

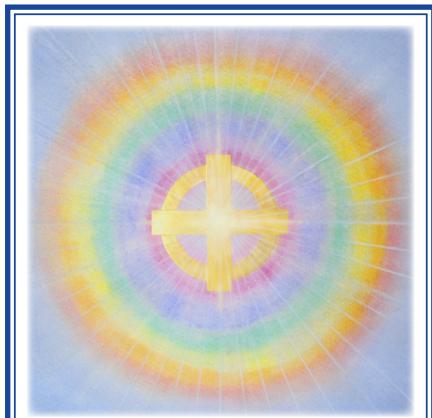
## The Festival of Easter

There is something significant in the Easter Festival being placed in Spring. Though it is a movable feast in the Church's calendar, it nevertheless moves within the months of Spring in this hemisphere. For Easter Day is one prophetic of glorious triumph over all elemental limitations, all adverse conditions, all the contracting and preventive influences and all the breaths of Winter, in the Soul's experience. It is the triumph within the Being of the divine potencies, the ascendancy of the manifest Life of the Father-Mother contained in the Heavenly Principle of the Soul's Being, by which the elemental soils are penetrated, and the life rises into the clear atmosphere where is found the Radiant Presence, to drink in of the glory of that Radiance, and to become clothed with the glory that Radiance gives; to be stimulated by the magnetic flow from that glorious Sun, until every attribute inherent in the Being unfolds unto perfect manifestation.

Thus, Easter Morning is like Spring when all nature is awakening in this hemisphere, quickened anew in its hidden life for manifestation, rejuvenated through the glorious magnetic Life-stream flowing from the Divine Kingdom entering the atmosphere of the planet. For the advent of Spring is a divine event, though it would not be so spoken of in the Church's calendar. It is a divine event of the most momentous nature for this planet and all her children. Souls are nourished by the outpouring of that Stream, for it passes through all the planes of the planet. It goes right through the planet, finding its centre, nourishing that Mystery of Being contained there which no human eye could look upon, and which none understand unless it be given to them to understand from the Divine Kingdom.

Easter Day is, therefore, beautifully prophetic. It is the day of the Soul's awakening, all hindrance to divine liberty overcome, and the Lord of Being beheld once more.

*Life's Mysteries Unveiled* pages 360, 361, 364 and 365



# The Order of the Cross

## Spiritual Reflections

March 2016



## Thoughts on the Teachings

John  
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**E**ASTER AND CHRISTMAS are the two great ‘festivals’ which are also very much part of national life, both being times of celebration and of holiday. The fact of the use of that latter terminology also indicates something of the original nature of what is being celebrated, ie a ‘holy day.’ This aspect of these two great ‘festivals’ can often be either overlooked or even unknown, with commercial pressures of all sorts having a powerful influence. Thus the true meaning of these ‘festivals’ is lost. But not irretrievably. People always have the capacity for wonder and curiosity, and these qualities help lead to a searching or a seeking for meaning.

These two ‘festivals’ can perhaps be seen as complementary the one to the other – that of ‘Christmas’ being the inception or the birth (re-birth?) of an idea or a realisation, with the link to ‘Easter’ being the fruition or the flowering as the result of that gradual process. The one cannot come without the other. Artists, poets and musicians have often been intuitively aware of such a process and are able to express it each in their own way. For instance, the painter Marc Chagall wrote to a friend –

Everything may change in our demoralised world except the heart, man’s love and his striving to know the divine. Painting, like all poetry, has a part in the divine; people feel this today just as much as they used to. What poverty surrounded my youth, what trials my father had with us nine children. And yet he was always full of love and in his own way a poet. Through him I first sensed the existence of poetry on this earth. After that, I felt it in the nights, when I looked into the dark sky. Then I learned that there was also another world. This brought tears to my eyes, so deeply did it move me.

This realisation that there is ‘also another world’ is something that returns bringing its blessing afresh each Spring and each Easter, in the certainty that it is indeed, in Our Friend’s closing words of the cover-extract,

... the day of the Soul’s awakening, all hindrance to divine liberty overcome, and the Lord of Being beheld once more.

## The Artist and the Message

THE MESSAGE HAS THE SAME CALL AND INSPIRATION to all alike who respond and travail in the Return of the Soul to its ancient inheritance in God. All Souls tread the path of that Return according to each one's Age-long history as the angels open the books of Life and overshadow the way of redemption and regeneration. All Souls too are gifted in their attributes diversely, and these attributes are used in relation to the individual Soul's return, re-awakened, renewed, often changed or constrained to the laying down of such gifts, that other gifts may be taken up and used in Service unto the Lord.

There are some who seem to be specially gifted in the ability to express themselves in the Arts, and these would seem to require special recognition as such. There are the artists, inspired to create works of art, variously expressed, and their special gift naturally plays its distinctive part in the path of their Return. It would be good to review this special distinction in the light of history and consider its true relation to the needs and services of Life. There is a generalisation sometimes used in this relationship, not readily acceptable to the artist, and yet it has a measure of truth in application, as we may see. It is sometimes expressed that all are artists in their work, be it just washing up and "putting a polish on the knocker on the big front door", to affairs of responsibility in organisation and government. The special distinction of the artist is something apart from such every day, matter-of-fact "self-expression", and yet we might wonder how far this special claim is justified when so much that "makes the world go round" from day to day can readily dispense with the service of artists. Plato found the inclusion of poets in his ideal republic inconsistent with his idea of Utopia, for the reason apparently that they could not be trusted in their expressions, which tended to bring down the pure forms of the spiritual world, and so distort them through such outer expressions. We must understand that the poet in ancient Greece occupied a place of distinction as seer and prophet. An equal distinction was given to the eminent painter during the Renaissance. The artist and craftsman, on the other hand, were often not deemed to be worthier than common workmen. Changes in the social status of

the artist, of course, occur from time to time, and such a change comes about in the time of Alexander the Great, due no doubt to the propagating of the hero's prowess as conqueror and the adulation of personality. The accumulation of wealth by individuals led to a demand for works of art which increased in material value and public appreciation. The names of Zeuxis, Parrhasius, Apelles and of others, appear and remain in recorded memory. Anecdotes of 'eccentric' artists are told and there are signs of something like the modern conception of the artist being apart from his fellow-men.

It would be a very fascinating task to trace the rise and fall of the artist as a special kind of person or as an obscure humble worker receiving no marked appreciation or monetary reward. John Thornton of Coventry received, as his own reimbursement as master glazier of the great East window at York Minster, four shillings a week, an annuity of £5 with £10 on completion, the whole work to be completed in three years. The days of the cathedral builders are well known as times when the artist and craftsman worked especially for the "glory of God", and few names, apart from the founders and master-masons or architects, have come down to us. These are the times also when work was carried out by such collective effort, under the guiding hand of the master-mason, (the magister lapidum), as had not quite been done before, though the Greeks and Romans gathered workers together into building corporations, and group work was well known among the Egyptians. It is an over-romantic conception to visualise great sanctuaries being erected as though by inspired magic through the hands of many workers, and by unseen direction; but there is no doubt that a great sense of unity of purpose and zest for work went forward from the master down to the humblest worker. The most marked change of all times, a change to great exaltation of personality from anonymity and humble obscurity, occurs at the close of the Middle Ages, and the dawn of the Renaissance. This is so well set forth by Arnold Hanser in his *Social History of Art* that I cannot do better than quote from this great work of scholarship and insight. After discoursing on the influences of the mason's lodge and the crafts guild on the studios and workshops of the

Renaissance by their communal spirit ‘the work of art...not yet the expression of an independent personality’, he later writes

The development of the concept of genius begins with the idea of intellectual property. In the Middle Ages both this conception and the desire for originality are lacking; both are directly inter-related. As long as art is nothing but the representation of the Divine, and the artist only the medium through which the eternal, supernatural order of things is made visible, there can be no question of autonomy in art nor of the artist actually owning his work...The idea of intellectual productivity and intellectual property follows from the disintegration of Christian culture. As soon as religion ceases to control and unite within itself all the spheres of spiritual life, the idea of the autonomy of the various forms of intellectual expression appears, and an art which bears its meaning within itself becomes conceivable. In spite of all attempts to base the whole of culture, including art, on religion, no later age has ever succeeded in restoring the cultural unity of the Middle Ages and depriving art of its autonomy. Even when it is placed in the service of extra-artistic purposes, art now remains enjoyable and significant in itself. But if one ceases to regard the separate intellectual moulds as so many different forms of one and the same truth, then the idea occurs of making their individuality and originality the criteria of their value...Originality becomes a weapon in the competitive struggle.

What a thought in this last sentence for the art of today! Painters like Titian ascend to great social heights. Even when he has passed away his body is laid to rest in the church of the Frati with the greatest honours the Republic can offer.

Although a victim of the plague, his passing overrules the strict prohibition of burying such stricken ones in a church. Michael Angelo finally, rises to absolutely unprecedented heights. ‘Foregoing all public honours, titles and distinctions’ he becomes ‘The Divine’, the friend of princes and popes; daring even to be their opponent... He is the first...to be

completely possessed by his idea and for whom nothing exists but his idea... who feels a deep sense of responsibility towards his gifts and sees a higher and superhuman power in his own artistic genius...it is no longer his art, but the man himself who is the object of veneration and becomes a vogue.

A further measure of detachment from life occurs in the nineteenth century through the growth of the Industrial Revolution. It was William Blake who so sensitively felt the change from a rural to an urban life in the rise of the manufacturing towns. The “dark satanic mills” became the prison houses of so many who may still have enjoyed the work of their hands under an improving condition of living and organisation, but the century had to run its course of commercialism and materiality, further divorcing the artist and craftsman from any spiritual conception of life. Even the teachings of those like John Ruskin, and the noble example of William Morris seem to have met the challenge of further materialisation in mechanical organisation and production, the craftsman having been driven more and more into a restricted field of work and service, and the artist more and more into his own individual, subjective experience.

It would seem that this subjective experience has become the most precious side of art in our time, and that some aspects of this inner experience find their best service in revealing the unseen causes of the world’s distress, rather than in endeavouring to create a picture of a harmonious world of life detached from actuality, as in the sentiments and “escapism” expressed so much in “academic” art, particularly in the last century. Art today has certainly become more “fluidic” and less fixed than it has been for a long time, and in this fluidic state maybe is awaiting a true spiritual urge, the Renaissance of the Spirit. Subjective experiences, inner realisation and inspiration cannot remain unexpressed any more than the tree, full of potent life in the winter, can remain without bursting bud in leaf and blossom at the awakening of the year. Yet to find the whole of inner spiritual experience in art alone, as the artist too often has been led to do, cannot but lead to disappointment and disillusion. We have in recent times those like Van Gogh and Paul

Gaugin, the one endeavouring to find respite from the spiritual struggle of his tempestuous nature, and the other literally escaping from the restrictions and false values of the Western world to express himself completely in painting.

Many are finding a release in self-expression, but underneath lies the Soul with its age-long history awaiting its complete return to God. Art cannot completely fulfil the Soul's desire once it has been awakened to the full possibilities of the spiritual life, yet in the dedication of its desire to the Kingdom of the Heavens, purpose and fulfilment can be realised. In the self-expression of the individual much release is found, but the full realisation of oneness with God ultimately must come through finding first the Kingdom of the Heavens within. It was Michael Angelo, great as he was, who declared at the close of his life he had worshipped his art before God. The restless, seeking spirit of the Renaissance, breaking away from the bondage of religious dogma and the failure of the Middle Ages to found spiritual unity in life symbolised in the art of the cathedral, found in him the desire and struggle to be complete in art alone.

Perhaps in the world of Art we can see a reflection of the mystery of the Fall (though we may not be permitted to penetrate deeply therein), in the desire by the betraying spirit to fix the phenomenal world. When the self of the artist rises up and is esteemed above the work itself, and when his creations become crystallised and revered before the subjective, spiritual inspiration and experience that moved them to expression, the true meaning and purpose of Art, like creation, is lost. The Message is a great work of Art in its Divine inspiration and dedication to the Divine Purpose, and inasmuch as its meaning is revealed to the Soul, is a great example of true sacrifice of all the gifts with which a Soul is endowed. In the rising life of the individual and the community, and in the relationship of the individual to the community, will the gifts of the Spirit, be they expressed in Art or in any act of service, herein surely will such gifts find their greatest and sublimest fulfilment. Until these things are known and expressed in unity within and without, all will travail, yet in the consciousness of the growing realisation of the Kingdom of God, all will find, and with the artist

in the midst, the greatest joy and sense of purpose. Surely in the seeking and realisation through embodiment, living and serving in a spirit of Love, will the Kingdom of the Heavens arise in our midst, and then the true value of Art will be known as an added treasure within that Kingdom.

[This article originally appeared in the Supplement to *Herald* 26 on pages 17-21]

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### Easter

I got me flowers to straw thy way;  
I got me boughs off many a tree:  
But thou wast up by break of day,  
And brought'st thy sweets along with thee.

The Sunne arising in the East,  
Though he give light, and th' East perfume;  
If they should offer to contest  
With thy arising, they presume.

Can there be any day but this,  
Though many sunnes to shine endeavour?  
We count three hundred, but we misse:  
There is but one, and that one ever.

George Herbert  
1593-1633

## GATHERINGS AND EVENTS

### March-April

- 24-27 Easter Gathering: Sarum College (accommodation available till 28 March)  
28 Family Service: Sarum College  
28-4 Natural Movement Dance Week: Swanage

### July-August

- 27-3 Natural Movement Dance and Families Gathering: Ammerdown

### CHANGES OF ADDRESS

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