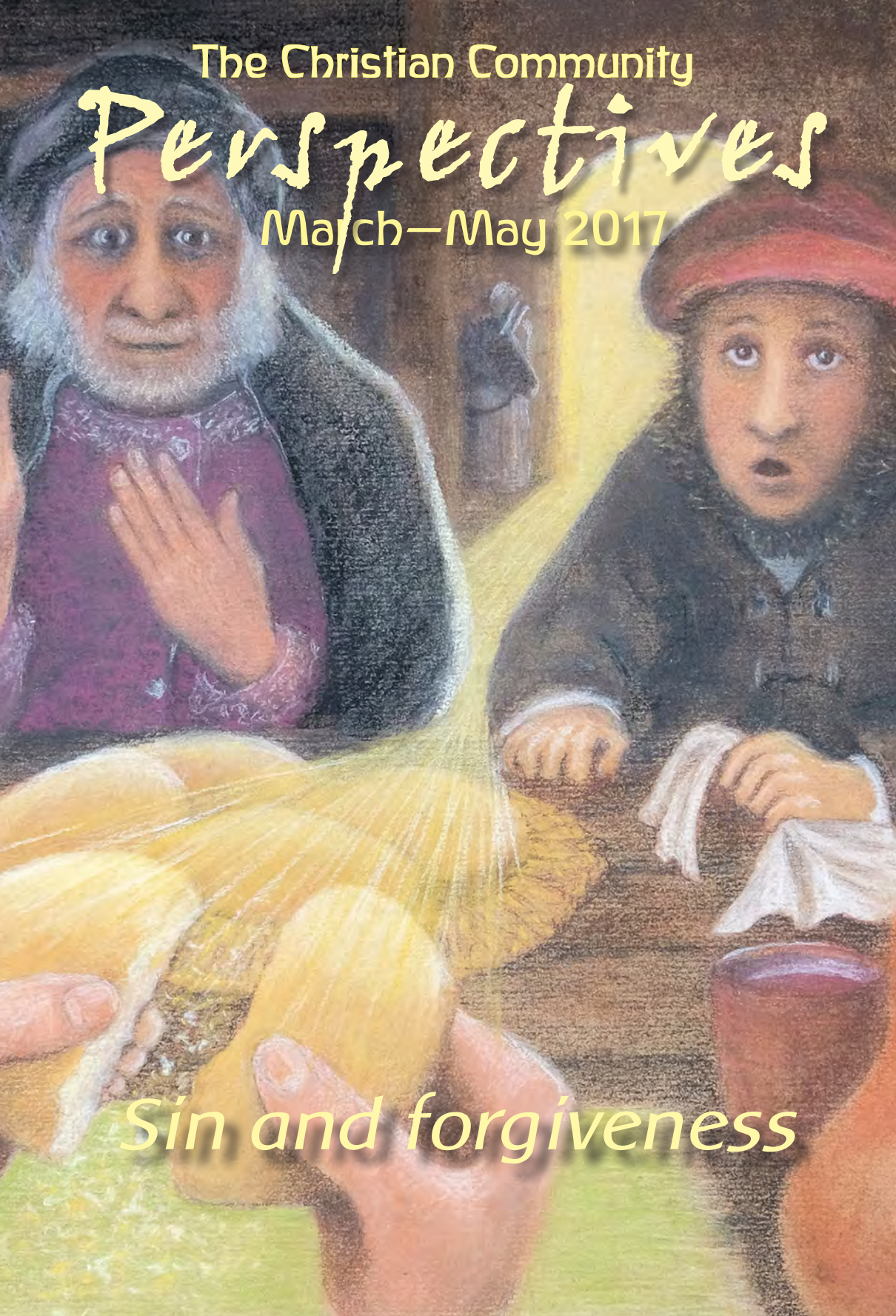


The Christian Community

# Perspectives

March—May 2017



*Sin and forgiveness*

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## **Cover picture:**

Diana Reynolds

*Inn at Emmaus (Moment of Revelation) Luke 24:31*

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Born 1945 in a fisherman's cottage in north-east Scotland. After an academic education I chose a career as a photographer. In time, with three children the family moved to Kings Langley where I became a Kindergarten teacher at the Rudolf Steiner School, and later pioneered Gardd Enfys (Rainbow Garden) in North Wales.

I have always painted landscapes, but in 2015 on encountering the remarkable paintings and sculptures by Greg Tricker, who depicts stories of unique people, I was moved to attempt paintings of people.

My recent pictures in pastels have been inspired by anthropology and the work of Rudolf Steiner. I've tried to capture moments in profound stories, and moments of revelation. I also draw inspiration from Rembrandt who is not only the master of light, but of gesture and facial expression.

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# Perspectives

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*We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace. (Ephesians 1:7)*

For many modern human beings, the thought that God needs to forgive us is quite foreign. Is it really possible to imagine that our failings and peccadillos concern the ground of all being, ultimate reality itself? Do we have to imagine that the spiritual world is keeping score and would hold our sins against us if we were not forgiven? The idea of an original guilt that came into the world through Adam and for which we need to be forgiven is even further from the contemporary mind. The psychological insights of the last century have gone a long way to help us to understand neuroses and complexes that cramp us and prevent us from reaching our full potential. Understanding gained through self-reflection or with the help of a counsellor has replaced reliance on the sacraments of the church and the forgiveness of God that used to seem so important.

However, with all that we can do to understand the depths of our psychology and work consciously with what we find there, a certain dissatisfaction with our current state seems to belong to the human condition. Anyone who spends time reflecting on their experiences will find that there is a discrepancy between the person they feel they really are and the person they manage to be in daily life. Perhaps I have contemplated deeply

the virtue of listening and making space for the point of view of the other. Sitting quietly in my study, it seemed so clear that this is the ideal I wish to follow. Nevertheless, in the full flow of a meeting, I quickly forget and jump into the conversation, perhaps speaking over someone else because I am so anxious to bring in my own insight. Maybe I have been inspired by reading about a life that embodied true loving kindness, and I resolve to cultivate this virtue. Once again, it is easy to feel quite sure that I will be able to change my ways; once I am at work, or in the stresses and strains of daily life, I lose sight of my ideal. St Paul puts this very clearly: 'For the good which I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I practise.' (Romans 7:19)

Living in this tension between ideals and reality is an essential part of human experience. Contemplating the extremes makes this clearer: we can give up our striving altogether and cease trying to change and grow—then we are hardly living a human life. Or we can give way to fantasy and ignore the evidence that we are not the perfect self we dream of—then we have lost touch with reality. Deeper reflection helps us to see that what we are encountering in this tension is not the result of a lack of effort, but a fundamental limitation. If we decided to go for the world record in sprinting having never run before, we would soon have to acknowledge that we can train all we like, but a simple limitation of our physique would prevent us from reaching our goal. In the case of our moral efforts, it is harder to acknowledge the limitation, because we sense rightly that the more perfect self does belong to us, even if we cannot make it real in our daily lives.

The western Christian tradition, inspired by St Augustine, has seen sin largely as original or transmitted guilt. Adam's act of rebellion was transmitted down the generations through concupiscence, the desire that sullies procreation. This contrasts with the emphasis in the eastern tradition, which sees the Fall as an objective change in what it means to be human. Salvation is not focussed primarily on forgiveness but on healing and restoration. In this regard, the Act of Consecration, which emphasises the 'sickness of sin', is more in line with Orthodox than with western theology.

Here it is interesting to look at the original meaning of the Greek words in the quotation from Ephesians above: redemption and forgiveness. ‘Redemption’—*apolutrósis* in Greek—is an image drawn from hostage-taking and commercial transactions. Today we still speak of redeeming a pledge, or redeeming a ticket in a pawnshop. In St Paul’s thought, Adam’s sin has made us belong at least in part to the Devil; redemption means that Christ pays a price to release us from this bondage. When we speak of being ‘wage-slaves’ or being trapped in cycles of addiction or abuse, we acknowledge that our freedom can be curtailed by powers outside of us. ‘Forgiveness’—*aphesis* in Greek—originally meant release from bondage or imprisonment. We might imagine that our failings trap us within a prison of our own making. Such a thought is not far from conceptions of neurosis that see the limitations that our mental models put upon our understanding of reality. Again, the emphasis is not so much on personal guilt and blame, but on an objective change that has come about.

When relating to others who have offended us, it is useful to inquire how the course of action that seemed so hurtful and wrong to me felt like the right thing to do for the one who committed the offence. This does not mean that one has to justify what has happened. There is a difference between empathic understanding and bland acceptance. One positive result of the last year of political turmoil in Britain and the USA has been an acknowledgement that bandying insults from either side of an ideological divide will not produce creative results socially and politically. Might we find in the theology of forgiveness a way of acknowledging our own and each other’s brokenness and of releasing each other from the grip of powers far greater than we can counter on our own? Then our request in the Lord’s Prayer to be forgiven as we forgive could take on a cosmic dimension: we ask to be released from a bondage which we are ourselves attempting to dissolve. When human beings approach each other in a spirit of true forgiveness, they are reducing the dominion of the powers that otherwise hold them hostage. They are joining in the work of Christ.

TOM RAVETZ

# A thought for Easter

*Calvary [Golgotha] is a bifurcation in human history. There are two ways for that history to go after Calvary: one leads to disaster for all humanity, and the other saves humanity from that disaster. Calvary was an event in which man confronted God and God man. At that point in history God put himself at the mercy of man, proposing himself as a source and wellspring of a new and everlasting life for humanity, offering it from within humanity... The autonomy of the human race was accepted by God, so God had to allow himself to be either accepted or rejected by man. He was rejected; God was assigned to death. And just here an amazing turn of affairs takes place. For God accepted the rejection as a way of going on being present in the world for human beings—a way those who wanted to accept could accept, when and if they wanted, and a way those who wanted to reject could reject. God resurrected his proposal in a new guise, proposing himself as rejected for man's acceptance. From this point on human beings can choose between two histories: the normal natural history that will go on without heed of Calvary, and another graced history which will line up behind a God who has shown that though people can kill, they can never prevent the dead from rising again.*

From *(How to Read) Aquinas* by Timothy McDermott. Grant Books 2007

# Sin and forgiveness

Martin Samson

Recently I had a conversation with a person who was apologetically telling me that they didn't believe in forgiveness. They thought it was a Christian contrivance that was, in reality, very counterproductive in their lives. Part of me had to agree. I too, have experienced situations where I thought forgiveness had been granted, or even reconciliation achieved, and it emerged that the other person involved (or was it me?) still harboured feelings of anger or ill will. That process had made a mockery of forgiveness and became a social platitude to avoid the pain of real forgiveness.

So what then is forgiveness? Is it a social construct by which we can live and let live, or even a psycho-therapeutic process by which we gain some freedom from an event that dominates our lives? Both have a valid place and role in the world. However, is it possible that forgiveness is not a state, an outcome, or a healing process, but a living spirituality? Forgiveness can be seen as a path by which we live to become more 'in tune' spiritually. This also allows us to unfold love in action, or what we commonly call compassion. Forgiveness can become a way of life through which we actually develop compassion. The injustice becomes the fuel for us to become able to walk a path of forgiveness and compassion in our lives. Forgiveness becomes a daily practice for our compassion.

There is a saying: 'You can only forgive the unforgivable.' This implies that forgiveness requires a certain tenacity of soul highlighted by another contemporary saying, which emerges when people are indignant about something which has offended them: 'First world problem!' How many of the things we take exception to, hold grudges about, and occupy a portion of our antagonistic emotions, are actually situations that require forgiveness? Some of them really require us to realize how petty we often are when we compare our woes to really desperate situations. Is our feeling of being transgressed against a first world problem, or do we really have unforgivable transgressions in our lives that make these smaller things more difficult to process? I think many readers of this article would agree that there are events in our lives that are unforgivable! How do we assess their role in our destiny? Were these events something we sought, to be part of our formation

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through our biography? Are there things that happen to us that are purely unjust? Can we transform the energy of these events into something we can use in our lives?

This brings us to a core starting point in the question of sin and forgiveness. There are things in our lives that can be considered an injustice, events that by all reasonable assessment we think we did not deserve. When we look at others' lives we can feel that in their destiny too. This is an example of the practice of loving kindness offered to humanity by the Gautama Buddha. It is called *Meta*: the development of feeling oneself, one's friends and strangers, even our deepest enemy and all of life, as deserving of health and wellbeing. We can learn to offer all of them wellness and loving kindness. From this attitude we can understand how events which are averse to our health and wellbeing can be seen as unjust. If we deserve and want wellbeing for all, then anything that causes distress and makes us unwell might be considered out of sync with what our experience of life is supposed to be.

However, we must return time and again to the reality that we all encounter, and ultimately have to accept, that there are things in our lives that happen to us that place us firmly at odds with what we would want for ourselves. As the saying goes, 'stuff happens!'

How do these events sit in our soul if we consider them to be unjustly visited upon ourselves? We could begin by recognizing that there is a loss of innocence, a loss of a naivety and a transgression against a childlike quality within us. As we begin to feel our way into how and why a particular injustice occurred, we apportion blame to a person, an accident of nature, an illness or some other cause. We can easily find causality outside of ourselves and focus the attention of our emerging resentment upon this object.

### **Feeling betrayed**

It is not unusual to feel that our innocence, our naive assumption that all will be well, deservedly well, in the scheme of things has been betrayed. We find that it is often a trusted person or familiar energy that has transgressed our sense of belonging. It was, after all, one of Christ's closest companions who betrayed him!

An essential dynamic of the story of forgiveness is to comprehend that we have been 'sinned against', betrayed, and that the event becomes traumatic. Where a transgression of the just entitlement of belonging and care is broken, we experience betrayal. No matter the relative size of the event, it is still an objective deed that becomes a persistent script in our souls. A memory forms that confines the event to its proper place and acts as a healer of our



wounds to protect us from further hurt. This guardian memory is a key to forgiveness as a form of spirituality.

During a workshop on this theme, a woman participant expressed that a path that we can take with such events is to let our resentment escalate into rage and a desire for revenge. In many ways it can be considered almost inevitable and necessary to honour and acknowledge our pain. Society may strongly suggest we need helpful people, processes and therapies to help us quickly get through this phase of the process. In fact, there is huge pressure today to navigate beyond our pain and move on.

It is worth reiterating that, if forgiveness is to become spirituality, then after injustice and betrayal, the rage and related emotional expressions can actually be helpful for us for a time. The danger is that we can become hardened in them. What then is their useful application?

We have arrived at a very interesting juncture in the process of understanding sin, an unjust transgression against us or another, and forgiveness. It is the part where we realise that the injustice is an irreversible reality! This is why we are resentful and get angry: we can never go back. Our innocence, or the part that was damaged or lost through this violation, can never be restored. In the strongest terms we can say that our being has been abused and that from an objective point of view we are owed justice. A debt is owed to us through the betrayal, but no amount of what is offered will undo the wounding. We need to find a way to live with our wounds. Caroline Myss has suggested we need to make a sacred contract with our wounds, which could be considered a way of describing forgiveness. There is a point in the healing process where we might find ourselves stuck waiting for the counter event that will make things well and whole again, and repair our relationship. Yet it is a bitter medicine to swallow to realise that it is I, the offended, who must create the counter event.

This is not to suggest that justice and reconciliation processes are irrelevant. It is extremely important that we find ways to bring about reconciliatory processes where a perpetrator can stand in front of the victim/s to offer apologies and witness the impact of their deeds. A real meeting in love between two people can be deeply healing. As I write this there is a story making national news of a young man who drove his car into a young child. He was then able, through the father's presence, to be there when the child's life support was turned off. At that moment the father, a minister, and the young man hugged each other and cried. The child is not alive, the young man must live knowing what he did, but the deed is transformed. The memory becomes a guardian for him to remain awake in the process of life.

## **How do we forgive?**

It is by embracing a new paradigm of 'forgive and remember' (let your pain be your guide to love) rather than the more popular 'forgive and forget' (move on from your pain) that allows forgiveness to transform from being a banality. If we just want to forgive, forget and move on, we are only addressing one part of forgiving. We are avoiding the emotional depths we can plumb from contemplating our transgressions or the wrongs done to us. We can take 'the forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us' to another level. How do we forgive?

We can forgive the debt! We can take the initiative and say I forgive your debt. This is the first part of the process where we must say 'I will forgive and forget. I no longer hold you accountable to pay me back'. This is not easy.

How can we go through rage, to reaching the point of releasing the objective debt? I think grief is the way. Before we can embrace forgiveness as a path of remembrance, a sacred contract with our wound, we need to stand at peace with the injustice. This can take years, and in some cases may not be attainable, due to the scale of abuse and impact it has had upon us. Nevertheless, we can work towards it. It is a path of courage and pain, expressed through grief. Grief at our lost innocence, grief at what we must feel. Through tears and anger (an essential part of grief), we wash our souls clean. The release of energy is helpful to us in that it also washes away our attachments to what we justifiably would be due! Forgiving allows us to remain conscious of the debt we are owed and then slowly purge ourselves of any overbearing claim or expectation of redress from another. This does not take away the pain of the wound, but frees it for spiritual work and compassion.

Through manifesting grief, the memory of the injustice safeguards our injury in a new way. It no longer merely protects our wound from further pain. Through grief and conscious choice, we release the wound from its desire for retribution or compensation. The important development is to know that the wound and pain are still there!

This is where the new paradigm and the spirituality come to a new expression. We may need to re-establish the lack of claim on our debts every day for years, or for the rest of our life, which is a deeply spiritual commitment to not letting our injuries control our existence. This is the sacred contract that was previously mentioned. The new aspect is the 'forgive and remember' process which means that every time I see an injustice in the world, especially one similar to what happened to me, my wound will ache. The pain becomes the spur to choose to love in a better fashion. Forgiveness, then, is essentially establishing a new source of love in action, and that is why it is never over. It

is creating a living memory that will continuously remind us to be humble, non-judgemental and discover ways to act in love when we witness injustice.

As suggested earlier, forgiveness seems to be so unfair since it is the one who has been harmed who must do the work to transform the energy of the sins against them. There are many stories and healing modalities that express this dynamic. The concept of the wounded healer suggests that we are better healers when we have been wounded ourselves and use these injuries as the source of our healing.

The *Earthsea* series of books by Ursula le Guin tells the tale of a young wizard who performs magic out of arrogance and has a wound inflicted upon his throat. In the future, each time he is about to perform magic, the scar begins to ache, acting as a call to conscience. In that moment all the work done, the anger, the grief, the establishing of forgiveness as the source of compassion, feed into our future deeds in the world.

The injustice of betrayal is converted through grief into forgiveness which in turn becomes compassion and love. It takes us beyond an objective empathy to a real strength for transformative deeds in the world. We allow the sins of the world to enter into us and transform them into an expression of love. Through this we build the capacity to bear the distress of the world in a way where we can find meaningful engagement with it in the present as well as a compelling future.

*The Young Man who fled naked* — Mark 14:52, Diana Reynolds



# The art of dying and forgiving

Luke Barr

What is forgiveness; where does it live within us; how does it unfold? It seems to be of vital import to our world and yet we have hardly begun to understand it. Even when we want to forgive and may be persuaded of the general benefits for all concerned, we find that there is something hindering us from doing so. Our conscious soul life cannot simply decide to forgive, in the usual manner of a decision.

Forgiveness does not easily yield up its secrets, particularly to the casual enquirer. It demands an inner maturity in human souls. This makes it all the more precious. True forgiveness creates in the soul a reverential modesty—one does not speak about it, let alone boast. Rather, it is always a quiet deed of true love. The act of forgiveness is often intangible; it leaves no visible trace. And yet it fundamentally changes everything. Whether one is the recipient or the one who bestows forgiveness, it seems to transcend our normal human range of possibilities. It is something divine. We do not possess it—it seems to flow between giver and recipient, and belongs to neither.

And yet, just as we need to know more about the Being of Love and Freedom, we need to understand more how he functions or moves in our world of cause and effect. We may do this through practising forgiveness, in which deed becomes experiential knowledge.

Forgiveness is deemed of such importance for the human soul that it is a prominent part of the Lord's Prayer that was given as a gift to mankind. We may designate it as the second of the earthly petitions. Esoterically, this second petition involves our life forces, that subtle part of the human constitution where the soul and body meet.

Here, where they meet, a wound, or several wounds in the soul, can drain the vitality of our life forces. It can do so to such an extent that it can

render the physical body practically useless. One becomes unable to effectively engage further in life. Hence, the life, or etheric body, is pivotal to the human soul's task in finding its purpose.

Furthermore, it seems to be bound up with our destiny. The etheric field of human interaction (the 'flow' between us) is the realm where the Christ is Lord of Karma. Our karma with each other is very much dependent upon the mystery of forgiveness. For

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the obstacles and problems in our lives may be thresholds through which we have to pass in order to progress on our path. Forgiveness is a gift of the gods, a grace, to help us approach those thresholds fearlessly. It has the power to dissolve karma.

In our times, the constitution of the human soul is becoming increasingly thin-skinned. The world of hectic sense impressions has left the soul exposed. In this way, it is as if we are being compelled to practice the art of forgiveness. Our constitution now demands it of us. It is a token of our apocalyptic times.

### **The seven epochs and their mysteries**

In the occult tradition, one may hear of there being seven great mysteries. They correspond to the seven cultural epochs of world history. Thus the fourth, or central mystery fell in the fourth epoch, which is called the Graeco-Latin epoch. It is the period of time during which Christ walked the Earth. Humanity of that time strove to understand the central mystery of this epoch. These were the mysteries of birth and death. Even today, we are unable to fully penetrate into these mysteries. But the more that we understand of the mysteries of birth and death, the more we will be 'grounded in the Spirit' and thereby be prepared to begin to understand the mystery of the fifth epoch: the mystery of evil. We may then apprehend the vital importance of grasping the mysteries of birth and death.

Until now, we in the West have been extremely uncomfortable with death. We have preferred to sweep it under the carpet. It has been indecent to talk about it too openly. I believe that in our coming times, we must be prepared to 'befriend' death. It must no longer be seen as the unspeakable enemy. Otherwise, it sits as a basic fear in the soul. This fear serves to feed evil.

Forgiveness is a process in time; its unfolding is a mystery. No one can tell how long it will take. It requires then a *faith* in the process, a *good will*. If we could practise it more often, the world would look radically different. Moreover, it would help to prepare us for the encounters with temptation and evil that the Lord's Prayer speaks of, and which we may expect will increasingly be the problems of our time.

### **Dying as a life process**

Just as the great Goethe was indebted to Luke Howard for his work in bringing order and clarification to the nebulae of clouds, I feel that Elisabeth Kübler-Ross has given us a great help in working with that emotional and spiritual nebula which we call dying. Through understanding death and

dying, we are better equipped to understand and take hold of life. As is well known, Kübler-Ross has enumerated and described five stages in the process of dying. These are: denial, anger, bargaining, despair and acceptance.

It occurred to me that we not only journey through these five basic stages in relation to death, but also with regard to that other manifestation of the human life body, *illness*. In fact, in all the phenomena of the life or etheric forces, we may experience these stages of dying that Kübler-Ross has recognised. Dying belongs intrinsically to life, and vice versa. The two are constantly at work within each other, unceasingly weaving together.

I suggest that forgiveness is a process that takes place in the life body of the human being, and is thereby also a *dying process*.

Perhaps we may follow the path that Kübler-Ross has prepared for us, and enumerate five stages (which may be better understood as five qualities unfolding, much as a plant does in time) in the process of forgiving. The first stage is **denial** of the issue; there is a refusal to speak of it, or to confront whatever the issue may be. One treats it or the person as if they were dead. It is too painful to think of or to speak of.

**Anger:** There are many ways that this stage may be activated. Today it is increasingly through forms of therapy. Positively seen, the soul life is now awakened and something will happen. However, the anger is primarily experienced as a destructive flooding of the soul in which the dams of denial are overwhelmed. It is now *out there* and can cause havoc if it fails to evolve beyond this stage.

**Bargaining:** Usually the realm of the law. One wishes now for some form of objective acknowledgement of the wrong that has been done and a commensurate recompense. This is completely understandable. We try and find a way forward according to 'how things have always been done'. We demand that the other gives way, that they apologise and show remorse. This is, however, merely a polarisation/exacerbation of the situation. It entrenches opposite positions. Alone, it is unlikely to work.

**Despair:** If one can see beyond the pointlessness of bargaining, then one is thrown into despair *for we see no human way forward*. There is nothing in the realm of our experience that helps us. It is a point of hopelessness. It is the threshold, an abyss that most people refuse to go to. We would rather stay with the 'safe' stage of the law and bargaining.

At the culmination of the Offertory in the Act of Consecration of Man, we also speak of a threshold having been reached in which we ask that our human error, and the evil in our personal speech, be nullified before this

life-changing point. A personal silence, the silence of the soul, enters the process at this point.

The threshold then leads to the Transubstantiation, the realm of transformation. Basic form and even substance, the things of the world, are changed here.

Likewise, in the fifth stage, the threshold leads us to an utterly existential realm; a realm of transformation, the realm of the new: **acceptance**. This acceptance must be reached through traversing consciously the path of the previous four stages, all in varying degrees, depending upon the individual and the circumstance. More often than not, it requires predominantly the ability to endure despair, to drink the dregs without a complete inner collapse. What happens when, after the despair has penetrated us, we accept?

Up until now, the first four stages have played themselves out in 'all the ways of our human soul'. Now, with acceptance, we enter the realm of the 'I am', that essential part of us which rarely appears. It is the sphere of the Spirit.

Acceptance is then a heightened decision, an activity of the 'I', a conscious 'letting go' or 'dying'. Acceptance possesses courage, a quality of the force of the ego. Acceptance has the courage to go over the threshold, not out of a negative despair ('throwing in the towel') but rather, through hope, another quality of the 'I'— but a hope that has fully tasted despair. It is a realisation that there is something greater that can now enter into the chain of circumstances and which transcends our causality. That is, it breaks out of the bonds of the cause and effect of the problem. Acceptance helps us to transcend the apparent limits of the soul. Here, we can truly say, 'He must increase, I must decrease' (John 3:30).

In the 'I' ('the place of Thy heart' as it is called in the Passiontide prayer) the chaotic disturbances of the soul life decrease and space is made there for the greater principle, Christ. It is Christ who can enter at this point of acceptance. And then all things are possible.

Where Passiontide has been the domain of denial, anger, bargaining and despair, Easter announces the miracle of acceptance. The place of the heart, which once felt empty, is now full and we experience the comfort of spirit. Acceptance is resurrection. It goes beyond our imagining of what could happen, which is based on past thought forms and feelings. It is the in-flooding of 'grace and truth' (John 1:14) which clears a new path in our lives. It 'makes all things new' (Rev 21:5). This is forgiveness. It is freedom and love. It is the Christ in us.

# The diary of the woman of Samaria

from the Gospel of John, 4:4–34

## Douglas Thackray

Unlike most of the women of my town I am considered self-reliant and think nothing of walking alone to the well. I have problems with some people but then who hasn't? It is mainly to do with small-town talk about my many relationships. One can hardly blame them after all. My focus has always been on the bigger questions of life and that is where the walk to the well comes in. I treat this as a pilgrimage, treading daily on the ground of the forefathers of Joseph and Jacob who lie buried nearby. It is like walking over the blood of Israel<sup>1</sup>, this land lying in the region of Mount Gerezim where we have our temple so as to be as near to God as we can.

One day, as I left the holy city of Sechem with my water jar, I remembered the city's noble past and when God appeared to Abraham, telling him of the sacredness of this ground for future generations.<sup>2</sup> Later it was here where Joshua with his people made a covenant to honour God and to worship only him, and he placed his covenant under a rock by the oak tree at the centre of the city.

I remember that as I walked on that particular day, I meditated the coming of the Messiah and repeated to myself the prophecy, 'I will raise for them a prophet from among their brothers, I will put my words into his mouth and he will tell them everything I commanded him.'<sup>3</sup> This is my faith, a bulwark against the constant attacks and derisions of the Jews.

Don't ask me why I went to the well at that time of day, as I had water at home. Despite this I found myself on the way. I had drawn the water from the well and had filled my jar and was ready for home. Unexpectedly, a stranger was suddenly sitting on the wall and on top of it, a Jewish man. He looked at me and I lowered my eyes, for I had never spoken to a Jew before and was not going

to start now. He asked me for some water but as I was not prepared to forget lightly the enmity between our races, I said to him, 'How come that you, a Jew, ask for a drink of water from me, a woman of Samaria?' He ignored my question, replying, 'If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.'

It took me a moment to regain my composure. How was I to understand someone who first of all asks me for water and then immediately

*Douglas Thackray is a retired priest of The Christian Community living in Devon.*



afterwards offers me some? So I said to him, 'You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob who gave us this well and drank from it himself as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?' He answered, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'

I knew then that I would never forget those words. So I said to him, 'Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.' However, there still seemed to be something impeding me from receiving the water of life as he said, 'Go, call your husband and come back!' I replied, 'I have no husband.' He said, 'You are right when you say that you have no husband. The fact is you have had five husbands and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.'

I now began to understand him better. His asking for my husband was only a means to open up the chapter of my past concerning my many relationships. When he said 'what you have said is quite true,' I felt that I had received absolution; that I had become free. I think that if you experience a truly free moment, bigger questions than just the personal ones come to the fore, those which live in the heart of every Samaritan and therefore I said to him, 'Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.' He answered me, 'Believe me, woman, the time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. The time is coming when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. For they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth.'

These two sentences came like a thunderbolt out of the sky, wiping out all forms of ritual, wiping out all geographical significance of earthly locations, wiping out all other sign or symbols, all these to be replaced by the grace to worship God directly out of the spirit of truth in the heart of each human being.

I wanted to share with him the true longing of my heart to meet the Messiah. So I said, 'I know that the Messiah is coming, and he will explain everything to us.' And he replied: 'I am he who speaks to you.' I immediately recognized these words as the words that were spoken to Moses by God: 'I am the I am,' and I knew then that I was in the presence of the Messiah.

I lowered my head, overwhelmed to be in his presence yet unable to remain and so I rushed off to tell my people. Now that I am old, I reflect back on what had happened and realise that in some mysterious way, I played my part in the revelation of the Messiah to my people.

1 Gen. 47:28 2 Gen. 33:18 3 Gen. 12:6

# Baptism by fire as a third baptism

*In preparation for the 2017 Whitsun conference in Den Bosch, Netherlands, entitled Playing with Fire*

**Bertolt Hellebrand**

*To cast fire on the earth, I have come. How I wish it were already kindled!*  
Luke 12:49

It was one of Christ's greatest goals to set our 'I' alight, to bring the divine fire-play to us. This is also evident in the culmination of the offertory in the Act of Consecration of Man when we hear about the 'fire of love', in which the Son, born of love, can be present and engender 'eternal being'.

However, we need to have fire before we can set anything alight with it. Even Jesus—as he said himself—had to be baptised with fire before he was able to 'cast fire on the earth': 'But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed!' (Luke 12:50). These words point to his path through suffering and resurrection, which transform and remould humanity.

What does it mean to be baptised with the Holy Spirit and with fire? John the Baptist says that only the one who comes after him will perform this baptism. Looking at this more closely, it becomes apparent that what we call the baptism in the Jordan actually contains two separate baptisms. After the baptism in water, 'behold', a second baptism immediately follows—a baptism 'by the Holy Spirit.'

In light of this, we might be surprised that Jesus speaks twice of yet another baptism that he will have to undergo. First, as already mentioned in connection with his 'casting fire upon the earth', and second, responding to

the question of the sons of Zebedee about their places on either side of Christ in the kingdom of God. A third baptism is needed in order for Christ to complete his task on earth. This path through three baptisms seems to be important for the disciples and for the whole of humanity: 'He who comes after me will baptize you with spirit (pneuma) and with fire.'

This image of a three-step baptism is easier to understand if we consider that pneuma means, besides 'spirit' and 'wind', also 'breath',

*Bertolt Hellebrand is a priest of The Christian Community in Frankfurt am Main.*

‘soul,’ ‘life,’ and last but not least, ‘air.’ Thus the triad of baptisms—in water, air and fire—is connected to the four elements. We can see in the three steps of baptism the earthly human being’s path to the divine spiritual through water, air and fire.

The first step can be administered by any human being with spiritual authority. However, the further steps require Christ’s involvement.

What is the meaning of ‘baptizing’? The Greek word baptizo means to dip or to dive. ‘Baptizing’ does not only describe a sacramental process but more generally a submerging into the depth of forces that bring something to movement and enliven it, in the sense of the watery element. This can give rise to levity and inspiration in the sense of the airy element. In the element of warmth and fire, it can radically transform the innermost core of a being, to enable the human being to exist in heavenly realms through ‘the re-enlivening of the dying earth existence.’

In the Baptism in The Christian Community, salt and ash lay the groundwork in the baptized human being for the baptisms that Christ will administer to us. Rudolf Steiner described salt as connected to the spirit. Ash originates from the process of combustion and belongs to the principle of sulphur. These two substances complement the water so that further baptisms through Jesus Christ are prepared for, but not yet accomplished.

How does Christ baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire? In the Sacrament of Ordination of The Christian Community there is a reference to baptism in a wider sense. The ordinands are instructed to ‘assemble baptizing’ the congregation at the altar. This seems to point to participation in the Act of Consecration of Man. The inner connection between baptism and Act of Consecration shines out in the three crosses that members of the congregation each make over the places where the baptismal substances are applied. Diving into the stream of Christ’s words in the Gospel reading leads to an encounter with the sanctified airy element (pneuma agion) and a baptism with the Holy Spirit.

Further, our experience of living creatively with our destiny, bearing our cross and passing through the fire of transformation corresponds to Jesus’ baptism of fire of through Crucifixion and Resurrection. Here, the Sacramental Consultation can be helpful.

These three baptisms that John the Baptist proclaimed are at work in us, consciously or unconsciously. We can make them real for ourselves again and again through our participation in the Act of Consecration of Man and the Sacramental Consultation.

## Peter Allan July 19, 1933 – November 5, 2016

Peter Allan was born in Edinburgh on 19 July 1933, the older of two boys. Both his grandfathers were church ministers.

Peter's father, Nimmo, was a civil engineer who worked in the Sudan on irrigation projects. Peter's earliest memories are divided between life in the Sudan and in Scotland—and the sea voyages between the two.

In the Sudan he remembered the houses with windows shuttered against the heat and brightness of the sun, and also cooks and house servants. He remembered the endless desert and donkey rides under the watchful eye of the servants early in the day before the sun got too hot. It was a comfortable colonial life. In the hot season, it was back to Scotland with his mother and life in the big old manse with his maternal grandparents.

Peter described how although his parents were kind and loving, home simply did not happen: 'life took one from place to place, but nowhere was one truly at home.' Probably for Peter the nearest to a 'home' experience were the times he spent in Callander at the home of his grandparents.

These early years of Peter's life in the 1930s seem a long time ago not just in chronological terms, but also with regard to the attitudes prevalent then. And so it was when Peter was just three years old and his brother was born it was felt that the right thing was for Peter to go into a children's home for a few weeks while his mother was busy with the new arrival.

At the age of six Peter was left in Edinburgh with an aunt in order to attend



school there. His mother sailed back to the Sudan to be by the side of her husband. Peter wouldn't see his mother again for almost two years for this was 1939 and Britain was now at war. With great difficulty and after a long and hazardous sea journey, his mother returned to Britain at the end of 1941.

When Peter was nine years old he was dropped off at a prep school in Melrose, which he attended as a boarder. He was completely unaware that he would not see his mother

again until the end of term. In the years that followed, leaving home at the beginning of each term would be a sad and painful experience for Peter.

Through the destiny of John, Peter's brother, who had special needs and attended a Camphill school, the family got to know anthroposophy and met Alfred Heidenreich. This was the beginning of the family's relationship with The Christian Community

Like many young boys, Peter was fascinated by weapons, and perhaps this fascination was enhanced by it being wartime. Before the allied landings in Normandy in 1944, his school was surrounded by the noise of battle as the army trained on the nearby moorland. Finding some blank cartridges, he set them off in the school with a hammer. The teachers were not amused.

In 1944, during the Easter holidays, an event occurs which affects the family, and is a life changing event for Peter. He was with his mother in Callander. Not far off in the hills the military were practising with live ammunition. At the weekend, Peter and two

boys from the town were wandering around when they came across a shell dropped by one of the soldiers. Unaware that it was 'live,' Peter picked it up and played with it; then when he threw it—it exploded! One of the boys ran off having escaped injury; the other is injured but not as badly as Peter.

A day or so later Peter regained full consciousness and learned that his right leg below the knee was gone and the left leg was also very badly injured. He spent a year in a children's hospital, only able to leave as the war ended.

Later in 1945, the family moved near London where Peter's father worked at the Sudan Agency. For over a year Peter remained at home, convalescing. Then in 1947 he attended Michael Hall school as a boarder. Peter was very happy there, finding the teachers inspiring and getting a good grounding in French and German.

When Peter was about 19 years old he underwent a crisis—perhaps depression—breaking off studying and spending a year at the Waldorf school in Stuttgart doing, he said, pretty much what he pleased, and gaining fluency in German. Wanting to see Goethe's *Faust* on stage at the Goetheanum, he made his way there on an old motorbike.

The following year he returned to Dornach and Arlesheim and became an outpatient at the Ita Wegman clinic.

After this time away he returned to Michael Hall to finish his exams and also take part in the Steiner teacher training course led by Francis Edmunds.

When Peter was twenty-one years old he lived with the musician Ferdinand Rauter and family in London. They were very important for Peter's wellbeing at this time in his life, giving him the warmth and security he needed until he was ready to take his next step.

At the age of twenty-four, Peter began his degree in German language and literature at University College, London.

Three years later while in Berlin finishing his German studies, he wrote to the priest of The Christian Community there, Helmutt Vermehren, enquiring about service times.

The priest invited the English student to his home where Peter met, among other family members, his daughter Marianne, a medical student nearing the end of her training.

Peter returned to England and began a post graduate course in education but it became clear that Peter's gentle, diffident personality was not suited to teaching.

Peter started his studies at the priests' seminary in Stuttgart in 1963 and was ordained in July 1966. The commemoration of that 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary last summer was the last time Peter was in vestments at the altar.

Peter's first sending was to Bristol from where he made fortnightly visits to Stroud. A year later he was sent to Edinburgh where he remained for four years. Marriage to Marianne and the birth of their first two children belong to these years.

Then Peter was sent to Newton Dee/Aberdeen where he remained for seven years. Two more children were born during these years. During this time, Peter was very involved in the setting up of the Aberdeen Waldorf School. He also took over the running of the children's camps when Taco Bay left Britain. This was not an easy task for him, but he never gave up.

In 1979, Peter was sent to Stroud with responsibility for the growing congregation there, a task he carried faithfully until his retirement. For some years, the family lived in Gannicox, a small community comprising the Allan family, special needs people, and other co-workers. Marianne worked in the medical practice.

Peter had a few colleagues for short periods during these years. In 2000, when he was approaching retirement, he was joined by Malcolm Allsop.

Peter 'actively retired' in 2003, but found it difficult to step back for retirement. This is not easy when one has invested heart and soul into one's work and when the people are so much part of one's life. Peter's priesthood was very important to him—it was part of who he was.

Peter had a beautiful, mellifluous speaking voice and one could hear the love and respect

he had for language. He always chose his words carefully, which could give the impression that he was uncertain. He spoke German as proficiently as he spoke English. He loved singing and had a beautiful singing voice.

Peter was not authoritarian—he was confident and gentle—but quite firm and could get cross. He was modest to the point of being self-effacing, which could be frustrating for those around him. But when it came to big decisions, Peter knew what he wanted and could be very stubborn.

He was a caring person with real interest in others and he gave great support to people in times of crisis. Peter had a lovely smile and a twinkle in his eye and he had a very good sense of humour, which he kept until he died.

When things got too much for Peter he would retreat into his shell. Over the years, Peter grew in confidence, although he always struggled with his sermons, feeling they were never good enough. His feelings of insecurity and inadequacy were transformed so that what one experienced was his gentleness and warmth.

In the days since Peter's death many, many people spoke of him with great affection and appreciation, describing his gentleness,

his helpfulness and the support that he offered when it was needed. Peter was not an outgoing, charismatic person but his dogged determination, his interest in and concern for others, and his openness laid the foundation for what is today a healthy and thriving community.

In the last few years with the gradual onset of dementia, Peter spoke less, but when he did speak, what he said was appropriate. One had the feeling he was holding himself together in a very dignified way, refusing to give way to the disease.

The final three months of Peter's life were spent in hospital. This was a difficult time for him. He often said that hospital was not the right place for a priest. Up until the very end his priesthood and the Act of Consecration remained very important to him.

Two days before his death Peter was moved to a nursing home. He said, 'I am not going to stay here.' When it came to the big decisions Peter knew what he wanted and was determined to get his way. He died on November 5.

FROM THE EULOGY GIVEN BY  
REV. CARMEL IVESON, 15 NOVEMBER 2016

## Reviews

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### ***Community Care and Inclusion for People with an Intellectual Disability***

edited by

**Robin Jackson and Maria Lyons**

240 pages, published by Floris Books,

£ 25.-, ISBN: 9781782503330

*Review by Mark Gartner*

This book brings articles on the subject from seventeen contributors from countries such as Norway, Australia and the USA, examining issues relating to disabled people and changes in society.

Opening articles chronicle changing societal attitudes over about 150 years, from embracing all those with differences such as the physically and intellectually disabled, offenders, old peo-

ple etc., to then segregating them in institutions and then once again seeking different ways to reintegrate them into society. The articles are well researched. While these chapters, having scientific and technical language, may not be as easy to read as the remainder of the book, the information they contain makes the effort worthwhile. They highlight the intimate destiny relationship between individuals and the society and times they live in. Different perceptions, gifts and limitations and cultural elements that shape societies in various parts of the world and at different times are well described.

The focus in the latter half of the book shifts from provision for the disabled to a realisation that society itself needs to change the values and criteria that shape it. In an attempt toward a healthier society the positive contribution disabled people can make becomes more apparent.

One contributor describes the work of Camphill worldwide as 'a laboratory for new democracy in all aspects of life.' Ha Vinh Tho, a one-time Camphill co-worker, writes about work with the Gross National Happiness project in Bhutan which connects with elements of the Buddhist/Confucian community forming culture there. To end, I quote his last paragraph: 'The Camphill Movement has shown over many decades and in many countries, that innovative social forms are possible in living practice, and that people living with intellectual disability can contribute to pioneering such social experiments.'

***Being Disciples:  
Essentials of the Christian Life***  
**Rowan Williams**

Paperback: 96 pages, SPCK Publishing  
ISBN: 9780281076628

*Review by Donna Simmons*

This lovely book on what could be considered the central task of every Christian—how to live as a disciple of Christ—is written by one of the major figures of the contemporary British Church, former Archbishop Rowan Williams. With grace and generous encouragement, Williams takes his readers on an exploration of the possibility of not merely being a 'theoretical' Christian, but being one who actively strives to accompany—and be accompanied by—Christ.

This is a formidable topic and one could imagine a book devoted to it to be extremely dense, complicated, even convoluted. Somehow Williams finds a way, with awe-inspiring simplicity and a light conversational tone, to explore what lies at the heart of being a Christian. At the same time, Williams is never trivial and never ever patronizes his readership. Indeed, Williams expects a great deal of each of us: that we aspire to not just consider discipleship, but to *be disciples*. His very human and humane approach makes what could seem impossible, possible.

For Williams, being a disciple means 'very simply going on asking whether what we do, how we think and speak and act is open to Christ and Christ's Spirit; developing the skills

of asking ourselves difficult questions about our consistency and honesty; about how seriously we take what we say.'

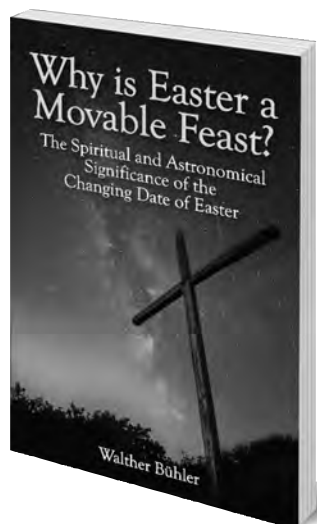
The book is based on a series of lectures and reads like a skilful speaker addressing a fond audience. The chapters are short and each begins with a quotation from the Bible which Williams elaborates on as he develops the theme of the chapter. Each chapter ends with a few questions which could be used for further reflection or could help stimulate conversation in a group.

The chapters are: Being disciples; Faith, hope and love; Forgiveness; Holiness; Faith in society; Life in the spirit. Much of what Williams writes about focuses on Christian life in the context of 'the Church'. This could give us in The Christian Community a good opportunity to consider how this might or might not include us and what exactly 'the Church' is. How do we, along with our fellow Christians, take up the task of being disciples? How does the theology and practice of other streams enhance what we do as Christians?

One of the main recurring themes of this book is Williams' awareness of the primacy of relationships—relationships between each other, and between each of us and the Persons of the Trinity. Early on he says, 'Being with the Master is recognizing that who you are is fully going to be determined by your relationship with him. If other relationships seek to define you in a way that distorts this basic relationship, you lose something vital for your own well-being and that of all around you too. You lose the possibility of a love more than you could have planned or realized for yourself. Love God less and you love everyone and everything less.'

On the one hand this is an 'everyday' book about everyday things and everyday people. On the other hand, through its deceptive simplicity, it is a deeply profound book. There is no mysticism here, no complex theological argument—indeed, there is no argument at all. Instead there is a simple message of mindfulness and love, one that can appeal to anyone. At times I was left breathless with delight at the sheer skill with which Williams writes, his ability to cut through the waffle and write straight from the heart. I highly recommend this book as a companion to turn to again and again.

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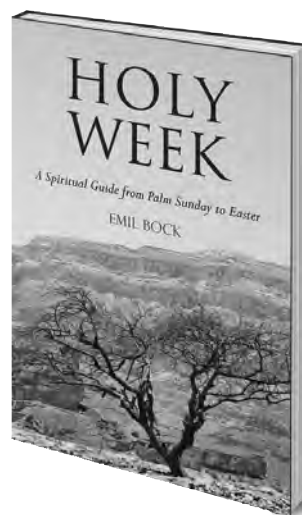
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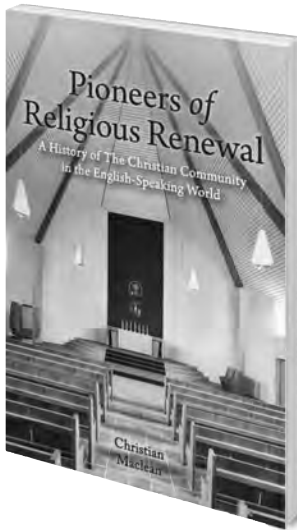
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