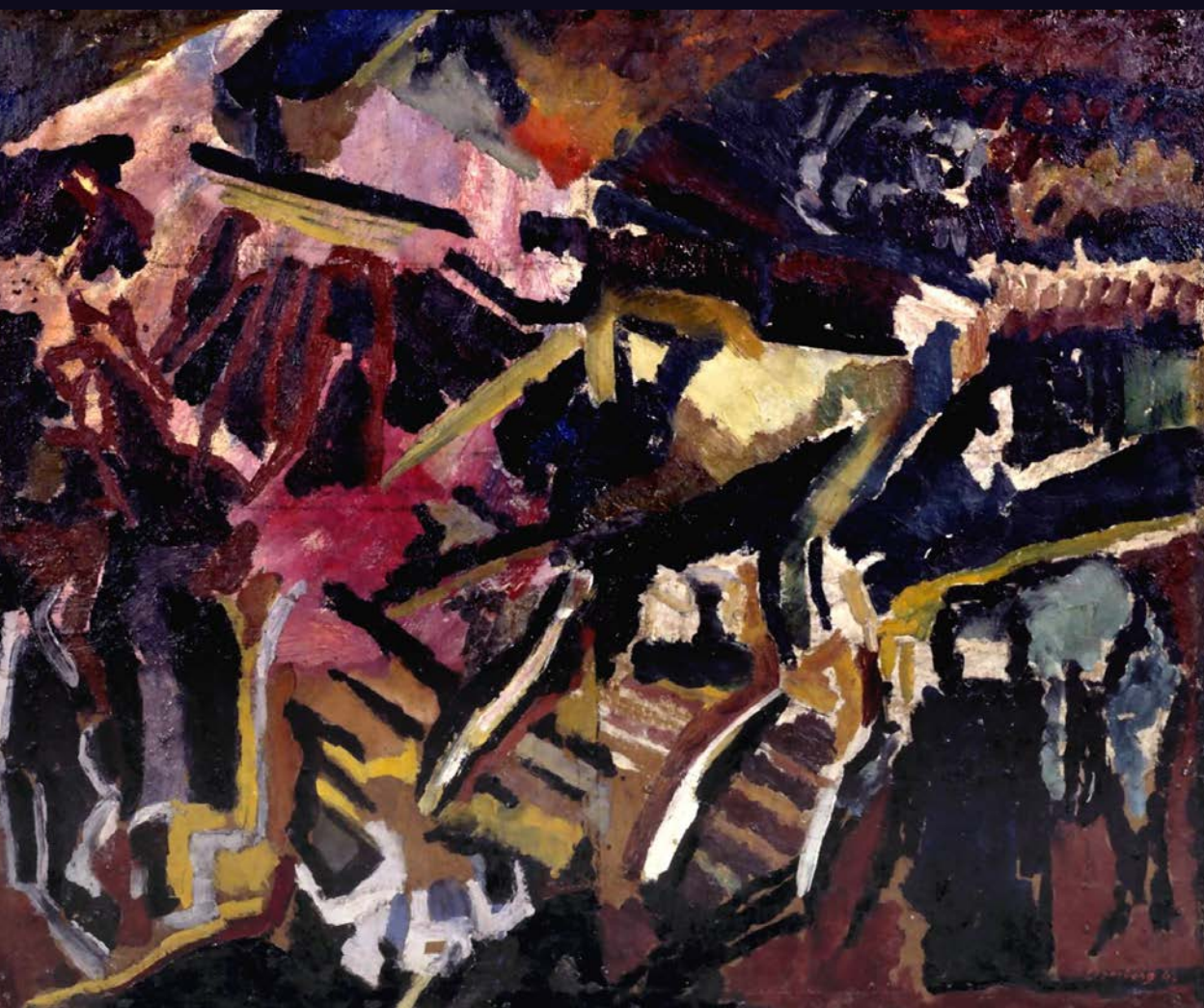


The Christian Community

# Perspectives

September–November 2014



## First World War

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# Perspectives

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## Editorial

*In war, truth is the first casualty.*

Some thoughts seize the imagination of humanity, even if it is unclear where they come from. This phrase about war is often attributed to Aeschylus, though it seems unlikely that he wrote it. The first person to have said something similar seems to have been Samuel Johnson, who wrote: 'Among the calamities of war may be justly numbered the diminution of the love of truth, by the falsehoods which interest dictates and credulity encourages.' This longer version draws our attention to the fact that the injuries done to truthfulness in the context of war are not merely unfortunate; they are a calamity. For Johnson, this disaster stems from a lack of love of truth. Love of truth, even against our own interests, represents the highest point of human striving. To deny the truth because it harms us is to abuse our power to protect ourselves. To give in to what Johnson calls 'credulity' is to give into manipulation by others—to allow ourselves to be abused. When we think of truth as a casualty, we realise that such failings are not merely our personal concerns. Truth can be a casualty, it can be wounded.

When Christ says, 'I am the way and the truth and the life,' we realise that it is more than a metaphor to see truth as a person who may have to bear wounds. If we think of our own

relationship with truth, we might almost feel oppressed by the feeling of how often we wound this being. We sometimes offend against truthfulness because we fear that it might harm us to be honest. At other moments, it seems too much work to try to discover the truth, even when we feel worried that something doesn't seem quite right. If striving for truthfulness is a challenge in our personal lives, how much the more do we struggle when looking at world events?

George Orwell said, 'He who controls the past controls the future. He who controls the present controls the past.' (George Orwell, 1984) It has been fascinating in recent months to observe the attempts to take ownership of the story of the First World War in Britain. Various politicians have pronounced on the factors that led to war and its conduct. Unsurprisingly, the interpretations they favour turn out always to fit their picture of Britishness and the rightness or otherwise of war.

When *we* put to ourselves the questions that the politicians and historians debate, we may observe the two temptations outlined by Johnson. Is the First World War something to celebrate, or is it something to regret? After 100 years, are we still committed to the stance that certain countries were to blame for the war, whilst others were blameless guardians of the peace? Thinking about these questions from a British perspective, we may find an almost reflexive answer to the question of war guilt. The guilt always lay somewhere other than in British policy. Weren't the British and their allies the 'goodies' in the First World War, and indeed in the other conflicts of the twentieth century? Thinking further, though, we notice that this is the reaction of our 'interests,' as Johnson describes. How do other nations feel about the same questions? We hope that the excerpt from Emil Bock's life story will help us to gain perspective on this question.

When we dig a little deeper and discover the use of propaganda by all sides in the run-up to the War, we might become aware of the danger of credulity. If we can trace step by step the evolution of a story which starts relatively harmlessly and ends with a report of utter barbarism, as Donna Simmons describes in her article, do we not need to be cautious about other sensational stories that get presented as truth? There are many parallels to this in today's world. How quickly the official line emerges about who is a virtuous freedom fighter and who a terrorist! How quickly do we hear about a clash of civilisations, when that suits the agenda that is being pushed, only for a different line to emerge when an important trade deal is being signed. How fast do the heroic victors of an uprising,

supported at first perhaps by western money and military intervention, become the new terrorists who have to be eliminated.

Perhaps bearing in mind the wounds that truth has to bear, we might cultivate the attitude that by at least noticing that there are important questions we cannot yet answer, we are doing truth a service. Doing this demands an inner commitment to questioning our reactions as the first step towards finding some distance from our own opinions. Perhaps Emil Bock's description of his experiences in the War could help us with this change of perspective.

Preparing for this centenary year, I read two books. One, *Sleepwalkers*, gives an account which echoes certain statements by Rudolf Steiner, who spoke of the almost trance-like state that affected the very few men in whose power it lay either to prevent the War or to allow it to happen. As the weeks of the July crisis passed by, they seemed to lose sight of the reality of the situation—of the truth. Fears and suppositions floated around the corridors of power, and decisions affecting millions were made on the basis of untested hypotheses and rumour. The other book, *Hidden History*, is less mainstream. It gives an account of the work of groups of influential people, starting with Cecil Rhodes, who set out to work for the continued domination of the world through the Anglo-Saxon peoples. This book seeks to expose particularly the role of the British Foreign Secretary and the secret undertakings he made to France and Russia. It also exposes the use of propaganda and provocation to create an atmosphere of panic about Germany's intentions that then served as a justification for war. Here, the picture that emerges is not of truth obscured by 'sleepwalking', but of truth deliberately distorted.

With the distance of a century, we can see beneath surface events to the forces that were at work beneath these offences against truth. The historian Terry Boardman once suggested that when we have identified these forces, we need to see the work of evil in power politics not as a mistake but ultimately as a kind of sacrifice. Only through the encounter with evil can human beings meet the resistance through which they develop in freedom towards love. At the root of all evil is a sacrifice that wants to make this possible. Looked at from this perspective, the story of our century becomes a passion play, in which the forces of evil wound the being of the truth, who can be redeemed through our efforts patiently to understand, to gain a viewpoint beyond our narrow, egotistical horizon.

The Christian Community was born in the world that had been irrevocably changed by the events of the First World War. Many of its

founders had fought in the war. The challenges and obstacles to the founding of the Community were determined largely by the state of the world in the aftermath of that event. It was hard for the young theologians to acknowledge that they were not hearing the truth from the professors when they returned to university after military service. Hard too for those few older ones to acknowledge that quite a new path was needed for humanity, as Friedrich Rittelmeyer describes in his epochal book, *Rudolf Steiner enters my Life*. These courageous human beings founded The Christian Community to make a contribution to the culture of truth that wants to emerge in our time. At Easter we hear that Christ has arisen as the earth's meaning. When we seek the truth, seek to find meaning even in the events that seem hardest to grasp, most compromised, we are serving the truth. In this way we serve to heal the truth that is constantly wounded in our world.

TOM RAVETZ

*The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914*, Christopher Clark,  
Penguin (4 July 2013), ISBN: 978-0141027821

*Hidden History: The Secret Origins of the First World War*, Gerry Docherty,  
Mainstream Publishing (4 July 2013), ISBN: 978-1780576305

*Rudolf Steiner Enters My Life*, Friedrich Rittelmeyer,  
Florin Books; 5<sup>th</sup> Revised edition (4 Jan 2013), ISBN: 978-0863159589

### Correction

Elizabeth Roberts died on 14<sup>th</sup> March this year, not on 16<sup>th</sup> as was stated in her obituary in the last issue of *Perspectives*.

Our sincere apologies for this mistake.

# The Spiritual Challenge of the First World War

Donna Simmons

As everyone reading this knows, this year marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the outbreak of what came to be known as World War I. With great sadness we can note that this war, during its course, was optimistically dubbed ‘the war to end all wars.’ With even greater sadness, we can note that almost every major political conflagration from that time until now has its roots in this first major war of the twentieth century. From the Balfour Declaration to the impasses in Palestine/Israel and in the larger Middle East; from the carving up of Africa to the horrors in Somalia, Rwanda and the Congo; from the Russian Revolution to the atrocities in Cambodia and China; all can be traced back to events which unfolded around the time of World War I.

The War erupted during a time of unprecedented material growth, especially in economic, industrial and technological terms. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, materialistic thinking had reached its climax, with Marxism, the teachings of Freud, and social Darwinism influencing all spheres of life. Human relationships and the workings of the natural world were seen in terms of forces such as competition, governed either by physical laws or seen as chance happenings. Such thinking applied to the spiritual worlds either relegates such worlds to the land of make believe, or it limits the thinker from having any direct spiritual experiences. This either means that spiritual experiences are ‘miracles’—i. e. unexplainable—or unknowable (which amounts to the same thing).

Whilst the crassness of gross materialism is counter-productive to human growth, materialism does afford the individual the possibility of freeing himself from traditions and relationships unsuitable to modern consciousness. The rise of socialism, the efforts of the suffragettes, the first attempts to decriminalize homosexuality—most movements that came to be known as progressive grew in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Such movements highlighted the fact that major parts of society had been

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marginalized by dogmatic religion and autocratic power-structures and that this was no longer acceptable in modern society.

In the face of complex historical events such as World War I, which continue to have such resonance in our own day and which are so horrific, we can easily feel overwhelmed. However, it is important to discover what forces were at work beneath the surface of the outer events, even as we acknowledge that we will never know all there is to know. One method is to take a symptomatic approach to the events of the War, to see what was typical or characteristic of this time. Three phenomena stand out especially clearly for me when I contemplate the War in this way. The first is the proliferation of lies and half-truths around events leading up to, during and after the War; the second is the powerful image of soldiers in their trenches; the third is the effect of nationalism.

### **Lies and Half-truths**

Trying to understand what exactly happened during the pre-war and War years is a formidable task. One follows a thread, loses it, gets tangled in another, finds a different take on the first... It is unbelievable how many books and articles, films and now websites have been devoted to the War over the years. At some point too much information serves more to distort and confuse than to illuminate.

One does have to start somewhere, however, and *The Pity of War* by Niall Ferguson is one possibility.<sup>1</sup> It is important to remember, though, that Ferguson does no more than nod at the possibility of British culpability for the War apart from poor decision-making, greed or ambition on the part of particular individuals in power. Aside from that huge flaw, his book is very helpful in debunking many of the most persistent distortions trotted out to justify the War, such as 'German militarism' and 'German aggression.' Citing a number of factors including proportion of men in the armed forces, Ferguson amply illustrates that of all the European nations, France was the most militarised in the lead-up to the War. He gives a good picture of exactly how much Britain had to gain from any conflict with Germany, which was viewed as an economic competitor. This flies in the face of the idea that Britain was a disinterested party, only intervening at the last moment to preserve the balance of power in Europe for altruistic reasons.

Ferguson and also the BBC series *1914–1918* help one trace the growth of a number of lies about the Germans which were promulgated before and during the War. One of the most nefarious was part of the 'brave little Belgium' series of lies. This began with a newspaper report about the bells





*Evening in the City of London*, David Bomberg, 1944

being rung to mark the fall of Antwerp to the Germans; it grew into priests being forced at bayonet point to ring the bells after having refused; and ended up as a story widely distributed through the Press of the Belgian priests being used as human bell-clappers by the Germans. Such stories contributed to the image of the 'Huns,' inhuman brutes fighting against 'our boys.' While it is undoubtedly true that there were German war crimes as we would now call them, the self-righteous braying of the British press and politicians in Parliament would have one believe that no British armed forces ever, at any time, every wronged a single civilian. Even a superficial review of British conduct during the Boer War or in Ireland demonstrates how absurd this is.

But what really is astonishing is not that the War was justified by lies and distortions (such methods have been used by rulers since at least Roman times) but how, despite evidence to the contrary, they have persisted. Like materialistic thoughts about the spiritual worlds, either flat-out lies are told (it was all the fault of the Germans—see Max Hastings, *The Catastrophe*) or shoulders are shrugged and the War is declared 'unknowable.' (The BBC documentary previously mentioned is an example of this). Lies and distortions are good hiding places for those who do not want to be seen manipulating or influencing events. Careful discernment and suspension

of belief in the face of media outcry about any event is a good practice to develop as one attempts to sort through the tangles and reach toward some degree of truth. Keeping in mind whose interests a particular slant on a story might serve is also a good idea!

### **The Trenches/Catacombs**

Deeply carved into the soil of Northern France and Belgium, the trenches lay near a place where, hundreds of years before, a young girl, inspired by the Archangel Michael, led battles which ultimately resulted in the separation of France and England into distinct nations. At that time nationalism was a positive force in human history, not at all like the modern-day nationalism which led the descendants of Joan of Arc's army and its enemies to death and destruction on the Western Front of World War I.

Of all the images we have of World War I, one of the most enduring is that of soldiers sitting cold and wet, often in mud up to their hips, miserable in the trenches. When we think of them surrounded by rats and often the corpses of their comrades, unable to raise their heads above the lip of the trench for fear of being shot, we are filled with horror. Even during the times when conditions were not so bad, the thought of those men spending time in subterranean corridors in a war of attrition that brought so little gain for either side is unconscionable.

I think of those soldiers in their trenches and I am reminded of the catacombs of the early Christians. The catacombs were not hiding places, they were subterranean cemeteries. This is what the trenches in Flanders became for unthinkable numbers of men. Alfred Heidenreich describes the catacombs thus:

*Above ground, the sphere of Caesar, subjugating the world; below ground, the sphere of Christ, transforming the world. Above ground, the travesty of Man proclaimed God, with proud pomp and circumstance; below ground the reality of God become Man, in humility and love.* <sup>2</sup>

I see a clear parallel between the people in the catacombs and the soldiers in their trenches, between these events so far removed in time. The hubris of the generals of all nations involved in the fighting who acted like they had the divine right to dispose of the lives of their men, using the superhuman forces that science and technology had put at their disposal, made them like modern-day Caesars. So too are there similarities between the early Christians and the men at the Front.

Like the fellowship that bound the early Christians, comradeship and love bound soldiers together. Knowing that you would die for your comrade and

that he was willing to die for you made life bearable. Even as the French soldiers in 1917 rose up out of their trenches following orders to cross no man's land, loudly bleating like sheep as they met the fire of machine guns with their lives, the solidarity forged between them made this not just an act of desperation, but one of sacrifice, even martyrdom. To die for one's comrade was then—as it still is for many soldiers—the highest and most sacred honour. 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.' (John 15:13)

## **Nationalism**

Whilst pride in one's people, one's country, can be a force for the good, the nationalism that begins wars, sustains genocide, slides into racism and results not in warmth of identity as folk but in fear of the other, is a retrograde force in the modern world. Rudolf Steiner's intimate knowledge of the spiritual beings at work in creation and in human history meant that he brought a unique perspective to bear on the peoples and folks and the spirits that accompany them. He had many interesting things to say about the folk spirits of peoples and about the destiny of the peoples. But he was uncompromisingly critical of nationalism in the modern era, describing it as a poison, a subconscious force.<sup>3</sup>

Nationalism dwells in the emotions, in the unconscious sway of feelings. The incoherent joy, the overwhelming rage, the bursting pride that it can give rise to, are not subject to clear thinking or consideration. One of the easiest ways in which to sway opinion, whether of groups or of individuals, is by appealing to the stereotypes and emotive imagery that feeds nationalistic feelings. Hitler was a supreme master of that—but he was only an exaggerated spectacle. Far more subtle men than he have twisted opinion through the written and spoken word by using the magnetic appeal of nationalism.

Nationalism influences the feelings so strongly because its dwelling place is, as Steiner tells us, in the blood.<sup>4</sup> The caught breath, the racing pulse, the rush to the head, are physical symptoms which we all can recognize, especially if we enjoy following, for instance, a favourite sports team. For the most part, screaming incoherently, urging one's team on, is an enjoyable and harmless experience. But we also know how easily, how subtly, it can grow into something much more. It takes a good measure of maturity and self-awareness to rein in such emotions and to strictly limit their boundaries.

Nationalism can bring people a step away from clan or blood ties (as in the example of the formation of France and England cited earlier). However,



*Bomb-Store*, David Bomberg, 1942

in our modern times, if it is adhered to without a Christ-filled brotherliness that transcends mere loyalty to the state, it manifests as a negative force.

The nationalism of World War I overcame the enlightened thinking that Europeans were so proud of at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The desire to fight for one's country distorted the thinking of millions across Europe and beyond. In a time when human beings were supposed to be moving beyond narrow nationalistic jingoism into a new Christ-filled world of love, the dark spectre of war and hatred which have persisted into our own time emerged instead. The adversaries who seek to turn human beings away from Christ dwell in the blood, from where they encourage such backward forces as nationalism. But Christ also can influence the blood which is the bearer of the human I. Christ lives in the in-between, in the warmth of the heart-forces that can mediate between cold thinking and heated emotionalism. By exercising our I, by choosing not to incline toward either pole, but by keeping ourselves aligned with the heart-warmth of the middle realm, we can fill ourselves with the love-filled forces of the Christ.

## Conclusion

Rudolf Steiner tells us that two important spiritual events happened roughly during the time preceding the First World War. Kali Yuga, an age of descent into darkness, ended in 1899. This meant that now human beings could once again join themselves to the spiritual worlds. However, humanity lost its connection to spirit precisely so that it could attain freedom—for if one remains in a state of unconscious union and bliss as had been the state of human beings many, many aeons ago, then one is not able to exercise choice. To choose to align oneself with the spiritual worlds is an act of freedom. However, where freedom is found, evil is found, for if it were only possible to tread the path of the good, then no choice exists.

The other event of enormous importance to human evolution is that Christ, having joined himself with the earth through the deed of Golgotha, is now to be found in the etheric realm, the sphere of life around the earth. Steiner describes how, in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, more and more people would be able to have direct experience of Christ.<sup>5</sup> Christ has drawn nearer and His light shines more brightly. But... that also means that the shadow cast is that much darker. Temptations and evil of a magnitude to be found in the Book of Revelation become a reality for humankind as the age of freedom unfolds. One does not need to be clairvoyant, only awake and quietly present, to observe that individuals and groups, consciously or unconsciously, have aligned themselves with agents working against human development. If the Book of Revelation is anything other than a scary jumble of images, if it can actually be understood as the story of the struggle for human freedom and the need for human beings to become conscious co-workers with the angelic hierarchies—then we discover that we are challenged to not only focus on the good bits and ignore the fact of how evil works in the world. In recent history, this has meant that adversarial powers, who are at work in secret brotherhoods which do not want humanity to attain the Christ-endowed freedom that belongs to it by right, have operated behind the scenes to exploit human weaknesses so that events like World War I happen.

But these forces have not yet won the day. It remains possible for human beings to choose to drag themselves back from the abyss and to face the enormity of world events in all their horrible truth. The sacrifices made in the trenches, like the sacrifices made in the gas ovens, in the gulags, in the killing fields, can find meaning and purpose if we can face the evil that works in our world. Christ is with us always, even when

it seems he is the farthest away. As the one who came to be sacrificed himself, he shares with us the pain and sorrow of the most brutal and painful events in our times, filling them with love and meaning which we, as thinking human beings, can learn to comprehend.

Seeing through the lies, recognizing evil in its many forms, and listening with compassion to the feelings of those who wave the flag of nationalism but not being swayed by it—these are all things that each of us can do. Our challenge is to bring the light of Christ-filled, clear thinking to all that we encounter—in whatever way we are able. Then we may take up our responsibility to work towards understanding how spiritual events unfold on the earth, a grave undertaking that each of us can choose to embrace.

## Notes

- 1 The bibliography for this article is longer than the article itself! Anyone interested is invited to contact me and I shall send a document which lists sources with comments and short reviews. [morningglory62@zoho.com](mailto:morningglory62@zoho.com)
- 2 Alfred Heidenreich, *The Catacombs: Pictures from the Life of Early Christianity*; second edition, The Christian Community Press: 1962
- 3 Rudolf Steiner, *The Karma of Untruthfulness* vols I and II, Dornach, December 1916 and January 1917. He says this repeatedly and in a variety of ways throughout the 25 lectures.
- 4 Rudolf Steiner, *The Occult Significance of Blood* (Berlin, 25 October 1906); and *The Karma of Untruthfulness* (see above).
- 5 Rudolf Steiner, *The Etherisation of the Blood* (Basle, 1 October 1911).

For 14 hours yesterday, I was at work—teaching Christ to lift his cross by the numbers, and how to adjust his crown; and not to imagine he thirst until after the last halt. I attended his Supper to see that there were no complaints; and inspected his feet that they should be worthy of the nails. I see to it that he is dumb, and stands mute before his accusers. With a piece of silver I buy him every day, and with maps I make him familiar with the topography of Golgotha.

Captain Wilfred Owen, *The Manchesters*  
Killed in Action, 4 November, 1918

# The First World War and the founders of The Christian Community

Johannes Lenz

The First World War (1914 –1918) was the greatest and most elemental catastrophe of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Its aftermath and the damage wrought by it persist to this day.

In this war, Catholic France, Orthodox-Christian Russia, Anglican Britain and Evangelical-Catholic Germany fought one another until the very 'Downfall of the Christian West', to paraphrase the title of Oswald Spengler's influential book. All spiritual achievements, all traditional piety, indeed to a large extent all common humanity, fell away. The nations were no longer able to live together in peace; the Versailles Treaty became a victors' diktat, Germany alone was declared responsible for the War. In this connection, it is worth noting the work of the historian Christopher Clark, who has demonstrated for a new generation that the idea of Germany being solely to blame for the First World War is historically unsustainable; he calls the members of the governments of the combatant nations 'sleepwalkers'. They were not functioning on the level of wakeful and moral thinking, and so they stumbled into what was to be the most terrible war there had ever been. They had not even fully realised that modern technology placed in the service of the military makes possible a degree of slaughter that no longer has anything to do with fighting man to man.

Peace in a Christian sense is only possible when the faith and the bearing of Christians are so open towards the spiritual world that the grace of the living and present Christ can work in a transforming way in human beings. Hence, to the famous words 'only a God can save us', spoken in an interview by the German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1829–1976), must be added: Salvation has already happened, through the Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension and Whitsun; but human beings are not engaging actively with it. As the Acts of the Apostles puts it: their hearts are too 'hardened' to be able to bring to life within them the reality of what saving grace does for mankind ever anew. Christ himself is the essence of peace,

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is a priest emeritus  
living in Berlin.*

he 'stands at peace with the world', but we cannot leave it to God to do what it is the task and responsibility of we human beings ourselves to do.

In 1917 whilst the War was still raging, Dr. Friedrich Rittelmeyer (1872–1938), Protestant minister at the German Cathedral in Berlin, issued a proclamation together with other clergy, urging that 'in the name of Christianity' war should cease to be a means of settling differences between the peoples of the world. In this war, even the memories of the Reformation had lost their force. Rittelmeyer later became one of the founders of The Christian Community, and the new stage of the Reformation was not achieved until 1922 by him, together with the circle of the founders.

In the souls of the founders, the War, the study of theology and life within the traditional Churches, had awakened an active longing to seek a fundamental reformation and transformation of the Church through the working of the Holy Spirit, who makes peoples and nations to be at peace.

A number of the founders returned from the War. They had experienced battles, death and destruction and were seeking a new beginning. The following extracts from the biographies of the founders of The Christian Community will show some of the bitter experiences that gave birth and concrete reality to the impulse to help initiate a new stage of development of the Christian Church.

Emil Bock (1895–1959) was a Protestant theologian; he was to become a leading priest in The Christian Community. The end of his University time coincided with the beginning of the War. After his brief military training he was sent to the Front as early as 10 October 1914, and was wounded just three weeks later. [On page 17 of this issue of *Perspectives*, Bock tells his own story of that dramatic event.]

He eventually arrived back in Bonn where he slowly recovered. As part of his military service he then had to work in Berlin as censor of the mail. Here he noticed the numerous packages being sent to Switzerland, all bearing the name 'Rudolf Steiner'. He took them back to his lodgings overnight in order to scrutinize them more closely. This was in 1915.

Later, 'by chance', he heard Dr. Rittelmeyer's inaugural sermon in the 'Neue Kirche' in Gendarmenmarkt in Berlin. The text was John 17:4.

The War, the fighting, being wounded and the task as censor was the path of destiny that led Emil Bock to finding Rudolf Steiner and Friedrich Rittelmeyer.



Johannes Werner Klein (1898–1984) was only 17 years old when he joined up. He became an officer and fought in Russia and later in France. In the Spring of 1918, seriously ill, he was admitted to a military hospital near Sedan; at New Year he was discharged and now faced the question of living—to what end? On his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, 24 June, the day after the Treaty of Versailles, he formed the resolution to ‘take up the difficult struggle and see it through. I want to be a theologian. The Church is disintegrating. Who will help build it anew?’ Klein went on to become one of the first priests in the leadership of The Christian Community.

Johannes Perthel (1888–1944) was spared immediate call-up, but after having served as padre for the last one and a half years of the War, he was wounded. Inwardly, he felt his task to be an impossible, self-contradictory one, though he learned a great deal about pastoral care from the destiny of the soldiers. Later, he was among the first seven leading personalities of the priests’ circle and had a decisive influence on the growth and expansion of The Christian Community until it was proscribed in 1941. He perished in an air-raid on 20 July 1944.

Alfred Heidenreich (1898–1969) was deeply connected with the founding of The Christian Community and with its work in Britain. He was called up in 1916, having been an active leader in the German youth movement. He participated in the matériel battles at Ypres and was captured and imprisoned on the North coast of France by the English army. In the Autumn of 1919 he was released and took up the study of the English language and English literature. He was actively involved in the founding of The Christian Community and became the youngest leader. He decided to unite his destiny with the work in England, where, on 27 June 1924, the first Act of Consecration of Man in English was celebrated.

The four men mentioned here went on to take up tasks within the leadership of The Christian Community. Of the total number of 45 founders, a further 16 were led through their destiny to become actively engaged in the catastrophe of this War. At that time it was not possible to refuse to serve in the military, so as members of their people and nation they became involved in the destiny of their nation; Europe’s time of trial had to be endured and suffered.

Thus the depths and pain of life-experiences, of being wounded and of witnessing death again and again, all played into the founding of the

Movement for Religious Renewal, giving rise to a special quality of serving and of pastoral care. The courage and readiness to enter into a completely open destiny and future, trusting in the Holy Spirit, may have arisen out of these bitter experiences. We today can barely imagine it: consider how Friedrich Rittelmeyer, with his wife and six children, and receiving no interim money, left the most important position at the German Cathedral in Berlin, complete with a large manse—and entered upon a totally open future. This showed a power of trust supported by the sense of urgent necessity.

In the souls of these first priests of The Christian Community the experiences of the War were transformed into a substance of peace.

*Translated by Jon Madsen*

## **The Conscript**

*Indifferent, flippant, earnest, but all bored,  
The doctors sit in the glare of electric light  
Watching the endless stream of naked white  
Bodies of men for whom their hasty award  
Means life or death, maybe, or the living death  
Of mangled limbs, blind eyes, or a darkened brain;  
And the chairman, as his monocle falls again,  
Pronounces each doom with easy indifferent breath.*

*Then suddenly I shudder as I see  
A young man stand before them wearily,  
Cadaverous as one already dead;  
But still they stare, untroubled, as he stands  
With arms outstretched and drooping thorn-crowned head,  
The nail-marks glowing in his feet and hands.*

WILFRED GIBSON

# *Excerpt from the autobiography of Emil Bock*

*(condensed by the editor)*

The mood in the last days of July 1914 was one of great elation. There was a kind of general euphoria which almost everywhere took the form of patriotic optimism. A kind of Cassandra-like premonition of a European Twilight was stirred up in me. I was like a sleepwalker. The decisions I made came from quite another sphere than usual. It was entirely clear to me that I must at once sign up for the army as a volunteer, although I in no way shared the general superficial war enthusiasm. A higher imperative was at work. How my intention was to be carried into practice I did not know, nor did I give it much thought. Then in the street I met a fellow student from my former High School, Ernst Rummenh oller. He said he would be going to Berlin to volunteer for the Guards. From a deeply buried level my destiny was calling me to Berlin. I said spontaneously, surprised at my own words, 'I'll come with you.'

I walked through the streets of Berlin with my companion without seeing much, or even wanting to see. For the first time I was in a completely different part of Germany and in a truly cosmopolitan city. We had arrived in the morning, and we went to some relatives of mine in Sch oneberg who led us through the hustle and bustle of the big city to a number of Guards barracks. The answer was the same everywhere: volunteers could only be accepted in a few days' time. What were we to do? From out of a sleepwalking instinct I said: 'Come on, we'll just leave the city and stay a couple of days at some place or other that we like.' We just boarded the first train that came along and travelled southwards as in a dream. It was the stretch to Zossen which I later often had to travel. We got out at the station at Rangsdorf, and all at once we were standing before a wonderful lake that was suffused with summery light. We took lodgings at the small inn and spent two indescribably lovely days far from other people. We barely spoke to one another. I believe that this interval was of great significance for me. It was then that my relationship to my guiding spirit and to that of my people somehow became calmer and more harmonious.

Then, having returned to Berlin, we headed for the nearest barracks. Everything happened very fast. Before we were aware of it we had been separated: I was accepted and was then and there put into uniform; Ernst Rummenh oller, having been found physically not strong enough, was sent home. We could only wave goodbye to one another from a distance, and we never saw each other again. The only purpose of the encounter with this

acquaintance seems to have been to ensure that I came to Berlin whither I absolutely had to go in order to fulfil the destiny still waiting for me far off.

So there I was, utterly alone, amongst totally strange people, in a world whose unfamiliarity was soon going to cause me a good deal of anguish. My peers were almost all Berliners, among them a great number of students. They were alien to me because of their rapid way of speaking and because of their crude and smutty repartee. However witty it might be, for a long time I found them unpleasant and disagreeable.

We did a lot of drill on the Tempelhofer Square nearby. These were the days and weeks in which the houses every day were ablaze with banners after the reports of victory in the West. All these military goings-on passed me by. I was really not fully present. As long as we were stationed in the city I looked to the starry evening sky for comfort. At that time I was not familiar with the names of the stars, but I had picked out a few of them as though they had something to do with my personal destiny and my longing. I entered into conversation with them. When we then moved out for manoeuvres to a village near Vustermark, I awoke to the beauty of the countryside. When we streamed out with our guns and hid in the bushes, the golden immortelles and daisies that flowered there went to my heart as though they were sentient beings. I had never been so closely at one with the pulse of nature as I was in those days. I think that I often annoyed the commanding officers by my deliberately retained dreaminess. Fortunately, I was repeatedly restored to favour by my good marksmanship. Led on by the NCO Alberti, who in civilian life was a barman in a pretty unsavoury part of Berlin, my comrades went in for extensive drinking bouts. I always stood apart from that. In the village I had discovered a place near the edge of the forest where there were particularly beautiful daisies. I always kept some where I slept in the attic of the inn. My quiet thoughts turned to them while the others got roaring drunk downstairs.

Then, on 12 October, we were off. The journey westwards seemed endless to me. The mood amongst my comrades was quiet and apprehensive. At first I did not know why. Then it dawned on me that those who had always bragged the most were now afraid. This did not improve my opinion of them. The journey went on into Belgium. In Aalst we disembarked, and straightaway the forced marches began, which, in view of the enormous weight of our kit and the crazy, strict parade-like marching, soon pretty well extinguished our consciousness.

We had to be very careful, because the civilian population was employing guerrilla tactics. The nightly guard duty at our quarters was a great

responsibility. Again and again we caught people who were up to no good. I then had to interrogate them in French. In villages where we were fired on, the men were stood up against the wall. I was disgusted that certain loud-mouthed but otherwise very cowardly comrades at once volunteered to be part of the firing squad. Our captain, a reserve officer with a full, white beard, could not resist hitting each one of the men in the face before they were shot. My comrades, led by the worthy NCO Alberti, did not treat the wine cellars or the Belgian women gently.

After we had changed the direction of our march towards the West, things became more serious.

We came upon places where the English troops had bivouacked only a few hours before. And at last, while we were marching in closely formed columns, we came under machine gun fire. How quickly everyone then disappeared into the ditch at the roadside! The captain had never got off his horse so fast!

The way we were led was a disgrace. The close-ranked regiments ought never to have been allowed to become so exposed to gunfire. The enemy was nowhere to be seen, and in the end he withdrew. He was as unaware of his opportunity as we were of our danger.

Then one evening something strange happened. A village lay before us, Eessen near Dixmuiden. Our regiments marched towards it from different directions on the rail track. All day long my Berliner comrades had been complaining loudly about the lack of cigarettes; now they were terrified. It made me furious. One man who usually was particularly boastful lay down flat on the track and refused to go any further. None too gently, I applied the butt of my rifle to him and harangued him in brusque language until, cursing, he did in the end come along. Alberti, the NCO, had long since disappeared. Dusk fell quickly. Then I saw some daisies shining from out of the ditch next the track, and suddenly it was as if I was thereby seeing whole clouds of shining angel-beings surrounding us. Something came over me. I said a few words to my comrades. The spark ignited: all at once the pressure was off and we stormed forward into the village. We were met by firing from every house, so that it was as light as day around us. Amazingly, not one of us was hit. It was a miracle; later it became clear to me that many such supersensible events occur on fields of battle—it is just that often they



Emil Bock

are not noticed. We surrounded the houses and set fire to each one and, standing outside the village, watched the imposing spectacle of the fire. As the church tower was going up in flames and at last began to teeter, we saw the enemy machine-gunners plunge into the depths with their weapons. For a long time we stood watching the inferno. Later I learnt that from other regiments two people who were later to become my fellow priests took part in this attack on Eessen. They were Martin Borchart in a different infantry regiment and Heinrich Ogilvie in the artillery which attacked the church.

Once we had entrenched ourselves for the first time after the flame-drama of Eesen, being subjected to the murderous fire of the artillery never ceased. We were so exhausted from the forced marches that we were not in full command of our human consciousness. We lived in an animalistic-vegetative element. This state was only lit up by particular moments of destiny.

One night in particular stands out for me. We were actually quite in disarray. If the enemy had had any idea of this it would have been easy for him to break through the German front. As far as we were able to discern, our leadership had lost its head. Our regiment had established itself in a farmstead. It was noted that we had lost all contact with the neighbour regiment. As darkness fell, a patrol was dispatched in order to re-establish contact. Together with two others, I undertook this task. We had advanced perhaps one kilometre when we stumbled upon a large group of guerrillas, armed to the teeth. My two comrades withdrew at once. I thought that whatever happened I must complete the mission, and so I hid by leaning against a tall haystack. The enemy group surrounded the yard, and soon I saw the men come towards me from all directions, just five paces away. There was no point in shooting; it would also have been dangerous for our whole troop. So I drew my dagger and, being suddenly free of all traces of tiredness, I was determined to sell my life dearly. I felt hard as steel. Then, just as twelve to fifteen men are standing in front of me, for some incomprehensible reason the whole company took fright and tore off as if the Devil were after them. I have never been able to explain to myself what the reason was. So there I stood with my dagger, and only slowly did I come to my senses. After half an hour I succeeded in reaching the neighbouring regiment and carrying out our mission.

Now back to our farmstead! I had been trudging along through the fields with sore feet for a quarter of an hour and had just arrived at the edge of one of those extensive Belgian parks, when the enemy fired the grenades and shrapnel that he rained down on this area every night at the same hour. There was nothing for it: I had to lie down in the roadside ditch and

wait for the end of the murderous barrage. Everything near me was torn to fragments. From sheer exhaustion I soon fell deeply asleep, and only woke up again when there was silence after about an hour of uproar. I found that many of the tall poplars close by me had been bent like straws and were lying across the ditch in which I had been sleeping.

I plodded on, and saw before me a house, lit up and clearly visible from afar: an obvious target for the enemy artillery. When I eventually arrived, I saw through the windows that our regimental staff was gathered in there around the treacherous paraffin lamp. I recognized our regimental commander, the CO of our company and some other senior officers. Resolutely I walked in, and after having made my patrol report, remarked that the light could be seen from far away. But this only aroused the gentlemen's petty fury. The General screamed at me to get out, and even made as if to kick me. All the same, the gentlemen soon extinguish the lamp and come out of the house. The next moment the whistling of the shells from the enemy's heavy naval guns is heard, and the very first grenade destroys the farmhouse, which at once bursts into flame. I look at this from a little distance away, and say to myself: 'So these are the kind of people whose lives you have just saved.' Next day the first Iron Crosses and Lance Corporal Badges were awarded, but only to our officers' favourites—and I was far from being one of them.

Two days later the company reassembled, though thrown together pretty much at random. The battles near the Yser Canal began. Finally we were to attack a high railway embankment 800 metres away, behind which the enemy—English troops—were entrenched. In order to achieve this we had to advance across an open, swampy meadow, criss-crossed by a great number of channels full of water. This was sheer lunacy. Our infantry was moving in close formation, and in certain places it had to close up even more so as to cross over the deep channels—and so was simply mown down by the enemy machine guns. Every time we advanced, dozens of comrades fell. I dragged some back, and was also able to help some as they lay dying. Strangely enough, I felt absolutely certain that nothing would happen to me.

To my utter amazement, however, at noon things turned out otherwise. In yet another hopeless attack we got stuck in a wide water-channel. The order to retreat was given. I was just about to climb out of the water when a long copper bullet tore through the thigh of the man next to me; it passed clean through, however, and only gave him a slight flesh wound. Then it hit me in the back. It was travelling sideways and cut through my leather belt which dropped off. Although its force had now been lessened

several times, the bullet, moving crosswise, still found its way through my abdomen. It was as if a red-hot iron bar was driven through my bowels. The entry wound, the size of a fist, was immediately to the left of my spine. The bullet buried itself in the pelvic bone. I was immediately paralysed and fell back into the water to above my knees, only able still to move my arms. I could feel how the blood flowed out of me in a torrent. As they retreated, my comrades promised to come and fetch me, but I was quite aware that they had given up on me.

Now, as everything fell silent around me, I got ready to die. I did not find it difficult. But I became aware that I was not about to die just yet. I was still able to look at my watch. When an hour had passed, I said to myself: 'If you are still alive now, maybe you will stay alive after all.' Although it was only the unspeakable pain that prevented me from falling into a daze, in the second hour I consciously made the decision to go on living. My will asserted itself, I began to struggle against losing consciousness. Again and again German soldiers passed close by. I called out to them. None of them took any notice of me. The night deepened; it seemed endless. I had to struggle more and more grimly and tenaciously to avoid passing out. Starting at dawn, aeroplanes flew overhead and threw down small bombs, some of which splashed into the water near me. I thought: 'Oh, I just don't care if they hit me.' That whole day was bad. Back and forth the bullets whistled and flew above me, but time seemed to stand still.

At long last, at dusk, a six-man patrol led by an officer came past. I called out to them, just as I had done to all those who had gone past before. Now I have almost no voice left. And the strangest thing is this: I hear myself calling, far below—as though I were at a height of 20 metres above myself. That was an indescribable experience. Clearly, I had already passed that far out of my body and was only still calling out due to the iron will-resolve working on in me.

The comrades laid me on a strip of canvas and carried me back. I remember how surprisingly heavy they seemed to find me, although I had, after all, lost a massive amount of blood in the previous 30 hours. Being carried was intensely painful, but now I could give in and I lost consciousness. I do not know if it was for one or two days that I lay behind a fighting troop, waiting for the ambulance corps. I am no longer completely sure of the dates, but I believe that I received my wound on 31 October, 1914.

*Translated by Jon Madsen;  
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# Making Meaning – the life of David Bomberg

Deborah Ravetz

David Bomberg's family were Jewish Polish immigrants who moved to Whitechapel in London when he was a small boy and it was there that he grew up. Coming from a poor, working class family, it was expected that he would learn a trade and at first he was apprenticed to become a lithographer. There his skill as a draughtsman was recognised and he was eventually able to give up his practical training and attend the Slade School of Art in London. There he was part of a precocious and gifted group of young artists which included Dora Carrington and Stanley Spencer.

Bomberg's youth was a time of revolutionary developments in art. Picasso and Matisse were changing the way we looked at the world as were groups like the Italian Futurists and their British counterparts, the Vorticists. Both the Futurists and the Vorticists reduce the forms of nature to abstracted, splintered and angular shapes. Bomberg was unusual amongst his gifted contemporaries, because his background meant he was interested in the fate of working people. These two movements were therefore particularly interesting for him. The Futurists especially celebrated the idea of the great pulsing city of steel where the machine would free man from the burden of labour. It was to these ideas that Bomberg gave his heart and out of which he began to paint. However, the First World War and the horrors of trench warfare were to challenge the idea of the liberating power of the machine in a way that would affect Bomberg along with many of his generation.

Bomberg joined the army in 1915 and was sent to France in 1916. Confronted with the barbarity of the power of the machine, his modernist ideas seemed nothing but abstract babble. They had nothing to do with the realities of life and death in the trenches. He was so traumatised by the field of battle that he shot himself in order to be sent home. Self-inflicted wounds were punishable by firing squad. Mercifully he was spared this dreadful fate and returned to Britain a changed man. He fell into a deep depression. He had seen unforgettable horrors and he

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had lost beloved friends. This crisis led to a complete reassessment of his youthful philosophy.

He said of this time, 'We have no need to dwell on the material significance of man's achievement, but with the approach of scientific mechanisation and the submerging of individuals we have urgent need of the affirmation of his spiritual significance and of his individuality.' It is this assertion of man's spiritual significance and of his individuality that was to become the signature of his life from then on.

Before the War, Bomberg had had a one man show which received much acclaim. After the War, he renounced the fashions of the day which was to lead to his exclusion from the art world for the rest of his life. This was to result in extreme financial hardship and a lonely isolation. After the War his deep depression led him to embark on a long period of healing. In 1929 he visited the Holy Land whose history and landscape meant a great deal to him as a religious man. He painted both the landscapes and the city of Jerusalem in an objective and naturalistic style. It was as if with each mark and stroke he was rebuilding his shattered soul and his broken world.

He travelled and painted for the rest of his life, visiting Spain, Morocco and Cyprus. He painted portraits and landscapes. As time went on, he worked with a new and free energy. He let go of the meticulous accuracy of his paintings of the Holy Land and instead worked in a forceful and expressive way, full of soul and feeling.

Although his determination to follow an authentic path left him isolated as an artist after the Second World War he became known amongst young artists for his amazing capacities as a teacher. He was not able to get a position in the well-known art schools in London. Instead he began to teach drawing classes in the unfashionable venue of the Borough Polytechnic. His deep intelligence and brilliant teaching meant that he soon had students from the fashionable art schools flocking to his classes.

He would demand of the students that they renounce anything glib and mannered. All the big art schools were turning out artists with a house style. Their teachers were horrified that their students were going to Bomberg's lessons and listening to him. He was not interested in the homogenised way of making work coming out of the Art Schools and told the students instead to find their own way of seeing and to find their own visual language. He taught them to find the spirit in the mass. This meant accepting the challenge of imbuing the marks they made with their own subjective feeling as a counterpart to the description of the world that they contained. He would sit down on the floor and work with the students,

pushing them to find their way. He would visit the parents of students and speak with them late into the night, reassuring them that to be an artist was a worthwhile thing and encouraging them to support their children. He is one of the few people from the world of art whom I have ever heard make the connection between what we are and what we make. He said it was not possible to be a bad man and a good artist.

He died in London in 1957 unrecognised and undervalued. He had suffered but he had never given up and he had taken the fruits of his wisdom and passed it on to the next generation. Thirty years after his death there was a huge retrospective of his work at the Tate and he finally received his rightful place in the history of British art. His life had not been easy. He responded to his crises of confidence by working, by reading and researching and by giving life his full attention. Despite his struggles and his lack of recognition he resolved his conflicts inwardly and died at peace with himself. He suffered and he made meaning of his suffering, leaving behind a radiant body of work which was finally seen and recognised for its true value.



*Jerusalem, Looking to Mount Scopus* 1925, David Bomberg



*Sappers at Work—Canadian Tunnelling Company, R14, David Bomberg, 1919*

# Oh What a Lovely War?

Kevin Street

Less than twenty years after the nuclear cataclysm that marked the end of World War II, attention was turned to the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations that marked the outbreak of World War I. The 'Swinging Sixties' marked the emergence of many social and cultural changes, and amongst these was the growth of the Peace Movement, protests against the Vietnam war, and a growing tide criticizing the way politicians and the 'older generation' had placed civilization on the brink of a nuclear holocaust. The necessity of World War II wasn't to be questioned, but what emerged was a wholesale condemnation of all that led to, and perpetuated, the slaughter of World War I. The floodgates of protest by the younger generation had been opened, and by the protests against the warmongering of the super powers it was as if the whole issue of World War I was scooped up in this tide and held up for criticism using whatever means possible. Generally, this was to place the suffering of the 'common soldier' (hundreds of thousands of whom in 1914 were in their late teens) at the hands of the older generation of politicians and leading generals. It was a further way to underline the scathing criticisms of the contemporary 1960s war protest movement. By the end of the 1960s it was the standard teaching that the First World War had seen innocent lives sacrificed by political stalemate and the ineptness of military leadership—and all for nothing. The graphic images of no man's land, of that line of gas-blinded soldiers shuffling forward, one hand on the shoulder of the comrade in front, coupled with the searing poetry of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon creating a hell on earth, became the stock curriculum for generations of exam candidates.

It was no coincidence: the new Coventry Cathedral was dedicated on 30 May 1962, with Britten's War Requiem premiering there five days later—Owen's poetry, featuring largely in this work, was set to become staple fodder after 50 years of relative obscurity, underlined by the publication of the first major war anthologies in 1964. In 1963, the arrival of Joan Littlewood's musical *Oh What a Lovely War!* cemented the images of innocents being slaughtered to satisfy the political and military vanity of their leaders. Even at the time, the *Guardian* commented that the production was 'as unfair as any powerful cartoon,' but it struck the chord of the

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age. Academia was represented in the writings of A J P Taylor and Alan Clarke, and by 1969 the film version of *Oh What a Lovely War* took the images to many more cinema goers and classrooms. The shadow lingered for a long time with *Blackadder*, and now in 2014 the original musical has been nominated for yet another award.

However, a new age, and a new looking glass. As we approach the centenary of the outbreak of World War I, the figures and the assumptions have been re-examined, and a very different picture emerges. Not one of those who has looked again at the way this war is depicted underestimates the scale of the slaughter—on particular occasions. One figure will suffice: on the first day of the Battle of the Somme, 1 July 1916, 20,000 British and allied troops died, most of them within minutes of ‘going over the top’. The practice of recruiting ‘Chums Regiments’, when whole groups of men joined up in their factory cohorts, or by geographical location, heightened the devastation of loss and bereavement back home.

This however has to be seen in the cold light of fact. Exact figures have been difficult to pin down, but on 10 March 1921 the final corrected figures were issued that put the number of those killed and missing from the 5 million British who enlisted or were conscripted at 673,375. This represents about 12%—in other words, 88% returned home. And whilst in so many towns and villages war memorials list the names of whole families, in many others the war memorials are conspicuous by their absence—because everyone returned. The reasons for this start to reveal a very different understanding of the conditions that met the troops when they arrived in Europe.

At any one time, just 15% of a regiment was at ‘the front line’—but, if this was when ‘a push’ took place, you were indeed in the wrong place at the wrong time. Ten percent of your comrades were in the next line of support trenches, and a further 30% held in reserve. In a major offensive, even these might be called upon to fight, but by then, advances were being made. This left 45%, who were well and truly behind the lines, undergoing training, drill, sports activities and parades. Although their food could be monotonous, for many former factory workers on a limited income and diet, it represented, if not luxury, then regular and sustaining food. The comradeship, the comforts sent from home—and the loosening of sexual morality—led to a life that was tolerable. And for the 55% in the trenches, life was generally unspectacular and boring. The trenches themselves had been intelligently engineered to provide protection and shelter, and the rotation between the different levels of engagement pointed to an

enlightened leadership that may stand at odds with the images of puce faced officers having little concern for the well being of ‘the men’.

As the four years of the war rolled on, rapid advances were made in strategy and technology, and the British were generally reckoned to be at the forefront of this—the advent of tanks was just one example. If we go back to ‘that photo’—the blinded soldiers—it has now been discovered that they had been temporarily blinded, and once treated they regained their sight. Indeed, 92% of wounded men evacuated to British medical units survived.

Of course survival was one thing—disfigurement, later medical complications and death, were something else, and none of this revaluation should be used to belittle the trauma of survivors or those bereaved. Even in the pictures painted of post war widowhood, with a whole generation of ‘lost women’ (designated as ‘surplus’ in a 1921 census) have now been questioned by comparisons with the number of unmarried women in relationship to available males before 1914, which found a trend already in place, and one very much demarcated by social class. Again, in those areas devastated by the deaths of ‘Chums’ this effect was far more marked, but should not be taken as representative of the whole.

It’s reckoned that during the First World War, 2,225 poets, men and women, had work published, and many (such as ‘Woodbine Willy’) represented a very different view from that we have come to expect from the likes of Owen and Sassoon. What has survived has been based on literary merit, but Owen did not claim to be writing for his generation, but to express his personal view of the war. Though the war was of course a terrible event, we must be aware that of the importance of staying awake to the truth and not being carried away with the emotional political slogans of the time.

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# The Threshold Crossed in War

Albert Steffen

In October 1914 I returned to Munich. My first experience in this German city (I will express it as directly and simply as I experienced it) was the nearness of the dead. I felt as if I lay in a damp, cold mass grave. But in this grim atmosphere of the graveyard, was also the nearness to God, in the moment one summoned one's thinking to activity. I felt that the decay of the body, which is a necessity of nature, can in no way hamper the liberation of the spirit. Never had I experienced dying and becoming so closely intertwined.

When I stood by one of those pillars on which the telegrams were posted reporting the course of the battle, I sensed not only the stream of blood that had flowed but also the powers of inspiration that the spiritual world had poured out over mankind. Those fallen in war, whose death was a sacrifice, wanted to speak of love to those they had left behind. The bridge between the living and the dead was there. It only needed to be set foot upon.

I remember a performance of Mozart's Requiem. One knows the legend that is associated with the origin of this work. An unknown stranger comes to the composer and commissions him to create a memorial for the dead. Mozart, who already carried the seed of his own death in him, began to create with his last strength. The stranger was death who called him away to higher deeds.

The chorus was sung by brothers and sisters of soldiers who had fallen on the battle front. All came dressed in black. The tones created a rainbow path into the spirit, an indestructable road over which friend and foe might pass. The temple to which it led was for everyone, built for men of the West, of the East and of Middle Europe.

I experienced the certainty that evening that a community to which the dead do not belong will never last.

The dead are not bound by national boundaries.

It was at this time that I read in a German newspaper about the graves on the Oise; the wooden crosses of fallen German soldiers had been decorated with roses. Below stood the inscription:

'Offert par les Francaises aux soldats allemands, nos freres en Jesus Christ...' (*Offered by the French to German soldiers, our brothers in Jesus Christ...*)



# The Heart of the Epistles Part II

Cynthia Hinder

In The Christian Community there are nine festival seasons celebrated in the course of the year, each with its own epistle. Since Passiontide has two, and the Christmas season has three, there are twelve epistles. Further, there is a thirteenth, a Trinity epistle, for four times of the year between festivals. This Trinity epistle appears between Epiphany and Passiontide, between Pentecost and St. John's Tide, between St. John's Tide and Michaelmas, and between Michaelmas and Advent.<sup>1</sup>

## Trinity Intervals

During these Trinity intervals, the colours at the altar are lavender, edged with orange. The light violet and orange of the four Trinity times incline us toward harmony and devotion; they let our soul catch its breath in a deeply filled pause between the tones of two festival seasons. It is as though the curtains of the other festivals are drawn back, and we perceive behind them the source itself of all the festivals.

The mood of the Trinity epistle is at once particular and expansive. It is spoken in the voice of the collective 'we'. Its three stanzas describe the interrelationship between the qualities of the Father, of the Son and of the Spirit. Furthermore, each stanza describes how each of the members of the Trinity relates to our own being and existence, to our soul and spirit. This epistle can be heard as an extension of the three lines spoken during the Act of Consecration of Man when the three crosses are made. In these moments we ask that God the Father be in us, that God the Son work as a creative force in us, that God's holy, healing Spirit enlighten us.

The Trinity epistle is an expansion of these three basic sentences. In the epistle, the three aspects of God are described, not as though he were some distant being sitting in a heaven beyond; rather he is immanent in us, working now, in and through us. He is perceived through our feeling. God works in our thinking. He works in the very nature and fact of our consciousness. Since God became a human being, we can experience him in the very nature of our being human; he is born, suffers, dies, rises. God shines in the light of our thinking. He works in what we know and do. Our very attempt to grasp his nature is his working in us, because our reaching for him is at the same time his reaching for us. The three aspects of God can be felt and perceived in the very fact of our existence, through what we feel, through what we do, and what we know.

The first stanza of the Trinity epistle concerns God the Father. The conscious experience of our very existence is a portal into an experience of him. Over the long ages of evolution, God poured his Being into creating a world that we could live in. Not only do we live, we know we live. We exist! Moreover we are aware that we are, rather than 'are not'. We owe our being to the Being of the Father. He is the steadiness of being itself, and as such, he permeates everything, all our substance, both material and non-material. Not only is God poured out into the world; he is inside of us, as our awareness of our self as a continuing self. He moves in and with us, in and through all the phases of our being: before we

*Cynthia Hinder is a priest of The Christian Community in Los Angeles.*

were born, on earth, after we die. As Paul said, 'In him we live and move and have our being.'<sup>2</sup>

The second stanza concerns God the Son. We are creatures, created beings. According to Genesis, we were created in God's image.<sup>3</sup> We are destined to become a likeness of God. God not only is, that is, not only does he exist; he also creates and transforms. If we are created according to his image, then we too are ultimately creators. When we achieve our full potential, we will have become a likeness of the creator.

Our speaking is one place where we are creative, albeit for now often somewhat unconsciously. Whole worlds, true and fictive, material and non-material can stream forth from our mouths. The second stanza of the Trinity epistle makes us aware that today God's Son, the Logos, the Creating Word of John's Prologue, continues its creating; but now God's Son creates through us; the act of creation has been given over to humanity. Creation and its evolution continue in our thoughts, in our words, in what we do. Creation continues 'in all the soul's creating.' This suggests to us the intimate nature of our relationship to Christ. Because he is an eternal being, everything he did he continues to do. He incarnated once in a single human being; he continues to incarnate in single human beings. Having become human, having expanded his being to cover the whole living earth at his Ascension, he now lives deep inside each of us. God the Father supports our being. Christ supports our being alive. From inside of us, he gives us life and maintains our life. His continuously creating life sustains our life; he continues to create through us, now, moment by moment. He now can create through what our souls think and invent; through how our feelings guide our action, 'in all the soul's creating.' We experience him in our creative humanity.

The third stanza is dedicated to the Holy Spirit. It might be worthwhile here to spend a moment with the word 'spirit'. This word spirit is perhaps something of a mystery. What is spirit? By its very nature it seems to elude our grasp. We find ourselves seeking its meaning in the non-material world; is spirit the breath of life? Is it our non-physical soul? Is spirit an incorporeal being? Is it an essence or quality? Is it energy? Is it consciousness itself?

I would suggest that it is something of all of the above. One can perhaps understand that by the word 'spirit', a living being is meant. But what is the nature of 'spirit'? I would suggest that one important aspect of spirit consists in a level of consciousness. As a child, one has a certain perhaps intense and immediate awareness of what one sees, of what one feels. At the same time, the child usually experiences adults, particularly parents and teachers, almost as gods, as beings who are greater and more powerful. This is because as a child, one's own wisdom of experience is as yet small. There is so much that the child does not understand about the world; so much that is unforeseen, because the consciousness of the child lives in the here and now, in the moment. The adult has a higher and broader awareness of the world, an awareness of the past, of the future, and even of the child's momentary and future place in it.

If we transpose this dynamic of consciousness to the world of angelic beings, we can imagine the consciousness of an angel to be even higher and broader than that of the human. And as we move up the ladder of the hierarchies to the Trinity above, the degree and breadth and width of consciousness becomes unimaginable.

The nature of consciousness is further described not only by the degree of its awareness, but also by its quality. For example our

language speaks of a spirit of brotherhood, or of being mean-spirited. The Holy Spirit is God's consciousness. His consciousness is permeated by an unimaginable degree and quality of love. Just as God's consciousness is aware of everything, so is his love all-permeating and all-inclusive.

In the wee hours, lying awake in the dark, we can feel ourselves alone, separated from everyone, literally in the dark. Terrors arise. Yet when the sun rises, the quality of our consciousness changes. We can experience a sense of relief, for somehow the sunlight lightens our thoughts and feelings. We feel healed of the sick sense of terror. The feeling of separateness disappears as we rejoin the world and we think in a more light-filled way. And if we were to imagine further, we can picture that through our own light-filled thinking, the amount of inner light in the interior of the world, the soul of the world, is increased.

The Holy Spirit enlightens us with a deeper understanding of the world, of ourselves and of destiny. God's spirit consciousness, drenched with love and healing, is like the sun at dawn. His cosmic sun of love sheds the light of understanding on the world, and on us. It illuminates everything in the world. In moments when we grasp this, this light of love can begin to shine out of everything we see. God's spirit of love can even enlighten the way we perceive and understand. And when that happens, we are healed of our sense of separateness, even if only momentarily. Furthermore, our enlightened way of seeing can result in an enlightened knowledge, a kind of knowledge that itself increases the light of love in the world. Our light of love can be taken up by the Spirit of Love. A kind of respiration begins to take place between the healing Spirit and ourselves. He can take up our enlightened knowing; and at the same time,

his loving light of awareness can permeate our thinking, drench our feeling, and inspire our actions. This may happen only for moments now; but it will increase in the future as human beings evolve further.

In this epistle, we come to understand the nature of the Trinity and at the same time, we come to know and understand ourselves. God is present and active not only in heaven; he is present and active in the world; he is present and active in us. In realizing this, we also come to an awareness of our true being. In a certain very real sense, the Trinity epistle is an expression of the heart and source of all the festivals. It creates the backdrop for all the epistles.

### **Michaelmas**

Michaelmas is the last festival season of the Christian liturgical year, the ninth of nine festivals illumined by four Trinity intervals. Michaelmas is preceded by a ten week Trinity interval in August and September. This interval, especially with its gospel readings, can be seen as a pathway toward Michaelmas. The Michaelmas season itself begins on September 29, the feast day of Michael the Archangel, and covers the following four Sundays and the weeks following them. The colours of the altar and vestments are pink edged with light green. They are the pastel hues of the colours of Easter. The pink and light green of Michaelmas let us feel how the victorious power of Easter is transformed in human beings through the great inner light of Christ in us. In the Easter colours of red and green, the powers of heaven take hold of earthly matter. In pink and pale green, earthly matter is transfigured and purified. The mood of the heart is earnest, searching.

The epistle expresses great contrasts, but is balanced, centered and upright. It speaks in the communal voice. The place from which it

is spoken is an interior space of soul; this soul has eyes that behold a countenance, a face. The face is the face of the Archangel Michael, and Michael's face is itself a kind of transparent mask behind which we see Christ as the divine-human healer, the God of all Humanity. In the past, Michael once stood in front of God the Father; now he stands before Christ, especially during the offering of earth substances, of ourselves, and of Christ in the Act of Consecration of Man. He helps overcome those adversary powers that would act as an unhealthy weight, an enslaving force to our spirits. He helps our hearts find the power to lift heavenwards that which is earthly, so that the earthly can receive the transforming, spiritualizing power of the divine. Indeed, salvation and healing are not only for our own souls; they are for the whole earth.

The epistle speaks of Michael's earnestness, which stands as a necessary preparation before Christ's loving gentleness. We are to take ourselves, both the good and the bad, seriously. We are to take seriously what we are doing, especially what we do in service to the divine. Michael stretches his hand against the devouring dragon of egotism, and at the same time he beckons us to follow him to a greater understanding of what Christ did in incarnating, dying and rising; he encourages us to see how Christ continues to work creatively, now and into the future. Michael would bring the light of conscious awareness to our life in Christ, so that the light of heaven will continue to shine on earth, through us, for us, and for all creatures, now and forever.

The inserted prayer furthers this motif of the heart's conscious awareness. We ask Michael, perhaps surprisingly, to lead us, not into the heights, but into the depths of our own soul; for it is in the depths that Christ brings the spirit light of awareness into human hearts.

Rather than a wish to escape the turmoil and darkness and the heaviness of earthly being, the prayer expresses a wish to plumb the profound layers of the soul, in steadfast longing for the light that brings healing to the unconscious depths.

The word heart appears three times in this prayer; first simply as human hearts, then in a properly enkindled 'fire of the heart'. During Holy Week we heard of hearts that burn, and at Pentecost of hearts aflame. Now we hear of hearts that turn toward Christ-Michael, so that healing can work in us. This echoes the change of heart and mind of the flame-word at St. John's Tide. Now this turning of heart is fulfilled through our own free choice, in longing for the wholeness of healing. This final festival prayer of the Christian year sums up all that has gone before, as we move into the next round of the future.

Michaelmas is followed by the fourth Trinity interval in November. The gospel readings are taken from the Revelation to John, the book of our future. This interval leads us into the next round, the beginning of a new liturgical year at Advent. Christ is coming; he is at once always here, and always arriving.

- 1 Liturgical texts are meant to be heard in the context of the living service to the divine in which they are embedded, not read on paper. It is the author's hope that these contemplations of the theme of the heart's seasons in the epistles will help accompany and prepare the listener to hear and live more deeply into the words and mood of the Christian festivals. The author owes much of the content of this article to the work of Hans Werner Schroeder, *Die Episteln der Menschenweihehandlung*.
- 2 Acts 17:28. Here Paul quotes the Cretan philosopher Epimenides.
- 3 Genesis 1:26. 'Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness.'

# Dying and Becoming: Being Rapunzel

David Knight

*Go forth upon your journey from  
this world, O Christian soul,  
in the name of God the Father almighty  
who created you;  
in the name of Jesus Christ  
who suffered death for you;  
in the name of the Holy Spirit  
who strengthens you;  
in communion with the blessed saints,  
and aided by angels and archangels,  
and all the armies of the heavenly host.  
May your portion this day be in peace,  
and your dwelling the heavenly Jerusalem.*

(An ancient prayer usually called *Proficiscere*—  
the first two words of the prayer—  
and much in use in hospice ministry and in  
denominations with a formal sense of 'Last Rites'.

Dying and becoming is a Divine archetype. By which I mean that it is a recurrent Divine motif. It seems to be part of the essential pattern of all life and experience and reflects the, to us, usually inscrutable methodology of God in achieving His purposes. I am going to be sticking to one small part of the concept. The part I have chosen is not that surprising given that I am a hospice chaplain: namely, dying and becoming when our astonishingly wonderful, physical bodies finally wear out. The human mortality rate continues to be 100% and, given the vast numbers involved in this on-going human

dying, I will confine myself to the experience of dying with a hospice by your side and principally what the hospice can offer to those making those final, physical steps.

I'd like to begin with a story...

A king of a tiny country in a place that looked not unlike a mountainous, heavily laked and wooded corner of modern day Germany, was enjoying a golden life. Everyone agreed that he was a good king, prudent, wise and looking grand in uniform. They also approved of his choice of wife who had proved to be equally wise and just and endearingly less suited to uniforms. Quite without realising it, however, they had earned the enmity of a powerful witch, partly by not inviting her to the royal wedding but mainly because their obvious happiness and contentment drove her mad with jealousy.

It is said that revenge is a dish best served cold and the witch was happy to wait. It was only when some years later that the first, royal child was born, a princess, that she took both her revenge and the princess. This beautiful girl child was called Rapunzel and, still only a few weeks old, she was spirited away and imprisoned in a magical tower set in a magical forest. This tower was remarkable for having only one door, one window (in Rapunzel's room at the top of the tower) and no mirrors or reflective surfaces of any kind.

## Michael Tapp

Michael Tapp, who was born on 1 April 1993 died in Stroud in the early hours of Wednesday, 30 July. His funeral took place on 4 August.

Michael was lenker for Great Britain and Ireland from 1974 until he took on the same role for Australia/ New Zealand in 1988.

A full obituary will appear in the next issue of *Perspectives*.

As Rapunzel grew, she had no idea what she looked like and the most excruciating part of her suffering was that when the witch visited her daily with food, she would say each time, 'Rapunzel, you are ugly; you are very, very ugly. No-one can love you. No-one.'

As time went by Rapunzel's greatest fear became that of meeting any other person and being shamed by their revulsion at her ugliness. A growing part of her no longer wanted to escape from the tower. Her one consolation was her hair which was also magical, golden and of a great length. She would brush it for hours each day, the tresses falling far out of the window.

One day a prince, riding on a ridge above a forest, saw a young woman with a mass of golden hair in the high window of a great, black tower. Drawing his sword, he made his way slowly through the dangerous tumble of trees and brambles and eventually reaching the tower, called up to Rapunzel. Startled, afraid and crippled by her sense of ugliness, she hid. The prince, though, was charming and with wit and reassuring words eventually persuaded her to show herself and even to lower her hair so that he could climb up to her.

The story ends, we know, with the escape from the tower, the death of the witch and a life that was happy ever after.

However, the real climax of the story, which is often missed, is found in that first encounter at the window. As they finally look at each other, Rapunzel sees, reflected in the eyes of the prince, for the first time since her infant life and as a complete revelation, that she is both beautiful and already loved.

\*\*\*\*\*

The business of a hospice chaplain is to accompany those whose illnesses cannot be cured and to inject spiritual care into their

experience of the total flow of hospice care. It is an exercise that is pretty well captured by the words of this well-loved, Anglican litany-prayer:

*The Lord is here,  
his Spirit is with us.  
We need not fear,  
his Spirit is with us.  
We are surrounded by love,  
his Spirit is with us.  
We are immersed in peace,  
his Spirit is with us.  
We rejoice in hope,  
his Spirit is with us.  
We travel in faith,  
his Spirit is with us.*

Just because an illness cannot be cured doesn't mean that you haven't got lots of living to do yet and sometimes that journey can be years long, with hospice becoming a second home. Sometimes the journey is shorter and the taking of a healthy adult in the middle of life, with a diagnosis of a vigorous cancer and a prognosis of weeks, is not unknown either. Whether the journey is long or short, all the ideals of hospice care in accompanying the dying come down to one simple thing: love. Dame Cicely Saunders, who has a legitimate claim to be the mother of the modern hospice movement, spoke of the vocation of the hospice movement to love, when she said, 'You matter because you are you. You matter to the last moment of your life.'

Serious illness can make you feel ugly, separated from life and unloved. Your friends may avoid you (or visit briefly and gabble about the grapes), you may promptly lose your job or any sense of a meaningful social role, your sick body may change in appearance, colouring and sensed vitality and your

life may not make sense to you anymore. You may feel—and it may be with good reason—that you are suddenly isolated from your old life. This sense of isolation can be driven by many things, from your palette of make-up (developed over years and through many experiences) no longer being right for your changed skin colour, to the destruction of your immune system by radical treatment and the necessary avoidance of much human contact (called in Michel Petrone's great series of cancer-related paintings, 'The Island of Neutropenia'). Serious illness can be like a tower with the vicious words telling you that you are ugly.

To set against that horror, we have love: the most powerful weapon in the spiritual armoury. Love uniquely has the power to include, to reassure, to enoble, to generate hope, to strengthen faith: to make beautiful. People need to see in someone else's eyes that they are beautiful and loved. They need to see that they matter to the last moment of their lives.

The poet, Lucretius, writing many centuries ago, spoke of a continuous flow of matter, of atoms (then the smallest things imaginable) coalescing briefly to form a human being and then, inevitably, disintegrating as the individual returned to anonymity, oblivion and the ceaseless flow. There is nothing new in a materialist view of dying. For those who believe that death is final and that personality ceases absolutely (as a philosopher put it, a Greek this time, Epicurus, 'I was not; I have been; I am not; I do not mind'), this loving care is the last gift to be given to a fellow human and the mark of a truly civilised society.

For those of us who believe that the human personality survives death (a purposely general term to include all the varieties of

insights into continuing life) love is more active still.

I'd like to tell you another story about love:

While gardeners can be entirely ruthless with weeds, they can be the gentlest of people elsewhere in the garden. One such gardener, having just worked out all of his aggression on some ground elder came across a butterfly struggling out of a cocoon. Sitting quietly, with his flask of tea beside him, he watched the frantic wriggling for quite some time before deciding to lend a hand. Very gently, with his pruning knife, he eased things along making it easier for the butterfly to free itself. The emergent creature lay there strangely shrivelled and clearly unready for flight. Even a small drop of sweet tea placed carefully by its head failed to help. Gradually, and with a growing sense of sadness, it occurred to him that perhaps the struggle had been a necessary part of the process. Perhaps it was in the action of having to squeeze hard in order to get out of the cocoon that the hydraulic invigoration of the wings became possible! Perhaps, it was in the struggle that the ability to fly was earned. Of course he wouldn't have intervened to shorten the process if he'd known the devastating consequences of his mistaken kindness. Now, it was too late.

Hopefully, those who choose the mistaken kindness of something like a Dignitas induced death will, through the Grace of God, find a way back through the metaphysical damage caused.

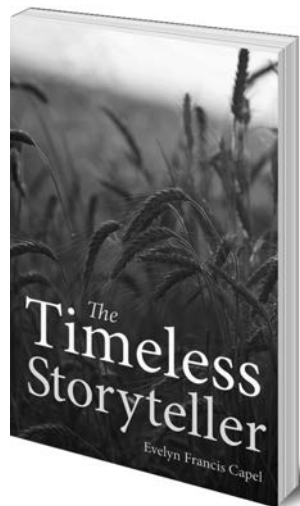
The story teaches that the process of dying and becoming is marked by

*David Knight  
is the Anglican  
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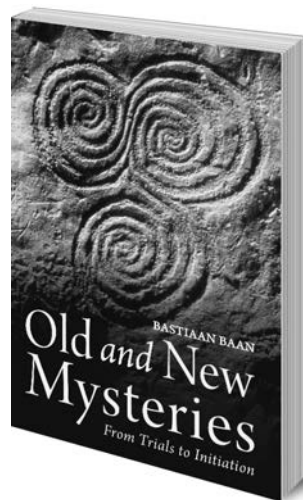
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struggle. It is likely to be unavoidable if we are to experience a full rebirth.

For those of us who believe in the survival of the human personality beyond death, love in end of life care is more than a civilised action: it includes the active (although tentatively expressed) expectation that God is about to spring the most fabulous surprise through the experience of dying. This makes all the difference: 'dying and becoming' as a concept, takes flight. Pain has a context and purpose. Loss hurts but isn't irretrievably bleak. In the vigil with the dying we can have poise and perspective. We have a Divine comedy: a Shakespearian comedy, where everyone ends up alive on stage.

Those of us who believe that dying is a gestation, that dying is a process of becoming, know that love is the vehicle designed to take the soul on that birth journey with the greatest possible care and reassurance. Love on this side of the veil reflected back from our eyes, love in the eyes of the already dead who often come to visit before the end and lastly, and most great, love in the eyes of the Prince who welcomes us home to our eternal country.

An Anglican prayer based on the 90<sup>th</sup> Psalm:

*Teach us, Lord, so to number our days  
that we see the span of our life  
in the light of eternity.  
Reveal your splendour to us.  
Give us the wisdom and  
grace to know your love  
and to rejoice in your  
forgiveness and life;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

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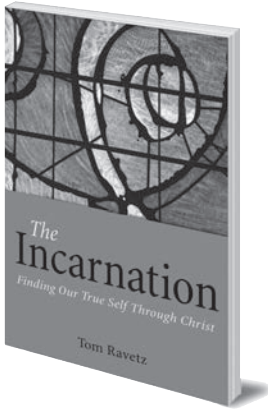


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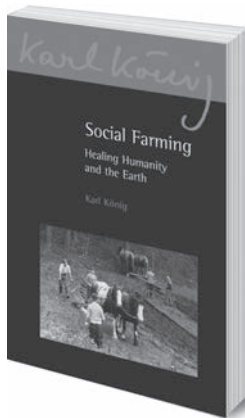
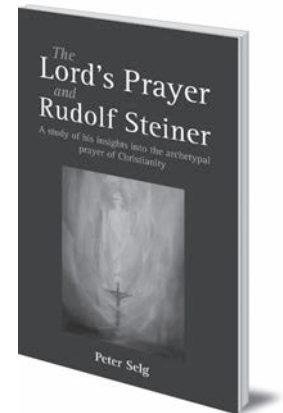
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