



The Christian Community

# Perspectives

June—August 2012

The Christian Community  
in IRELAND

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## Cover picture Harald de Bary

While holidaying on Achill Island in 1971 Harald de Bary fell in love with the quietness, beauty and friendly people of Ireland. He bought a schoolhouse in County Leitrim in 1972 and since 1974 he has produced his art there.

*2003 untitled, tempera on canvas, 86x56 cm*

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# Perspectives

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The Christian Community is a worldwide movement with many 'centres'. There is a centre in Berlin, and at its heart is the Erzoberlenker, whose awareness embraces the whole. However, the most central activity of the Community is what happens at the altar. The centre is always where the Act of Consecration is being celebrated. When a region expands, we don't need to think of the new congregations as being on the periphery; instead we can feel that the centre has grown.

It was a great moment for the Region of Great Britain and Ireland when the Community was fully established in the Republic of Ireland. After years in which priests had visited there from the UK, finally a house could be bought which became the home for a chapel and for a resident priest. This issue contains articles from some of those who have found nourishment for their lives at the centres of The Christian Community that have grown up in Ireland.

TOM RAVETZ



# *The Logos and the Heart— The Sources of a new Morality*

Elizabeth Roberts

## **Part 1 The Logos-potential of each human being**

The Logos is the ordering principle behind the world. The aim of evolution is that each human being will become a Logos-bearer, and fulfil the creative potential invested uniquely in each one of us. The true 'I's of all human beings were formed in the image of God by the divine Logos and are sheltered at the heart of the spiritual world in the Logos-sphere. The sacraments belong to this higher world order and every celebration of a sacrament provides the means by which the earthly order can be penetrated and sanctified with Logos-power. When we participate in a sacrament our higher 'I' becomes a co-celebrant in this process of the transformation of the earth. In this way we can experience what heals our true being while in full consciousness and as a result, we are also led towards our own goal. Normally, it is only during sleep that we engage with the affairs of our true self.

### **The moral predicament**

In sleep we reunite with our own higher I which guides us through our earthly lives, and we merge with all other human beings and therefore also with their higher 'I's. But, when we wake up in the morning and return to day consciousness we immediately become separated and isolated, locked into our familiar personality traits. Consequently, our free creative morality, our love for one another and our connection to the intentions of our higher 'I' are dissipated.

However, it is this very separation that gives us our self-awareness and our existence as autonomous, individual spirits. So a most pressing question is: how can we remember the essence of the morality which permeates the highest will of our true self and introduce it into our daily lives without compromising our individuality?

### **The spiritual world takes a new step towards humanity**

The development of humanity has reached a point at which we can begin to be creative in quite a new way through a genuine unfolding of morality within the human being. In this sense we could say that we are at the very beginning of the Christian path.

*Elizabeth  
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priest of The  
Christian  
Community  
in Bristol.*

This new possibility arises because the spiritual world has taken a step towards human beings since the mid 19th Century. Christ has become present for human beings in a new and more immediate way, which challenges us to connect with him on a deeper level than has been possible in the past. This goes hand in hand with a heightened working of evil, as human beings are cut loose from old bonds.

We may become painfully aware that things cannot go on as they have been in the past, but that the seeds for an exciting working together of human beings and the spiritual world have been sown. It is for humanity to rise to this challenge. During the long journey towards a reunion with the spiritual world, the affairs of human beings will become intermingled ever more with the will of God.

Through this future reunion the impulses of our higher self will no longer be inaccessible or hidden but will become available to us in many far-reaching ways. Since Roman times, the State has placed the legal life into the hands of human beings, but now a further stage has been reached as the *individual* is becoming the bearer of a new moral order that is beginning to flow out of the region of the Logos. When this higher ordering works into earthly life, it will become ever less necessary to act according to the prescribed norms or moral codes which currently order our society. Indeed, as individuals begin to 'come into their own,' to do so will actually stand in the way of the new dispensation.

### **Freedom to draw upon the substance of the true 'I'**

We may begin to recognize that freedom is not a state of being, but an activity with an intention and a goal. 'I am not yet able to be free, but I choose to embark on a journey which leads towards freedom.' Once we have made this conscious choice, life will constantly place challenges in our path which we must negotiate as if steering a course between Scylla and Charybdis. We easily stray off course and lose ourselves in the extremes and then have to struggle to regain the equilibrium and hold to the middle. This active approach, however daunting, offers untold creative possibilities for our 'I.' 'On the Way' we discover that the 'I' is not an entity, but a *capacity* which functions through improvisation, creating itself out of its own original essence.

As we embark on our own pathway towards freedom, we appreciate that the elements which apply to ourselves also hold true for all other human beings and we realise what is totally new about this endeavour - its inherently social dimension. In acknowledging this, I also realise that I have the

power to encourage another person to tread his or her own path towards freedom through empathy. I can experience what they experience as if it were happening to me. I may then walk alongside them, learning in so doing to accept their strengths and weaknesses, as I come better to accept my own. Accompanying another person 'on the way' also teaches me that until I have walked many miles in their shoes I am not in a position to understand their actions. I am constantly challenged to create the space for the other, and this means working on the areas in myself which cause me to place obstacles in their path, particularly due to my constitution and aspects of my personality of which I am not yet aware. The gap between what I feel I truly am or could be, and my actual personality as presently constituted will prove to be the greatest struggle on this pathway.

The second part of this article relates to this undertaking as we begin to draw imaginatively upon the newly-available substance of our true 'I', and focuses on the practice of being 'mindful in the moment' in relationship to our heart's potential to connect to Christ anew. This practice in turn helps us to address the social aspect of this path.

## **Part 2 Goodness in action**

### **Mindfulness in the moment**

Whitsun gives an archetype mindfulness in the moment through the power of Love. In the ten days following Ascension, the disciples are filled with pain at their separation from Christ and their inability to accompany Him in the days and hours leading to His death on Golgotha. In this mood they gather to celebrate the Jewish Feast of Pentecost which commemorated the gift of the Law to Moses. Contrary to their expectations however, they find themselves immersed in the inauguration of a wholly new festival in which the Holy Spirit reveals a realm completely beyond time and space. Rudolf Steiner describes this as follows:

*The Apostles felt as if there had descended upon them from the cosmos something that could only be called the substance of all prevailing Love. They felt as if they had been quickened from on high...by this primal force of Love...It seemed as if they been transformed; as if their souls had been made new. They seemed to have lost all narrowness, all selfishness in life, to have acquired largeness of heart, an all-embracing tolerance and a deep understanding for all that is human on earth. It was felt they could look into every heart.*

*The Fifth Gospel GA 148, Lecture 2. October 1919*

In this moment they reveal a promise of every human being's potential. Through the Holy Spirit they grow in their humanity and are able to share in the work of love through realising *Not I, but Christ in me*.

The social essence of Whitsun is expressed in the following picture. When the Holy Spirit descended, the disciples felt united by the glowing warmth in their hearts from the strong presence of Christ's love within. They did not see the tongue of fire that hovered over their own heads, rather each saw the flames over the heads of the others. The new connection between them shone out.

With this image as a *leitmotif*, when we seek to join in the work of doing the good in our daily lives, we will be helped to recognise the spiritual potential of other people if we relinquish any thought of personal gain or usefulness arising from our actions. In this way little 'Whitsuntide experiences' may begin to occur and we may be graced with the experience of 'Not I but Christ in Me'.

The Holy Spirit is at work in the middle, between the poles of head and will. Such working comes like a lightning flash, for the Spirit needs neither space nor time, nor any external conceptual framework, but manifests according to the will and intention of the individual who has a new quality: he or she is autonomous. This word comes from *autos*, 'self', and *nomos*, 'law'. It expresses the independence of the free human being who becomes the law of his or her own deed.

### **The moral order**

A new social and moral perspective opens up when we accept that morality is a dynamic 'middle'. All forms of anti-social and immoral behaviour bear the hallmark of the fixity of evil, where the middle has become frozen. Life teaches us that evil can function only according to the principle of exclusivity, with 'either-or'. The good on the other hand works by linking opposites or polar qualities by means of an intermediary or 'middle' realm, and thus embraces the paradox of 'this as well as that'. When we perform any moral action, we are called upon to take up the tension between the two poles through the forces of conscience and courage. We delicately hold the middle open so that the paradox can live. Our mind holds back in wisdom-filled appraisal, whilst our will engages enthusiastically. We can easily lose the middle ground and allow the balance to tip towards either paralysing guilt or manic rage, but through the working of the powers of warmth and sacrifice in the ether forces of the heart we are helped to achieve a balance between these two pathological extremes.

guilt ← conscience 'the middle' courage → mania

The exercise of freedom means overcoming ourselves on two levels simultaneously: in our judgement we seek to rise above our inherent tendency to remain at a distance from the other, and in our will we try to learn that we



can receive an experience of the other only through relinquishing our own experience of ourselves. Both of these are possible within the heart. When we make the necessary sacrifice to understand *and* embrace others, we may act *with* them, rather than through or against them. The personality learns to transcend itself through the power of the Good, which unites I and I into a higher oneness. This will ultimately lead to a higher human moral order.

Wherever this dual overcoming is achieved, we experience deep within our heart an affirmation of the essence of the mystery of the Logos. Each person is as valid as 'I am' and each stands together with me as an equal before God. Such an experience of the mystery of the 'I am' of another is entirely dependent on our capacity to seek and to be attentive to the brother or sister in the other. In our attentiveness we evoke the presence of love and the unlimited possibilities it presents for the social relationships between individuals. Striving to realise such high ideals leads us repeatedly to reassess our priorities in life and how we meet other people. As we accept the uniqueness of others we come to appreciate the creative impulses which only they can bring, their originality, their rootedness in the Logos.

This dynamic of the middle in our soul-life has its foundation in the physiology of the heart, the organ of the middle. Humanity has not yet grasped the enormity of what happened when Christ's blood poured into the earth, and his circulation became part of the life-sphere around the earth.

Listening ever more intently to the voice of our conscience, which we could call 'presence of heart', rather than presence of mind, and acting in accordance with it, gives us the courage to do what we *know* deep down we should do. In this way our conscience acts as midwife to a new vision for the future, as it intuits the consequences of our actions. When the heart's imaginative powers of sensing and judging allow us to perceive the will of the spirit in the moment, a new visionary power of the heart is possible which is very different from that of ancient times. The Etruscan *haruspex* also saw by means of the blood for as he plunged his hands into the side of the sheep to retrieve the liver he was drawn out into the life-sphere around the earth which contained the stream of time coming from the future, which he was then able to read prophetically. Fortunately our modern encounter with the ether sphere of the heart requires no such drastic interventions, for when our heart is sufficiently 'moved' we may succeed in escaping from the narrowness of our own blood's pathways, and enter Christ's circulation where our own I relates to the I of all others, as it does in sleep. Then there is no longer any incompatibility between going out to others in love and realising our own highest aims.

*Ár n-Athair atá ar neamh,  
Go naofar d'ainim,  
Go dtagfadh do ríocht,  
Go ndéantar do thoil ar an talamh mar a dhéantar ar neamh.  
Ár n-arán laethúil tabhair dúinn inniu,  
agus maith dúinn ár bhfiacha  
mar a mhaithimidne dár bhféichiúna féin  
Ach ná lig sinn i gcathú,  
ach saor sinn ó olc,  
Amen.*

and this is extracted from  
St Patricks Breastplate (Lúireach Naomh Phadraig)

*Críost liom  
Críost romham  
Críost i mo dhiaidh  
Críost istigh ionam  
Críost fúm  
Críost os mo chionn  
Críost ar mo lámh dheas  
Críost ar mo lámh chlé  
Críost i mo luí dom  
Críost i mo sheasamh dom  
Críost i gcroí gach duine atá ag cuimhneamh orm  
Críost i mbéal gach duine a labhraíonn liom  
Críost i ngach súil a fhéacann orm  
Críost i ngach cluas a éisteann liom.*

Christ with me  
Christ before me  
Christ behind me  
Christ in me  
Christ beneath me  
Christ above me  
Christ on my right  
Christ on my left  
Christ when I lie down  
Christ when I sit down  
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me  
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me  
Christ in every eye that sees me  
Christ in every ear that hears me

# *Celtic Christianity, Scotus Erigena and a cosmic dimension*

**Malcolm Allsop**

In a recent Perspectives article (Autumn 2011), I considered characteristics of a Christianity which could be described as 'Celtic'. The story is well known, how pre-Christian spiritual practice in the western reaches of Europe came towards and merged with the dawning of the Christian era. The story of how this had evolved over centuries prior to the arrival of the Celts in Ireland would warrant a further article. Suffice it to say that the qualities (listed below and in the previous article) had a very long period of gestation, before becoming the canvas underlying the many-coloured picture of spiritual practice and belief, a little of which can still be glimpsed today. This grew into a flowering in the 5<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries around such historical personalities as Brigit, Patrick, Columcille, and even Pelagius; as well as numerous others who were involved with setting up and joining monastic settlements that nurtured this Celtic 'brand' of Christianity. Some of the characteristic qualities were:

- *a working together of divine grace and mankind's 'Creative grace'*
- *autonomous monastic groupings*
- *the 'peregrinato pro Christo'—a travelling pilgrimage*
- *Christ as lord of the elements*
- *the multi-faceted nature of the spiritual worlds*
- *the evolving of the gods and therewith a sense for past, present and future.*

What became of this 'Celtic' stream in the ensuing decades, into the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries? Its influence was felt in a wide area of Europe, as the 'peregrinato pro Christo' continued, but the tide was turning. Whitby, in Northern England, well known for fish, jet and the Synod of 644, was a first focal point for this turning tide. The abbess there, Hilda, herself a supporter of the Celtic tradition, hosted the synod at the newly founded monastery (for monks and nuns). It was called Streanaeshalch, that is 'The bay of the beacon'. Various differences in practice with the Roman Church such as the dating of Easter and the tonsure, were after lengthy debate 'streamlined' in favour of

*Malcolm Allsop is priest of The Christian Community in Southern Ireland.*

Roman practice. Gradually the changes were implemented, not without quite some reluctance. (After fifty years Iona too conceded to this demand for uniformity.) In mainland Europe we find then the continuation of this 'streamlining' of the monastic settlements which had meanwhile become established. Not least of all were the changes spearheaded by St. Boniface, born in Crediton, Devon, a few years after the Whitby Synod. The story books tell of a saint who converted the heathens of Germany to Christianity. In fact the majority of these so-called heathens were Christians of Celtic stock, learning and practice. Perhaps one of their greatest sins, in the eyes of Boniface, was that their priests did not practise celibacy, which by then was becoming the rule in the Roman church. What with that and further divergences such as issues of dress-code, acknowledgement of Rome and its Fathers etc, the choice was simple: Convert or be dismissed. By 747 even the great Irish monastery of St.Gallen had given in to the pressure (even if they did, for decades, still wear their white habit underneath the brown Benedictine cowl!).

Then, one hundred years later, John Scotus Erigena appeared, as if from nowhere. Jakob Streit describes him as 'a late flowering'. Clearly of Scottish/Irish descent—exactly where and when he was born is unknown—he arrived at the Court of Charles the Bald in 845. Neither a monk nor a priest, Scotus Erigena was nevertheless steeped in religious thought and study, in philosophy and with a command of various languages, all of which found him the wholehearted favour and support of the king. This support developed into protection as his commentaries became increasingly at odds with the uniform views which were gathering momentum all around. (One can speculate that his apparently violent death, shortly after the death of King Charles, was an indication of this protection he had previously enjoyed.)

Scotus Erigena's writings, as well as the works which he translated, point to an individuality with a consciousness that could embrace the farthest reaches of human and cosmic development, that could identify, understand and illumine the works of others who, similarly stood head and shoulders above the stream of world development.

His first major task was the translation of Dionysius the Areopagite's 'Celestial Hierarchies', which had recently been brought from the East, from the Greek into Latin. The quality of his translation was described by one scholar of the time as being inspired by 'the art of the Holy Ghost'. Scotus Erigena was later to add a commentary to the work as well.

His most important original work, 'On the Division of Nature', over seven hundred pages in length and complex even in summary, describes

in grandiose stages the path of Nature, from the uncreated creator, (God, alpha), through the angelic hierarchies of creating and the 'finished product' of created nature, to a final stage beyond creating, that of 'Omega God'. Towards the end of his life Scotus Erigena composed his work 'Vox Aquileæ', the Voice of the Eagle—a remarkable homily on the Prologue of St. John's Gospel. This was one of those voices in which he could hear a spiritual guide who stood far above the stream of time, as he says in the opening words:

*This is the voice of the bird of high flight—not of the bird who soars above the material air or over the aether, orbiting the entire sensible world—but the voice of that spiritual bird who, on swiftest wings of innermost theology and intuitions of most brilliant and high contemplation, transcends all vision and flies beyond all things that are and are not...*

(taken from the translation by Chr. Bamford)

A commentary on the whole of the John's Gospel was to follow but remained unfinished.

Another area of his work was his response to theological issues of the day, on which his opinion was sought. Two such issues in particular brought controversy and outrage upon him, as he spoke to the Augustine doctrine of 'double pre-destination' (the doctrine that held that all human beings were pre-destined by God to either salvation or damnation) describing it as 'cruel and stupid madness', and secondly to the ongoing debate around the Eucharist and the transubstantiation: were the inner mysteries of the transubstantiation still accessible to people, or was help needed for the contemporary consciousness in understanding these—for him—still very real processes? This he tried to do by focusing on the inner nature of the bread and the wine becoming the body and blood of Christ, a process which fulfils itself together with our thinking, or our intellect as he called it. On these and further issues Scotus Erigena's voice was filled with a wider, a more cosmic understanding, at a time when just the opposite tendency was holding sway, as the Church incarnated more and more. For those ears his words were at best 'pultes Scottorum' (Scottish/Irish porridge!), at worst heresy. It is as if the works of Scotus Erigena, this 'late flowering', took things a step further, deeper, behind the many colours of the canvass mentioned above, to the easel on which this Christian spirituality was, and is, ultimately grounded. The inter-relatedness of the earth and the kingdoms of nature, Man, the Being of Christ, the planetary worlds and the manifold spiritual beings and their common purpose; all this starts to sound through in his writings in a way which could really be described as a cosmic view of Christ and of Christianity.

Hans Werner Schroeder in his book *The Cosmic Christ* (Floris Books), explores this theme in quite some detail. That Christ is a being far greater than the man from Nazareth goes without saying, but a definition of the 'Cosmic Christ', Schroeder says, also implies more than a deed for mankind and the earth. He also flags up a danger of equating Christ's cosmic nature with something that is simply everywhere, permitting everything far and wide, saying that a more precise picture is needed. This he describes further on in the book, where he details specific aspects of Christ's pre-earthly existence, his earthly working and thirdly 'the continued working' (p.136ff) The latter includes that which flows back from mankind to the realms of spirit as nourishment for those realms. Schroeder brings one example, from the writings of Rudolf Steiner, of spirit light which we can feed back to the highest hierarchies for the 'future ordering of the world.' (p.131)

H. W. Schroeder's book doesn't speak directly of Scotus Erigena, but a picture starts to emerge of him as being an important stepping stone in this development from the spirituality of Celtic and early Christianity into a deeper understanding of Christ's cosmic significance. He stood there as a final beacon before Roman Christianity moved to centre stage, a beacon for the potential of this early stream which went out from Ireland and Scotland through much of Europe—until it went into an enforced hibernation as the Middle Ages began—the relevance of which however has started to resurface once more in recent generations.

# *Beyond the Celtic tiger 'A story of renewal from Moyross Co Limerick'*

**Moyross, a place set apart**

**John O'Connor**

Why move to Moyross in County Limerick? It is one of the most notorious economic black spots in Ireland. In the 1980's a number of families organised gangs within the different housing estates, violence escalated and a thriving drug business was established. The police were helpless to curb the downward spiral and could not safely gain access to the trouble-spots.

With close to five times the national unemployment average (approx. 70%) it offers little apparent hope of a future for the youth. In such places gang culture gives people a sense of belonging and an alternative to the poverty of life on social welfare. Moyross has in the past been labelled as the murder capital of Europe. With half of the population under 25 it has been forecast as a potential social disaster well on the way to an irretrievable social breakdown. This came to a head in 2006 when a horrific arson attack shocked the country. Two children were severely burned in a car by youths because the children's mother refused to give the youths a lift to a nearby shop.

From an early age children are groomed to become criminals. Children under 16 cannot be put in prison in Ireland and so can act as untouchable couriers for the drugs trade. By 18 some already have 30 or 40 convictions. In 2008 the Fitzgerald socio/economic regeneration plan was drafted. This plan was an ambitious project of social and infrastructural regeneration. However, even in a time of huge wealth the plan did not develop due to lack of funds and lack of political will for the project.

One facet of the plan that did go ahead was promoted by the Bishop of Limerick when he suggested inviting in the Friars of Renewal with view to an added 'spiritual regeneration plan.' The Friars of Renewal are a reformed group of the Capuchin order set up in 1986 with a strict observance of the vow of poverty and a simple wish to live as witnesses to Christ in the socio-economic black spots of the world.

A number of years ago when I first visited Moyross I was shocked by the desolate surroundings. Many houses are boarded up and show signs of arson attacks, horses wander on long lunging ropes on the greens like some scene from a Wild West movie. On my first visit to the Friary where the Friars have converted a couple of empty council houses I experienced

a mood of tranquil order in the small chapel. Outside the front door on a nearby green I could see the remains of a burnt-out car; I was informed that this was the result of the previous night's joy riding.

Since the Friars have moved in, things have slowly been changing in this corner of Moyross, and on more recent visits some of the boarded houses in this part of the estate had been given an artistic touch with religious or nature murals painted onto them. This small gesture gives the impression that concern and beauty are being cultivated within the apparent desolation of this half derelict site. A gardening programme is well developed on another vacant site and one of the friars in his grey worn habit kicks a ball on the street with the local kids.

It is striking to see social renewal spread slowly over one small corner of a housing estate. Over the months I can witness a widening circle of order and presence. The contemplative garden stands out in these bleak surroundings and as I wander around its simple layout I notice the remains of a dramatized passion or nativity scene which took place on the streets with Roman soldiers riding the local horses. This and other attempts at bringing a different type of drama to Moyross are shared with great laughter and enthusiasm. The productive small vegetable garden also stands out with its high security fence and a growing number of garden birds congregate around the well-tended bird feeders.

The reasons for moving to Moyross begin to become apparent. Delicate signs of hope spread across this little corner of Limerick. People notice and are touched by it. I am mindful of the fact that I am seeing the tip of the iceberg and on enquiring more deeply into how this transformation happens; the Friars share the roots of their work.

### **The inner life of the community**

They describe with humility the aspiring inner life of the community which is based around a disciplined life of prayer and extends to 4 ½ hours a day. This is shared between liturgies of the hour, the study of scriptures, the saying of the Rosary, adoration of the Eucharist, and Mass. In this time of prayer and solitude each member is reminded of why they are there and why they do what they do. Once a month the brothers partake in a hermitage day which involves going away to spend a silent day in solitude and prayer, this is also practiced each week as members also have a day away from the practical tasks of the Friary and focus on prayer. All of these practices are described as a 'stoking of the fire' and provide a firm basis on which they can serve each other in Christ.



On one of my visits I experienced the sacred reading and singing of the Psalms. This is a daily occurrence within the Community which complements the more personal inner pursuits. Community worship is strict in form but open to interested visitors. The lives of the Saints are studied as examples of how transformation happens. Saints such as Francis, Bonaventure, Padre Pio, St Elizabeth, the life of the early Capuchins, and Mother Therese provide inspiration. I attended on the feast day of St Elisabeth and experienced a reflective homily on her life.

In the evenings members are encouraged to partake in a personal examination; this is seen as a key to self-knowledge and corrective self-action. They describe their task of removing themselves from hindering God's motive in their lives, seeking to become 'a pencil in the hand of God'.

The community's practice of 'metanoiete' and the inner disciplines seem to aim at cultivating a readiness to go to the 'rough places' and live a life guided by the Holy Spirit. 'It is not a personal motive but Christ's motive the community is seeking'. Spiritual direction is required to keep this journey objective and friars avail of a monthly session with a spiritual director usually from outside the community.

In one discussion with the Friars they shared views on their pro-life position and its implications. Initiatives show their consequent approach such as one of their centres opening up a Good Counsel home for expectant and needy mothers.

Some of their views, for example that contraception has a disintegrating effect on marital life place the community against the popular cultural practices such as family planning through medical interventions and the much-debated subject of the use of contraception in developing countries as a means to population control or aid to health. This argument goes with the deeply rooted belief that we are 'pencils in God's hand' or 'Thy will not mine'.

Other connected initiatives in the campaign for pro-life in Moyross are parish missions, youth retreats, suicide awareness groups and interventions with families involved in the misuse of drugs. This work on social justice involves a 'cross-pollination' with other groups. However in this crossing the community appears to be mindful of not losing its core values. It was explained to me that the community prefers 'to do its own thing' which is centred on the spiritual element.

There are also descriptions in our conversations of extreme circumstances within families on the estate, where nothing short of a miracle is needed to bring change and in the absence of a miracle the 'long haul' approach is required.

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The Christian  
Community  
in Jerpoint  
Camphill,  
Thomastown.*

The Franciscan Friars have done a lot for the image of spirituality in post-modern times in their short life span. Their high profile way of life is not orchestrated but comes from the fact that they show audacity, and are easily noticed as they walk the streets bearded and in their worn grey habits. They told me that this attire helps people to approach them and conversations open up.

Their order is very fruitful with a consistent stream of young vocations from an international background. The median age of entry into the order is 33 but there are also many who join in their 20's.

Interacting with the wider community is an integral aspect of the Friars' lives. Whatever radiates from the Community may provide incidental experiences of peace. Finding moments for deeper conversations and spiritual guidance with the wider community only happens slowly. People may meet crisis moments in their lives which bring about a moment of openness. They may try to understand tragedy or other dark moments in their lives and turn to the Friars. How to help people into a process of mature religious practice is a challenge they often encounter as religion can be kept on hold for emergency moments in life.

I have experienced great warmth within the Friary at Moyross; respect towards others' gifts is often mentioned. There is a great evidence of gratitude towards their local surrounding, and reverence towards the sanctuary of the church and its environs. This gentle quality attracts benefactors to the community and the Friars are fed and lodged from these donations. They do not own anything which they cannot carry. This faithful practice is I imagine at times a torturous path of self-doubt and struggle, which some members allude to.

However this community appears to have inner structures and networks of friends and guides to safeguard and protect it through these leaner times, which undoubtedly happen. Many visitors come and stay; jovial conversations are to be witnessed it is hard to imagine we are in the economic social black spot described by the media.

The Franciscan Friars of Renewal have answered the inherent scepticism regarding spirituality within post-modern society with a deep committed, audacious gesture. They do so in true Franciscan simplicity, remaining faithful to the dogmas of the Church and yet transcending institutional religion.

There is something new in this old Franciscan tradition, which offers a more domestic small-scale model for a new concept of Church. Why would you go to Moyross and become a Friar? It may have something to do with the intimacy of discipleship, a strong and committed altruism, in a hardened and cynical age. It is a new story for Moyross—the physical and relational signs are there.

As a member of The Christian Community in Ireland at this particular time, I often find myself in conversations around the topic of renewal in religious life. I personally cannot choose such a contemplative monastic life in one of Ireland's urban black spots, nor is it a choice that many can take. I do however find inspiration and a rich opportunity to reflect on my own commitment and understanding of renewal in religious life on hand of such a community.

On reflection there are within this story the challenge of the twin qualities which Rudolf Steiner outlines as necessary qualities in approaching Christ in our time, the first quality is the cultivation of a feeling of *fraternal interest in what is passing in another's soul*. This active interest works on how we think about the world around us, encouraging us to engage with inner tolerance and interest in the life and thoughts of others. This quality can be simply expressed but remains a difficult path for the modern human beings, who are so attached to their particular viewpoint. It involves gently and consistently correcting the subtle layers of bias within our thought processes. The second quality is more focussed on the will and outlines *the cultivation of our idealism through inner education*. This can lead to an inner resolve which allows us to practise 'the long haul' approach which can become steadfast through an achieved idealism. The cultivation of these two qualities can lead to a feeling of responsibility for others, for our surroundings and for every action that we perform; it is a Christian path of active heart awareness.

Frontiers such as Moyross exist in all of our lives on many different levels of our existence and call out for transformation. Burnt-out cars, unkempt horses tethered on urban greens, smoke scars on the windows of the neighbouring burnt out homes, all of these signs of neglect and violence can be seen as metaphors for the neglected pockets of our personal and interpersonal lives. The cross of Saint Damiano which spoke to Francis many years ago now sits in a converted council house in Moyross; the derelict house has become a friary and each day a small group gather around it for individual and common worship, in their unique and humble way they shape a renewal where many have long given up. Slow and steady transformation is evident in Moyross and the 'mad monks' as they are referred to locally will be there for the long haul.

The example of the friars can awaken us for the working of Christ in the less obvious black spots, the ones that are subtle and surround our lives. There we can practice the dual qualities of fraternal interest and inwardly cultivate our idealism. In doing so we become participants in a movement for the deepest renewal, which can be found in the most unlikely and 'roughest places' of ours and others lives.

# *From lone tree to community, chronic fatigue to health*

## **My path to The Christian Community**

**Penelope Easten**

I was reared an atheist. My mother rejected the church after hearing a sermon on how all non-Christians would go to hell. My father's father was brought up by killjoy Presbyterians, and my father took on his hatred for all religions. When I went to school I'd never heard of God and wondered what the Lord's Prayer was all about.

But my father had another god: he worshiped at the altar of art. He was an art historian, and spent his days engrossed in great art, music and literature. The paradox was that at least half of this was religious in nature; he knew his Bible better than most churchgoers, so that he could tell the stories of pictures; and on holidays we went round many churches and cathedrals. But what was important was the aesthetics. My parents were critical of anyone who didn't understand art as our family did. This ruled out most of the world. Since the house was filled with a modern art collection, and no popular culture was allowed, there was no getting away from this. I learned early on how to explain modern art to friends. My sister avoided bringing anybody round.

At the age of eight I lost a quiet battle to become myself as I wanted to be, and so withdrew into myself. The only outward sign was that I began wearing spectacles. But looking back I realise that I stopped relating to my own peers at this point, instead becoming obsessed by my schoolwork and personal projects, and wanting to please all the adults around with my achievements. With my peers it was me against the world; they were to be out-competed in all ways, at any cost.

After a year or so God began calling me at night. I felt very held by Him, very secure. I took a hymn book from school, made my own cross for the wall, and began reading a chapter of the Bible every night, unfortunately only in the King James Version, so I didn't understand very much of it. The family teased me but I didn't care. But by the age of twelve intellect had kicked in. I could no longer reconcile my belief with my burgeoning interest in

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science, or with the family ethos. I reverted to atheism. As the increasing loneliness of my personal position grew stronger this became very lonely indeed. By 17 I had secured a place at Cambridge to read science, but an attack of glandular fever had left me with ME.

I enjoyed the work at college and got a good degree. But I simply didn't know how to join in the collegiate life, to enjoy groups of people for what they were. I had a few friends who were as intense and driven as I was. Just before my second year exams I had a religious experience. I was opened out to an experience of pure love, and a voice that I knew was God's said 'trust in me and everything will be all right.' It was that year I got a top first. But once the feeling-memory of that event dimmed, I couldn't reconcile it with my science and so buried it.

Because I couldn't relax with people, I always drove myself too hard and forgot to have fun. Neither body nor soul liked this. The result, I now realise, was that through my degree I had had huge attacks of anxiety, psychosomatic symptoms, and ME relapses, and had wondered whether I would get the degree or whether the degree would get me. Now the PhD I was doing began to drag me under; I was probably heading for a nervous breakdown. My back eventually seized up completely, and because of this I went for lessons in the Alexander technique.

It was a life saver. I realised this was what I wanted to do with my life, and over the next few months the technique began to crack me open. I could no longer hide from the religious experiences I had had, and a growing understanding of alternatives and holistic thinking enabled me to begin to reconcile this. First I joined a pagan group, which had ceremonies celebrating the solstices, equinoxes and Celtic festivals. For the first time I met people I really felt at home with. But the progression from this group was into Wicca, and that did not feel right at all; it sounded very scary.

I moved to London, and for a while was seeing an older man who was an ex-priest. He perceived my deep need to find God, and one afternoon when I was in a completely anxious and symptom-ridden crisis persuaded me to go to a church and pray to Jesus. I trusted him enough to try it. Praying to Jesus did nothing for me. But the priest whom I had hysterically persuaded to open the church for me came after a while and talked with me, and then gave me a healing with holy oil. The crisis lifted instantly, and I was hooked.

I understood quite quickly that for me Christianity was about humility; coming out of the isolating stance learnt from my family of feeling superior to everybody; recognising that everybody has gifts. And on a pew you cannot shrink away from your neighbour. For the first time

ever I became genuinely interested in people: hearing their stories, and desiring to help.

The years went by. I did a lot of therapy, qualified as an Alexander technique teacher and began practising, met my husband and in Sheffield we started a family. But 'workaholic me' took over again, and in 1998 I had a serious relapse of ME, with a year lying still. The stillness and contemplation in that year brought many gifts, as I learnt to recover hidden emotional memories for myself and clear them. Then with the help of some aura soma my past lives surfaced, and I worked through them finding increasing freedom and lightness. I discovered I'd had about 17 past lives as a nun, all looking to find the real meaning of Jesus. But a convent is not always the easiest place to do this! Most of them had been extremely unsatisfactory. I realised that for me the church was a safety net, and the real challenge is to follow Christ, not shelter in His shadow. I had to risk leaving the church, which suddenly felt old-fashioned and constricted, its hymns and prayers filled with dust.

Leaving it was extremely scary. But my husband had become a Reiki Master and Osho Sanyassin. For several exciting years we explored the Osho meditations together, different lineages of Reiki, channelling, crystal healing, earth healing and earth energies. Once I could walk and function again after the ME bout I returned to work, working with increasing intensity. Then there were two mad years, as circumstances forced home educating our daughter (emotionally huge!), and also I started giving workshops for teachers. Then we sold up and moved to rural surroundings in Ireland. I kept going by controlling the increasing symptoms with all my techniques: but by the time we arrived in Ireland I was exhausted.

Two years struggling on, resting when possible; (our daughter was now back in a small school where she blossomed); then a big pre-menopausal bleed triggered a collapse. It took the three months on the sofa to heal it, while my husband, for the first time ever, took over the running of the household including all the shopping and cooking. Then I tried to step back into cooking, and doing the lot as before. But something did not want me to do this. After some years of struggling, I fell ill again but this time the symptoms were bizarre. It was as if an icicle had been driven between my ears. The ice then worked its way down to my chest, across my back, even to my stomach. It would shift around, and wherever it was, it felt more frightening than the last place. When I focused into it to heat it up it would turn instead to intense burning, which was equally frightening.

Now the many methods I had used over the years to control my symptoms or remove them all stopped working. Neither the conventional doctors nor the alternative therapists understood what was happening. Everybody was very frightened to see me getting weaker and weaker. The doctor put me on thyroxine which should have strengthened me and brought my energy back. But that too triggered an intensifying of the weakness. This was obviously something that my body wanted to happen. The Ayurvedic Vedic doctor I talked to weekly on the phone was the only one who was not frightened or perturbed. Each week he told me calmly to surrender to what was happening, and to stop trying to sort it with my mind. But making my mind quieter also made the symptoms worse! For six months I lay on the sofa or in bed, attempting not to think; too weak to do anything, everything was painful, frightening and overwhelming. For a lot of the time I hid under the duvet.

One night in December I made the commitment to live again. The huge anxiety that stopped me sleeping completely, gave me nightmares and pains through the night, reduced somewhat so that some of the night I was pain-free. At New Year we went to Fuerteventura, hoping some sun and heat would help me. But mostly I was too ill to go out. My daughter started a jigsaw, it was of the Raphael Madonna of the Rocks. Looking at, it I suddenly realised how much I was missing the church. I made a decision to return once I was well enough. I wondered if The Christian Community, based very near us, would suit me since I knew several people who went.

In March the penny dropped. Community was what it was about. A quiet mind allowed a present heart. I could be present with my family without trying to compete to survive at some subtle level. My super-brain didn't have to have the answer to everything. I had been forced to let go of controlling everything. We were all in this together, I brought my gifts and they brought theirs.

We had been three lone trees, like the ones my husband used to photograph almost obsessively. The tree that stands on the hillside with its roots barely in the rock, bent over with the struggle against the elements. But surviving. Now as I stopped fighting them, they stopped fighting me. We started to feel like a family for the first time.

By allowing these profound changes to take root in me, that my body had, I think, always wanted, I began to get stronger. Being with groups of people began to be completely different and much more pleasurable. On my 48<sup>th</sup> birthday I got to a service of The Christian Community. 'Christ in you' became a new meditative focus, to let Christ into my heart. It also

became the focus of my first proper social grouping. We have a recorder group, and last year I became a left-hand server. I'm now fully recovered, and have a wonderfully active life, fun and fulfilling.

And what part did Ireland play in this? I have doubted often whether I could have gone through this healing in a city, or in the UK at all. First, the peace and beauty of the countryside. Second, the deep power of the Irish land, with its huge feminine energies (think of the omnipresent Mary statues here). Third, Ireland is a land of heart, not head. There is a sense of community here, and of all the different small communities, all encircled to make one huge caring community. In the UK I only felt these as excluding cliques. To find a Christian home here that embraces community, nature spirits, earth energy and festivals, and reincarnation, feels completely appropriate.

I suspect I'm not the only one needing to go through this transition from lone tree to community. Darwin's concept of survival of the fittest itself came from Victorian thinking that competition was the heart of everything. But competition has no heart. Even scientists are now looking at cooperation in the natural world; not just seeing it in bees and other social insects, but also in a wood, as trees help each other survive. Finding cooperation, community and heart is the way forward not just for healing ME, but also for our world.

## *Failte Romhat - Welcome to Clare so Fair!*

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# Comic afterpiece

Paul Brennan

On 5 April, 2012, the centennial anniversary of the sinking of the RMS Titanic, tee-shirts were being worn around Belfast, the city where the ship was built, bearing the legend—‘It was all right when it left here.’

Humour is important to Irish people. Perhaps it is important to everyone, but different peoples have evolved different ways of bringing it to expression. In the Irish case, the basis for much humour is found in the Irish language word for ‘joking’—magadh, or mocking. Nowadays, we talk of ‘slagging’ one another. Another strand of Irish humour involves word play, a trait thought to have arisen from the changeover to the English language from Irish (a very different language) for the bulk of the population in the course of the nineteenth century.

It was, I suppose, this tendency to word-play or punning, which led to my query with our priest, Malcolm, about financial contribution to The Christian Community, when I asked him if it was a Faith worse than Debt (—as some religious movements are!).

But the simplest and most commonly found humorous exchanges often occur between strangers, for whom humour is a means of identifying who one is dealing with. Remarks from, say, a shopkeeper such as ‘It’ll be fine if it doesn’t rain’ or ‘Lovely weather for ducks!’ or ‘What can I do you for?’, are intended to elicit at least a smile if not a comic riposte from the customer and with this response the shopkeeper, or whoever, can establish that his customer is a fellow countryman, if not a fellow townsman. Also he can know whether he is dealing with one of the small minority of same totally lacking in any sense of humour whatever! It’s an invitation to participate, however minimally, in being ‘one of our own’. I had a friend who spent five years in France. He learnt the language perfectly, but lamented, when he came home, that he’d never ‘cracked the code’, as he put it. This code, as I understand it from our own case, comprises a complex grid of local references found in all societies, whether topical, political, cultural, geographic or whatever, often bound together with humour. It is considered that the most eloquent and comprehensive response to the current recession here is: ‘Ah, shure, lookit!’ Get it? Well, maybe only if you’re Irish.

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This humour becomes a part of making one's way in the world, a litmus test of a shared understanding, which in our case is often rooted in a kind of jocular melancholy. One glum shop assistant I encountered once, when asked if, to judge by his countenance, he was unhappy, replied with a smile: 'Of course I am, I'm Irish!' It rather put me in mind of the expression coined about the Irish by G. K. Chesterton:

*All their wars are merry  
And all their songs are sad*

For example, two mild-mannered friends of mine, both respectable National school teachers, were having a late night drink with visitors of theirs in our local pub in Mountshannon, one night. Two of the locals, rather the worse for drink, started to argue. When blows began to be exchanged, the landlady was sent for. She herself is what's known locally with great glee as 'a character'. Standing behind the bar in her dressing gown, she summed up the situation with an imperious sweeping glance around the premises, then pointed a finger at my friends. 'OUT!' she bellowed at them. 'Out! They're only fighting 'cause ye're here!' True story. Surely it could only happen in Ireland. Merry wars!

Not that humour is confined to pub and shopkeepers here, you understand. Indeed some of the finest gems of wit can be heard in our own humble vestry in The Christian Community house in Tuamgraney, where the servers' gaffes in the service or my inability to put my servers' garments on in the right order (head out the sleeve, and all that) can prove an opportunity for slugging. On the first occasion on which I served on the left, having 'mastered' the right, I prepared for the service alone and in a hurry. (Always a mistake!). In the course of my preparations, I neglected to put any incense in the incense bowl. This fact occurred to me just before it was required during the service and in the few seconds before I went to collect the censer and bowl, I reasoned to myself that surely Malcolm would pretend the incense was there and just carry on with imaginary incense. But when the time came and I presented him with the empty bowl, well, you'd want to have seen his face! He looked at me with a dismay, which said: 'I can't go on without real incense'. So I went back into the vestry and got him some real incense. Not funny at the time, of course, but in retrospect, I have to admit my cock-eyed reasoning deserved, at the very least, a gentle ribbing, afterwards. (Useless to protest that if the other server had turned up in good time, etc, etc.) The Christian Community is a wonderful context for humour, because it provides the polar opposites of solemnity, reverence and so on in its

activity. It is precisely because of the necessary high seriousness of its ceremonies and talks, that we can enjoy the outbreath of humorous exchanges, at other times.

Because humour is often linked to national identity, it may be no harm to have a brief look at one or two aspects of it. Rudolf Steiner described it as a declining force in human affairs. At the same time, one clearly cannot afford to ignore it completely, to judge by observations in his *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds*, in which he refers to the importance for each individual of the national spirit, in that you 'owe what you have become to the Spirits of your communities' (from the chapter 'The Guardian of the Threshold'). We may be pushing determinedly on to the distant future age of Philadelphia, when we will relate to others more on the basis of like-mindedness than shared national identity, but anyone who currently thinks he or she has nothing to do with the spirit of their country will be in for a surprise after death, we are given to understand.

There is something of this same impulse—to establish an identity through humour—here in Tuamgraney, in a social and cultural milieu, which is decidedly mixed. For The Christian Community in the west of Ireland finds itself peopled by a mixture of races and cultural backgrounds, which is in itself a blessing and a wonderfully enriching thing, but those among us who are on native soil are sometimes tempted to let these others know where they are and what better way to do it than through humour? Not that such others are humourless, not at all, but they sometimes, understandably, haven't got a complete grasp of the local perspective. 'What ever happened to "When in Rome" and all that?' I sometimes ask myself. Something of this same impulse—to establish an identity through humour—arises.

Getting a bit serious isn't it? Okay then, time for a little comic relief and where better to turn to than to recall that one of the chief culprits, when it came to bringing humour into connection with the serious business of spiritual discourse, was none other than Rudolf Steiner himself. Despite the observation of a friend of mine, who commented that in describing the 12 senses, Steiner 'left out the sense of humour!', he was undoubtedly possessed of such a sense. I first noticed this in his lectures entitled *The Spiritual Beings in the Heavenly Bodies and in the Kingdoms of Nature*, (Lecture 6) where his lampoon of the 'Kant-Laplace' experiment—intended to show with oil and water how the solar system could arise naturally, as it were, without any other agency—gave rise to a chuckle or two. His remarks on home-made collection boxes at the Christmas Conference of

1923, I take to be further examples of ‘magadh’—a gentle ribbing as, again, you might say.

Comical stories about him abound, admittedly of an apocryphal nature in some cases. I particularly like the one where he concealed from students in a courtyard, on one occasion, how he re-tied an opened shoelace. When asked why, he replied to the effect that had the students seen him, there would be, by tomorrow, only one way to tie a shoelace! (Generally speaking, wherever you meet exclamation marks from the transcribers of his lectures, they come at the end of a comic remark. One learns to watch out for them!)

More importantly, there are two telling examples of Humour in Steiner’s work, which clarify for us something of its significance. One concerns the figure of Humour in the top left-hand corner of his sculpture ‘The Representative of Man’, of which he says that it warns against sentimentality:

*A genuine ascent to the spiritual must be undertaken in purity of soul (which is never destitute of humour), not from a motive of egoistic sentimentality.*

in *A Sound Outlook for To-day and a Genuine Hope for the Future*  
(second lecture) in Berlin 3 July, 1918

A similar motive lies behind the creation of ‘The Song of Initiation’, a parody of his eurythmy piece ‘Twelve Moods’, both of which I had the good fortune to see performed in Drogheda in March 2011. There, the efforts of those lumbered with a sentimental or self-important slant to their spiritual strivings are mercilessly lampooned.

We have then met humour, both as a way of reaching out to another in the search for something of their identity and as an astringent, purging in its mockery the egoistic or the sentimental. Jesus, we are told in the Gospel of Judas, laughed at the apostles on a couple of occasions, perhaps with both intentions. (I find it hard to be sure, with such a damaged text).

The ancient Greeks followed their tragedies with comic afterpieces, which were often intended to provide an outbreath after the intense seriousness of the main play. That comedy has increasingly in the past five hundred years or so come to rival and even displace tragedy as an important dramatic form is a reflection of its growing importance to people generally.

Could the priest in the Act of Consecration say ‘Christ in you’ with a smile? Perhaps not, but properly used, humour can help us find balance and find one another, and that in turn can lead to the possibility of finding Christ. At its purest, a comic remark intended to forge a connection with another has the possibility, eventually, to deepen into a ‘Christ in you.’

# The centennial of the sinking of the Titanic

Gisela Wielki

The two Titanic events, the actual disaster in 1912 and the movie version in 1997, for the centennial released in 3D, are like the bookends of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The sinking of the great ship hailed as ‘unsinkable’ became something of a harbinger for the imminent and greater twentieth-century disasters to follow: revolution, World War I and II, the invention and use of the atom bomb, the holocaust, famine, new diseases and other human tragedies

To move from the actual sinking of the unsinkable ship in 1912 to the movie version of 1997, is to journey from reality to virtual reality. Some may say, rather, a journey from truth to myth, in the sense that myth is merely illusion or fantasy. But a myth is also a tale that embodies a timeless truth, a story that—unlike history—maintains a continuous presence. It is perhaps this kind of myth that we have yet to extricate from the Titanic catastrophe, which shook the world at the beginning of our century.

The Titanic was a social microcosm of 19<sup>th</sup> century society, a society, in which each individual could still feel secure in his or her own social position and role in the world. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,

there remains little assurance or security of any kind and it is all too common to feel oneself lost at sea, unhinged from ones moorings, in fear of capsizing—or even shipwrecked. At the close of this century, we know that ‘trouble on board’ no longer allows a simple return to the old and familiar safe harbours. We see a picture of our storm-tossed 20<sup>th</sup>-century predicament in the final words of the Titanic’s captain: ‘Every man for himself!’

Some have characterized the sinking of the real Titanic as a kind of punishment for hubris, for placing too much faith in technology. In contrast, the movie has been praised for its depiction of love as stronger than death. Indeed, to a certain extent the Titanic film caters to our deepest longings that this indeed be so, that perhaps heart’s warmth can melt the iceberg of our rational and calculating intellect. But today surely it is no longer the case of choosing between cold and lifeless technology, on the one hand, and heart-warming feelings on the other, for indeed now is the time, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, to create the myths that may join both together, head and heart.

With respect to a new myth of truth that may endure, the cry ‘Every man for himself’ may refer to a new ship (not a physical place or technological marvel) that will bear us together, but as individuals from the old world to the new. The new ship will be built only

## Correction

There was an printing error in the poem ‘Forgetfulness’ by Virginia Gilmer in the last issue of *Perspectives*. The lines ‘Only the King of the Cross / Can redeem the irreverence of Chaos’ should have read ‘Only the King of the Cross / Can redeem the irreverent Chaos’. Our apologies to the author. *Eds.*

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by individuals, but in the construction of the great ship, each individual finds his or her brothers and sisters, united in a higher purpose. In his drama, 'Voyage to the Other Land,' Albert Steffen, the Swiss dramatist and poet depicts the sinking of the Titanic. What the human voyagers on the 'Titanic,' who are brought together by destiny, experience during the catastrophe; what they wrest from it as insight—the courage equal to meet death—shows them the way to build a new ship of life fit to bear them securely into the future of

humanity. The closing words of the play could become a theme song for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

*O let us build a ship for Christ's disciples,  
Set sail to seek His visage through the dark –  
For mankind in the cradle and the coffin  
And for the blissful in the sun's bright barque.*

*The Cross her anchor, rudder—the Spirit's ray!  
O brother, sister—you, to steer the way!  
And guiltless or guilty, all who sail from land  
Shall know the mercy of His saving hand.*

## Review

### *Seeking the Risen Christa*

Nicola Slee

SPCK Publishing

*Reviewed by Deborah Ravetz*

It was challenging for me as a member of the Christian community to read a book which is about the Christ in a female form. However it was a worthwhile challenge because it gave me the chance to meet a world of ideas and experiences that were full of life and depth. The aim of the book in thinking of the feminine aspect of Christ is described by Nicola Slee in her introduction. She says; 'The Christa is

one among many symbols of a re—emergence of the divine feminine, both within Christianity and other faith traditions, but also outside mainstream religions, which is part of the universal movement of oppressed peoples and paths finding their voices and insisting on their experience, wisdom and gifts being recognized and taken seriously. Christianity rejects that wisdom and those gifts at its peril, expelling the very life force that can heal and revivify the ancients paths.'

The divine feminine in all its myriad forms is beautifully described in the book.

This book shows us these images in concepts and biography as well as poetic and visual images.

Through reading it I found myself meeting a rich seam of inspiration that didn't detract from my path but rather enriched and widened my inner life. I warmly

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recommend it to our readers. I would like to end with one such image. These words were spoken by the anti slave campaigner Sojourner Truth in 1851. She herself had been a slave and made this speech in response to speakers who had used the maleness of Christ as a justification for limiting women's rights.

She says, "That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages and lifted over ditches, and to have the best places everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I could have ploughed and planted and gathered into barns and no man could heed me. And ain't I am woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman! I have borne thirteen children, and seen most sold off to slavery, and when I cried with my mothers grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?"

Then that man in black there, he says women can't have as much rights as men, 'cause Christ wasn't a woman. Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with him.

Just for the sake of learning of this history and for sharing this and the many other amazing contents of this book it is worth the read.

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

## Temple Lodge Club a quiet oasis in the middle of London

Temple Lodge—a Georgian Listed Building in the middle of Hammersmith—was once the home of the artist *Sir Frank Brangwyn*. Whilst his studio has been converted into a chapel with a **vegetarian restaurant** on its former mezzanine floor, the house itself is given over to accommodating bed and breakfast visitors. They come from four corners of the world to enjoy the *quietness and tranquility* of the house. Many have described it as a really peaceful haven, despite being a stone's throw from the centre of Hammersmith and its busy traffic interchange. The absence of a television in the house and rooms *adds to this atmosphere*.

There is a quiet secluded garden. Most rooms look out over this large and **sheltered garden**. Two rooms look out over the front courtyard and garden.

Upon becoming members of the **Temple Lodge Club** (£1.00 annual membership) visitors seeking Bed & Breakfast accommodation may share in all the facilities the house has to offer.

Breakfast is served in the ground floor Dining Room looking out over

the quiet, secluded garden. A library provides a space for relaxation or quiet reading. All the rooms are well appointed and comfortably furnished, the two double rooms being deluxe rooms.

### **All prices include breakfast and are per room:**

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All rooms have hot and cold water.

For any further information or to make a booking, contact:

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(020 8563 2758 if unobtainable)

Fax: 020 8748 8322 (will also take messages)

e-mail: [info@templelodgeclub.com](mailto:info@templelodgeclub.com)

[www.templelodgeclub.com](http://www.templelodgeclub.com)

# Taco Bay

## Commemorating a Year Since the Passing of a Spiritual Leader



Taco Bay was born in 1933 in Switzerland to a Dutch mother and Swiss father. As his family moved about, he went to many different schools, in five different languages. For a time he worked in Camphill, but at the age of 28 was ordained a priest of The Christian Community.

He worked in Edinburgh for many years before becoming *lenker* of the Netherlands. In 1977 he moved to Stuttgart taking on many of Rudolf Frieling's tasks as *erzoberlenker*, a role he took on fully after Frieling's death in 1986. He was the first priest to step into that role who had not been present at the founding of the movement.

Taco had an ability to engage in conversations which helped both priests and members to deal with challenging situations.

Frieling believed that these abilities, along with Taco's strong will, would be very helpful to the whole movement.

It was Taco's wish to develop the role of the members of The Christian Community so that responsibility would be shared between members and priests. He wanted this to be the case in areas beyond the celebrating of the sacraments, particularly in the economic life, as well as hoping that it would develop in the realm of pastoral care. In this way he wanted the church really to become a members' church, right into every level of the life around the sacraments.

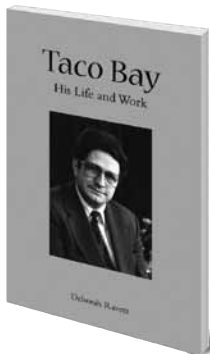
Under Taco's leadership The Christian Community became established worldwide, with The Act of Consecration of Man being celebrated in more than twenty languages around the globe.

Taco led The Christian Community for twenty-five years. Breaking with the practice until then, he stepped down from his office, consciously handing it over during his life. He died in August, 2011.

*Taco Bay: His Life and Work* by Deborah Ravetz is the first biography of this highly influential and spiritual man, published one year after his death. Deborah Ravetz worked closely with Ita Bay, Taco Bay's widow, in writing this book.

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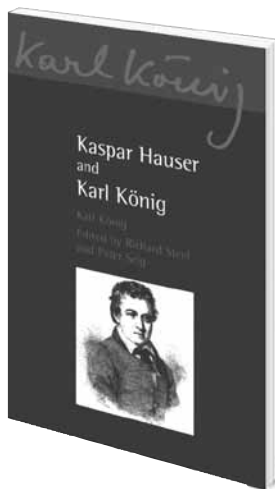
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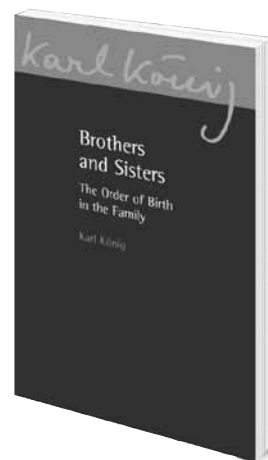
Just as our environment shapes our language, social behaviour and mannerisms, so our place in the family also determines how we encounter life.

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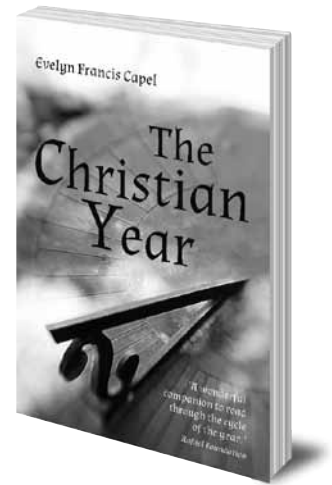
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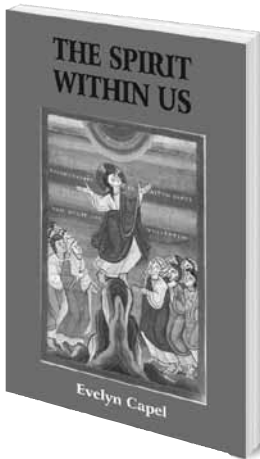
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