

THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

MOVEMENT FOR RELIGIOUS RENEWAL

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Advent ~ Christmas ~ Epiphany

1994



Three Services at Christmas

At the beginning of the 13 holy nights and 12 holy days of Christmas, we celebrate, three times, The Act of Consecration of Man. The first time we come together at midnight of that first holy night (i.e., the night from December 24 to 25); then a second time in the early morning usually when the sun rises (if possible we begin in the dark and end in daylight); and eventually in the morning of the first Christmas day.

Often we can read in the announcements that these three services “belong together”; still not everyone feels able or ready to dedicate his/her life to all three. Although this is difficult from our everyday point-of-view, those who have tried will agree that there is an unexpected help at Christmas which gives us the strength and stamina needed.

There is the great help from above. But this help if we really want it to be effective needs to be met by the help which we can provide ourselves, and that is that we try to understand what is happening with these three services.

Because of this holy time, once a year, our Act of Consecration reveals its inner being, shows what otherwise, all the year round, is also present but in a more hidden way. What usually is One shows as Three; the One becomes Three and thus shows its inner being.

The first of the three services (we could also say: The first part of the threefold Christmas Service) happens at night. We come to Him like Nicodemus “at night” (John 3, 1-2) and ask maybe eventually like Nicodemus, “How can this be?” (John 3, 9). At a time when we otherwise sleep we try consciously to invade those realms of the night which Novalis glorified in his “Hymns to the Night”: “I turn to the holy, ineffable, mysterious Night. Far below lies the world...” Modestly we can feel, the whole of our human past is pulled into this short hour: what we celebrated through four weeks of Advent, crystallizes in what we read

from the Gospel at the altar (The beginning of the entire Gospel, of all the four, according to Matthew 1). But this night brings all this past, on which we rely as the ground on which we stand, to an end; it leads towards a new daybreak. We are to give up what comes with the night. We take the gifts of the night, of the past, our thinking, feeling and willing and offer them in the presence of the new day. What comes from the night needs to be offered to and in the presence of the Child.

This is what we do with our second service. It is the most intimate of the three, leading us out of the night into the new day. This is the real Christmas present where we inwardly, humbly appear at the cradle not only to offer our gifts, but also to witness how these gifts themselves go through that transformation from night to day: that is when He is born. And we document this by reading from the Gospel that core part of the scripture (Luke 2) which states the most fundamental fact of Christianity which in the old Creed was expressed with the words: “Et incarnatus est...” and He incarnated, He took on, as it were, the earthly body, the entire earth. Not only Night and Day come together, also Heaven and Earth that the great transformation can begin.

At the end of that second service we have already reached Day and now look forward to what it asks of us. Here we may think of Christ’s word to his disciples when He was to raise Lazarus from the dead: “Are there not twelve hours in the day? If a man walks by day-time, he will not stumble because he sees the light of this world” (John 11, 9). Our third service we celebrate in the day. The light of the day leads us to understanding the Christmas happening, i.e., why incarnation, the need for resurrection and the eventual goal: conscious communion with the Divine World. This is also emphasized through reading the very end of the entire Gospel (John 21) which opens the gates to the future. The three Gospel readings represent the whole Gospel which lights up in its

threefoldness at Christmas.

This third service then leads us through the other holy nights to Epiphany, eventually gives birth to the Epiphany Festival which is to add warmth of heart to the spirit-enlightenment of Christmas.

Our three Christmas Services are actually one and represent both Advent, Christmas proper and Epiphany as well as what we always celebrate in any Act of Consecration of Man: Offering, Transformation and Communion. At Christmas our Act of Consecration opens and thus can receive Christmas powers of renewing, like a rare flower opening once a year. We can help through our understanding that we become aware of the help from above.

Werner Grimm
Vancouver

Poem

As darkness of winter envelopes me
in a deep velvet wrap
I draw into my soul
for the truths
which unite me with the Christ.
The child
radiant with new birth
leads me forward into cosmic love.

Helen Farnam,
Troy NY

Ascension Conference

Remembering and Forgetting

May 13 - May 15, 1994

Editor's note: We wish, belatedly, to publish this article both for its excellence and our oversight.

The festival of Ascension was celebrated at the Christian Community in New York City through a conference on "Remembering and Forgetting." Revs. Sanford Miller from Boston, Franziska Steinruek from Devon, PA, Erk Ludwig and Gisela Wielki from New York were the four priests carrying the weekend in such a way that a wide range of practical life experience and esoteric Christian mystery wisdom were woven together into an artistically balanced and unified whole.

The feeling of our own identity is delicately revealed through the interplay of what we remember and what we forget. How lost we would be as Ego beings if we could not remember the truth of our own past. How pathologically imprisoned in our limited sense of self we would be if we could not open ourselves to ever new possibilities through the freedom of a "rightful forgetting!" Both must live in the human soul as inwardly flexible and true abilities, enabling the "I" to unfold its evolving life.

During the time of the first Ascension the twelve Apostles had to "let go" of their prior relationship to Christ in order to remember and re-experience Him as the One Who dwells within; as their own higher Self. This forgetting and remembering was for the Apostles a part of their path toward initiation, a time of rebirth and a new-found well-spring of life achieved through grace.

It was He who bore within Himself the cosmic memory of the whole of creation; who through the mystery of Golgotha, gave the earth its identity. He it was also who carried within Himself the entire past of each human being and gave to each human being the power of forgiveness. How do we forgive? Our "remembering-understanding"

gives us the power to allow others and ourselves a new beginning. We let go of the past because we understand. It is Love which allows us to remember and to forget.

The Ascension Conference was supported by extremely good food, singing, speech formation, music, and the discussion groups held by the individuals attending. The theme itself was especially revealed and enhanced by the conference members being allowed to participate in The Act of Consecration of Man. Our warmest thanks to The Christian Community of New York for this most enriching weekend and to the priests who sponsored it.

Daniel Roth
Spring Valley

A Report on the Toronto Regional Conference

On October 7-9, a conference was held in Toronto with the theme "Embattled Spirit Birth." In part, the purpose was to begin to prepare for the All-Americas Conference next July in Kimberton, Pennsylvania. The number of participants varied over the holiday weekend from 13 - 20+, with leadership from priests, Susan Locey from Toronto and Hartmut Junge from Detroit. Besides Toronto members, there were five of us from Detroit and the rest from Sudbury and other small Ontario communities north of Toronto, stretching up to Georgian Bay.

The theme, "Embattled Spirit Birth" was taken from the Book of Revelation, Chapter 12. We discussed this chapter in a circle, sharing first our observations of the images presented there and then our attempts at interpreting the meaning of those images. Were we enlightened? Each can answer for him or her self - I was grateful for the progress we made together, but like much else it seemed a

preparation for future deeper exploration.

Ralph Marinelli, from Detroit, presented an overview of his research on the heart. He also touched on the obstacles to truth in scientific dogmatism and the difficulties in interpreting statistics (such as reported population growth rates being high while worldwide fertility rates are dropping).

Susan Locey gave a characterization of Christ in his relationships to men and to women in the New Testament. She discussed the present challenge for each to come to a more conscious relating to the opposite sex within rather than past unconscious dependency on others for balance and wholeness.

Artistic activities included singing led by Elizabeth Lebret and copperworking led by Alfred Koerber and Leeds Jackson. These activities provided a satisfying balance to our study and discussions, enhancing our appreciation and participation in The Act of Consecration of Man.

Along with fond musical memories, many of us carried away from the conference attractive bowls and bracelets. The Toronto congregation contributed a warm and gracious hospitality with wonderful meals and accommodation for all of us out of town guests. Regarding the question of whether we are now prepared for the All Americas Conference, each can answer for him or her self: Something has been done - what is there that remains?

Ed Sayers
Detroit

Christianity and the Reality of the World

Michaelmas Conference of
The Christian Community
October 8-10, 1994 in New York City

The conference could be said to be an inquiry into “What does the spiritual world ask of us?”, “What is the destiny of the earth?”, “Can we all come together?”, “Who is Michael?”, “How does one serve Michael?” The very inquiry and the quest for answers are, of course, very Michaelic.

Many answers emerged in group conversations and in the talks by the Reverends Susan Lowndes of Boston, Richard Dancey of Devon, and Gisela Wielki and Erk Ludwig, our hosts. Some of the answers that we uncovered follow:

We can work actively in that clear space which Michael, by pushing the dragon to a level beneath man, creates for man and in which he can freely choose whether to be lulled into ignorance of Ahriman’s work among us, or awaken to the heavenly light and fulfill the promise with which we each came into our earthly life.

We need to know that Mephistopheles, or the dragon which Michael keeps underfoot, wants to suck up all intelligence in the universe and use it to put mankind into ideological and materialistic fetters. But we need to be balanced and know, too, that we need the adversary to keep us from being lazy. The analytical and intellectual powers he has given us have resulted in our modern civilization. We need to not disparage all science, all technology, since they are necessary and useful to our understanding of the physical. The job at hand is to learn to use technology responsibly. We must be neither naive nor ostrich-like, but aware and have the courage not to engage with all that is possible, simply because it is possible. In other words, bring our philosophical ideals down to concrete action in daily life, “where the rubber meets the road.”

We can re-identify with the earth, transform the view of the earth as “Not I” to “The earth and I are one, and I and the Father are one.” Consciously joining the “I” and the “I” as Christ united himself with the bread and the wine is a deed of love, a healing, a making whole, a salvation. Knowing that we give meaning to the earth, our task is not so much to “preserve” it as it is to not precipitously hasten the earth’s biography.

Like God, we too can view a man not with the critical eye which sees just the physical appearance that is the result of the work of past lives, but rather to lovingly behold the best in the being before us as the seed of his own future.

We are God’s great risk, but where the adversary would enslave us, God accepts the risk and allows us into contact with the adversary because He respects man’s freedom and has faith that man will fulfill his mission on earth of uniting the now-separate worlds, the heights and the depths.

As we awaken more to the sun forces, we feel Christ’s love living in the etheric forces of the world and can strive to “become sun again,” a vehicle for Christ’s love, as Michael is.

We can freely choose to put on the armor of God and be a “Coworker of the Divine,” be like Michael himself who never gives up and never loses his faith and interest in man.

The spiritual world asks of us to lovingly and in complete freedom make God’s gamble on man pay off by also being willing to risk, to dare, to give all.

To the angels we can give the gift of knowledge of a world of things, a world which has death as its constant companion but which now also has resurrection and rebirth. To the spiritual world, we can give the gift of Michaelmas, the one festival not given us by the spiritual world; it can be our creation, our gift.

And throughout the conference we were given many gifts, including stupendous meals and glorious arrangements of the last riotously colorful flowers of the season.

The artistic endeavors which interspersed lectures and discussions, services and Close of Day were truly gifts of love from some very talented people. The power of music to communicate was brought home by the soulful playing by Gili Melamed-Lev of Beethoven's Bagatelle No. 4 and a movement from each of four of his piano sonatas. The luminous Michaelmas hymn, especially created by Betty Hamilton for the conference, was rehearsed by some on Sunday, sung at the end of Monday's service and combined music and words most beautifully.

The dramatic recitation by Dawn Langman of Judith Wright's poetry, interspersed the Beethoven selections in *Born of Fire, A Michaelmas Dialogue*, which opened the conference and gave a power to the written and spoken word that was extraordinary.

Another experience of the power of the word was granted those who did eurythmy with Maria Fredriksen. To physically act out and represent the meaning of words gives a completely different, deeply felt experience of a written work.

But perhaps the biggest gift of all was a deep sense of love and respect. We are well named, we are a community, no matter where we go. Some came from Pennsylvania, Upstate New York, Massachusetts, as far away as Rhode Island.

On July 12th-16th, 1995, we have the opportunity to gather in community in the Devon-Kimberton area for the Inter-American St. John's Festival conference, "Prepare the way" with people coming from as far away as Lima, Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, and Sao Paulo.

Gitta Mechlenburg
Lenox, MA

A Report on a Talk given by Rev. Taco Bay,

Erzoberlenker of The Christian Community
Given in Denver, Colorado, October 29, 1994

Denver was fortunate to have a visit from Erzoberlenker, Taco Bay, with his wife and fellow priest, Ita Bay over the weekend of October 29 and 30. On the Saturday, the 29th, Rev. Taco Bay gave a talk on: The Place of The Christian Community in the History of Christianity. Rev. Bay began by drawing an historical picture for the purpose of seeing how and why The Christian Community has come into being. For the question could be asked: "How does The Christian Community have the right of existence?" And it is in the very nature of its existence as the "becoming adult" of Christianity that the question fits.

He began by speaking about the fact that a more "correct" translation of the German for "The Christian Community" would be the phrase, "A Community of Christians." We would hope, he said, that a community of Christians would become a Christian Community. And with this thrust into the heart of our common endeavor, Rev. Bay began to paint a picture of how the 21 centuries of Christian history remarkably correlate with the 21 year development of a human being.

Just as the child learns to stand and walk, speak, and think in the first three years, so too the first 3 centuries of Christianity hold parallels. In the first century martyrs who did not denounce Christ - who stood up for the truth - were fed to the lions. In the second century we find the gospels coming into being and the word unfolds. In the third century, with the emergence of the early church fathers, we have the first great thoughts about the divine.

In the third year of the child's growth we experience the emergence of an experience of the I. Rev. Bay characterized this initial experience as

something that in a sense comes too soon and is a picture as it were of the fall, of humanity gaining self-awareness before its appointed time. In the 3rd and 4th centuries, the church first says "I" to itself. It is at this time that it becomes the established church of Rome. And just as the child may have the tendency at this age to say "NO!" to all that meets it good or bad, so the church at this time rejects and even persecutes many of the older religions.

In the fifth and sixth centuries we see the emergence of the Creeds and the great ponderings upon the nature of God and Christ. So too children at these corresponding ages may continually surprise us with the depth and profundity of their questions. And, in the seventh year, when a child normally begins to attend school, in church history we have the first appearance of the monastery.

At the age of nine or ten we meet another significant episode in child development. It is here that the child takes another step in separating from the world and becoming more individual. Rev. Bay's poignant example was of a study done where it was revealed that before this age a child, when facing you and seeing you raise your left hand, will, in mirror-like fashion raise its right hand. But with the coming of this age the child will begin to raise its own left hand when you raise yours. At this time in the church we have the famous split between east and west, Roman and Orthodox. And even in the west there are two popes for a time, one in Rome and one in Avignon.

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, with the rise of Scholasticism and all the profound intellectual strength and energy devoted to theological questions we have a striking parallel with the 12th and 13th years of a child, where the logical faculties come into their own. At this time the teacher well knows the different tack one begins to take with these newly burgeoning forces in the youth.

And in the 14th, 15th, and 16th years, as puberty unfolds, this thinking is brought to bear upon

the world with all the judging and early decision-making practice that can so make parents tremble! Here too, in the church we have an amazingly similar occurrence typified in the protesting figures of Wycliffe, Hus, Calvin, and Luther who all wished to think things through anew!

Here, Rev. Bay stopped and looked back on the development so far described. In the early years, the congregation was the child, with mother (the church) and father (the priest). With the emergence of Protestantism, the congregation made the transition from childhood to becoming a "youth." Here the individual was emphasized over the communal and what had been the Mass was reduced and minimized by many protestant practices, becoming something as it were shriveled in comparison with its earlier majestic form. As well, Rev. Bay stressed that this picture he was painting was not intended to provide for an opportunity to criticize either past religious practices or present ones, but simply to be able to place The Christian Community in a context.

Rev. Bay then mentioned that many youths of 19 or 20 may experience presentiments concerning their life paths and find ideals or movements in the world with which they feel connected. We have, from the years 1841 to 1879, the War in Heaven occurring that is spoken of in the Book of Revelation. The forces of the Adversary are cast down into the human world. Out of this and other decisive events the necessity for Religious "Adulthood" becomes more and more pressing. And just as a child of 19 or 20 might ask itself, "How do I become an Adult?", so the question indeed lives with us: "How can a community of Christians become a Christian Community?"

So in its 20th century, Christianity receives the Seven Sacraments of The Christian Community anew for the adult. A church appears - without dogma and doctrine - (where even the Creed is slightly misnamed in that nowhere does "credo", I believe, occur in it) that strives to become Community more catholic than the Catholic, and like

wise strives to become more individually protestant than the Protestant. The Christian Community is seen as a new beginning, as much as a fruition and fulfillment of all that has come before and could not have come until now, with all the dilemmas and polarities that can problematically arise in emerging adulthood. Such a wondrous and tremendous challenge for us all!

In closing this amazing lecture filled with warmth, humor and humility, Rev. Bay wished to further deepen this unique quality of The Christian Community for our imagination. So he painted for us a word picture of the Sunflower. In the Sunflower we have a plant that is similarly unique in that, although a whole, each of its blossoms is itself a self-contained whole plant as well. With the stem we have the priest grounded in the spiritual world. With the outer yellow leaves we have friends providing sustenance. With the inner yellow flowers (which appear as a single beautiful yellow blossom) we have members likewise providing sustenance, but also bearing fruit. All work together - no one part more important than another - so that the whole organism can become a reality.

Dale Brunsvold
Denver

(Visiting Denver, Rev's Taco and Ita Bay were on their way to the Sacramento Conference "Sacramental Christianity - Medicine for our Soul," which took place November 4-6. They also visited the congregations in San Francisco, Tuesday evening November 1, and Santa Rosa, Wednesday evening, November 2.)

Visit By Lothar Reubke, Musician and Composer From May 6 - May 21, 1995

For many years, Lothar Reubke has dedicated his skills as a musician and composer to the music and songs for the various Christian Community Services. Ordained in 1977, he now works as a

priest in Nuremberg, Germany.

We are delighted to announce his visit to the East and West Coasts, visiting congregations to explore singing and music.

PREPARE THE WAY

**An Inter-American St. John's Festival
of The Christian Community**

**July 12th to July 16th, 1995
at Kimberton, Pennsylvania**

You will hear more about this special event, the first gathering of The Christian Communities of North and South America, in the months ahead.

A Thank-You

I would like to thank Melissa Kay for the powerful poem, "Hymn to My Son", printed in the Michaelmas Newsletter 1994. To take the energy from what must have been personal agony and use it to carve a jewel of a poem is a great blessing for us all. The events surrounding her son's death are unknown to me, but, with them, I sensed she reached new levels of understanding with people very different from herself. Reading this poem strengthened a personal belief that the new temple of wisdom of initiation is the world itself and that transformation and regeneration may come in unusual places and crises situations. Thank you again.

Susan Koppersmith
Vancouver

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