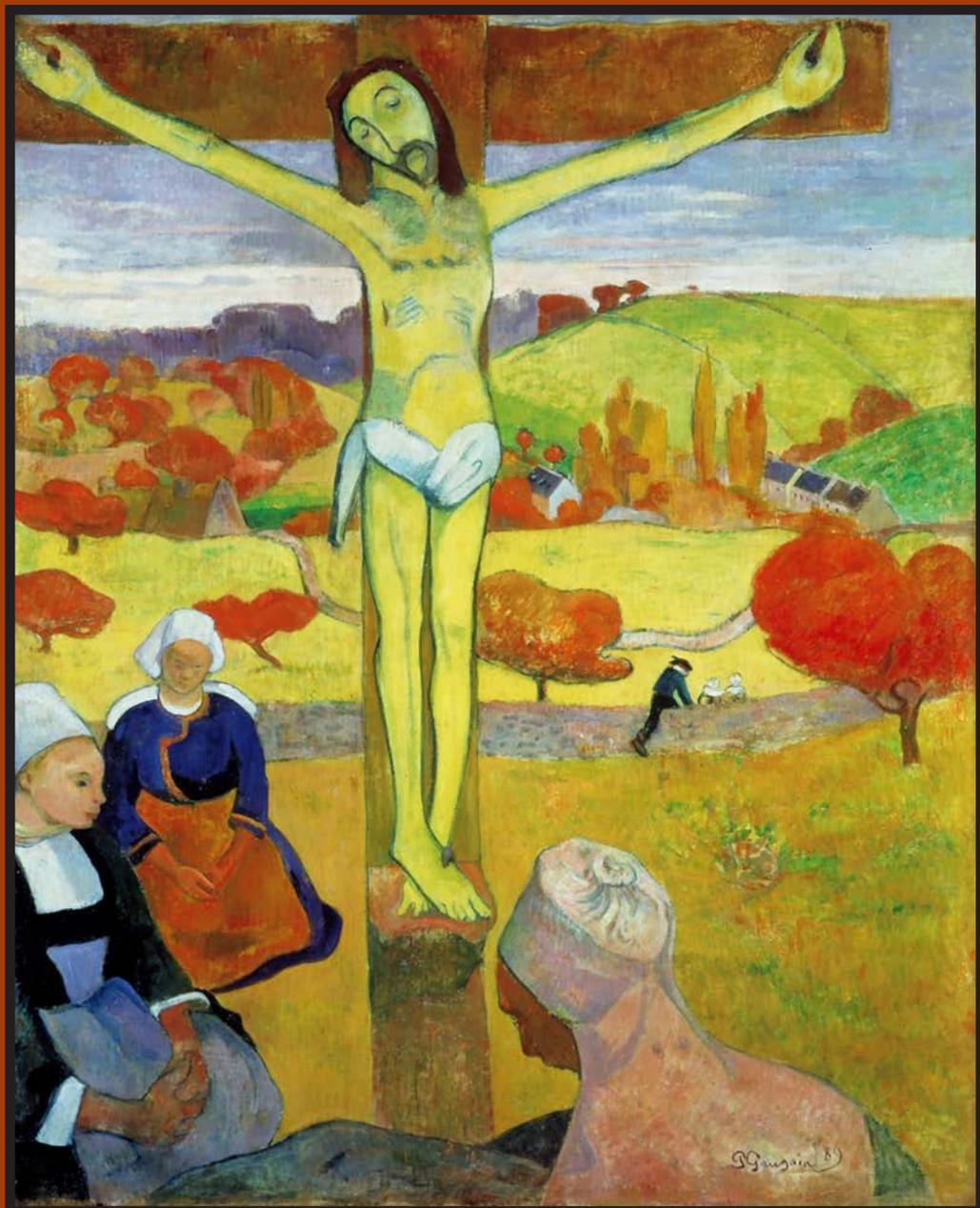


The Christian Community

# Perspectives

March—May 2016



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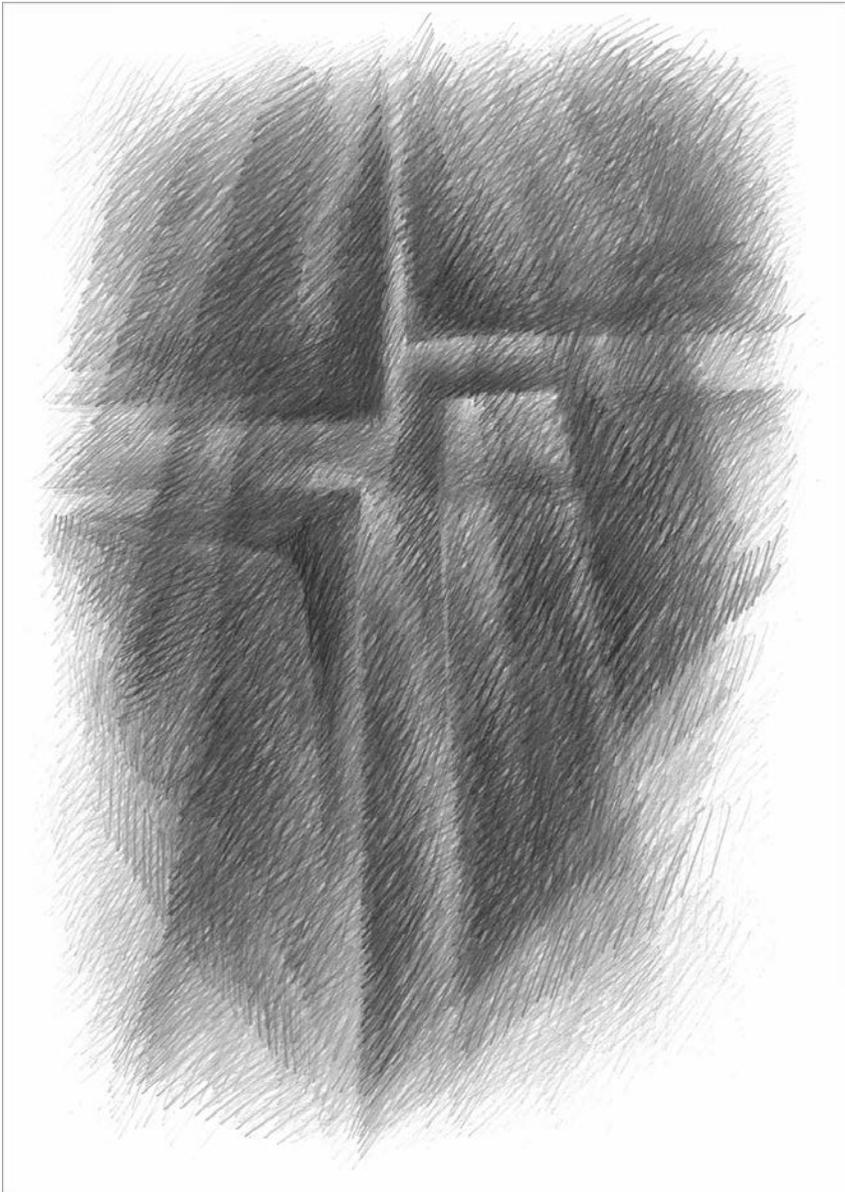
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The head of the established Church of England, Justin Welby, recently suggested that the British State should fix the date of Easter, which would become a Spring Holiday, in order to do away with the difficulties caused by its present, variable dating. Many Christians who read the Archbishop's comments were scandalised. It speaks for a loss of the insight that Easter is no mere commemoration, nor a human arrangement, but the expression of a cosmic reality, for which the modern world-picture has no space.

Why should the State have anything to say about the date of a Christian festival? After all, the Sermon on the Mount does not tell us that Easter should be a public holiday; for the first centuries of the church, in which it went through its greatest expansion, the Roman State did not distinguish between the days of the week, and it would have seemed absurd to expect that it would take an interest in Easter Sunday. Only in the fourth century did the Emperor Constantine follow a policy of favouring the Church after growing convinced that Christ had assisted him in his campaign to seize power. He convened the Council of Nicaea (325) with the express intention of bringing the disputes in the Church to an end for the sake of the harmonious order of the Empire. One of the points discussed and fixed was the date of Easter. The old books on Church History call the fourth century 'the victory of the Church'. A more critical attitude has emerged recently, which asks the question: was Rome Christianised, or was the Church Romanised? When we read of the destruction of the sacred groves and the enforced baptisms that followed the adoption of Christianity as the only religion of the Empire in the 380s, our questions might grow.

We could therefore wonder whether the progress towards a truly secular state, which favours no particular religion, is only a bad thing. Looking ahead to a time when the Christian festivals are only celebrated by those who consciously decide to do so, we might see in this a growth of freedom. However, it would become all the clearer that we can no longer rely on being part of a 'Christian society', in which people will be exposed in some way to the fact of Easter, even if they hardly grasp it. Rather, we would have to accept the challenge of the Easter prayer and find words that would reach other human beings with the message that Christ has risen, and that through him the existence of the earth has meaning.

TOM RAVETZ



**Good Friday** by *Gertraud Goodwin*

***The Cross of the Earth***

At Epiphany, the interpenetration of the earthly (body of Jesus) and the cosmic (the Being of the Christ) took place. This is the foundation on which Christ's body was nailed to the cross on Golgotha. It was then already a life that could no longer be hurt through death as it was imperishable, eternal life. The cross on Golgotha announces this to all of mankind into all four directions of space. It does that in an asymmetric gesture that moves with a consciousness from one branch to the next, thus creating an interconnectedness between all directions of space.

*(See the note on page 17)*

# What remains of us

Luke Barr

In the mid-sixties of the last century, Philip Larkin published one of his most famous poems, 'An Arundel Tomb'. The poem is a meditation on death that is conducted amongst the sarcophagi of a medieval cathedral. The perennially pessimistic Larkin is mostly famous for his poems decrying the parochial banality of modern life; the irony of a sexual revolution that has come too late for his generation (and at the same time, his ambiguous questioning of it and distaste for it); and the pressure of the ubiquitous Cold War and bomb that deforms all mankind's hope in a future.

And yet Larkin's arguably most famous poem ends with the words: 'What will remain of us is love.' Typically, Larkin doesn't entirely commit himself but he calls this statement, a 'half instinct which is half true.' These words have captured the popular imagination like no other of Larkins' and their force and poignancy betray how hopeful, and ultimately how optimistic Larkin was in his heart—singing his trust in love.

There is a mysterious space between us. We all experience it daily: that unmistakable feeling for a mood. We enter a room where several people are in discussion and we know immediately what the mood is. In a family gathering, for example, we instinctively know where the tensions lie. If someone who is in love walks into our house, before they have said a word, we sense their joy.

We might experience this feeling often and yet pass it by or not think of it consciously. Perhaps we pass it by because it is so powerful and in fact we can barely endure it. I would like to suggest that that which makes this space between us so hard for us to endure is not only the fact that it is ever changing, always in a metamorphosis from seed to ripened fruit, dying and returning to seed again; but that it is love, in all its forms and stages—the very life and essence of our Creator-Being.

This experience or mood that happens between us can either attract these life forces of love when we are able to make an effort or have the seed of destruction within it, the antithesis of love. Only active love, however, lives on or as Larkin puts it, 'remains of us.'

When speaking about the reality of karma, which is the study of what remains of us, Rudolf Steiner said that it works in such a way that for those who act with love, joy flows from the world back to them. For those who act out of hate, suffering returns to

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them. And for those who act out of mere duty ('I was only doing what I was told') their irresponsible indifference returns as the world's indifference to them. Like so much that we can discover in Steiner's work, these indications abundantly repay repeated contemplation.

Something remains from our actions—they have consequences, and the consequences pour as seed into the space between us where the one is at work who is leading human destinies to ever greater creative love.

Understandably, and thankfully, we mostly sleep through this space between us. Its force is too great to endure and an uninitiated entry into it can be harmful. However, we can strengthen our selves gradually to learn to observe it and to be sensitive to it. I look back on my time in the Priest Seminar in Hamburg (2010–2013), and I remember a great variety of activities, encounters and new thoughts. I remember personalities who taught us and I recall challenges and illness, insights and breakthroughs big and small. And I wonder—what was all this? What was this process happening in a seemingly insignificant biography in a huge city, teeming like an ant-hill in an apparently meaningless cosmos? It was love. Love as a seed, pushing to burst forth and flower. This seed remains alive in the cosmos. Why? Because my efforts, and more importantly, the efforts of those around me to help me, consecrated the process.

What have I begun to learn between the time that I was in Seminar and now? I have begun to experience how our central sacrament, in its strange, mysterious and modest way, not only changes us each time that we encounter it—this would be miracle enough, but more: it brings something new into the space between us: a ripened form of love that we can live into. Our working with and living together in the Act of Consecration creates a communal love that will indeed remain of us.

# The go-between God

Tom Ravetz

The centre of Christian faith and life is the relationship to Jesus Christ. Everyone who feels that they are a Christian may remember how they became conscious of this relationship. Perhaps they read or heard something; maybe they participated in a service or found him through a work of art. Somehow this unique personality who is at once so close to us and so much greater than we are, dawned on us. In difficult times we feel the closeness of the one who suffered so much on his earthly path, and during more joyful times, we have an inkling of how the power of the resurrection pours out into the world. Through our relationship with Jesus Christ, we also feel the connection to his Father. In The Christian Community we think of the Father as the Ground of the World, who is the deepest foundation of all being, as well as its 'grounds' for being, its reason for existence.

The religious life is there to care for and deepen these relationships. We read the gospels, meditate on the Creed, read Christian authors—all of this is far more than the assimilation of interesting information. It all serves to deepen our relationship with both Jesus Christ and the Father.

How can such relationships be possible? It's hard enough really to relate to our fellow human beings. How often do we simply pass each other by or think that we have understood someone, only to realise when reflecting on the interaction that we projected our own meanings onto their words? Our encounter with the other can be nothing more than an encounter with our own self, if we are enmeshed in the phenomena of projection and transference.

If true encounter is so hard in the realm of human relationships, how can we manage to encounter beings of the heavenly worlds, where it would seem that we can't even ask whether we have understood them aright? In the Middle Ages Jesus was a mighty warrior—a heavenly knight—who fought the devil; in the liberal Protestantism of the nineteenth century, he was an enlightened moral preacher; and in the theology of Black Power he is an oppressed black man, one of the dispossessed who wanted to make a revolution.

The depths of the challenge of entering a true relationship with the divine become clear when we meditate on the Trinity Epistle, particularly if we do this in connection with something

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that Rudolf Steiner said in his lectures on *From Jesus to Christ* (lecture 3). There, Steiner speaks of the layers of our being in which the experience of the persons of the Trinity is located. In the Epistle, we hear of the Father as the one who is, and who endows us with being. Steiner describes how the experience of the Father lies beneath the level of the unconscious. The unconscious is the realm which is the object of much psychological research, in which our deepest drives live. We do not experience it directly, just its effects, which intrude on our awareness in ways we cannot predict or explain. The experience of the Father lies deeper still. We can approach this experience through a contemplation of falling asleep.

It is a kind of miracle that we are prepared to lie down and sleep every evening. In daily life we strive with all our might to be present, to hold ourselves together and maintain our place in the world. The fact that we can entrust ourselves to sleep without panicking demonstrates that we have a deep trust in the continuation of being—of our being, and of being itself—in our deepest core. If the process of giving ourselves over to sleep is interrupted, we can have an inkling of the power of this trust, because the shock of being awakened is so powerful that it might take a long time before we are able to go back to sleep. If we can draw on our experience of falling asleep and remember what it is like, then we can distil the essential feeling and allow that to live on in us. This could be a preparation to hear the first sentence of the Creed resounding within us: *An almighty divine being, spiritual-physical, is the ground of existence of the heavens and of the earth.*

The Trinity Epistle locates the experience of Christ in the realm of creation. Rudolf Steiner describes how this experience also lies in the realm of the unconscious. In our deepest drives there lies a power that can create new life. A contemplation that can lead us into this realm could come from an experience that we can have after times of illness or great desperation. This is wonderfully expressed in the original title of Viktor Frankl's book, which we know in English as *Man's Search for Meaning*. In German it is called *Trotzdem Ja zum Leben sagen!* which could be rendered *Saying yes to life in spite of it all!* This is the experience that we can connect to a source within us, far deeper than our conscious thinking and deliberating, in which we can find the strength to make the next step. If we remember such experiences, we can let the details fade away once again so that only the essence remains. If we let that fade away in turn, we have created an empty space in our soul, into which we could hear the words of the Prologue: 'All things came into being through the Word ... in him was life.'

## The Spirit of encounter

Now we might be struck by a question, which is connected to a paradox. If the experiences of the Father and of the Son are located in layers of our being that are inaccessible to our consciousness, how can we experience them at all? After all, experience has to be conscious in order to be experience.

A contemplation of human relating can be a help here. We have seen the problem of projection—that I only experience myself in the other. Here, the self overwhelms the world. There is another phenomenon, when we see the world clearly, but we only see it as an ‘it’, as an object which has no connection to my inner being. That is the relation that Martin Buber called ‘I—it’. What needs to happen so that the other person, the other being, appears as a partner in dialogue—as a ‘you’?

If for example we manage really to listen to someone in a conversation so that his or her words bear witness to us of a different world, or if we look at a plant in such a way that its being comes alive in us, then we know that we have entered a different relationship with reality. This is also a critical moment in living a Christian life consciously. It is in these moments and in these relationships that we realize that we are now also in relationship with a ‘thou.’ A third one has joined the two who are having the encounter: the spirit of meeting, of encounter. John Taylor describes this third one in his book, *The Go-Between God*.

*In every such encounter there has been an anonymous third party who makes the introduction, acts as a go-between, makes two beings aware of each other, sets up a current of communication between them.* p. 17

This is the work of the Holy Spirit, who is at work in every true encounter, every moment of true attention. Paul sees a quality of the Holy Spirit in *koinonia*, in a formula which was probably part of an early Christian prayer:

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the koinonia of the Holy Spirit be with you all.* 2 COR 13:14

The word *koinonia*, normally translated community or fellowship, has interesting roots. It points to a partnership which transcends family ties. *Koine* is what is in common; *koinonia* means what we share in common. Such community presupposes that I know my partner. The gift of the Holy Spirit is nothing less than this: he makes it possible that we can have a consciousness of Father and Son. If we understand the work of the Spirit, we notice that the relationship on which Christianity is built is not a neutral medium but a being—a person.

*Every time I am given this unexpected awareness towards some other creature and feel this current of communication between us, I am touched and activated by something that comes from the fiery heart of*

*the divine love, the eternal gaze of the Father towards the Son, of the Son towards the Father.*

*God's love has flooded our inmost heart through the Holy Spirit he has given us.* (ROMANS 5:5) John Taylor, p. 18

In the farewell discourses, Jesus promises his disciples this gift.

*But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.* JOHN 16:13

This can help us to understand why we hear less about the Holy Spirit than about the Father and the Son in the gospels and the liturgy. Theologians sometimes call him the Reticent God. He does not speak about himself—as the very relationship itself, he has nothing to say. Simultaneous interpreters hardly retain anything of what they translate. It flows through them; nothing gets stuck in them, and they don't add anything of themselves. In the Prologue, the Holy Spirit is not named. However we find him hidden in the grammar. When we hear 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God...', we have God the Father and God the Son and the relation between them, which is expressed in the preposition 'with.' The relation is the Spirit. Augustine said that God the Father is the lover and God the Son the beloved; the Spirit is the bond of love that unites them.

The Act of Consecration also mentions the Holy Spirit sparingly. However, drawing on these thoughts, we can see the whole service as an event of the Holy Spirit. This is clear from the Trinity Epistle. Unlike the other two parts, the part that concerns the Spirit passes over into the mood of prayer. We pray that the Spirit illumine us; that his light might drench our daylight. We can take this as a prayer for everyday life. We could pray that every meeting, every perception might be illumined by the light of the Spirit; that the Spirit might join us in *koinonia* with the world.

The Trinity Epistle comes at the beginning of the Act of Consecration and is repeated ever and again throughout the year. We can take that as a pointer to the fact that the extraordinary intimacy with which we speak to Christ in the preparation for the Gospel-Reading and the naturalness with which we ask the Father to accept our offering, are only possible through the great mediator, the Go-Between. The Holy Spirit makes it possible that the Father and the Son can become conscious experience. The Spirit creates the common bond—*koinonia*—that brings our service on earth into connection with the work of the spiritual world. The Spirit gives us the assurance that our prayer can be more than a mere projection; just as the Spirit makes it possible that we can experience the divine world as a partner in conversation.

# About a woman caught in the act

Louise Madsen

*'Master, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. In the Law, Moses commands us to stone such women. What do you say about it?' They said this to test him, and to find a reason for accusing him. But Jesus only bent down and wrote with his finger in the earth.* JOHN 8: 4–6

When Christ heard the accusation against the woman who was placed before him, he did not say anything but started to write. What did he write? He set out her deed before her and, so to speak, documented for her and all those standing round what she had done. Making a record of what has happened delivers a memorandum for the future. With this memorandum was marked the beginning of a new age.

With our deeds we all write in the earth, whether we realise it or not, and when we see what we have done we become our own judges. If we do not shut our eyes, we see what we do to the world and the imprint we make in it. We now know only too well what impact our actions have on the natural environment. The effect of our moral weaknesses and deficiencies may, as yet, not be so evident to us, yet many are acutely aware how dissipated and dissolute behaviour upsets and disturbs the surroundings in which it takes place. When we have done something we know to be wrong, our conscience will be stirred and feelings of guilt and remorse may well up. In our predicament we can turn to our highest guide and helper and look at what we have done in His light, the light of the world. In this light that penetrates into the inmost recesses of our soul, the feeling that we really *have to do* something about it may take hold and we know that we have to act.

But this was not always so. In fact it is a modern development, and our on-going reliance on the rule of law, or, at least, the dictates and norms of society, testifies to this. In the main we are still much guided by, 'Thou shalt not...', rather than thinking that we ought to go to work with our conscience and work out for ourselves what is the right thing to do and trust in our own judgement of the matter.

When Moses gave humanity the Law, it was in the form of a series of instructions on to how to conduct oneself as a member of

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the community that was being led into a new way of living together, with new forms, customs and structures for the regulation of society. This was in itself a mighty developmental step. No such guidelines were in use while the Israelites were in Egypt. There it was still the supreme ruler, the Pharaoh, who guided the lives of his people. With the introduction of the Law, a shift took place amongst the Israelites whereby the seat of power was moved from the supreme ruler to the people themselves. A new principle was introduced into humanity and the people themselves could begin the journey of finding the way to their inner power with the Law as their guide. Moses was still very much the leader, yet with the coming into being of the Law, he also was required to recognise and be subject to it. Nobody was to be above the Law and for certain transgressions the sentence of death was necessary, not only as a punishment, but so that the offending soul would be removed from the people. The necessary social hygiene in this new way of living together needed to be upheld and promoted. Under the Law a clear 'right' and a clear 'wrong' prevailed, and nobody was to be left in doubt as to what was the right thing to do under any given circumstance. This higher degree of ordering under God's guidance brought the people to a new moral awareness of how they stood before their Lord and his expectations of them. For each and every person, knowing the Law meant that they had to carry the responsibility for their own conduct. Their deeds were measured over against the Law and it became the bench-mark for their behaviour and conduct. To look after one's own property was right, to help oneself to a neighbour's property was wrong; to honour and treasure one's wife or husband and the parent of one's children was fully to be expected, to trespass into the forbidden domain of a neighbour's husband or wife or to have other forbidden relationships delivered the grounds for the death sentence.

When Jesus started preaching to the people, crowds of whom gathered to hear him—as described in the Sermon on the Mount—matters took another leap forwards. No longer was it sufficient to avoid the (outer) deed: not to kill, steal or commit adultery. Now the concern was with what lived in each person's heart and mind. Jesus taught that what really matters is what lies behind and drives the outer action in the sphere of thoughts and emotions.

*You have heard the word that was spoken to mankind in the past:  
You shall not dishonour marriage. But out of my own power I say to  
you: Everyone who looks at a woman with a lustful eye has committed  
adultery with her in his heart.*

MATTHEW 5: 28

When the woman caught in adultery is placed before him, Jesus takes matters still another step further: he does not teach or moralise, but he bends down and writes in the ground. Moses wrote the words of the covenant with the

Lord, the Law, on *tablets of stone* (EXODUS 34: 27). Jesus, in his teaching, points to what is written in men's hearts—by man himself, and now, in view of the woman's actions, he writes in the *earth*. He shows to the world that actions carried out by human beings are part of human life on earth, that they are not only private events, particular to the people concerned, but that they are woven into the fabric of society at large.

For the conduct of the people, Moses received guidance from above. But Jesus draws our attention to our inner world, and here demonstrates how, out of our own awareness, remorse and repentance, we can judge and correct ourselves:

*Then Jesus straightened up and said to her, 'Woman, where are they, has no one condemned you?' She said, 'No one, Lord.' Then Jesus said, 'I do not condemn you either. Go, and from now on do not sin anymore.'*

Only at the end of their meeting does he caution her about her future conduct.

Jesus' action appears to be far ahead of his time. In this new dimension of justice, far removed from that of the Law, this one event opens up a vision of how we can work with our wrongdoings. Jesus has not changed or dismissed the law,

*You must not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the prophets.*

*My task is not to abolish but to fulfil. ... Not a dot of the Law will lose its validity.'*

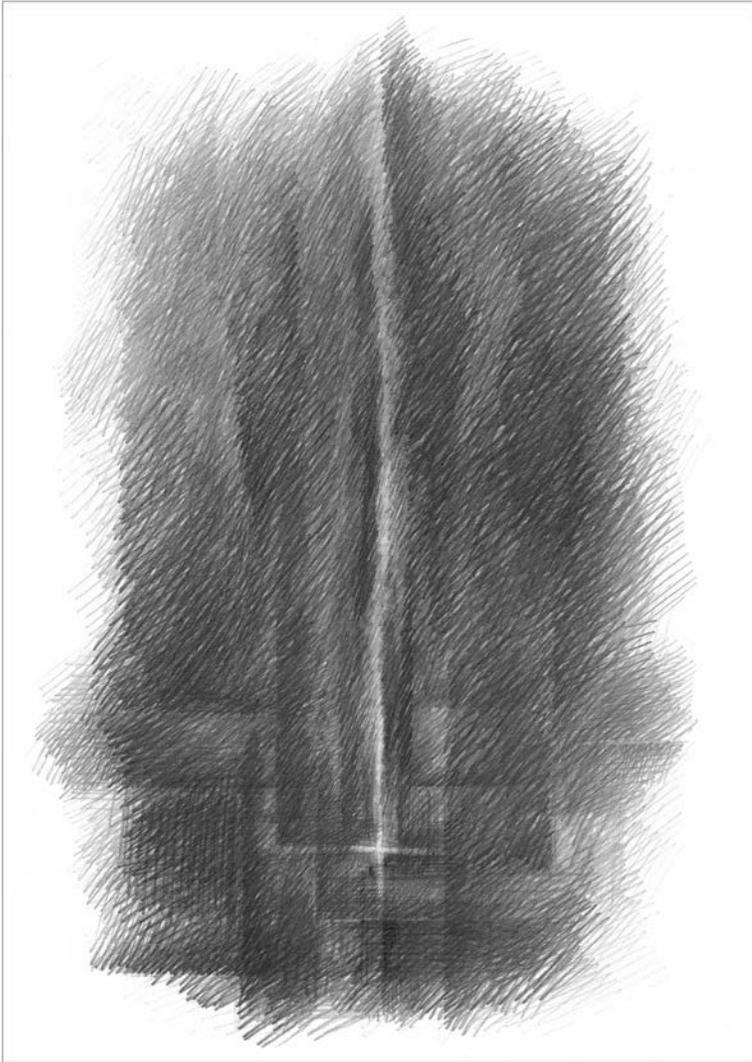
MATT. 5: 17–18

But rather, he demonstrates how an evolutionary step in the application of righteousness allows us to act in freedom and in truth. Thus I as an individual, can find my own truth and do that in the freedom of my own soul.

This is certainly a high aim and we may feel that we are not able to do this; that it is utopian. We are all too aware of our weaknesses, but when we are in the presence of Christ we will wish to confess and admit to what we have done. The woman may be silent, but as she stands before him, he brings his whole being to bear on her troubles. As we look at ourselves, his strength and love so uphold and cherish our souls that we allow ourselves to place our trust in him—even to lean and rely on him to see us through as we face our deeds and come to terms with them. We experience how, as we change our ways, we draw nearer to our real Self, the truth of our Self, and become more at one with our true being.

It is not hard to imagine that what the woman went through inwardly as she stood before Jesus Christ is what is asked of us in the few short sentences of the Sacramental Consultation, as practised in The Christian Community. In his presence, she will have had to free herself of all that had lived in her up until that moment. She will have *offered* it to him as he inscribed that side of her destiny into the earth. In order to be able to follow his admonition not to sin any more, she will have needed to *receive* her will from him and make it

her own, setting the course for her future life. Bringing her own destiny into order in this way will have allowed her soul to be filled with *peace*.



**Easter Saturday** by Gertraud Goodwin

***The Cross of Death***

The descent of the Christ being into the realm of death is the substantial (literally: 'in the way of spiritual substance') communion of his whole being with every physical particle. Thus He carries new life into the dying earth substance. Now the crossing has become a true physical interpenetration. Its activity goes downwards with gravity, its forms have become static and mineralised. It is the verticality that enables the ultimate redemption, connecting the spiritual with the earth, forever.

*(See the note on page 17)*

# A sea-change— Shakespeare's *Tempest* and the path to true humanity

**Peter van Breda**

A four-year old boy when encountering the sea for the first time exclaimed as he stood on the shore gazing at it in wonder: 'door'. In this moment an inner revelation took shape in his young mind. The sea is indeed a mighty door, a threshold that leads us over into another realm beyond our earthly experience.

For Shakespeare, the sea is an invitation to step off the firm, familiar ground under our feet into another very different experience of reality. It is a force for change. Human beings' encounter with the sea becomes a quest that carries the key for them to discover their next step in their destinies, which intertwine. The sea is the place where personal and world destiny are mirrored and encountered.

In the unfolding tale of *The Tempest*, Shakespeare's last play, there is much at stake for those who appear on the stage. Not only for the company of people with their complicated and unresolved destinies but also for nature itself, the elements and the elemental world and for the powers of good and evil. The play, which is the culmination of Shakespeare's work, brings us into a web of destiny which reaches far beyond the actual story and the stage.

The defining key to *The Tempest* occurs at the start with a mighty sea storm. A boat capsizes, spewing into the rough waters a family of people who in different ways affected each other's destinies. Central to the tale is Antonio, the Duke of Milan. He has usurped his brother-in-law Prospero and banished him together with his daughter Miranda to the island where the drama unfolds. Everything flows and evolves out of the storm and the resulting capsizing of the boat, after which the company land wet-through on the island. There we meet Prospero, the rightful Duke of Milan, and his innocent young daughter, Miranda. They have lived there for the last twelve years. Miranda has never seen another human being beside her father.

The storm, shipwreck and arrival on the island awaken each of the players gradually to their essential being and also to the waywardness of their lives. As in all of Shakespeare's plays, each char-

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acter has to go through some kind of catharsis; they must learn to transform themselves even if only a little. There are no perfect human beings, however gifted a character might be: even Prospero has to learn to distinguish between love gained and the urge for revenge against those who have plotted against him. He recalls to Miranda 'the dark backward and abysm of time' (Act I, scene 2, line 49). He is a highly evolved human being with talents that go far beyond the mundane. He is a skilled magician who has power and also influence over the elemental world and its inhabitants.

Two expressions of this world, which borders upon ours, are present on the island: Ariel, a light-footed being of the air and Caliban, a fallen earth-being, who is trapped within the world of cause and effect. These two beings play a significant role in the unfolding of this mysterious story. Ariel is the creator of the tempest by magical means. We listen enthralled to Ariel's vision and experience of the storm from above the sky, from the realm of the Gods—'Jove's lightning, the precursors O' the dreadful thunder-claps, the fire and cracks of sulphurous roaring, the most mighty Neptune seem to besiege.' (Act I, scene 2, line 201) We encounter powerful pictures of the sea as a hostile force which threaten man's existence—'I saw him beat the surges under him, And ride upon their backs; he trod the water, whose enmity he flung aside.' (Act II, scene 1, lines 115–121)

The sea eventually calms down and we move from there into the 'veins of the earth' but the imagery of the sea continues in different ways throughout the unfolding story. One example is when Sebastian says to Antonio: 'Well, I am standing in water.' To which Antonio answers: 'I'll teach you how to flow.' Sebastian: 'Do so: to ebb, Hereditary sloth instructs me.' (Act II, scene 1 line 222)

Before we try to deepen our understanding of a few incidents from this play we can ask, do we know what Shakespeare meant? Like the ever changing face and ebb and flow and rhythms of the ocean, we can only in the end conclude that for Shakespeare the play is the thing; he left us no commentary on what he meant. Shakespeare did not have a world-view which he wanted to impose; rather, he let the events speak their own language. He was a playwright who, with a finely developed skill, opened doors without bias or prejudice and led us into undiscovered realms of life.

An important moment takes place when the Duke's son, Ferdinand, comes across Miranda, Prospero's daughter. This is her first encounter with a human being other than her father. When she sees him approaching she is astounded and cannot believe her eyes. She doesn't think that Ferdinand is real. With pristine, fresh eyes she gazes upon him as she asks, filled with wonder: 'What

is it? A spirit? Lord, how it looks about. Believe me sir, It carries a brave form. But 'tis a spirit.' (Act I, scene 2, lines 407–409).

Prospero explains to her that he is a man, not a spirit, and that he is looking for other survivors of the shipwreck. Later Miranda meets the other survivors of the capsized ship and exclaims with words filled with amazement: 'O wonder! How many goodly creatures are there here? How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world that has such people in it!' (Act V, scene 1, lines 181–184.) The sea tosses its bounty on to the shores of the island and gives rise to new possibilities. A new social balance and an elevating of the play's main character, Prospero, on his pathway towards becoming truly human is the ensuing result of the shipwreck.

We all share the goal of becoming truly human, which means becoming truly christened. This always involves the encounter and question of evil and the overcoming of negative forces. In Ariel, we meet one expression of the adversary, who weaves his airy magical talent into the biographies of all who appear on the island. He is closely connected to Prospero and follows his commands almost to the end of the play. Ariel shares with all other elemental beings a deep desire to be transformed, which he cannot achieve out of his own forces. He has lived for twelve years very close to Prospero, his master, intimately listening to his soul. Ariel has as such no soul of his own; he has absorbed and learnt the stirrings of Prospero's soul, which is still filled with vengeful feelings towards his brother who usurped him. The shipwreck and the landing on the island has been engineered by a vengeful Prospero. On another level of his being, Prospero has a deep longing to resolve the past and to move on to a healing future. Ariel in a quickening moment in the unfolding story reflects, mirrors and reveals to Prospero these deepest longings. What Ariel awakens in Prospero transforms the course of the play from one of revenge to one of healing.

Ariel speaks, pointing to a capacity in us all. If ever we are to resolve and redeem a destiny, pity, empathy and humility will need to well up in us. 'In the lime grove The King, his brother and yours abide—all three distracted. Brimful of sorrow and dismay—The good old Lord Gonzolo his tears run down his beard like winter's drops from eaves of reeds.' (Act V, scene 1, line 10) Your magic, Ariel indicates, has overwhelmed them so strongly that if you were to see them you would be filled with pity; your heart would become tender. Prospero enquires: 'Do you think so, spirit?' Ariel: 'Mine would, sir, were I human.' Prospero is deeply touched. He knows all at once that he must allow fallow feelings of forgiveness and understanding to become active within him. In spite of what his family has woefully done to him, Prospero

resolves in his ever maturing spirit that he will do the good. 'The rarer action is in virtue than in vengeance.' (Act V, scene 1, line 27).

Prospero has lived one-sidedly in the pursuit of the spirit and consequently he has neglected his earthly responsibilities. Now he recognises that he has to heal this split and develop a consciousness for both the spiritual and the earthly. This call is most apt for our time.

This cathartic moment, brought about by an adversary force, gives Prospero the strength to give up his 'rough magic.' He breaks and drowns his magic staff which has caused such trouble. Along with his book of spells, it is cast deep into the ocean.

In a very different way Caliban is also given the chance of redemption through the unfolding events in what many see as a description of Shakespeare's own biography. Caliban is an earth spirit, fallen mindlessly into the weight and constrictions of the all too earthly realm. He reacts to the world around as if by ingrained instinct. The possibility of the transformation of Caliban depends largely on Prospero's attitude towards him. At first he reviles Caliban. As the play moves on, we learn that Prospero understands more and more that the world in which Caliban is locked is a world of illusion. 'I see we're nothing else, just as we are, But dreams: our life is but a fleeting shadow.' We live in the shadows in the world of appearances. This self-knowledge progresses in Prospero. Later, when his thoughts turn to the dark Gestalt of Caliban, he begins to acknowledge that Caliban is also part of his own nature. 'This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine.' Caliban is that unredeemed part in Prospero, in us all, which we are challenged to transform again and again. Until the moment when he felt and experienced real empathy and awakened to what he himself had done, Prospero lives in great inner danger. His white magic could easily degenerate into black magic. He has to overcome his need for revenge, purify his pride and transform his egotism. Prospero is brought through Caliban face to face with the deception of those adversary forces that wish to drag us down into a nether world of non-being. An awakened conscience begins to sound within his soul and he realizes that it is time for him to pass through a profound act of renunciation to allow his past to be taken up by the renewing fresh waters of the spirit.

In this tale, which begins with the enduring of a tempest, a threshold is crossed from one realm to another. On the island of destiny, where both forces of good and evil are present, these human beings are all challenged to go a step further. Through a process of transformation and purification in which they confront and meet the actions and consequences of both their individual and collective destinies, a new world order is founded. We are

called upon to develop a new morality that acknowledges our entrapment in both the illusionary heights and the constricting depths. Prospero shows us the way forward which is Christ-like as well as truly human.

In his deeply moving farewell address, Prospero appeals to us to respond to the needs of others in order to awaken to the call of life here on earth. He asks in all humility that others might follow his example and relieve him of the cross that he is taking him, help him to carry it and pardon him.

Looking back, we may gather up the unfolding flow of complex destiny as it seeks to take on a human countenance: there is a sea sorrow with all that leads up to the tempest; the sea-storm follows with the disorder and trials on the island; then the beginning of a new world of genuine human beings is lived out. Finally there is the sea-change when all is re-configured, transfigured and enlightened through the inner change in the heart of man.

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## **The Metamorphosis of the Cross**

### **A contemplation of the Christian Festivals**

Like no other subject, the mood of the Christian festivals lends itself to an exploration of the changing relationships between light and darkness. The seasons and their changing light evolve around us more in a horizontal gesture. Into this and with the sun's shining down to us, a more conscious and vertical gesture can occur by connecting ourselves to Christ's life. In this earthly-cosmic cross man stands and is part of both processes. His own soul-spiritual relationship to the reality of the Christ-Being expresses itself through the various turning points of the festivals.

The togetherness of nature and the cosmos, their complete belonging to each other, can become a gateway to perceive the festivals as belonging absolutely to man as an expression of the recognition of his origin—an origin both earthly and cosmic.

This recognition happens in me, when I perceive that I am a cross myself and that this cross changes its angle, perspective, mood and relationship all the time. It attains particular soul-spiritual 'solstices' at particular turning points in the year. It is as if at these times, the heavens are a bit more open. What happens outside or inside myself can pass me by completely, or it can touch me tangentially. It can also enter either by force or being openly received. Then I allow a change to take place within myself. I can also say that I allow or even invite myself to be crossed.

For our time, a crossing received can become an inner activity, if we allow things we experience to cross us inside, to touch and consciously change us. If we are standing truly at the centre of our own cross, in the heart, then we allow the aspect of the Christ into our every perception. This helps us to see not only part of reality, but further, its spiritual and moral dimension.

GERTRAUD GOODWIN

*Gertraud  
Goodwin is a  
sculptor working  
in Hoathley Hill,  
West Sussex.*

## The First Letter of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians, Chapter 13, Verses 1 to 13

*Could I converse divinely, freely,  
Yet remain self-seeking,  
I'd be a tintinnabulating bell  
Or rattling cymbal speaking.*

*And were the future in my ken,  
All mysteries, and will  
Sufficient to transform landscapes,  
But loved not, I'd be nil.*

*And were I to give all my goods  
To those with less, and ought  
I immolate my mortal shape,  
Without love, I'd be nought.*

*Love never hurries. She receives  
The other's best, whose gain  
She won't begrudge, nor force her own,  
Nor is her nature vain.*

*Her courtesy informs her deeds;  
Love's selfless. Neither would  
She bristle early at offense—  
Thinks always only good.*

*Love takes no pleasure in a lie,  
But only in what's sure;  
Lifts all, holds all conviction, hope,  
And will each trial endure.*

*Love will survive beyond all time  
That crumbles each forecast,  
When all our languages have hushed,  
And all our knowledge passed.*

*For all our thoughts are fragments,  
And our vision incomplete;  
Only the advent of the whole  
Will fill what's unreplete.*

*When I was young, my speech and wit  
Were both as immature;  
But when I grew, these I released  
To ripen to their cure.*

*Just so, our view, now indistinct,  
Reflecting, apprehends  
A future reciprocity  
That present sight portends.*

*What lasts? The heart's perceiving,  
And its longing for what's true;  
And thirdly, love, who will alone  
Surpass these other two.*

## Peter Gordon Button

30 May 1930–27 December 2015

Peter was born in Sheffield on Friday, 30 May, 1930 at 5 pm. He was the second of four children—Catherine the eldest and then Alfred and Arthur. In his biographical notes, Peter meticulously wrote down times and dates of all the turning points of his life. He also celebrated and followed up the births and special days of many people, often connecting them through research to surrounding historical events. Whenever possible, he would travel far to attend a funeral, especially for a colleague.

Peter was nine at the beginning of the war when he and his youngest brother Arthur were evacuated to the small village of Oxtan in Nottinghamshire, not far from the ancient Southwell Minster. There, they both had a wonderful time until family circumstances brought them back to Sheffield. Although not always able to grasp practical life as his mother thought fit for a boy of his age, Peter's obvious intellectual abilities were recognised and at the age of eleven he passed his scholarship for King Edward VII School, a renowned school in Sheffield with the motto: 'Do right, fear nothing.'

Peter was an outstanding pupil—his aptitude for numbers was recognised. He was



advised to take up banking but decided instead to become an accountant. Strong-willed and single-minded, he pursued this aim, and so left school at fifteen having successfully achieved all that the school could offer him.

Peter obtained employment with Sheffield City Council and took a correspondence course in accountancy. After gathering experience

with several different firms, he eventually became a member of the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants.

This professional progress was interrupted when at the age of eighteen he was called up by the Army to do his National Service and after the initial training in Aldershot, he was posted to Singapore. Out of his own volition, 'fearing nothing,' he managed to arrange a posting back to Britain. He left Singapore on 8 February, 1950. Once back in Britain he managed the remaining time until his demobilisation on 1 April, 1950 so that he could continue his accountancy studies. At this time he became conscious of two things: that he had absolutely no karmic connections with any one person in the army and 'now is the time to take on sole responsibility for myself.' After a brief spell at his old job, he moved on to work

with a large firm of chartered accountants and remained with them from 1950 until he moved to London in 1957. His father had died the previous year.

Peter's initial decision to pursue this profession was a very important step in his life: 'for the first time in my life, I felt really free.' This experience never left him. Always striving to maintain this initial experience of freedom, however, posed many challenges in his later life—no easy task for both himself and those around him. He was supported throughout the different stages of his life, even up to his last moments here on earth, by different constellations of family, immediate friends and colleagues, who respected him and loved him dearly. This could sometimes entail a degree of sacrifice on their part. At some point in the early Fifties, Peter heard a lecture given by Evelyn Capel, a well-known and much travelled priest of The Christian Community. She made a profound impression on him, which was reflected in the obituary that he wrote for her in *The Guardian* newspaper on Tuesday, 8 February, 2000 titled: 'Early Woman Priest Active in Post-War Germany'. Taking the previous experiences of his developing self into account, it was an opportune and decisive meeting for his future life, which never left him. Truth became very important to him. Any form of dogmatism paired with sanctimonious behaviour embarrassed him.

During this time he became a frequent server at the Glenilla Road Church, North London, where he met Rudolf Frieling, one of the founding Priests of The Christian Community, on 2 April 1957, with whom he served the following day. On Sunday 14 April 1957, he became a member of The Christian Community in Sheffield. A year

later, shortly before his 28<sup>th</sup> birthday on 27 April, 1958, Peter arrived in Stuttgart to study at the The Christian Community Seminary. There he became very attached to his fellow seminarists whom he never forgot and his teachers whom he greatly admired and respected. Sunday, 18 March 1962, together with Taco Bay, Peter was ordained by Rudolf Frieling in the Church at Glenilla Road, North London. On Easter Sunday, 1962, he gave his first sermon in Aberdeen where he remained until his move to New York in 1971. During this time Peter met his wife Rachel Campbell in a Christian Community Youth Camp in Llanbedr, North Wales and they subsequently married on 12 April, 1969. Their three beloved daughters were born in New York. The Button family left New York to return to England in 1978 and moved to Forest Row. His marriage to Rachel came to an end in 1983 and shortly afterwards, Peter moved to Bristol. Rachel and Peter separated in 1984 and the marriage was dissolved in 1986. A fairly short-lived marriage to Hente Sodderland followed though they remained friends for the rest of his life. On 5 July, 1995 Peter returned to Glenilla Road where he lived and was the resident priest. He continued working after the time of his official retirement, holding services in various communities. Peter suffered a massive heart attack in Belsize Park on 6 July, 2004, falling at the feet of a heart specialist who was able to save his life. He then underwent a triple heart bypass operation from which he made a full recovery after a period of convalescence until September of that year in Botton Village. Peter moved from the Glenilla Road house to sheltered housing nearby—and lived happily in his top floor flat until his health started to fail

late in 2013. For the next two years he was looked after in hospital and latterly in a nursing home.

Peter crossed the threshold at 12.45 on Sunday, 27 December, 2015 after receiving the Last Anointing the previous evening. A kind fate allowed him to greet his three beloved daughters moments before his crossing. The Burial Service took place together with family, friends and members of the congregation on Thursday, 31 December at 3 pm, before the Altar of the new chapel at Temple Lodge, West London. The Memorial Service was celebrated on Saturday, 9 January, 2016 at 11 am and his ashes were then buried in the garden of Temple Lodge.

Peter's accurate use of the English language, his great respect for the Word as such, his astute and agile mind, his historical interest of times and dates in the lives of friends and colleagues, his profound, enlightening and original knowledge of the Gospels, his kindness and understanding for people with difficulties, his modest bearing, his respect for freedom and his humour are those attributes of his being that were always present in lively and changing combinations in the various meetings of family, friends, members of his congregations and colleagues. All this he carried with a strong, quiet determination of will.

CHRISTOPHER WEST

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*And then I found the sun,  
In the midnight of my body,  
In the uncharted lands at the heart of me —  
A place, like the corner of the garden that waited for me  
to look beyond what I know;  
To push past the thorns to a home I left  
Before ever I knew.*

*Rain falls on my lips,  
And flowers spring up  
To tell of this heart,  
This heart, hidden for so long in the garden,  
Where I will grow old at last.  
Time will entwine me and dew cover the sun  
That it weep at the beauty it shines upon.*

SARAH LETT



**Easter Sunday** by Gertraud Goodwin  
*The Cross of Life*

The strongest and most dense and static darkness becomes the springboard for the largest expansion. It is the biggest mystery and the fulcrum of the process of transformation: The light has taken the one-sided power out of the darkness and death, transformed it, and rises upwards, spreading itself mightily: Christ has arisen. *(See the note on page 17)*

# International Youth Camp

**Donna Simmons**

Last summer seventy five young adults and one brave priest met together in the foothills outside the village of Gaggio Montano, southwest of Bolgna, for three weeks of playing, talking, hiking, creating, eating and working together. The young people (age 17–24) were mainly from Europe, but there were also individuals from Japan, Australia, Algeria, and Turkey. Many, but certainly not all, knew The Christian Community from children's camps and/or the Children's Service. Surprisingly, though, a number had simply searched the internet for a camp experience for young people—and liked what they found on the IYC website.

Like many of the Children's Camps, the IYC is a rough camp—the first days saw the staff (all young ex-campers themselves) erecting tents and digging latrines (and creating a sheltered space complete with hammocks for chillin'). Washing dishes meant hauling and heating water and bathing...well, we won't mention bathing.

Below are three pieces written by campers who were asked to set down a few thoughts about their experience:

*As the summer draws to an end and I pack my bags to embark on new studies, I take a moment to look back on some wonderful memories made on a little field in Tuscany, home to this year's International Youth Camp. For two packed weeks, around seventy youth from across the globe came together, singing songs as they put up their tents beside new neighbours. Filled with laughter, joy, vibrancy, companionship and whole-hearted gusto, camp rekindles old friendships and sparks new ones, bringing together ideas, passions and curious, spritely individuals! It's not often that you find yourself singing on the shores of a lake, taking a dip in a waterfall, creating an epic massage circle, or building some*

*Donna Simmons is a member of The Christian Community in Edinburgh.*



home-made showers on the side of a mountain; then whooping for joy on the final leg of hike, running up to the campsite, singing and cheering one another home! It was a memorable mixture of exhaustion and sheer happiness which brought us all closer as we lay on the grass, chomping on juicy watermelon chunks, the sun beating down on our glistening skin as we threw our heads back and smiled. Truly wondrous.

At camp there is always that bit more to be discovered, to be admired. Amongst nature, we begin to widen our gaze, to look deeper, to see what lies beyond, further off into the distance. We can take the time to admire and behold or simply to watch. The rippled reflection of a tree in a forest stream, the crackling sparks from the campfire fizzling off into the surrounding darkness, the rain as it beats down on the canvas of our white marquee, the sound of early-morning staff footsteps as they come to wake us with song and merriment! And yet, whilst we look outwards, we can also look within. We discover the power of curiosity, of genuine engagement in conversation, and take time to

listen to those around us. We give one another the space to thrive, to learn, to open, to behold, to collaborate, to be moved. We are held in the silence, stillness and sublimity of the Close of Day. A beautiful and powerful moment of peace, a moment for quiet, to reflect, search, appreciate, listen. Away from the laptops, phones, TVs, we begin to create our own little community, living in the present, feeling, seeing, sharing whole and full experiences. We are fully alive. Shoulder to shoulder, with one another, side by side. What we are given is a rare opportunity: to let go of all daily concerns, burdens and truly to discover what drives and inspires us. What makes us happy. We challenge ourselves to try new things, in the knowledge that we are always surrounded by those who care and who support us, those who are ready to catch us if we stumble along the way. We can live to the full without worry or care! We can give and receive; we can gain courage. We can grow. We return home healthier, filled with new energy and drive, knowing that we have found a place, a special place where we belong. And as the sun sets, and we



*return to our corners of the world, we can look to the skies and see off in the distance many other flickering flames that continue to burn, shining out into the night, brighter and stronger; and we know we are not alone.*

*Heartfelt thanks to Paul and all the staff for creating such a special two weeks.*

PHOEBE G, UNITED KINGDOM

*Standing in a circle while holding hands, each individual spoke one word defining International Youth Camp 2015 at the last night. I spoke the word 'warmth' where others said 'friends,' 'love,' 'support.' Collectively we thanked each other in that moment for the community-feeling we had built those two weeks. A beautiful, unique bond between people, which I had never experienced before.*

*Before coming to Italy I thought myself a stranger between my fellow students. Openminded, warm hearted and creative, I wasn't able to find good friends who were thinking and acting on the same level as I do. At the campsite in Gaggio Montano, though, everyone felt deeply connected. Being a part of this warm*

*community made me feel so happy. I had found people of my own age thinking as openmindedly as I do and while doing that lifting each other up to a higher level. While standing there watching the grand campfire I thanked the campmembers and staff for their warm hearts. Having been able to be part of that community was the greatest gift I could have received this year. I said goodbye to a very unique, special community(feeling) called IYC 2015 created by beautiful individuals.*

MAARTEN HONDORP, THE NETHERLANDS

*IYC where time doesn't exist and you're living in the moment. Lovely people, good conversations, always laughing and the best view. IYC—the summers I will never forget.*

AMANDA VAN LIEROP,  
THE NETHERLANDS

Do you know any young person who would like to be part of the ICY experience this summer? Tell them to visit the lively and informative website, [IYCamp.com](http://IYCamp.com) to find out more and to get in touch!



# Reviews

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## Three Guides to the Gospel of John

*Donna Simmons*

Recently, Temple Lodge Press released a book by Richard Seddon entitled *The Challenge of Lazarus-John: An Esoteric Interpretation*. I decided to review it but as I examined it, I realized that a similar book written by Paul Allen Marshall, called *Notes on the Gospel of John* (Steinerbooks: 2013) is also available. And so I decided to review both.

As it so happens, I have been re-reading Friedrich Rittlemeyer's book on meditation which Floris Books reissued in 2012 with the new title of *Meditation: Guidance of the Inner Life*. Although one might not guess from the title, as soon as one peeks at the contents page it becomes clear that this too is focused on working with the Gospel of John, though very differently from the other two books.

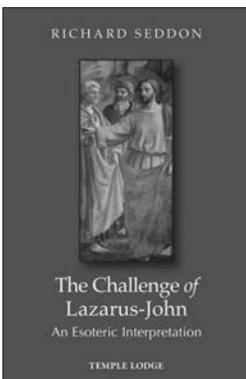
As people often find it difficult to know which book to choose when there are several on the same (or seemingly the same) subject, I thought it could be useful if I wrote something on all three. Of course, there are many, many other books within and outside of anthroposophical and

Christian Community circles on the Gospel of John, but these three will make a good start!

Seeing as each of these books references Rudolf Steiner's work on John's Gospel, it might seem obvious to start there—or at least to acknowledge that some readers might choose to tackle perhaps Steiner's two major lecture cycles on John (Hamburg, May 18–31 1908 and Kassel, 24 June–7 July 1909) referring to the following books before, during or after such studies. While wholeheartedly recommending Steiner's lectures on John's Gospel, comments on them are beyond this review (which has already shown signs of growing longer than initially intended). I should mention that Steiner did not confine his remarks about John's Gospel only to those two lecture cycles—he made numerous references in a variety of other contexts. For someone interested in exploring all that Steiner had to say about John, Richard Seddon's book is an invaluable guide.

Seddon warns in his preface of the dangers of stringing together quotes 'taken out of one context and placed into another, which may change their meaning in unintended ways.' (page 2). Bearing this in mind, however, the serious student of anthroposophy will find such work invaluable in his or her explorations. Seddon is also clear that such students are the intended readership of his book—those not familiar with anthroposophical concepts will have quite a tough time.

Seddon opens with a brief overview of who the John who wrote this gospel is and what his special destiny was. The format of the rest of the book is the entire text of the



### *Notes on the Gospel of John*

**Paul Marshall  
Allen**

SteinerBooks  
ISBN:  
9781621480099  
\$28.00/£19.30

gospel, interspersed with comments pulled together from Steiner's work. Whilst some might wish Seddon spelled out a bit more explicitly where Steiner said this or that (he does make notes but they are not exhaustive) or discussed more fully the range of perspectives Steiner brought to various thoughts on the gospel, there is certainly enough to give one a solid grounding.

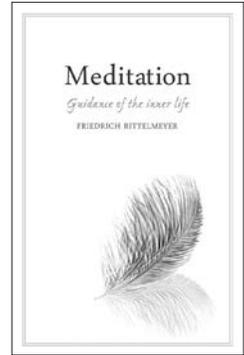
Paul Allen is also focused on the riches that Steiner's lectures and comments bring to one's study of the Gospel of John and, like Seddon, he organizes the book as a series of notes and comments interspersed throughout the text of the gospel (which is included). A major difference, however, is the stronger religious and theological, as opposed to anthroposophical, slant of the work. For two years Paul Allen and Rudolf Frieling (one of the founder priests of The Christian Community) studied the Gospel of John together and this book is the result of Allen's careful note taking of those conversations. Much of what is written is based on what Steiner says in various places, but there are also theological discussions and very interesting notes on, for instance, the various meanings of the Greek words used. Further, there are several places where the Gospel of John is brought into relation to the Act of Consecration of Man.

Whilst Richard Seddon's book comprises developed paragraphs (albeit often paraphrases of what Steiner said), Paul Allen's book is mainly a series of notes, which some might find frustrating. However, they are so full and so clear that one can get an enormous amount by slowly reading through them and meditating on their content. Having said that, I can imagine that this book would be perfect for a study group, as this treasure of notes lends itself

***The Challenge of  
Lazarus-John  
An Esoteric  
Interpretation***

**Richard Seddon**

Temple Lodge Press  
ISBN: 9781906999728  
\$25.00/£14.99



readily to discussion and shared reflection. Some of the notes are rather brief and many assume more than a passing acquaintance with anthroposophy. It might be worth noting that when Steiner gave his lectures on the Gospel of John, his assumption was that his listeners would be well grounded in anthroposophy.

Whereas the two books discussed are study guides to understanding John's Gospel, Friedrich Rittelmeyer, a founding priest of The Christian Community, wrote *Meditation: Guidance of the Inner Life* as a path of self development. The challenge of love and peace, the heart of John's Gospel, is Rittelmeyer's starting point. He moves through the seven 'I Am's', the steps Christ took toward his death and Resurrection, and a number of parables and healings. He does not work his way through the Gospel chronologically and he assumes one has one's own bible for reference. In a down to earth and practical way, he gently and with warm encouragement leads the reader on their own journey of self development, with verses from John's Gospel providing a path. Rittelmeyer says that 'to meditate means nothing other than to let the 'Word' be there, and to be

*Donna  
Simmons is  
a member of  
The Christian  
Community in  
Edinburgh.*

there for the Word; to let the Word create, and to transform oneself in the Word. That is the fulfilment of the last commandment which Christ gave to his disciples, to go the way which he pointed out, to let the Christ live on in the soul' (page 174).

For Rittlemeyer, meditation is a vital part of religious life and inner development. He gives practical suggestions on how one might meditate and discusses the differences and similarities between prayer and meditation. Rittlemeyer guides one deeper and deeper into the experience of Christ's love and peace, spiralling slowly into the centre of one's being and the centre of John's Gospel. As he accompanies his readers' journey, one can be aware of Rittlemeyer gaining in strength, changing his tone and finally ending the book with an exultant picture of the possibilities for the future of Christianity.

So which book to choose? Well, that really depends on what one is looking for. For an extensive guide to Steiner's investigations and thoughts on the Gospel of John, with special attention paid to the question of Lazarus-John, Richard Seddon's book is the best of these three titles. For a series of thoughtful and thought provoking notes on the inner meaning of John's Gospel with special reference to the Act of Consecra-

tion of Man and quite a lot of examination of the Greek used by John, Paul Allen's is the one to choose. And for guidance on how to actively work with the Gospel of John on a meditative path, one could not ask for more than Friedrich Rittlemeyer's book.

***Nature Contemplations  
Through the Christian Year***

**Peter Skaller (Author)**

Floris Books

ISBN: 9781782502289

£9.99

Ever and again nature lovers remark that 'you are nearer to God in a garden,' a sentiment echoed by all who have an eye and an ear for the beauties of the natural world: for the clouds and the skies, the trees and the plants, the creatures of the soil, ponds, fields, rivers, hills and mountains. The feelings stirred in us by the immense variety and wonders of nature are not without foundation; indeed, there is good reason to be so moved by what we experience in the outdoors. Watching, pondering on, maybe even dreaming into nature's captivating activities, moods and atmospheres stimulates in us feelings that lift us beyond the immediate experience of what we are actually seeing or hearing. Under their influence our own mood of soul changes.

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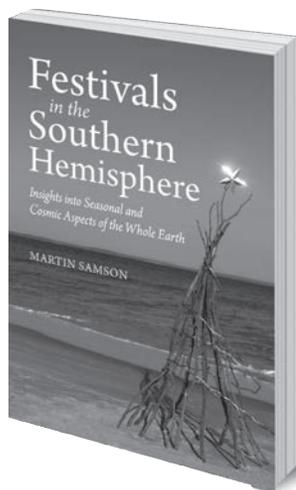
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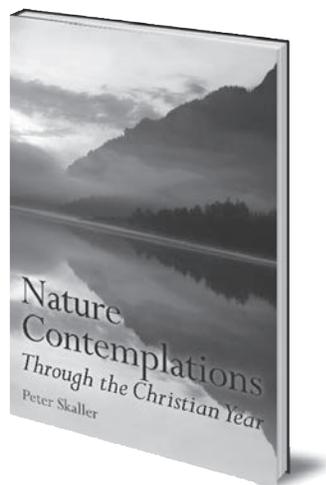
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If we extend our image of the bird to include how it is hatched from the egg, or of how the river gathers force and momentum as it collects water from its tributaries, these pictures take on a dynamic, and in their liveliness we can find how they become bearers or expressions of the kind of activity that takes place in the invisible, supersensory world. Such images, taken from nature, have it in them to become parables for what lives in the invisible world. They tell of another world in images gleaned from this world.

In his book, Peter Skaller describes a number of his own original images which for him have become parables for a selection of the readings from the gospels that we hear at the altars of The Christian Community in the annual cycle of Christian festivals. A number of the titles of these contemplations are

intriguing and one wonders which one to read first. For example, the heading for one of the readings in February, which is about a man caught carrying his pallet on the Sabbath (JOHN 5: 1–16), is *Put Out the Sun!*

In Easter time one of the motifs is the very practical activity of pruning, which is then applied to the soul: 'Once we accept the shears and turn within to learn, we enter into a 'co-pruning' relationship with the angels. [...] Freely accepting the shears allows sweet fruits of love to develop.'

Dealing with the need to really wake up to the world around us in St. John's time, one does not expect the title, *Get Out of*

*Bed!* to bear any relationship to 'Christ's baptism with the Holy Spirit', but it turns out that it does because 'the Holy Spirit has to do with really getting out of bed and taking hold of what destiny brings.'

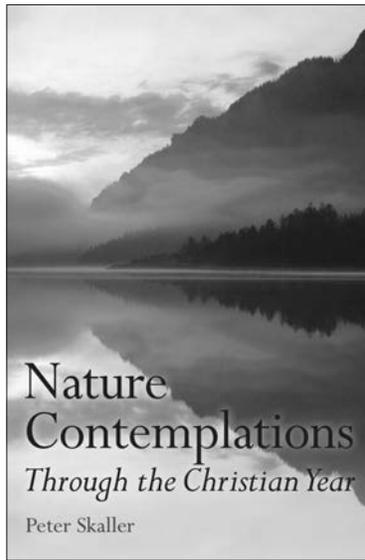
In his ponderings and musings Skaller leads us through his parables while gently and perceptively touching on many of the deep questions that we all carry within us. He gives examples of how the supersensory

(Skaller calls it suprasensory) world expresses itself one way in the natural world and in another way within the human being. We see that what takes place 'out there' truly corresponds to what takes place within us.

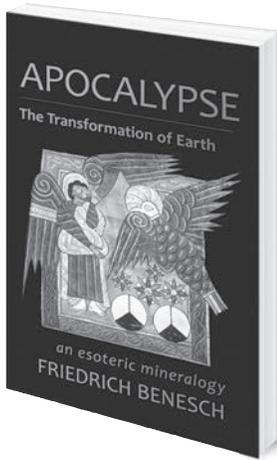
St. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, remarks, 'Ever since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities—his eternal creative power and divine nature—have

been spiritually perceptible in the kingdoms of creation.' (1:20). St. Augustine put the question, 'What is my God?' to 'all that can be admitted by the door of the senses': 'the earth, the sea and the chasms of the deep, the living beings that creep, the winds that blow and the air' as well as 'the sky, the sun, the moon and the stars';—and from each he received the answer, 'I am not the God you seek.' Loud and clear they said, 'God is he who made us.'

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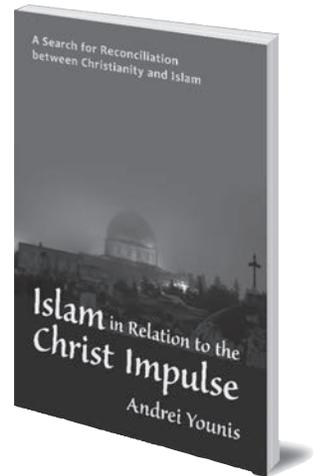
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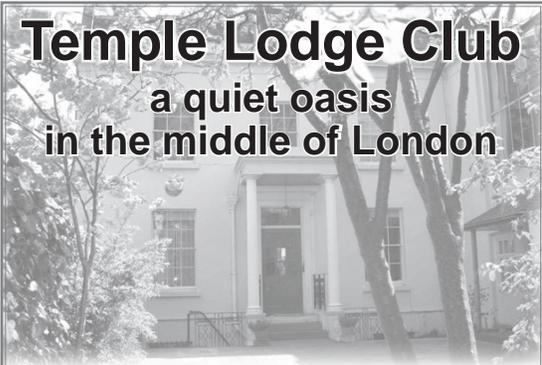
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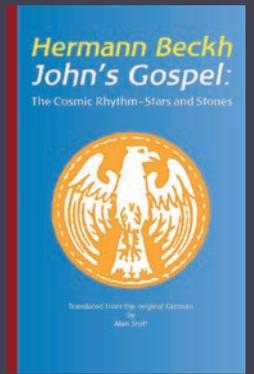
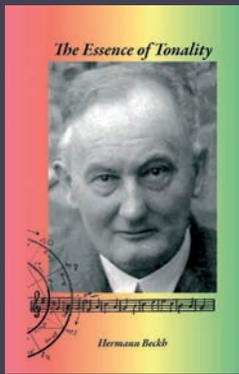
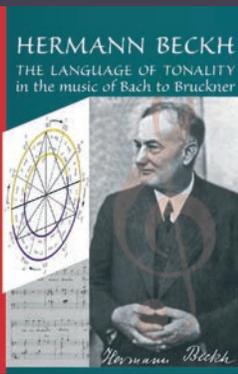
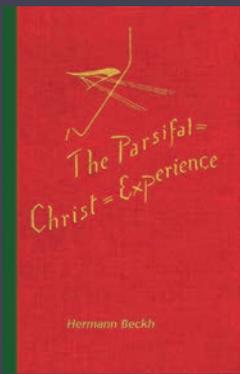
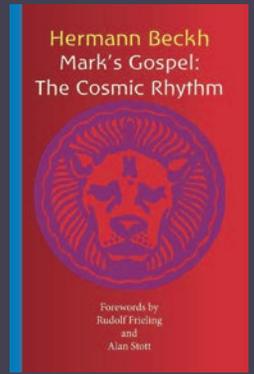
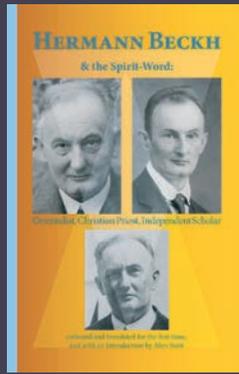
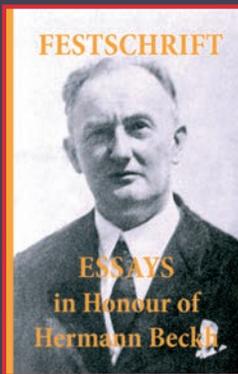
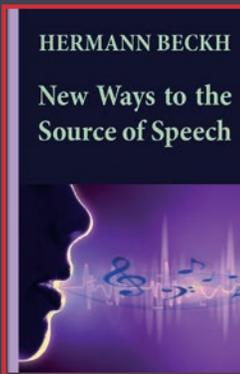
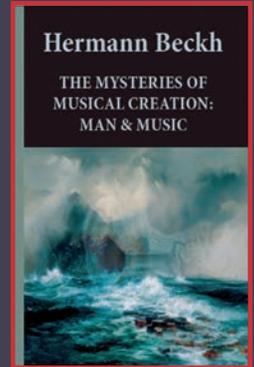
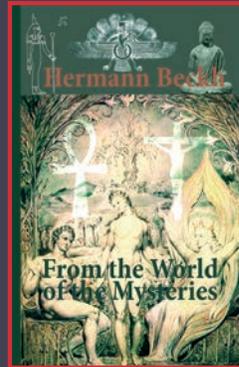
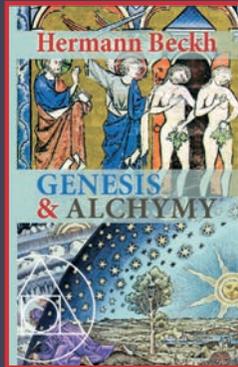
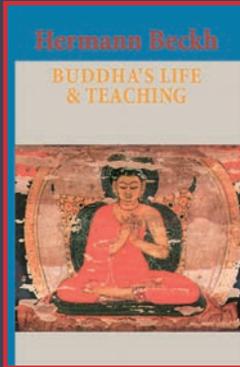
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