poignant symbol of the 'kenosis of patriarchy,' the self-emptying of male dominating power in favour of the new humanity of compassionate service and mutual empowerment. On this reading Jesus' maleness is prophecy announcing the end of patriarchy, at least as divinely ordained.'

It would be wrong though to think that patriarchy needs to be replaced by political correctness, calling God 'She' as well as 'He' or by a return to the Goddess and matriarchy. The book of Genesis tells us that God created the Human Being as an androgynous being at first: 'So God created Man in his own image; in the image of God created he him; male and female he created them.' The Human Being was created in the image of God, male and female in one Being. That means of course that God is both male and female too. And then the Human Being was separated, made in two in order not to be alone, to have a partner, a mirror, a companion. And since that second step in our creation we have the task to overcome the separation, to make whole and one again what has become divided. Jesus said to the disciples (Mark 10:6-9) 'In the primeval beginnings of creation God created them male-female. Therefore man will leave his father and his mother and join himself to his wife. And the duality shall one day again become a physical unity, so that there will no longer be two kinds, but only one kind of physical body.'

Men and women represent two halves of a whole. Of course that means that we are different from each other as we can observe easily in daily life. The male gesture is very different from the female gesture. We create difficulties for ourselves when we value one more than the other—regarding one as more valuable, important or even more spiritual than the other. The female gesture also is not only expressed by women and men are able to live more than just the male gesture. Part of the process of overcoming the gender division is that we all need equally to develop and live both gestures. The female gesture can be described as an 'all embracing, peripheral gesture that receives, that carries, that is open to whatever may come. It has a universal and cosmic breadth and is rather passive.' On the other hand, 'The active male gesture is one that is directed firmly towards the earth. It is determined, thrust out of the cosmos and into the ever firmer and harder ground of earth existence. It has the urge to enter ever more closely into this earth existence, to penetrate it and in penetrating it to transform it.' (Baruch Urieli)

Both gestures are equally important, equally necessary in the evolution of humanity and the world. When one of them begins to dominate the healthy

balance is disturbed, with dangerous consequences. The book of Genesis describes how daughters of men became wives of the sons of God and bore children to them who were giants. (Genesis 6:1–8) These giants became a danger for the development of humanity, which needed to become fully anchored on earth. This was hindered by the continuing strong bond between women and the sons of God and therefore not only the Great Flood became a necessity but also the earth-directed male element had to take on the leadership of humanity.

Baruch Urieli writes in his book *Male and Female*:

Humanity had to leave the bosom of the divine world within which it had once been entirely embedded. Human beings had to become citizens of the earth. Thus the male element took on the leading role and humanity entered ever more deeply into the realm of matter. By the end of the nineteenth century this process had reached its completion. However, the earth-directed tendency continued to work and humanity began to encounter sub-earthly forces and their boundless power of destruction...the destruction of human life and of the earth for financial gain, the unleashing of...nuclear energy... Linked with all this is a basic development in our male-dominated civilization which can be seen as an equivalent of those events in Genesis which led to the appearance of giant human beings on the earth. The giants begotten today are not oversized humans. They are oversized machines, companies, corporations and multi-national concerns, telephone net, internet...we will have to learn to operate in settings and with implements that can be contained by the conscious human mind... A culture will have to develop which pays attention to detail and cares for the small things, just as a motherly mind would do. In other words, the truly female element that embraces, cares and forms must increase once more.

In The Christian Community, from the very beginning, women were fully integrated, ordained as priests and active in the congregations. Unfortunately that does not mean that automatically the female gesture is fully present. The history of the United Kingdom shows that a female prime minister does not necessarily mean a more female gesture in politics either. We are still only beginning to learn how as a woman to be a priest, a doctor, a teacher, a scientist, an artist. The task remains for us all, women and men, to develop and practise the particular female qualities which our communities, society and humanity need. We need to learn to be human beings who are open and receptive, caring and providing, embracing and listening and at the same time directed towards the earth, fully incarnated

and active, grounded and decisive. I look forward to conversations in which we can explore together where we are at in this process: as individuals and as a community.

In our central Sacrament, The Act of Consecration of Man, we speak about the Father God and call him, the Son and the Spirit 'He', although they all are also a 'She'. We address the male side of the Godhead as it is the male element and gesture which expresses itself primarily in creation and in the purpose of our Service, which is helping with the transformation of the earth into the next, spiritual stage of its development.

Whilst I was preparing the talk on which this article is based I celebrated the Act of Consecration in German and it struck me that the very last words each time are: Die Menschenweihehandlung, das war SIE. (The Act of Consecration that was SHE.)

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Confirmation in The Christian Community— Movement for Religious Renewal

David Ramsay

On a bright sunny day in May three years ago my son was confirmed at the Taconic Berkshire Christian Community—Movement for Religious Renewal in rural Hillsdale, New York. It was a light filled day that marked the transition between his childhood and youth. He remarked on the beauty of the chapel, which struck my wife and me because he'd never said anything like that before. His face softened and he looked happy.

Although not obvious to him, to us he was changed. Now on his own accord he chooses to attend services on an occasional basis. Inspired by what happened to him, I decided to look more deeply into confirmation and share what I found. What follows is based on interviews with two parents and two Christian Community priests. These conversations illuminate the fathomless depth of this sacrament and its value to the youth who have gone through it.

In The Christian Community, confirmation marks the transition from childhood to youth, usually around 13 or 14 years of age. 'As baptism is given to a child when it is beginning its own life in the physical body, so confirmation is given when a boy or girl is beginning his or her own life of soul,' says Evelyn Capel in *Seven Sacraments in The Christian Community*.

All the grownup powers of thought, all the various kinds of feeling, and all the forces of will are growing within them. Youths are trying out new ways of thinking, feeling and willing and just as a child gets bumps and scrapes when

learning to walk, so a fourteen year-old confirmand may cause concerns in his or her parents as they try out new behaviours... Selfhood with its light and dark side grows within them.

As the young person changes within themselves they are waking up to the world around them. As they begin to wake up to their destinies and sense how much they will need to learn, the sacrament confirms their sense of the importance of this transition period and consecrates them for their new life with its bright hopes and shadowy fears.

Young people prepare for confirmation by participating in classes led by their local priest starting in the previous year up until the confirmation which occurs on one of the forty days after Easter. Classes deal with subjects of importance to young people in early teen years including, death, birth, sexuality, and the role of Christ in their lives. In many cases the youth participate in a weekend retreat.

As will be seen below, it is important that the decision to receive confirmation should be made by parents and the young person working together. The time when the important decisions are made solely by the parent are coming to an end but in this decision, the young person and his or her parents can become aware of the deeply rooted trust that exists between them.

The confirmation service consists of two parts: the Sacrament of Confirmation and the Communion Service, the Act of

Consecration of Man, in which the confirmands receive communion for the first time. The congregation is the witness of the ceremony.

A parent looks at confirmation

The experiences of Jennifer Chace, a parent from Maine, USA and her daughters Emelie and Zoe, show the value of confirmation from a parent's perspective. They also show the difficulties in motivating youth to go through the experience whose deeper value may not become apparent until later in the confirmands their life.

Ms. Chace, a Waldorf teacher, said she was interested in having her daughters talk with someone other than with herself and her husband about important youth issues from a spiritual perspective.

I tried to bring up some of these kinds of topics and they'd kind of roll their eyes and say, 'Uh-huh.' I looked at the week-to-week curriculum for confirmation and it covered such topics as marriage, birth, death and what are my values, and I liked that they would hear about these things from a more spiritual, religious viewpoint...

Motivating and keeping her daughters going was a challenge as is the case with many young people.

In sixth grade, when they first heard about it, they really wanted to go... In seventh grade it was a possibility—we didn't talk about it much—and then in eighth grade, they really, really didn't want to do it. We said that they had to and they had said they would do it after we'd signed them up...

David Ramsay is a member of The Christian Community in Maine..

It was a tough sell and to make it more interesting, she tried to combine it with going to a museum, shopping, or sight-seeing. Another challenge was living two hours north, '...another day getting up at the crack of dawn—the travel made it really tough,' she said.

Yet, the biggest hurdle was their resistance. 'I don't think they wanted to admit that that kind of thing was important to them at that point,' she said.

At mid-year we said, 'Look, you have to go through the course this year. You don't have to be confirmed—that's your choice...If you don't go through the course, you don't know what confirmation is about. So go through the course and decide at the end if you want to go through the confirmation ceremony or not.

At the end they did chose to be confirmed and afterwards said that they hated to admit it, but they really thought it was worth it. Afterwards they said they were glad they did it. They didn't quite go so far as to say they were glad we made them do it but they said, 'We're glad we did it and we think Fiona (their sister) should do it.

Asked how her daughters felt about the importance of confirmation, she said,

I don't know that they articulated why. They just felt that they said they had learned something and that the ceremony itself was valuable to them ... in a way that they could not relate to us verbally.

The changes that happened as a result of confirmation were subtle, like a homeopathic remedy. 'Of course you always ask, would they have gotten better anyway?' But she said her daughters 'really do have a sense, more than some of their peers...

of their being responsible for their destiny... They seem to take on some level of responsibility for following their path and I didn't see that beforehand...'

Ms. Chace sensed that it made them different from their peers.

It's hard for them when they see their peers doing things like drugs or just painting your nails in math class or boys or whatever it is—and they shake their heads and say, 'Is that going to get them where they want to go?' They seem to have more maturity around that and I feel that's probably related to that path between baptism and the confirmation. For them it was really short, it was only two years.

A priest of The Christian Community looks at confirmation

Rev. Oliver Steinrueck, who as Lenker of North America, is responsible for celebrating and coordinating confirmations in North America, described confirmation as one of the most significant events in the life of the growing young person. He says, however, as a threshold experience, it is not experienced in a fully conscious way.

Of his own confirmation, he remembers it as a 'light-filled event.' But it was not until much later that it began to dawn on him what this light was—or who this light was. On the path of becoming a priest he was living with the questions: Who is the Risen One? How do I recognize the light from this being? Who is radiating a selfless quality of love?

Steinrueck says at the time of confirmation he didn't have the means to fully understand the experience. 'But as you begin to develop concepts in life, you have

that as something that you can draw upon because I think it is a real experience, but it's not necessarily a completely conscious experience.'

The Emmaus story at the end of the Luke Gospel illustrates this point, he says.

It's after the Resurrection and the disciples are in total chaos; they're in confusion and they don't know what just happened. Two of them are walking on the road to Emmaus and it's on that path that He meets them and begins to talk to them. 'What's going on?' He asks them. He then responds and starts to teach them about all the places where the Old Testament spoke about Christ and what He needed to go through. They're in their deep listening mode with the Risen One, not knowing who He is.

When the disciples reach Emmaus, Christ acts as if He's going to keep on going, so they invite Him in, and in that process of inviting Him in and sharing a meal with Him, they suddenly become conscious of who He is, and that's also the moment that He disappears from their outer sight.

The disciples knew something important had been happening, but it was not until later in the Emmaus story that they suddenly became aware that it was He on the road with them, walking along with them.

Confirmation as an important threshold in one's life

Even though most confirmands may not be fully aware of its significance, it is an important threshold, a qualitative middle point in their lives, 'a very specific and special moment that marks a change from the time of life where we are guided by an

outer authority to the time we begin to guide ourselves,' he says.

Even the way you learn earlier in life and the way you learn after that point are really different, he says. You can no longer just learn by absorption the way a child does when learning a language, for example. After this time of life it is as if one has to enter through a different door; you have to work a lot harder after this point.

In addition, it's after age 14 that you begin to take on personal karma, according to Rudolf Steiner, and you are responsible for your own actions, he says. Before that you are not personally responsible for your decisions. Thus it's a shift from being led to leading oneself, or one could say from Old to New Testament consciousness. 'It's actually divine forces that are guiding you from the outside, and after that point you need to try to find those forces within yourself.'

At the age of confirmation, youth are confronting death the forces of death in themselves for the first time in their lives. For this reason the confirmations occur during the Easter season. Easter is the event where the forces of death and the forces of materialism are overcome.

It is also about the death of childhood, the death of innocence. Youth no longer feel they are one with nature, and they can feel really alone as they begin to feel the presence of the death forces in their lives. It is often surprising when people who have had a pretty brutal childhood or living in squalid circumstances without much guidance look back and describe that 'there was something golden and wonderful about it,' he says.

Often when young people lose that innocent glow of childhood, there is a yearning

to go back and find it again. That search for paradise is not the path of Christianity. The Easter experience is finding new life out of the trials and pain and suffering we need to go through as earthly human beings.

Steinrueck concludes that confirmands come into contact with the light of Christ in a very real and substantial way, not in a way that's taught to them, but in a way that goes right into their constitution.

Another priest looks at his confirmation experience and its significance

Rev. Jonah Evans, who grew up in The Christian Community in California, resisted confirmation but later appreciated its significance. His mother would take him to The Christian Community and his father, a Christ-Unity minister, took him to his church.

Basically, it was a real struggle for me to go to the preparation classes, and really the only reason I went was because of my friends—that they were there. And I had some questions sometimes, but at the end of the day, I wasn't interested. It was more that my mom said I had to do it.

That's actually the most common experience—it's a real special child who, out of themselves, wants to go every time,'

he said.

They may want to go to the actual confirmation itself, but going to the preparation, to the classes, that's another thing.

So then, at a certain point, I began to get tired of it; it was right up to the last class, where we were preparing ourselves to do the actual confirmation, where I remember going to church with my mom and complaining the whole way, and then getting out of the car and sitting

on the sidewalk and telling her, 'I'm not going.'

At which point my mom, who was normally easy going with us, came over to me and said: 'YOU ARE GOING'. She was so vehement that it just woke me up. So I went and I was then confirmed.

His only memory of the confirmation itself was that it was a very special moment and that he was touched on the head by the priest even though he recognized later that the priest never actually touches the head physically.

Rev. Evans eventually found his way back but only after his own individual search. *It was a bit of a rebellion against my mom—the Anthroposophical things she talked about seemed a little bit crazy to me. So, I just went off on my own and really didn't go back to The Christian Community until I was 23.*

He was drawn back to The Christian Community in a roundabout way through his interest in Eastern philosophy and Zen Buddhism, which led him to a study of Anthroposophy. At the time he said, "There was a fire building in me for spirituality, particularly Eastern spirituality." He met and spoke with two Anthroposophical writers, Friedemann Schartzkopf and Georg Kuehlewind, who bridged the apparent gap between Eastern philosophy and Anthroposophy.

Through these men he was introduced to Rudolf Steiner's *Philosophy of Spiritual Activity* and *How to Know Higher Worlds* and soon he was practicing meditations that would change his life permanently.

The Turning Point

At the age of 23 he began practicing Anthroposophical meditation including the daily review and other main meditations

as outlined in *How to Know Higher Worlds*. This led him to an experience of himself as being "so sick" that he couldn't heal himself on his own. At this point, he had the impulse to return to The Christian Community and the Act of Consecration of Man.

In the Act of Consecration of Man it was in the communion where I had the experience of the real medicine for my sickness. From that point on I had found my source for healing. I had found my spiritual home,

he said.

It was in the Act of Consecration where I was able to find a real experiential relationship to the Being of Christ.

The Act of Consecration provided him with the real image and reality of what he could strive for in transforming his double *a picture for that, and a reality to go to,* he said.

That became my source for helping me to transform

he said.

Rev. Evans later made the connection between confirmation and his finding his way to the Christ or as he says, the Logos.

There was a seed planted in me unconsciously in the confirmation and that seed was, for lack of a better phrase, 'I will seek him' and this is what the children say every service. If it's done right or objectively even, the confirmation plants this seed of the possibility of finding meaning, finding the spirit, finding the Logos, the meaning structure in the world.

Conclusion

We live in very troubled times as the world changes at lightning speed. New ways of being in the world must be invented so that we may survive and flourish.

ish. Youth knows this. But what can we give them to help provide the strength they need to find their own way in this confusing yet marvellous world, that is fraught with possibilities and yet so much darkness?

Confirmation brings a young person into the light of the Christ in a deeply moving service that nourishes and provides the inner strength that their growing souls need at a critical time in their development.

It provides parents with the assurance that the child they have loved and cared

for all through childhood has been given a way to know that Being, whose light may guide them, whose warmth may comfort them and whose strength may give them the will to meet their life's challenges.

It is our hope that the words of the Service live on in their lives, 'Remember the importance of this moment. Never forget the Christ, not in joys nor in sorrows.'

This offering is a gift to my son, I realized, and perhaps the greatest gift we can give to all children, showing them the way to gain the strength they need on their unique life paths.

International Youth Camp 2011 in Romania

Helen (Leo) Keller

IYC! (Full name: International Youth Camp). Three letters which now mean so much to me. I was told it was going to be a good camp, a great camp, a camp that would make me a better person. Sure, I reckoned it'd be a laugh, but change me? I was a Steiner school graduate, a Camphill child, with a father for a priest to boot, how was two weeks at a Christian Community camp going to change me? But, my sister was staff and she wanted me to come, and, being the dutiful little sister, her wish was my command. There is a reason I do everything she says: She has an annoying tendency of being right!

And so, along with my fellow four Brits whom I met at the airport, off we trotted (well, flew, taxied and train-ed) to Romania where this year's camp was to take place. A day (spent walking round the beautiful, old, historic cultural city

of Sibiu, which, we realised, doesn't sell food on a Sunday) and night (spent sharing our 'beds' with gypsies and stray dogs in a train station) later, we met our fellow campers, before we headed off—by bus and horse-drawn cart—to our temporary home of tents, stunning views and regular visits from the local sheep and wild pigs.

That first day was a blur of faces, names and the exchanges of tired travel stories. seventy-six people: Different cultures, different ages, different life paths, but we were all there, whatever the reason, and that common ground bonded us.

It felt like we'd only just arrived when we got split into groups with people whose names we didn't even know yet. We were sent off on a hike, with instructions to meet at a temporary campsite the following day. The route was up to us, our sleeping place was up to us and the hike com-

petition was our motivation. We walked through many Romanian villages, sang to the locals and got photos with them wearing IYC hoodies, rode in a Caruca (horse and cart), traded a teabag till we ended up with a toy lion, helped build a roof, climbed hills, jumped streams, swam in a drinking basin, ate ice creams under the beating sun, and found a bed, roof and hot shower (!) above a cheese factory. By the time we met the others we were limping, tired, carrying the bags of two of our team and a tent and hot food were never so welcome.

I had gone quite unprepared in the shoe department and my trainers had lavished my feet with ten blisters at that point, however I was determined to go on the 'tough' hike, so the next day –still limping—we set off for the Carpathians, waving goodbye to those sensible ones staying behind for a rest day. In those two days we walked 70km, an average of twelve hours per day, and hitched our tents at 1550 meters. We had breakfast at dawn looking down over vast wild countryside with a river tailing away far off in the distance. It was stunning, magical, and gave us the energy to keep walking, walking, walking back to our camp and newly extended family. We arrived back in the darkness, limping –almost crawling—in pain and exhausted beyond measure, but singing with every morsel of energy we had left. We had done it! We had made it home! I think that was the point I realised that the International Youth Camp was special.

The next day we went straight into workshops. I was giving a circus and physical theatre workshop every day with my sister which was very enjoyable, and when we weren't clowning around in our group, we

were clowning around on the 'Open Stage', or singing, playing games and sports, discussing this year's theme—Truth—sitting round the campfire and singing again. Always singing. There's something so magical about making music as a group, our beautiful sound fading into the sunset. I'm not usually the outdoors type. I like to be warm and dry, curled up on the sofa with a good book, but those two weeks breathing fresh air, watching the sun and moon and the stars, really living in nature, gave me so much energy and such a sense of freedom. Everyone felt it. The schedule was jam-packed, and if you wanted to socialise round the fire at night, there wasn't much sleep involved either, and yet we felt relaxed, rejuvenated and simply content. I've never spent two weeks with the same group of people and experienced so much happiness. But then again, I've never spent two weeks with so few reasons to complain. We were given so much. So long as we had an open mind, we were given physical and mental stimulation, a vast collection of songs, the sense of achievement, experience, new skills, seventy new friends, and, in my case at least, a new, more motivated, more mature, more exciting outlook on life.

It took me five days to come down from the IYC. I no longer had my new-found friends with me all the time, I was trapped inside the walls of a house, and the music was now only a memory, but I emerged stronger and more at peace within myself. I don't know what it is that makes it so special. Maybe it's the admirable happy energy of the staff or the continual barriers and challenges you are overcoming, or simply the freedom to be yourself. But, like my sister had said it would, the

International Youth Camp changed me. It gave me richness in life, it gave me passion and it gave me a whole community of incredible friends. It may just have been two weeks at a Christian Community camp, but two weeks I wouldn't swap for the world.

IYC 2012 will be taking place in Sweden from 1–15 August. To apply and find out more information go to www.iycamp.com or visit the International Youth Camp Facebook page. If you want a summer holiday that you'll always remember, I'll see you there!

Review

Celebrating Festivals
with Children

Freya Jaffke



Celebrating Festivals with Children

Freya Jaffke

Floris Books, 2011

***Review by
Anna Philips***

Freya Jaffke brings many years of experience as a kindergarten teacher to this useful and informative book which is aimed at celebrating festivals with children in the first seven years of their lives or kindergarten age. She has published several other books on the subject of crafts with and for young children so we are indeed in good hands. This shows in the way she writes, with its emphasis on creativity and creating the right mood in oneself as adults before engaging in activities for and with the children. Creating this mood is repeatedly stressed as vital. At the start of each chapter the adults, parents, grandparents or teachers are addressed directly with background facts pertaining to the festival to be celebrated. This helps the adult to understand what they are doing and why, since only through a conscious relationship to each festival can they truly fill its expres-

sion, something children are very sensitive to.

From winter through to autumn, and from Advent to Martinmas, all Christian festivals around the year are covered. Jaffke also includes celebrations like birthdays, the last day of kindergarten and death-days. But the book starts with the permanent set up at home, or in the classroom, of the nature table which allows the child to follow the outdoor seasons indoors the year round. Each festival to be celebrated then brings its own features to this table.

Attention to detail is extremely important. Suggestions for decorating the room, for crafts, poems, plays, stories and dressing up are given in abundance for this purpose. But also related activities such as spring cleaning or preparing for a festival like Advent, in which all toys get some tender loving care, are addressed.

Through starting to relate to celebrations as described in this guide, our relationship to the children in our care, to others and the surrounding world of nature, is changed profoundly. You will find it enriched and deepened, increased in joy and love through the sharing of experiences with a content that truly matters. As

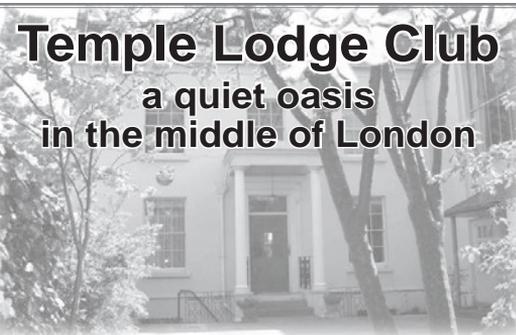
such, getting to grips with festival celebrations serves as an inner path for the conscious adult while providing a fulfilling, secure basis for the child's life. As adults we can again make the shift back from intellectually reasoned thinking to experiencing life with wonder and joy when perceived through a child's open, unpolluted senses.

Though Jaffke is very careful to avoid being prescriptive, I found at times that her opinions were very strongly stated. And I also wonder how much kindergarten teachers in inner city schools or modern families with children composed of various multi ethnic/religious backgrounds would have to juggle to adapt the advice given in this book, as it is clearly limited to western Christian celebrations.

Jaffke shows a real understanding and love for the young child through the study of anthroposophy, which she actively encourages the reader to take up as a foundation for making festivals one's own. Throughout, one feels how childhood itself is respected and protected. She conveys her warmth for the subject in all the practical advice, of which there is plenty. Drawings and pictures are included whenever necessary. Endnotes complete the writing and at the end of the book is an extensive bibliography for further reading.

Celebrating Festivals with Children is a very useful and stimulating book and is recommended to anyone with young children. One may even find that when one's children have grown up one still carries on with some of the traditions surrounding festivals simply to satisfy the needs of the child within.

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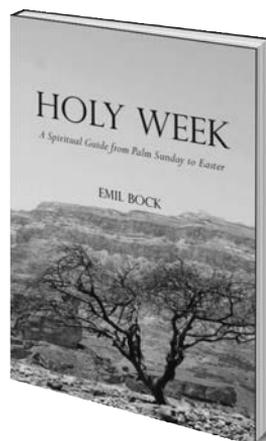
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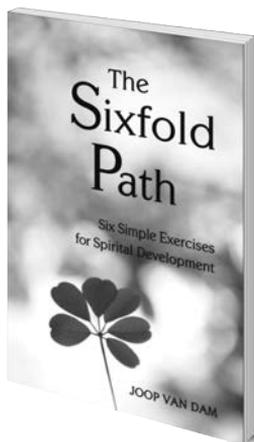
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Gospel Readings 2011–2012

Advent

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

Christmas

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

Epiphany

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

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

Passiontide

Sunday, March 11... .. Luke 11:14–36
Sunday, March 18... .. John 6:1–15
Sunday, March 25... .. John 8:1–12

Holy Week

Sunday, April 1..... Matthew 21:1–11
Thursday, April 5..... Luke 23:13–32
Friday, April 6..... John 19:1–15
Saturday, April 7..... John 19:16–42

Easter

Sunday, April 8..... Mark 16:1–8
Sunday, April 15..... John 20:19–31
Sunday, April 22..... John 10:1–16
Sunday, April 29..... John 15:1–27
Sunday, May 6..... John 16:1–33
Sunday, May 13... .. John 14:1–31

Ascension

Thursday, May 17..... John 16:24–33
Sunday, May 20..... John 16:24–33

Whitsun

Sunday, May 27..... John 14:23–31
Wednesday, May 30..... Acts 3:1–10
Sunday, June 3..... Acts 3:1–10
Sunday, June 10..... I Cor 12:4–13
Sunday, June 17..... John 3: 1–21

St. Johnstide

Sunday, June 24..... Mark 1:1–11
Sunday, July 1..... John 1:19–34
Sunday, July 8..... John 3:22–36
Sunday, July 15..... Matthew 14:1–12

Sunday, July 22..... Mark 8:27–38
Sunday, July 29..... Matthew 7:1–14
Sunday, August 5..... Luke 15:11–32
Sunday, August 12..... Luke 9:1–17
Sunday, August 19..... Luke 18:35–43
Sunday, August 26..... Mark 7:31–37
Sunday, September 2..... Luke 10:1–20
Sunday, September 9..... Luke 17:5–24
Sunday, September 16..... Matt. 6:19–34
Sunday, September 23..... Luke 7:11–17

Michaelmas

Saturday, Sept. 29..... Matthew 22:1–14
Sunday, September 30..... Matthew 22:1–14
Sunday, October 7..... Revelation 12:1–12
Sunday, October 14..... Ephesians 6:10–19
Sunday, October 21..... Matthew 24:29–44

Sunday, October 28..... Rev. 1:9–20
Sunday, November 4..... Rev. 4:1–11
Sunday, November 11..... Rev. 5:1–14
Sunday, November 18..... Rev. 10:1–11
Sunday, November 25..... Rev. 14:6–16

Advent

Sunday, December 2..... Luke 21:25–36

There is a basic annual pattern for these readings within which there may be some variations.

MEDITATION

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New
Edition

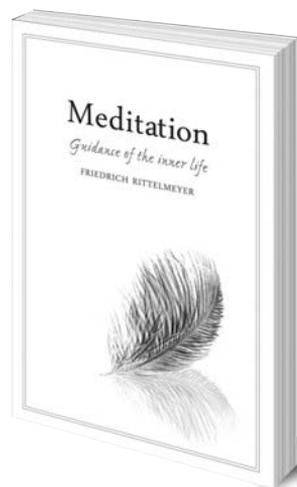
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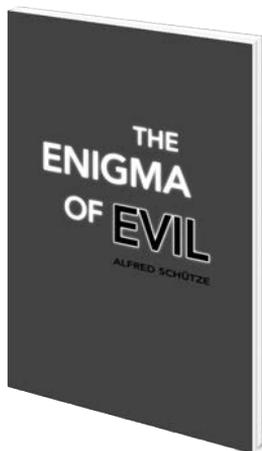
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