



The Christian Community

Perspectives

June–August 2011

Reclaiming Religion

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Perspectives

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In the western world, our journey towards freedom from all outer authority has led us to a place where it would seem that nothing that draws its authority from the past can compel the respect of human beings. The old dogmas of the church that told us about the origin and destination of man, of how to live a good life and be rewarded, have been rejected.

But it can seem as if the old un-freedom has only been exchanged for a new one: there is a new orthodoxy that tells us what man is, and what he is not; it tells us about the consequences of our deeds, of what we do and what we neglect for the future of the world. And for many human beings it seems that the thing they know best is what is not true—the old dogmas. Faced with the question of what they know out of themselves, they are less certain.

As modern Christians, we find ourselves in a strange position. We may well feel that the ‘god’ whom many enlightened, modern people reject is not one whom we would want to worship—a relic of humanity’s childhood, rewarding and punishing human beings in a predictable way. But we may feel equally alienated from modern, enlightened thought with its rejection of the very spiritual kernel of the human being on which it rests—man’s never-exhausted striving to understand himself and the world. What we can experience as a problem is in fact our challenge and our task. If we realise that we are not alone—that the world is waiting for a new, non-dogmatic Christianity—we may feel encouraged to take the task of religious renewal into our thinking.

TOM RAVETZ

Your companion in life

*Always alone, in the end alone.
When your lover goes to the other room
Or even when you turn away from him,
When you walk or drive, when you read,
When you're with no-one else, you are there
In that place you will be when death comes.*

*Always with death, your companion in life.
Then, at the end, your lover will be with you
Or you with him, all of your people,
All the goodwill you spread during life
Will come home and be round you.
How amazed you will be, that death
Is not only an angel in black
But all of your love, circling back.*

PETER HOWE

DECEMBER 2008

Spirituality and religion

Or 'when the two become one'

Michael Kientzler

In the western world and especially in North America, one often hears people say: 'I'm very spiritual but I'm not religious.' This points to a perception that these twain don't meet any more.

Religion without spirituality is definitely widespread. It is mostly the evangelical fundamentalist movements, the mega-churches with more than a thousand worshippers on a Sunday, the 'charismatic churches' like the Pentecostal, the fastest growing religious group on earth. (There is the saying in South America: the Catholic Church turned to the poor and the poor turned to the Pentacostals). But also most of the established churches which have lost spirituality in various degrees often only preserved in the text of old hymns.

On the other hand there are many searching souls who turn away from Christianity and organized Religion towards Paganism (A Jewish person I know called himself a born again pagan), Sufism, Buddhism (a religion which in many of its forms is without God, where the path is the important thing), Occultism etc searching for spirituality. One can meet many former Catholics or Fundamentalist Christians who are 'in recovery'. I was once asked, 'are you Catholic or Christian?' In North America, 'Christian' means born again evangelical Christian. For this reason, missionaries are sent to Spain, Greece and Russia, because Catholic or Orthodox Churches are not regarded as Christian.

Spirituality appears to have two sides: one connected with nature in the widest sense (paganism)—the periphery—and the other one with an inner path of self-development as represented by Buddhism—the centre. In Britain, Neo-Paganism seems to have developed a rather dark and decadent side, even tending towards grey or black magic. The change in the atmosphere at Glastonbury between the fifties and now reveals this fact quite clearly.

All of this is the result of a long lasting process in the history of Christianity with Church Councils and their decisions having had a landslide-like effect during the first millennium, and further developments in the 15th and 19th and 20th century. This has given rise to a separation of the religious and the spiritual, which in any

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of the religions of antiquity would have been unthinkable. To be aware of the divine-spiritual world (spirituality) and to have a working relationship with its beings (religion) was experienced as one and the same thing. In all ancient cultures, all decisions were taken in consultation with the Gods. Plutarch reports how one of the mythic kings of ancient Rome, Numa Pompilius, regularly asked advice and inspiration from the nymph Egeria for state matters. In the times of the Roman caesars, the Gods of the conquered nations and cultures were gathered and collected in the Roman Pantheon, because only then could the 'pax romana' be guaranteed.

A decisive moment was the second Council of Constantinople. It was held from May 5 to June 2, 553, having been called by the Byzantine Emperor Justinian. It was the last phase of the long and tumultuous conflict which began with the edict of Justinian in 543 against Origenism, which sprang from an impulse to wipe out all spirituality in Christendom. The early church fathers from Alexandria, Clement and Origen, taught the pre-existence of the human soul before birth. They used the example of John the Baptist, whose birth was not only announced to his father Zacharia but whose behaviour and mission was characterized by the angel Gabriel before his conception. The argument for his pre-existence was based on the fact that he was sent by God; this could not have happened, had he not already been in existence. Even the thought of reincarnation had been hinted at in Christian teaching and theology.

To force the outcome of this council, Christian peasant farmers were brought from Egypt to Constantinople to wield their big sticks against those priests and bishops who were reluctant to condemn Origen and Clement as heretics.

After this council a process of destruction of all the visible signs of spirituality took place in Europe and the Middle East with a hitherto unseen intensity. All the altars and shrines that stood in every field, at every spring or ancient tree were destroyed. These were part of the working of the land, the places for offerings and prayers to the nature spirits and gods to whom people knew they owed the fertility of the land and growth of plants and animals. The great Christian programme of de-spiritualization and 'spiritual cleansing' reached its conclusion.

The next decisive step on this path was the third Council in Constantinople (869) which took place in the church dedicated to the female or soul-aspect of the Holy Spirit, the divine Sophia 'Hagia Sophia' and where with a historical irony the spirit was abolished, as Rudolf Steiner described

it. The trinitarian character of the human being (body, soul and spirit) as the image of the divine Trinity was overruled, as has been described in these pages many times.

Everything that followed could be regarded as a continued erosion, including the text-critical theology and the demythologisation of the 19th century.

There were exceptions though. The School of Chartres with its inclusion of the Goddess Natura, with all the cosmic wisdom of the 'Book of Nature' interwoven with the images from the 'Book of Revelation' (the Old and New Testament) which found its way into the sculptures and the stained glass windows of the great cathedral, even after the School itself had come to an end. Or another spiritual stream was that of the German mystics like Meister Eckhardt, who revived the knowledge that Christianity is a path. And in the background there was the more hidden esoteric Christianity of the Grail Stream or the Arthurian Knights.

Ireland and Britain had their own history in relationship to our theme. Celtic Christianity came to Britain through Irish missionaries having peacefully transformed Druidic Paganism into Christianity. This peaceful transformation is reflected in the fact that early Christianity in Ireland especially and in Britain before the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons had relatively few martyrs [Saint Albans was 3rd century!]. It was a perfect example of the unity of Spirituality and Religion in Western Europe.

Celtic Christianity was not only built around the monasteries, decentralized with abbots as self-appointed bishops but also inclusive of nature and her spirits. Christ was seen as the 'Lord of the Elements' and the form of the Sun-Cross showed the relationship of Christ to the sun. Thus in the west the great separation was postponed and Spirituality and Religion remained conjoined for longer than in the rest of most of Christendom. This is reflected in some of the graces, songs, prayers and charms of the Western Isles:

SUN

*The eye of the great God,
The eye of the God of glory,
The eye of the King of hosts,
The eye of the King of the living,
Pouring upon us
At each time ands season,
Pouring upon us
Gently and generously.
Glory to thee,*

*Thou glorious sun,
Glory to thee, thou sun,
Face of the God of life.*

315 Carmina Gadelica p. 315 (collected by Alexander Carmichael)

SEA PRAYER

HELMSMAN

*What can befall you
And God the Father with you?*

CREW

No harm can befall us

HELMSMAN

*What can befall you
And God the Spirit with you?*

CREW

No harm can befall us

ALL

*God the Father
God the Son
God the Spirit,
With us eternally.*

HELMSMAN

*What can cause you anxiety
And the God of the elements over you?*

CREW

No anxiety can be ours.

HELMSMAN

*What can cause you anxiety
And the king of the elements over you?*

CREW

No anxiety can be ours.

HELMSMAN

*What can cause you anxiety
And the Spirit of the elements over you?*

CREW

No anxiety can be ours.

ALL

*The God of the elements,
The King of the elements,
The Spirit of the elements,
Close over us,
Ever eternally*

121 Carmina Gadelica p. 121 (Collected by Alexander Carmichael)

With the arrival of the Roman emissary St. Augustine to Canterbury and the Synod of Whitby (664) to wipe out the 'British heresy' Celtic Christianity faded away in Britain by the beginning of the 7th century. In Ireland it lasted into the 9th century.

Today, as a result of these historical developments, religion tends towards becoming a purely subjective inner experience, immersed in religious egoism, sentimentality or fanaticism. Spirituality on the other hand denotes a more or less undifferentiated wishy-washy New Age approach without spiritual discernment.

This separation prepared us for a clear differentiation and understanding of both religion and spirituality.

In a way it is similar to the distinction which Rudolf Steiner drew between spiritual science and religion: the first deals with spirit-understanding and knowledge, the latter with spirit-consciousness. It is like knowing about a person or even understanding a person on the one hand, or being in relationship with him or her, on the other.

It was the great achievement of the Spiritual Science of Anthroposophy to bring the two together again for the first time, because the anthroposophical path of gaining 'spirit-knowledge' ultimately leads to the development of an awareness of the spirit, or religion. To establish a relationship to divine spiritual beings is the next step that leads on from knowledge to existential relationship.

This was the impulse that led to the founding of The Christian Community, which seeks to re-unite Religion and Spirituality. The path character of Christianity had to be re-established, an understanding of Man as an image of the trinity and a new inclusive approach to nature in relationship to Christ had to be brought about. This is just the beginning of religious renewal and Christianity still has a long way to go.

For a true renewal of religious life in our time we need to understand the contents of religion and this can't be done without a spiritual approach. In the renewed mass, 'The Act of Consecration of Man,' what lives in the seasons of the year is woven together with the Christian Festivals and the religious inwardness of the Gospels, thereby bridging the polarities that we saw above between cosmic spirituality (paganism) and the inwardness of our soul life (mysticism). The Movement for Religious Renewal could never exist without this marriage between spirituality and religion. In preaching and teaching, images of the 'Book of Nature' are interwoven with motifs from the 'Book of Revelation,' the Bible.

The emphasis of the Movement for Religious Renewal is of course on religion, whereas in Spiritual Science (Anthroposophy) the emphasis lies on the cognitive side, which can deepen into the religious approach. Through the help of Anthroposophy, spirituality and religion can be re-united in our time hopefully never to be separated again. But it would be a misunderstanding to think of The Christian Community as a church for Anthroposophists. It is a church for all searching people who don't find what they are looking for in other churches; just as Steiner Schools are not schools for the children of Anthroposophists. Everybody who feels attracted by this renewed religious approach of The Christian Community is of course left entirely free in how they relate to the religious life and what stands behind it. They are not required to engage with it on a cognitive level, although questions and the will to understand the gospels and everything else are encouraged. Many modern human beings seek precisely this reconnection of their inner world with the objective world outside of them. What they will find in The Christian Community will help them to make this connection ever more real; they will find in it the bridge from their own experience to the objective world.

Finally, another element should be touched on, and that is art. A kind of trinity should prevail, science (including spiritual science), art and religion. Art of course always played a great role in both science and religion in the past. We owe innumerable pieces of art and music to this fact. If art is missing them we get a soulless world of technology without beauty contra-productive to life through science or a bleak shrivelled religiosity with rigid moral rules that fetters human souls in their creativity; the three always belong together as a cultural trinity.

To our atheist comrades: I don't believe in the God that you reject, either!

Julia Polter

'To our atheist comrades'— this title suggests that there are people we share a room with. And these comrades are atheists, which means, they do not believe in God. To those we say: 'This god that you don't believe in, we don't believe in either.' and with it we express the fact that, somewhere deep in our soul, we do not believe in God either. This is what I am trying to write about here.

I will describe the phenomenon of Atheism with the United States in mind. Statistics say that atheism is on the rise, particularly among young Americans, aged 16–35, and among those with higher education. 93% of all members of the American Academy of Science profess to be atheists.

This surge of atheism is comparatively new. It entered public consciousness in 2006 with four publications. Within a year these works of non-fiction that promote atheism were all on the New York Times' bestseller lists.

The most successful and famous of the four main representatives of this atheism is Richard Dawkins. His book *The God Delusion* received much attention in the United States. It is interesting that the authors Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens and Daniel Dennet all studied at Oxford and were all born in England. Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennet hold or held professorships. Christopher Hitchens adopted United States citizenship. Only the fourth, Sam Harris is in this respect the odd one out. He originates from the United States and has studied there at a prestigious university. However, he experimented with Ecstasy, left the university, travelled in the Far East and studied meditation. He has a kind of Buddhist background. There are streams within Buddhism that are atheist.

Why has atheism become so prominent since the years 2006 and 2007?

George W. Bush's second term included 2007. People, particularly the better educated, realized that the Bush government persistently confused politics and religion. Asked in an interview who was his favourite philosopher, Bush answered: 'Jesus'. There were prayer circles in the White House and public money flowed to religious organisations, which contravenes the Constitution of the United States.

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Bush belongs to the fundamentalist Christian evangelical movement. Its members often appear to be radical and bigoted because of their overwhelming missionary zeal to convert others to their own faith. The effect of this is that young people in the United States, also those who feel part of The Christian Community, do not dare to utter Christ's name, as they could be easily associated with Evangelical Fundamentalism. People realize how inhuman this brand of religion is and it leads them to reject everything religious.

The other reason for this rejection lies, not surprisingly, in the events of 11th September 2001. Many ask: how can God allow such things to happen? And they also say: the terrorists who murdered thousands have acted out of religious motives. They believed to serve their god by killing people in such a cruel way. Therefore they believe that religion must be a bad thing.

In 2004 his book *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror and the Future of Reason*—which swiftly became a bestseller— Sam Harris described the terror experienced in the United States as a religious phenomenon. Many people responded to his book. He received many death threats because of his attack on Religion, I suspect from the camp of the evangelicals. He responded to this by writing another text: *Letter to a Christian Nation* with the purpose of unmasking religious fundamentalism. He says: ‘The truth is that many who claim to be transformed by Christ's love are deeply, even murderously, intolerant of criticism. While we may want to ascribe this to human nature, it is clear that such hatred draws considerable support from the Bible. How do I know this? The most disturbed of my correspondents always cite chapter and verse.’ Harris has to live under cover to protect himself from attacks and he avoids public appearances.

Attempts have been made to distil the main arguments of the atheists. There seem to be five main points.

The prime argument is this:

God does not exist. Philosophically one would say: The statement: ‘God exists’ is a false statement. Richard Dawkins writes: ‘I am not attacking any particular version of God or gods. I am attacking God, all gods, anything and everything supernatural, wherever and whenever they have been or will be invented.’ This is the common base of the atheists: the denial of the existence of God.

The second point:

All religious impulses of human beings can be explained scientifically. Science and religion are irreconcilable.

The third point:

Religion has an evil influence on the world. The proof is events like 9/11. Atheism never leads men to do evil deeds. Statistics prove that crime and divorce is less prevalent among atheists. The highest divorce rate is among Jews, the lowest among atheists.

The fourth point:

If the god of the Old Testament existed, he would be an awful person. This is an interesting point which shows these atheists are constantly presupposing god.

The fifth point:

Only atheism can safeguard the achievements of our civilisation. The current system of democracy as is practised in the United States, is based on the thought of the Enlightenment. The founding fathers of the United States did not believe in God or were agnostic or at least secular. If we want to have a future as mankind without tearing each other apart in conflict and war we have to cultivate this enlightenment and eliminate Religion.

Let us think about these five points:

God does not exist.

Those who attend the Act of Consecration of Man regularly do so because they believe in God. However, even in our Service we mention atheism: 'the denials of thy being'. We do deny his being, we have in ourselves atheist tendencies. When do we deny God? I personally can say: I deny God when I am afraid that I will fail, when I distrust my destiny. We could see in the service a challenge to find our own denials of God.

Science and Religion are irreconcilable.

Consider that those who make this statement hail from a very particular scientific tradition. Natural science is a particular section of science, that is to say, of all that can be known by human beings. It limits what is knowable things to what is measurable. What cannot be measured in some way is excluded from inquiry. Therefore, religion is excluded. I would like to mention alongside this idea what Albert Einstein said. We could see Einstein as the archetypal representative of science. He was able to make for himself a surprisingly naïve connection between science and religion.

I'm not an atheist and I don't think I can call myself a pantheist. (...)

We are in the position of a little child entering a huge library filled

with books in many different languages. The child knows someone must have written those books. He does not know how. (...)The child dimly suspects a mysterious order in the arrangement of the books but doesn't know what it is. That, it seems to me, is the attitude of even the most intelligent human being toward God. We see a mysteriously created universe that follows certain laws, which we understand dimly.

It would seem that science did not prevent Einstein from coming to the conclusion that 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.' (Hamlet, Act 1, Scene 5)

Religion has an evil influence on the world.

It does not make much sense to discuss this vacuous allegation. I don't think religion is the problem here. One certainly could argue against this charge, by showing that there exist morally reprehensible atheists and morally creative adherents to religion; however, I don't think much could be gained by it. The lack of moral creativity is the origin of evil, not religion.

If the God of the Old Testament existed, he would be an awful person.

This argumentation is understandable, especially if you look at the Old Testament. Atheists often point out that the father murders his son. How can this be good?

In The Christian Community we emphasize the Resurrection. At the altar we always look towards the Risen Christ, although the cross is also visible. The Christian Community differs from other churches in its religious direction towards the Resurrection. We are carried by the thought of the transformed and self-transforming human being, the thought that development is possible and that this apparently and factually cruel death of the son on the cross results in a transformation that makes the human being greater, healthier and better, and more God-like than he has been before. It would be difficult to argue thus with an atheist, as he would have to believe this in order to let the argument stand. The concept of evolution allows us to deal differently with the issue of the 'immoral God'.

For civilisation to continue atheism is necessary.

There is a grain of truth here: how is it possible to deny God? We are all infected somehow with atheism. The cause of atheism lies in the Fall of Man. It led to our entanglement with matter in a more profound way than was planned. Therefore we are not able to penetrate our bodily nature fully with the higher members of our being. Our relationship to our physical nature

is disturbed, and this results in atheism. Rudolf Steiner describes mankind as being naturally organised towards materialism and calls it ultimately a disorder, even an 'illness'. Our brain mineralises increasingly, and we find it harder and harder to grasp divine thoughts.

Darwin describes in his biography how such a hardening takes place in his soul: 'But now for many years I cannot endure to read a line of poetry: I have tried lately to read Shakespeare, and found it so intolerably dull that it nauseated me. I have also almost lost my taste for pictures or music. Music generally sets me thinking too energetically on what I have been at work on, instead of giving me pleasure. I retain some taste for fine scenery, but it does not cause me the exquisite delight which it formerly did. ... My mind seems to have become a kind of machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of facts, but why this should have caused the atrophy of that part of the brain alone, on which the higher tastes depend, I cannot conceive.'

Also Lenin became unable to listen to music, as it made him so peaceful that he lost the energy to pursue his goals.

I mention this here as I believe that we need—in order to retain our humanity—the freedom which expresses itself in the fact that we can be atheists. We need to accept this atheism as a part of ourselves. What unites us with our atheist comrades is our striving for truth. On the other hand we need to be able to bear the fact that we often do not know and understand. This is an important step on the way to self-knowledge. Rudolf Steiner stresses the importance of enduring the pain of not knowing, without losing the courage to seek answers. This powerlessness can lead directly to the experience of Christ. It is, in truth, the way to Christ.

I would like to encourage you to acknowledge your own personal atheism, to look at it with all sincerity and to endure your—and all our—inability to get close to and bear the divine in its perfection. Out of this powerlessness we will become creative.

I believe that this re-emergence of atheism and our dealing with it can lead to something hopeful and positive, if we do not simply reject it as a nuisance.

Transcript of a lecture held in Hamburg in 2010, revised by the author

The Healing of the Sickness of Sin

Pearl Goodwin

Many people today, particularly young people, have difficulty in finding a relationship to Christianity, simply because there is such an emphasis on 'sin'. Nobody wants to feel that they are 'bad', and, what is worse, that this feeling arises out of being judged, by something or somebody that is outside, mighty and implacable—God, Christ, or the Church. It is not that faults and mistakes go unacknowledged, particularly in our time when excursions into the human soul and its complex landscape are so widespread. It is that 'sin' has such a moral absoluteness about it that the soul can be filled with fear. What is worse, it can paralyse inner growth and the soul's natural wish to develop. Nobody wants to feel that about themselves; so the religion in which it seems to be such a dominant factor is often rejected, even before exploration of its content. Today people are rightly free to choose their religion. The religious life cannot be coerced. Quite often it means that in the yearning for the spiritual or the religious, there is a leaning towards forms in which this concept of 'sin' does not occur so directly.

In its classical form, Hinduism never talks about 'sin', but instead talks about being 'unenlightened'. This is not a moral matter, but is the inevitable consequence of being incarnated in an earthly body, i.e. in a field of darkness, irredeemable in itself because matter in its very nature is not included in the spirit. Enlightenment is inevitable if one draws oneself out of this dark through strenuous inner exercises. The dark itself is not a question of morality, as we understand that word today, but is simply a fact of the human constitution. Only the inability to free oneself from the wheel of karma, which means repeatedly incarnating, or reincarnating, could seem to have a moral tinge to it.

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priest living in
Forest Row.*

Buddhism comes nearer to our experience by speaking about 'suffering'. All experience is suffering, because we are unenlightened, but that can be changed through the noble Eightfold Path, that does not draw one out of earthly concerns, at least to begin with, but brings them to the Good, and so to enlightenment. In

both of these paths one can feel free to find one's way into the light, without feeling 'bad'.

It is in Judaism and Christianity that 'sin' is seen as so central, because it is intrinsic to the human constitution since the Fall of Man. The Creed of The Christian Community tells us that this Fall went very deeply into the human constitution, and that 'sin' or 'the sickness of sin' in time beset the 'bodily nature of mankind'. It did not begin there, it began in the soul of Eve, and then went deeper and deeper. In the Ten Commandments, breaking the Law meant sinning, which was then judged, and punished with actions corresponding to the transgression, to bring about redemption. It would seem as if Christianity has simply taken on the same dynamic as we find in the Old Testament. Someone sins and then must do penance, perhaps in the form of strenuous exercises, often involving a kind of self-loathing. It is not so easy to discern that with Christianity, this whole question has taken on another quality altogether because this old dynamic persists.

This new quality can be experienced in the Sacraments of The Christian Community, in particular in the Act of Consecration of Man. If one listens with this in mind, it can be noticed that the word 'sin' hardly occurs until near the end, in fact at the end of the Transubstantiation, when the healing deed of Christ has already become manifest once again in the transformation of bread and wine. This means that before we hear the word 'sin', we have heard the Gospel, participated in the Offertory, and experienced the Spirit's reply to our offering in the Transubstantiation. After this, and again several times in the Communion, we hear about sin. Of course, there is the awareness of error, and the mistakes that flow from each one of us towards the Father-Ground, which each one of us has to address in our own way and as best we can. But in contrast to earlier versions of the Mass, these mistakes are not given the absolute weight that is there in the word 'sin'.

So what is happening here? Instead of being judged as sinful, and in need of help, we are first of all healed, having put ourselves into that process in the Gospel and the Offertory. Not only that, but Christ helps us with the Offertory, He offers with us; we do not offer to Him, nor are we judged by Him. He gives us the strength to offer our mistakes and even to know what they are. Then, and only then, can we come to a consciousness that these mistakes can be called the 'sickness of sin', the illness of mankind as a whole. This is something that can be familiar to us—it is possible to recover from an illness, and only then know fully what the illness had been and what it had done to us.

This means that in being healed, the true nature of human error can have the quality of revelation. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit, not a judgment. And then we can really do something, because it is a knowledge that does not belong to our ordinary consciousness. It is too big for that and can even do harm, rather than good, if we become unable to love ourselves enough to take on a path towards Christ. Here is a Trinitarian gesture within the Sacrament. We offer, not only our error, but also the best of us, to the Father. Then Christ transforms out of the 'nothing' space that has been created, and the Holy Spirit reveals. This is radically different from the way in which the Old Testament addresses 'sin'. It is supported by the Gospels, particularly the Gospel of St. John. Here are two examples.

In John 5 we read the story of the man who had been ill for 38 years, and lay by the pool of Bethesda. He need only express a will towards healing, and Christ heals him, 'Take up your bed and walk!' Only later when the man goes to the temple, from which he had surely been excluded, and Christ finds him there, is he told, 'Sin no more.' That is very strange. The man was ill and not what we would today call a sinner. This healing has to do with the 'original sin' of all mankind, which entered the bodily nature, depleting it and compromising it. In the Old Testament this 'original sin' is made personal and individual. This greater dimension is encompassed in the healing. But the man must now take responsibility for his life in a new way because through the healing he is now able to do so.

In John 8 there is something similar: the woman who has been taken in adultery, who should by the law be stoned to death for her sin. Once again Christ points to a greater meaning, 'let him who is without sin be the first to throw a stone.' The woman's deed is removed from the realm in which one person's judgment of another can lead to immediate punishment. After Christ pronounces her forgiveness, she too is told, 'Go, and sin no more.' The deed is not wiped out from the world. It is written into the ground and she will have to meet it. But because she has been forgiven by Christ, she will have the strength to meet it. His forgiveness is at the same time a healing.

From all of this, we can sense that Christ's relationship to human beings reveals a radical reversal of values, which places healing at the centre and so allows us to experience ourselves in a different way. Judgment is still there—it has to be—but it does not come to us from outside, but rather from inside. Depending on our relationship to Christ, the inner place from which judgment comes can become something that can even be loved. This motif can be taken further into a new way of understanding the festivals of the year.

So, the cycle of the Christian year can be seen in two parts. There is the time between Advent and Whitsun that directly relates to the incarnation of Christ on the earth. It begins with the preparation at Advent and then the birth of Jesus at Christmas. Epiphany until Easter represents the three years when Jesus Christ walked the earth, and it culminates in Passiontide and Holy week, which are the most intense preparation for the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. From Easter Sunday to Ascension is forty days and then that part of the cycle has its crown ten days later with Whitsun, when the biography of Christ on the earth is, one could say, handed over to human beings. This part of the cycle has a unique relationship to time: the three years are concentrated into roughly three months from Epiphany to Easter, but the events between Palm Sunday and Whitsun unfold in the exact number of days described in the Gospels, which emphasizes the direct relationship between the spiritual events and earthly time. In The Christian Community this part of the year is celebrated in a twofold way: in the Gospels as a living memory of the events 2000 years ago, and in the Epistles in the Act of Consecration, where we celebrate their eternal reality in this moment and into the future.

The festivals that follow are of a different nature. St. John's is a festival that relates to the biography of Christ only in that John the Baptist was a forerunner of Christ, who proclaimed his coming. But why is his festival after Whitsun? Why not around the time of preparation, at Advent? Or is it simply because St. John's traditionally belongs to the summer and has simply been added to the old midsummer mysteries? And what then is Michaelmas, which is not part of the Gospels narrative of the life of Christ? We are challenged to find a different way of looking at this relationship.

In the Gospels, John the Baptist has the mission of preparing the hearts of men for the coming of Christ. He does this through his uncompromising awareness of the 'sickness of sin,' not only through his teaching of a change of hearts and minds, but through the deed of baptism. This brought to those who were baptized a direct experience of their own errors, not by thinking about them, but through being lifted out of themselves in the act of the baptism itself. That is, they had an experience that is akin to that after death, when we can look back at ourselves free of the body, and finally understand who we are, good and not so good. On the earth we are immersed in ourselves, and so do not understand, since the body itself masks the truth from us. So John's Baptism was a form of healing, for it is always healing to be given a means of understanding out of a higher form of experience. So it begins to be clear why the festival of St. John comes

after Whitsun. Christ's life on the earth, his Death and Resurrection are the healing deed for all of us, lifting us into a new possibility out of which we can begin to understand our own errors. Only at St. John's does the Epistle speak, not about sin, but about the inner awareness of sin, which is guilt. Other festivals speak of error, or weakness or infirmities; guilt is unique to St. John's. Even Passiontide, where one might expect this, does not speak directly about sin, but about the effects in the body of the loss of our higher being. But St. John goes right to the heart of it and tells us about our guilt, because only after Whitsun can we bear it.

John the Baptist brought the awareness of sin to people, through the healing experience of baptism. Today, the healing comes to mankind through the life and deed of Christ, as we experience it the course of the Christian year. After Whitsun, through John, we can become aware of the sickness of sin. This is an important challenge for our time.

The natural and human disaster in Japan

Christopher Cooper

When the earthquake and the tsunami struck the eastern coast of Japan on 11th March it must have stirred up memories of the earlier disaster on Boxing Day 2004 when many countries from Indonesia westwards were devastated by the tremors and the tidal waves that followed. About a quarter of a million people perished.

Such mighty events always seem to re-awaken questions about divine justice and divine retribution. Following the Asian tsunami of 2004 Hans Werner Schroeder published a profound and helpful article in the German magazine of The Christian Community in April 2005. In it he sheds a new light of understanding on such world events. Below are the translated extracts from his article (The Tsunami Catastrophe: how can God allow this?)

The old questions are raised when innumerable people lose their lives. If there is a divine guidance of humanity, couldn't it have prevented all this from happening?

Such a catastrophe can have positive effects. There has been an extraordinary willingness to help the victims on a global scale. Donations have flooded in which can be seen as a sign of our feeling for all humanity.

The shattering event is a reminder of how dependent we are on the forces of nature and of destiny. One should learn to seek for earthly security in other realms as well as in our immediate environment. The traditional churches speak of the inscrutable nature of God's decisions to which one is completely exposed. The mind of God is unfathomable.

One can recall an earlier disaster in 1975 when on Christmas night in Darwin, Australia, a whirlwind devastated a whole town in a few seconds. Many people were killed. Why did this happen at Christmas? (like the Boxing Day tsunami of 2004). Christmas is not merely a festival of remembrance but an event in the present moment. Christ reunites himself with the earth every Christmas and his light shines radiantly into the earth sphere

Another Christmas disaster was the 2003 earthquake at Bam, an ancient Iranian city. This happened on Boxing Day. So what do souls experience who are torn out of earthly existence at such a festive moment of the year? Dying in the Christmas period brings with it a particular grace because the light of Christ is shining in a special way. These souls of those who have died are taken up into this light of Christ and experience his grace while those left on earth see only the terrible catastrophe.

Experiencing such catastrophes can teach us how a perception of repeated earth lives can give us a real perspective of the further destiny paths of a human soul. Not only old and sick people die, but also children whose lives still lie before them. There are also people who die at the peak of their power. These people will not only find a continuance of their destiny in a later life but there will be a full compensation for the painful destiny they had to undergo this time.

Christopher Cooper is a member of the South Devon Congregation.

There is a further perspective which modern Spiritual Science speaks of. People who die together in a catastrophe on earth can find a common task in the future which helps humanity evolve. Through such deaths they are able to serve the wellbeing of humanity and the earth to an even higher degree.

Now the earth is not merely a dead body of rock and stone. It is a mighty cosmic being which is intimately linked to the fate of humanity. The earth has said 'Yes' to the shared destiny with man. It knew that this shared path would be linked to great pain including the abuse and brutality that human beings would inflict on it. The earth brings a superabundance of cosmic forces into this common destiny and an infinite amount of patience with humanity. It is especially at Christmas that the spirit of the earth becomes deeply conscious of this fact once more. It lives in the memories of its own past and its future. However there come moments where the earth must show that it is not indifferent to all the atrocities committed by so many human beings. Looking back to 2004 one remembers the widespread torture and intimidation in Iraqi prisons, for example. We can also take note of a remark by Rudolf Steiner that earthquakes can also be a reaction of the being of the earth to the enormous power of materialism spreading everywhere.

One thing still remains to be said. How can God allow this to happen? A different question would be: what does our picture of God look like? Can we exclaim like Schiller in his Ode to Joy 'Brothers, above the canopy of the stars there must live a good Father'. If we feel like this about God then He is too far away.

However Christ has united himself with humanity. He lives with each one of us. He suffers with each one of us. He takes our suffering into his World Heart and into his love. He plants in it the seed of transformation when we turn to him. This is the true comfort in the Tsunami catastrophe.

Additional remarks by the translator, Christopher Cooper:

Although the most recent Japanese catastrophe is not linked to the Christmas festival, it does lie within a special rhythm of time. This is the 33 year Christ rhythm which Steiner spoke about on several occasions.

In 1945 Hiroshima and Nagasaki lay in ruins following the purely human deed of untold destruction when the power of the nuclear bombs destroyed thousands of lives. Sixty six years later the nuclear reactors at Fukushima also lie in ruins, not through deeds of anger and revenge but rather the hubris that gaining 'peaceful' energy from highly dangerous processes was entirely justified. That the greatest toxins known to man are produced in the reactors, that the spent fuel has a half-life of thousands of years before it becomes safe, is hidden from so many people's consciousness. A complacency that the nuclear industry has at last developed an entirely reliable and safe way of producing energy with no greenhouse gases has now been shattered.

Within the second return of the 33 year rhythm in 2011 mankind is being challenged to look again at energy derived from highly toxic elements which are totally alienated from life forces. Why is it

not possible to find a gentler energy (not fission but fusion) that is in harmony with nature? Apart from the international support that flows towards the suffering Japanese people with such abundance, there should also be deep questions about the forces we draw into our lives. In this time when Christ is so active in the etheric realm can we penetrate with deep understanding

into its energies that can be harnessed for the wellbeing of humanity?

One final thought. Have we to thank the Japanese people who have sacrificed themselves in this catastrophe in order to offer a great warning about destructive man made powers? If the warnings are heeded, untold damage to the earth in future centuries and millenia may be avoided.

Experiencing Salvation IV Whitsun and Saint John's

Tom Ravetz

Subjective and Objective

From Advent to Epiphany we experience particularly strongly the working of the Father, as we receive the gift of creation and potential re-creation. From Passiontide to Ascension we are in the realm of the Son, who passes with us through the darkness of earth-existence into new life. From Whitsun onwards, we are in the realm of the Holy Spirit. At Whitsun we celebrate the coming of the Spirit; at St John's we celebrate a human being who was uniquely endowed with the Spirit; and at Michaelmas we think of the Archangel, a being from the rank of the heavenly hierarchies closest to human beings, and most connected to the Holy Spirit.

The pivotal point between the time of the Son's working and that of the Spirit is the time between Ascension and Whitsun. Ascension is the climax of Christ's working and at the same time when he is withdrawn from the Apostles' sight. Now it is left to human beings to take the initiative, re-forming their community and

opening themselves for what is coming towards them.

The ten days between Ascension and Whitsun bring a radical change. Where, in the first part of year, the initiative comes from the divine world, now it is shared with human beings. There are fascinating books of 'what if?' history. There is a great 'what if?' about Whitsun. What if the Apostles hadn't found each other again; what if they hadn't decided to complete their number, and to celebrate the Festival of Weeks together in the Upper Room? The coming of the Spirit on Whitsunday clearly depends on all of these things. There is a co-operation between human beings and the spiritual world.

We experience something like this when we have had a particularly successful meeting. When we look back on the success of a meeting, we realise that it was important that we paid

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attention to the time and place it would happen; we also needed to consider who was needed so that it could happen in the right way. If we had not attended to all this, the meeting could not have happened. We needed to create a container within which the meeting could unfold. But what actually happened there was beyond our control: the spiritual being of our organisation or community filled the container that we had created, once we had become open for the Spirit.

If the Apostles hadn't taken the initiative, would the Holy Spirit still have come? What would it mean if he hadn't? Would there be something called Christianity in the world today?

Thinking such thoughts takes us into paradoxical realms. For traditional Christian thinking, it can seem dangerous, almost blasphemous to think that part of the fulfilment of Christ's mission would not have happened without human initiative and understanding. This is the hallmark of the third moment in the festival year, and of the working of the Holy Spirit: the boundary between human and divine initiative becomes porous.

Hegel, the great philosopher of German Idealism, had an intuition of this mystery. Although he is now out of vogue, his thinking inspired generations of German theologians. He saw Man's awakening to self-reflection as a 'moment' in the process of God's becoming. The divine spirit awakens to its own reality in the human spirit. Many theologians reject Hegel today because they want to think in terms of 'either/or'. For this thinking, the reality that Hegel grasped cannot be true without it placing a limit on God's power: if God's fulfilment depends on man, then is God really

almighty? Perhaps it is also the frightening thought of our potential almightiness in participating in God's power that makes us shrink from such a picture.

The images of atonement that we have looked at so far have had an objective quality. Atonement happened, whatever human beings think or do about it. If the creative potential of the world is renewed, and the fundamental disorder that afflicts us, the 'sickness of sin' is healed, this is true for everyone and anyone. There are many other images of atonement that come in the festivals in the first part of the year, which have the same objective quality. The word redemption is connected to being held captive and someone coming to release us. When the Christmas Epistle speaks of our being 'freed' from the slavery to the senses and the show of illusion, we are also in the world of objective reality. We have been saved, and released, and redeemed. It didn't depend on our effort, or our comprehension; nothing we do will stop it from being true.

One of the great struggles of the early church hinged on this very point, the question of the freedom of the will. This was far more than philosophical speculation about freedom: on the question of human freedom hinged the question of whether human beings were capable of choosing to do the good, or whether they were eternally condemned to sin, and wholly dependent on salvation mediated by the Church.

The British monk, Pelagius, anticipated something that we can only begin to grasp today: that there does not need to be a 'zero-sum game' between the divine and the human initiative in bring-

ing about salvation. In the course of the debate, St Augustine, who had previously been more flexible in his approach, became ever more one-sided. In terms of the Latin logic of the time, Augustine 'won'. The official teaching of the Western Church became Augustinian: nothing we do in any way influences God's decision whether to save us or condemn us. Any other conclusion would be blasphemous, making the almighty God depend on human initiative. This paved the way to the doctrine of the 'double predestination': if there is no way of changing God's decision, it follows that that decision was made before the beginning of the world: some are predestined to be saved, and some to be damned. Pelagianism was never entirely defeated, even in the mainstream churches, and it lives on in the 'Arminiasm' of the Reformation, the doctrine that man can cooperate with the divine initiative for his salvation. However, as long as an unbridgeable divide is set between man and God, this view too has its limitations.

In the Twentieth Century there was a backlash against the liberal theology, inspired in part by Hegel, that had been so optimistic about man's possibilities of redeeming himself. Karl Barth wrote that the Gospel is God's 'No!' to humanity: a No to all man's attempts to put himself right with God through religion. This critique still echoes on in the reactions to Rudolf Steiner's name that one sometimes encounters from the traditional churches: the author of *How can one attain knowledge of the higher worlds* is often accused of preaching 'self-redemption.' In reality Steiner, whose most-quoted Bible words by far are 'not I but Christ in me,' could be

seen as the forerunner of a renewed and transformed theology of the Holy Spirit that transcends the dichotomy between Pelagius and Augustine.

Walking with Christ

In a deeply intimate moment in the heart of the Act of Consecration, we are reminded of the journey that we make every year through the seasons. In the Transubstantiation the purpose of the offering is spoken out: the redemption of souls, the attainment of salvation and that we might walk with Christ. In the first of these motifs, we can feel the need for the liberation that can only come from outside—the payment of the ransom, the price beyond what any human being can manage. In the second motif, we might see the balance held between the divine and the human initiative. Salvation is on offer; it can be 'attained' through and with Christ. In the third motif, we are in the world of our conscious participation: only our choices will make our path in life one where we walk with Christ.

The traditional Christian sensibility has seen God as a loving father. Just living with this analogy can arouse the wish to lead the images further. What father helps his child, perhaps bringing remedial care and attention, only to say afterwards: just remember, you'd be useless without me! What father doesn't want to help his children to live more wisely, to grow stronger so that they have the strength to overcome whatever challenges they face and to find their own strength to meet fresh ones?

There is a strange paradox in the fact that the theology of human helplessness became stronger in parallel with the development of individual consciousness. Just

as human beings entered the Renaissance and felt more and more that they were independent 'selves,' a renewal of the theology of dependence took place in the Reformation, reaching a peak in the Reformed Churches who were influenced by Calvin's revival and development of Augustine's teaching on original sin. There is a tension between the experience of autonomy and the feeling of being a miserable worm, utterly dependent on God's grace for redemption. It is possible to see this tension as a tightly wound spring within the human breast that had the power to propel human beings forward. This could lie behind the historic phenomenon of the explosive drive of the north-European, Protestant states in developing the social and economic conditions of the modern world.

In reality the idea that salvation comes from a co-operation of divine initiative and answering initiative from human beings is deeply rooted in the New Testament. How many healings end with the statement: Your faith has made you whole? And in the Gospel of St. John, salvation is a question of human beings seeing and recognising the Son of Man, and of 'knowing' the divine life: 'Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only

true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.' (John 17: 3)

The Spirit of Wholeness

Now we see the particular role played by the Holy Spirit. Useful as it is to think of him as Person, it is important to remember that he can equally be seen as the current of communication between human beings and God. His very being dissolves the distinction between subjective and objective.

This becomes clear in the Whitsun Epistle. It speaks of the words of the Act of Consecration of Man as flames which rise up to heaven from human hearts. This forms a wonderful counterpart to the story of Whitsun in the Acts of Apostles, where the flames descend from the Spiritual world and rest on human heads. Is the origin of the Spirit in human beings or in the divine? In the language of the Spirit, which transcends paradox, we would have to answer: yes!

This shows that what for Augustine and Pelagius was a polar opposition of human and divine initiative in our salvation can be transcended. The missing element in the opposition is the evolutionary one. Atonement means that our capacity to develop to a place where we can make salvation our own is objectively renewed.

Review

The Other side of You

Salley Vickers

Paperback, 320 pages, Harper Perennial
ISBN: 9780007165452

Review by Deborah Ravetz

I have read and heard many descriptions by people of moments in their lives when they were in great distress and unable to go on, only to find themselves suddenly accompanied by another person who joins them and helps them, and then disappears when they are out of danger.

This novel is about two people who meet each other and have this experience through the alchemy that they create with the quality of their meeting. It is a joy to read.

Salley Vickers weaves together the paintings of Caravaggio, the discussion about the use of drugs and medical intervention as opposed to the talking cure and the bi-

ography of several different characters to make visible the crises of the two main characters, a psychiatrist and a failed suicide.

Their meeting becomes fruitful because both the professional healer and the suffering patient meet with open hearts. David, the doctor, acknowledges to himself that the suffering of his patient, Elizabeth, makes his own suffering visible to himself. In not fearing that but confronting it and allowing it to be known in a subtle and tactful way, two wounded people are able to have conversations which move them through their own particular crises to new insight and a new way forward.

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

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Sometimes when we are very unhappy we may long for a big shiny miracle, the appearance of an angel or a hand writing truths on a wall. This book is about something much more accessible; the everyday miracle which is entirely in our power to bring about. That is the miracle of two people meeting and listening to each other in conditions of love and trust.

One of the main themes of this novel is Caravaggio's paintings of the encounter between the disciples and Christ on the road the Emmaus. In this story, the disciples only realise when Christ breaks the bread who it was who had spoken with as they walked towards Emmaus.

As they recall the conversation on the way, they ask each other: Were not our hearts burning within us? It is a source of strength and joy to know that it is possible to have this experience; that we too can become a source of healing for each other in the way we meet and listen, and that our conversation can become an opportunity to see and release each other's potential.

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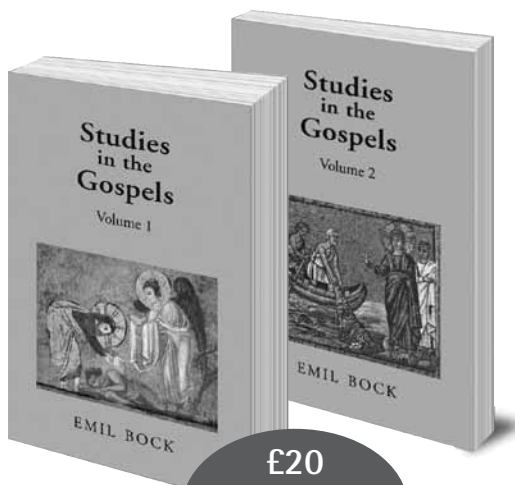
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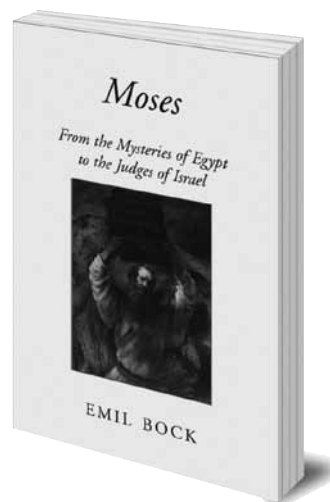
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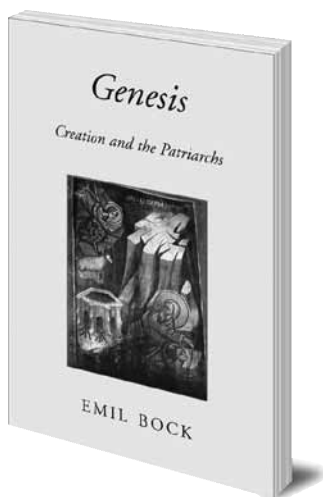
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